Supporting the foundations of self-build

Lessons from the Right to Build Initiative

Acknowledgements

Introduction

With over 2.5 million households – equating to one in seven households – registered on the National Housing Needs Register,[1] South Africa faces a housing crisis. The majority of inadequately housed people live in undignified and unsafe informal structures in informal settlements and backyards that fail to meet basic health and safety standards. The reality is that state-subsidised housing programmes are not able to keep up with the growing housing shortage and public resources are insufficient to meet demand. Clearly, a new approach is needed. But what can be done?

The case for self-build

According to statistics released by the National Department of Human Settlements, since 2010 public housing provision to poor and low-income households has seen a steady decline, with similar trends visible for the provision of serviced sites from 2007/08 onwards (see Figure 1). Provision of subsidised housing is now focussed on a narrow definition of those considered most vulnerable – child-headed households, persons living with disabilities, the aged, approved military veterans and persons with special housing needs.[2]

Figure 1: Housing opportunities delivered between 1994/1995 and 2023/2024.
Source: National Department of Human Settlements

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1   *Reply given by the Minister of Human Settlements to a question in parliament (Question NW535) by Ms M Makesini on 20 March 2023.*

2   National Department of Human Settlements (NDHS). 2024. *White Paper for Human Settlements. p 50.*

> 66 Self-build is an inherent, but neglected, part of human settlements policy."

In the context of the national housing crisis, supporting and enabling self-build incremental housing construction is a vital response. Self-build is not only a historical expression of people's agency to meet their own and others' housing needs; it is also an inherent, but neglected, part of human settlements policy. Although some form of support to self-build is provided via the Enhanced People's Housing Process (EPHP), the Finance Linked Individual Subsidy Programme (FLISP – now known as First Home Finance, FHF), the individual subsidy programme, and the individual rural housing subsidy voucher programme (IRHVS), the scale, scope and reach of these programmes are relatively limited.[3] Encouragingly, the 2024 White Paper on Human Settlements shows that the importance of self-build housing construction in advancing the right to housing is gaining greater policy recognition (see Box 1).

Box 1: Self-build provisions in the White Paper on Human Settlements

The White Paper broadly commits to the support and enablement of self-build. It does so mainly in terms of the policy commitments related to housing consumer support. A commitment is made to collaborate with the private and civil society sectors to establish Local Housing/Transactional Support Centres to support and enable self-build initiatives, consumer education and property transaction support, as well as to be hubs of alternative building technologies and provide technical and financial support to developers, contractors and communities.

An area-based approach will be taken in the establishment and location of these centres to respond to local contexts and the intention is to reorientate human settlement funding towards an area-based approach and provide for spatially integrated neighbourhood upgrading. Linkages to other state-led initiatives will be explored, as well as partnerships with civil society organisations (CSOs).

With specific regard to informal settlement upgrading and the managing of high densities, 'vertical density' will be explored and include double-story self-build solutions which utilise locally available materials and familiar building methods. A commitment is also made to a national support programme for small-scale contractors and developers, in particular women, that includes upskilling of local labour.

The National Department of Human Settlements commits to advocating for the establishment of funding mechanisms to enable CSOs to play a critical role in social facilitation and self-build, among others, with the intention of maximising the utilisation of public resources. Needs-based financial support for self-build will include a voucher scheme, subsidised materials or savings- and credit-linked systems, and the National Building Norms and Standards will be revised to allow for greater flexibility and incremental development, without compromising on health, safety, quality, and dignity.

Source: National Department of Human Settlements (NDHS). 2024. White Paper for Human Settlements.

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3   Isandla Institute. 2023. *Investigating the value and feasibility of using public finance for self-build housing processes in South Africa.*

Supporting self-build has a number of potential benefits to a municipality. Improved quality and safety of new self-build building construction, formalisation and regularisation of existing dwellings, and better densification management can be promoted. It can contribute to slowing informal settlement growth, land occupations and increases in homelessness. Township economic development and specifically women's empowerment can be enabled, as the majority of backyard landlords are women. Settlement sustainability and individual and community resilience can be strengthened. In contrast, even with an increased provision of serviced sites and amid ongoing and mostly informal township rental housing development, in the absence of state support for and enablement of self-build construction and incremental housing consolidation, people will continue to construct the standard of housing that they can afford. This is likely to result in a large number of informal structures, replicating the status quo.

