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The National Upgrading Support Programme is a programme of the National Department of Human Settlements

PART ONE: Communities and Social Change: What happens when an informal settlement is upgraded?

This is the first in a three part series of articles where we look at the dynamics in one of the most ambitious projects in South Africa – the N2 Gateway initiative in Cape Town – and how lessons learnt there are being applied elsewhere.

Transforming informal living arrangements into quality human settlements is no easy task, and national, provincial and local government are learning some hard lessons in the development of the N2 Gateway Project in Cape Town. It should be remembered that the project operates within a demographic context in which the Western Cape Province is the second most popular destination of migrants in the country. The N2 is a pilot project intended to address historic and endemic problems associated with rapid urbanisation, poverty and homelessness by providing people living in informal settlements or backyard shacks along or close to the N2 highway in Cape Town with nearly 15 000 homes.

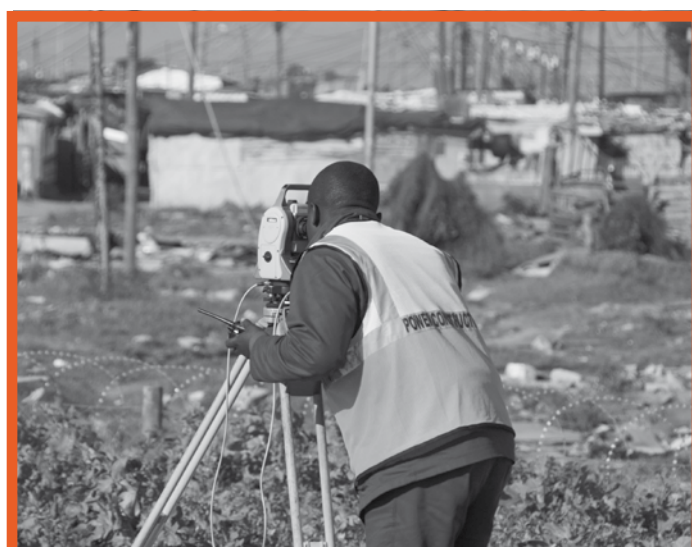
These lessons provide pointers for the upgrading of other large-scale informal settlements around the country, and could ensure that the process not only proceeds faster, but provides a more satisfactory outcome for those living in slum conditions.

The N2 Gateway National Priority Project

The objective of N2 Gateway is to provide formal housing for people currently living in shacks alongside the N2 highway. Phase 1 comprises six semi-autonomous projects, namely Boystown, Delft Symphony, Delft 7-9, Joe Slovo, New Rest and various transitional residential

areas. As of end 2013 there are at least 6000 shacks in the Joe Slovo and Boystown catchment areas alone.

In undertaking the massive task of redeveloping these sites representatives of all three spheres of government have had to work with community-based action within informal settlements in an environment of poverty and high unemployment. However, the realignment of resources, and signs of visible development, have aroused the development tensions of meeting the aspirations of citizens in need of housing. To further complicate this already volatile environment, in many instances the needs of poor people either coincide or conflict with other agendas present.



THE NATIONAL UPGRADING SUPPORT PROGRAMME

The NUSP was established to provide assistance to provinces and municipalities in their efforts to upgrade informal settlements.



As more and more fixed shelter is provided, this often gives rise to corruption and fraudulent activity as scarce opportunities for shelter become available.

Even with careful planning the complexities around community engagement are fraught with difficulties, are unpredictable and at times violent, especially when it comes to in-situ upgrading projects. It is no wonder that in situ upgrades can take up to three times longer than a greenfields project.

Difficult history

N2 Gateway has had a long, difficult history, dogged by inter-governmental and inter-party disputes over land, the relocation of large numbers of families to “temporary” residential areas several kilometres away, numerous contractual irregularities which were eventually probed by Parliament and fierce battles within the community in a desperate scramble over resources.

“Especially at the initial stages, beneficiary management and support lagged behind housing construction, and when delivery of completed units started there were a lot more people than the available housing opportunities,” explains Bosco Khoza, the Housing Development Agency (HDA) Programme Manager on the project. “When the project was launched it was intended to build a total of 23 000 homes in two phases. It was an ambitious project to deliver so many units in such a short space of time and the result is a highly charged and expectant community.”

Establishing structures of management, communication and consultation

Soon after the establishment of the HDA in 2009, the Agency was tasked with addressing the communication channels with the beneficiary communities. The aim was to re-establish strong consultative forums within the community to enable active participation

by residents in discussing the types of housing to be built, in resolving difficulties around “waiting lists”, and in ensuring that the project maintained momentum despite very real financial and budgetary challenges.

The main challenges government faces with large in-situ upgrading projects is how to manage and plan for those who do not qualify for subsidised housing and dealing with the overflow. There are usually many more households to be accommodated than number of units built on a project. One way to alleviate some of the tensions is for beneficiary management to take place at the early stages of project development so that the province or municipality can ascertain the scale of the problem and plan for “non-qualifiers.” Another is ongoing community engagement. “Even though engagement is difficult, project managers have to ensure that communities are continually engaged with. An important lesson is that there can be no such thing as over-engagement”, says Khoza. Indeed, the N2 Gateway experience has shown the importance of community involvement and consultation throughout all stage of the process – to not only understand expectations, but to ensure that they are managed.

The establishment of project steering committees at the N2 has proven to be useful both as a management tool and in ensuring representation of the interests of all stakeholder groups. The membership of such committees includes community representatives, municipal councillors, building contractors and the HDA. Consultative processes with the local community have been further enhanced by the recruitment of project-specific community liaison officers. The success of these officers, who are in fact HDA staff members, has been based on their ability to balance, interpret and represent community needs with the development requirements of project.

The N2 Gateway experience has also underlined the importance of effective day-to-day management of the projects in addition to ensuring efficient, quality development. Consequently, the HDA has made every effort to recruit the highest level of project management capability possible.

Importance of IGR

Another important management structure achievement at N2 Gateway – one that has been valuable in addressing a range of challenges – has been the establishment of a strong Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) framework along with well-functioning operating committees. This united and committed framework and committee structure has enabled the developers and other stakeholders to get on with the work while being protected, at least in large part, from destabilising factors. Effective IGR has helped facilitate establish and/or improve institutional ties vital to the project’s success.

COMING UP

In the next edition of the NUSP newsletter we will focus on the troubled Boystown in-situ informal settlement upgrading project.



human settlements

Department:
Human Settlements
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



CONTACT US

■ NUSP www.upgradingsupport.org ■ HDA 011 544 1000 ■ NDHS 0800 701701