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

This is the conclusion of a three-part series of articles exploring the dynamics on the N2 Gateway project in Cape Town – and how lessons learnt there are being applied elsewhere.

Planning is the key.

Careful planning in the early stages can help minimise forced removals, evictions, relocations and other disruptions that can create opposition and blockages. It must be stated, however, that with all in-situ upgrading projects it is nearly impossible to satisfactorily address all problematic issues that arise.

Informal settlement communities, by their very nature, are often temporary and migratory, and are in constant flux and motion – especially when it comes to upgrading. Priorities change, people come and go, people get married, children are born and people die, incomes increase and decrease. This inevitable flux makes the need for enumeration and rapid assessments of informal settlements all the more important as one of the early steps in the planning of an upgrade development. Where possible, this information is updated during the development process.

The HDA has been able to take the planning lessons learnt at the in-situ informal settlement upgrading of projects such as Boystown and Joe Slovo (see earlier articles) and apply them to the development of tools to assist provinces and municipalities to undertake informal settlement upgrading.

An important lesson learnt has been the importance of community / household profiling as prelude to planning. Five key elements of the new approach, based in part on the lessons from N2 Gateway are:
• An audit and rapid assessment, to determine the status quo of each informal settlement in terms of basic services provided, i.e. water, sewerage, electricity, roads, storm water and waste removal.

• Alongside this, an assessment is made of the socio-economic conditions of households, settlement conditions and social fabric of the settlement, history of the settlements and their patterns, to determine among others: the demand for informal housing and the possibility of establishing or implementing livelihood programmes for purpose of multi-sector alignment to encourage delivery of public facilities, sustainability of settlements and integration with surrounding neighbourhoods.

• A household enumeration exercise is conducted in existing informal settlements to capture the demographic information of households, profiling and mapping. The demographic information collected is essential as it allows a municipality to determine which housing opportunities will be applicable for the different groupings in each settlement. This information is collected under confidentiality and the database is made available to the municipality for purpose of screening and making decisions as to which instruments may be applied as each settlement is different.

• A livelihood analysis is undertaken to understand what the livelihood activities are that need to continue during the project and how to support or accommodate these activities.

• A status quo feasibility is then conducted to determine the suitability of upgrading and focuses on geotechnical analysis, engineering, environmental, planning, and yield assessment.

On the basis of these assessments, government is then in a more informed position to decide whether to proceed an incremental upgrading process – the installation of either basic emergency services or full infrastructure – or the development of fixed homes in the long term for residents.

The N2 Gateway project’s history of conflict, contractual regularities, poor management, community division and competing priorities would seem to have left a legacy of insurmountable barriers. However, through a multifaceted and collaborative effort, the HDA and its partners have been able to address many of the challenges and successfully redevelop through taking heed of the policy lessons learnt.

Lessons learnt from this project:

• Communications and on-going engagement with communities is critical – with special emphasis on community interaction and understanding the tensions that are typical and need to be dealt with;

• Planning needs to be undertaken in a way that maximises community consultation and input;

• To be effective, planning needs to be informed by comprehensive community profiling including informal settlement assessments, audits, livelihood analysis, enumerations and early beneficiary management;

• Project steering committees with broad representation are a useful management tool and can be effective forums for stakeholders to resolve difficulties;

• Community liaison officers on the project can be effective in facilitating improved relationships with residents;

• Effective IGR helps facilitate improved institutional ties which are vital to the success of the project;

• Developing and hiring expert project management capability is critical;

• Every effort needs to be made to keep the project on schedule. This will help mitigate the problem of temporary residential areas becoming long-term.

COMING UP

• More info on various informal settlements upgrading guideline publications on rapid assessment and categorisation, improved livelihoods, and early childhood development centres.