Enabling and supporting self-build in all its variety provides opportunity in a constrained fiscal environment and can allow for a more demand-led housing process that acknowledges choice, people's agency and incrementalism. It can be an important element in shifting the housing focus beyond just site-and-service and towards housing consolidation in both informal settlements and in established neighbourhoods, where backyard housing is providing, or can provide, affordable housing for rent.

> Enabling and supporting self-build in all its variety can allow for a more demand-led housing process that acknowledges choice, people's agency and incrementalism.

Isandla Institute has advocated for the right to build to be included in national human settlements policy and, in particular, for housing support for (incremental) self-build to be provided since 2019 (see Informal Settlement Upgrading Matters: A Submission into the New Human Settlements Policy of the Cape Town NGO Collaborative Initiative).

In the context of the Backyard Matters (BYM) Project, a partnership initiative between the Development Action Group (DAG) and Isandla Institute, Isandla Institute investigated how self-build can be enabled and supported through Housing Support Centres (HSCs), inspired by the local EPHP housing support centre precedent and other Global South self-build initiatives. This resulted in three 2022 outputs on Enabling the Right to Build through Housing Support Centres: a research paper, a shorter proposition paper that distils the main arguments from the research paper, and an animation.

In 2023, the focus shifted to developing a model for the institutionalisation of HSCs, as summarised in Institutionalising a Housing Support Centre to enable self-build. This in turn informed further advocacy around the uptake of the model in local, provincial and national policy and programmes.

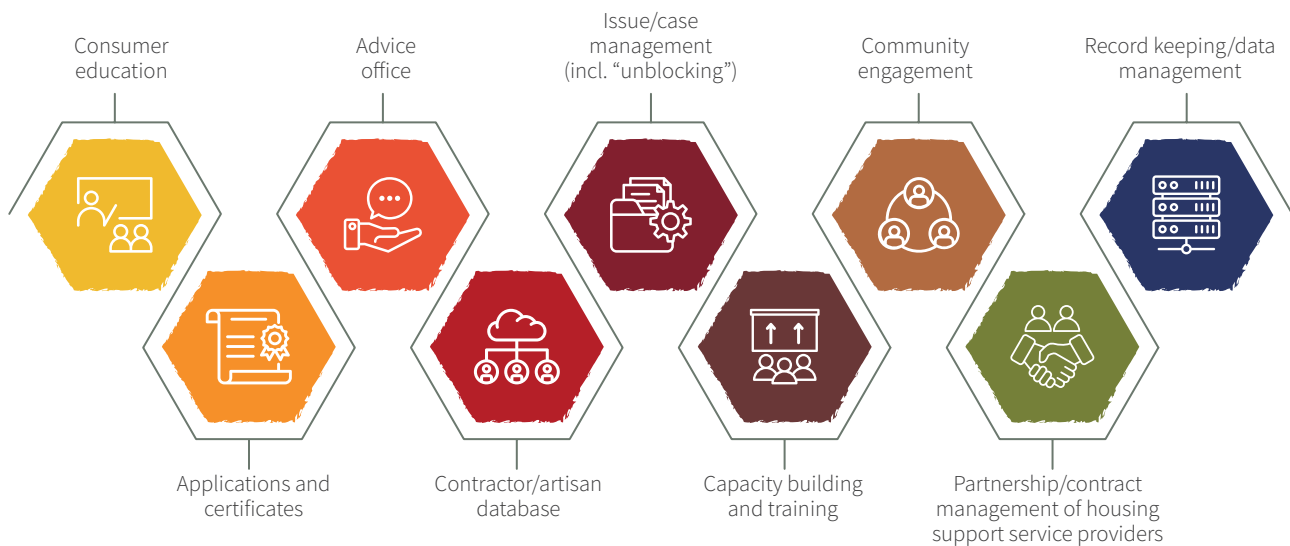In parallel, the Project engaged in research on financing for self-build. The paper Investigating the value and feasibility of using public finance for self-build housing processes in South Africa (2023) concluded that, firstly, there is a need for the scaling up of government subsidies for households without sufficient financial resources to self-build, and, secondly, this is allowed in the current policy framework.

Why Housing Support Centres (HSCs)?

It is clear that incremental self-build housing construction resulting in safe, dignified housing requires a progressive subsidy regime, which – on paper – exists. But people do not only need money to build better and meet safety standards; they also need technical advice and support on how to build and augment dwellings over time, how to comply with the municipality's requirements, and how to navigate the municipality's organisational structure to access relevant services. This is where HSCs can play such a vital role.

Rather than short-term, project-linked support targeted at collective needs (as is the case in EPHP projects), HSCs are largely targeted at individuals/households and can provide ongoing and area-based support to five broad categories of housing support needs, namely: tenure security, access to basic services, top structure, neighbourhood improvement, and sector support. This support can be suited to the specifics of different human settlement realities and needs.

An HSC can fulfil multiple functions in providing housing support:

Consumer education	Advice office	Issue/case management (incl. "unblocking")	Community engagement	Record keeping/data management
Applications and certificates	Contractor/artisan database	Capacity building and training	Partnership/contract management of housing support service providers	

An HSC model can initially leverage existing municipal capacity, structures and funding sources, while partnering with external stakeholders already providing housing support services. Over time, it can be enhanced incrementally with a broader range of support services and greater community involvement. While HSCs should in the long term be physical structures to have a community presence and respond to area-based housing support needs, the form of HSCs needs to be context-specific and linked to municipal capacity and resources. HSCs can be a permanent office, semi-permanent and periodic outreach (e.g. bimonthly or monthly), mobile, virtual or a hybrid of these forms. The model presents an opportunity to realign municipal administrative processes and governance towards delivering more integrated, customer-focused and efficient area-based services for housing support and other municipal needs, ultimately improving communication and strengthening community trust in municipalities.

Importantly, the White Paper for Human Settlements[4] contains a commitment to collaborate with the private and NGO sectors in the establishment of Housing Support Centres (referred to as Local Housing/Transactional Support Centres) to support and enable self-build housing construction (refer to Box 1). This policy commitment needs to be translated into programmes, with the requisite financial underpinnings, and actionable guidelines for municipalities.

Importance of piloting the concept

HSCs can take different shape and forms, depending on the human settlements context in which self-build occurs (e.g. informal settlement versus established township), the organisational context and set-up of the municipality and its institutional systems (e.g. the type of data systems), the potential presence of partner organisations to co-implement housing support services as well as available resources (both financial and human) for implementation. HSCs can also be set up to offer a growing number of services over time, thereby allowing for incremental expansion of housing support.

It is therefore important to pilot the HSC concept in a variety of municipalities and human settlements contexts in order to refine it, draw lessons from these different contexts for practice and replication, and build a solid evidence base to inform inclusion of the concept into human settlements policy and programming, primarily via the forthcoming Human Settlements Code.

> HSCs can be set up to offer a growing number of services over time, thereby allowing for incremental expansion of housing support.

Overview and target audience of paper

This paper draws lessons from the 2024 HSC pilot conducted in a partnership between the City of Cape Town (CoCT) and the Backyard Matters (BYM) project, for replication and contextualisation of the HSC model in other municipalities and other human settlements contexts.

Following an introduction to and details of the HSC pilot, known as the Right to Build Initiative (RtBI), the paper summarises and evaluates the results of the pilot. Lessons are then drawn from the RtBI to inform key recommendations for replication and contextualisation of an HSC pilot in other municipalities and human settlements contexts. Lessons are also drawn for national/provincial policy and programme development, and for CSOs and other support organisations engaged in housing struggles and/or looking to participate in the establishment of an HSC.

This paper will be helpful for municipal practitioners grappling with a number of interrelated issues. These include regularising existing self-built structures, guiding current and future self-build construction as well as managing densification and the quality of structures. Those keen to support sustainable neighbourhoods and township economic development will also find it beneficial. National and provincial government officials can find insights and implications for policy and programmatic support for, and enablement of, self-build. Lastly, civil society organisations (CSOs) and other human settlements stakeholders may get useful insights about partnering with a municipality, especially in the context of establishing an HSC, and may find the paper useful in their advocacy around self-build.

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4   National Department of Human Settlements (NDHS). 2024. *White Paper for Human Settlements.*

The Right to Build Initiative (RtBI)

Background

The BYM project identified the need to pilot the HSC model with a 'willing municipality' to test and refine the concept and the project successfully raised resources for the pilot to be implemented in 2024. In the last quarter of 2023, municipalities were invited to submit expressions of interest. Based on submissions received, the project chose the City of Cape Town as the preferred partner for the pilot, partly due to alignment between the HSC model and the Local Planning Support Office (LPSO) concept that the City had put forward in its Human Settlements Strategy and IDP,[5] which had a narrower focus on building and planning support. In addition, the progress already made in the workstreams of the small-scale rental unit (SSRU) element of the City's Mayoral Priority Programme on affordable housing were beneficial. After deliberation between the pilot partners, the decision was taken to name the pilot "the Right to Build Initiative (RtBI)", building on the HSC model's focus on supporting people's right to build and self-build. The intention behind the name was also to avoid giving people the impression that the initiative would bring housing.

As the pilot had to be completed in 2024 (followed by a monitoring and evaluation phase in the first quarter of 2025), the scope, reach, modality and location of the pilot had to be clearly defined in relation to the set timeframe.

Purpose and objectives of the pilot

The purpose and objectives of the pilot were:

- To test the HSC/RtBI model, demonstrate its benefits and determine how it can be replicated and augmented;
- To support policy advocacy around uptake of the model in local, provincial and national policy and programmes; and,
- For the CoCT, for the pilot to function as a precursor to the Local Planning Support Office (LPSO) programme, which it was in the process of developing.

The BYM project's strategy for piloting the Housing Support Centre model is shown in Figure 2.

A successful pilot provides an opportunity for the model to be institutionalised and scaled

The model is taken up in local, provincial and national policy and programmes

Improved housing solutions through a coherent self-build support programme

Figure 2: Backyard Matters project strategy for piloting the HSC model

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5   In the City's 2022–2027 IDP it committed to provide development application support, through the piloting of a local planning support function. Source: City of Cape Town. 2022. *Five-Year Integrated Development Plan July 2022 – June 2027*.

Key principles to guide the pilot were developed by the partners. As the BYM project partners have long advocated for co-production, community monitoring and accountability, one of the key principles was **community involvement** in the scope and monitoring of the pilot, thereby promoting accountability and the potential for an improved relationship with the targeted community. The importance of creating sustainable neighbourhoods was acknowledged by the pilot partners, and thus another principle of the pilot was to include a **neighbourhood focus**, beyond focusing on individuals/households. The often-siloed way of working in local government influenced the principle of **promoting transversal municipal working practices**. The thinking was that promoting these practices would work towards providing a more integrated, 'customer-centric' and efficient area-based service in terms of housing support and other municipal service needs, thereby strengthening communication and improving community trust in the municipality.

Target audience

The small-scale affordable housing sector is diverse and as such support needs vary. While increasing attention has been given to micro-developers by different spheres of government, the pilot sought to target homeowners and tenants in the traditional backyard housing sector, because they have less access to information, expertise and finance than micro-developers, and have greater needs in terms of tenure security, access to basic services and advice on top structure construction. They also need more advice and guidance on how to navigate the City's systems and processes. Homeowners in particular need advice on how to extend their homes or build new units for rental purposes. This target audience aligned with the BYM project focus and complemented the City's current primary focus on micro-developers. The proposed target for attendees/participants in each of the two focus areas chosen for the pilot was 300 in total (with a target split of 70% landlords/30% tenants).

Focus Areas

Location selection criteria were developed by the project team (BYM and CoCT) and applied to a longlist of potential focus areas. To allow for comparative results to be gleaned, it was decided to conduct the pilot in two areas. In instances where accurate quantitative data was not available (e.g. the specific scale and nature of backyard housing in an area, or the scale of title deeds backlogs), an assessment was made based on professional knowledge among the project partners. The selection criteria included:

- **Presence of an existing CSO partner relationship with the community and prior data collection:** As community involvement was identified as a key principle of the pilot, knowing the community and, in turn, being a known and respected entity in the community was seen to be vital. Community level data on the backyard housing sector in the area was considered an added advantage. DAG had worked in a number of the areas identified in the longlist and the BYM project had collected primary data in some areas in 2019.

- **Community readiness/capacity:** Given the expectation of community involvement and ownership of the initiative, and the relatively short time frame for pilot implementation, the presence of well organised and capacitated community leadership was deemed critical to the success of the pilot. DAG had existing previously capacitated communities in various areas of the city.

Key principles to guide the pilot

Community involvement

Neighbourhood focus

Promoting transversal municipal working practices

> "The small-scale affordable housing sector is diverse and as such support needs vary."

- **Scale and nature of backyard housing:** The selected areas had to have a relatively high prevalence of backyard housing and a mix of traditional backyard housing and entrepreneurial small-scale rental housing. The nature of the backyard housing market was also considered, i.e. whether the relationship between landlords and tenants was mainly familial or non-familial/transactional.

- **Property ownership:** Homeowners are unable to apply for city services, get planning approval or invest in their properties if they lack title deeds. This ruled out areas where backyard housing occurs predominantly on Council-owned land.

- **Developer of the area:** Whether the area was predominantly developed by the City, Province or the private sector would affect the City's ability to resolve or assist with title deed issues. As such, the area had to be developed by the City.

- **State of densification:** The intention was to identify which areas had potentially higher numbers of backyard tenants or still had space for further new self-build.

- **Estimated level of need for regularisation of existing structures versus need for advice on new build:** The scale of existing informal development in the area, and the potential for new build, were both considered important aspects for the pilot to respond to.

- **Presence of external stakeholders:** The presence of other CSOs, microfinance institutions, etc. could create opportunities for linkages, but also risk a duplication of effort or added burden on the community.

- **Unique attributes and potential issues/concerns of the area:** An assessment was made of specific features of each area that could either be beneficial for the pilot or have relevance to its roll-out (e.g. strong leadership structures) or potentially negative affect or derail the pilot (e.g. community instability, safety concerns).

Based on this evaluation, two focus areas were chosen: Eerste River and Langa. Eerste River was primarily chosen due to the long BYM project relationship with the leaders and community, the well-capacitated leadership and community and the stability and relative safety of the area. Langa was primarily chosen due to the strong leadership structures and level of community organisation in the area, diversity of housing typologies, and its relative safety. The City was also undertaking an infrastructure study in the area to ascertain upgrading requirements and associated costs to meet the growing demand in the area.

Profile: Eerste River

Eerste River is an area encompassing around 20 suburbs, located around 30 km east-south east of the Cape Town city centre and on the urban periphery of the city. It has a population of over 41 000. Eerste River was rural farmland for much of the 20th century and development only really accelerated from around the 1980s onwards. New erven were sold into the private market and many of the first owners, who were at the time primarily Coloured Afrikaans speaking households, would have bought land and built their own homes, or bought basic housing off-plan from small-scale developers who purchased and developed blocks. More recently, considering the large parcels of land available, the state has built large numbers of public housing in and around Eerste River. There is a significant level of backyard housing in the area.

Source: Statistics South Africa. 2011. Census 2011; Development Action Group. 2020. Neighbourhood Profile/ Palm Park, Eerste River.

Profile: Langa

Langa is a suburb, located around 9 km east-south east of the Cape Town city centre. It has a population of over 49 000. Cape Town's first township, it was established between 1923 and 1927 following the removal of Black people from Ndabeni location, near Maitland. Initially it consisted of migrant worker hostels/ barracks and state-built housing, but private market housing and large-scale state subsidised housing has also been built over time. Langa is characterised by high population densities and is mostly residential. It is a predominantly isiXhosa-speaking suburb. There is a high level of backyard housing in the area.

Source: Statistics South Africa. 2011. Census 2011; City of Cape Town. 2014. Langa Heritage Area Designation Report.

The City was keen to establish a baseline for evaluation purposes and selected a smaller sample area of ±300 erven in each pilot area. The City followed its own process to collect data for these sample areas, as it would bolster the City's fairly limited existing household-level data. The City planned to analyse available data, including planning statistics, and conduct a field survey in each focus area by EPWP (Expanded Public Works Programme) workers under the guidance of the City's Public Participation Unit (PPU). Due to limits in available data, only the field surveys were conducted, but the response rate was too low for the data to be representative, and there were also geographic sampling errors.

Figure 3: RtBI themes

Functions and form

It was decided that the RtBI would provide four of the HSC functions, namely: consumer education, an advice clinic, case management and community engagement. These relate to the needs of the target audience of homeowners and tenants in the traditional backyard housing sector identified above. As the advice clinic and case management functions were seen to be interlinked, these were therefore combined into one.

Consumer education function

This was planned to take the form of monthly information sessions, held on weekday evenings. The events would be held in city-owned venues in the pilot areas, facilitated by the BYM team, and with relevant City line departments distributing materials and providing presentations at each event. The sessions would cover a number of themes, addressed in consecutive months (see Figure 3).

First, the RtBI would be introduced, including its objectives and what it would, and would not, offer. Second, the rights and responsibilities of homeowners/landlords and tenants (as well as landlord-tenant conflict resolution) would be addressed in partnership with the Western Cape Rental Housing Tribunal (WCRHT). In the third month, the information session would focus on understanding city processes (e.g. property taxation, building plan approval, problem reporting, and municipal application processes). The focus would then shift to understanding city services (e.g. water, electricity and refuse removal, how to apply for service connections or meters, how to apply to be on the indigent register, and how to report issues with municipal services). The final theme of property regularisation, development and improvement would address regularisation of existing structures, the prototypical plans and urban design guidelines that the City has put together, and information on development charges and administrative fee reductions. These themes were chosen as they aligned with the identified needs of the target audience. There was an assumption that community members would attend multiple information sessions and that there would therefore be a layering of knowledge: starting with more general knowledge and augmenting this with more specific information as the pilot progressed.

Advice office/Clinic and case management function

This function would consist of monthly clinics held on Saturdays (with the expectation that working people would not be able to attend on a weekday), shortly after each information session. These would be City-run events, held in city-owned venues in the pilot areas, close to or in the same location as the information sessions. Representatives from relevant City departments would be present at each clinic so that a basket of advice services could be provided at all events. To ensure a more consistent and accessible service offering, officials from the City's Urban Planning and Design (UPD) department would also be present at the same venues on weekdays after the advice clinics to provide advice regarding building and land use-related issues, or referrals regarding other issues, to walk-ins. The clinics would cover the same thematic areas as the information sessions.

Community engagement function

This function would consist of monthly engagements with community leadership structures, the information sessions, and the clinics. The monthly engagement sessions would be used to introduce that month's theme and initially to clarify what the project would and would not do, e.g. not bring houses. The sessions would also comprise the community monitoring component, which would involve engaging with a set of questions and indicators in a tool developed by the BYM project. The function also included the engagements with relevant stakeholders in the preparation for the implementation of the pilot.

Figure 4 gives a programme overview showing the sequencing of the various RtBI functions and associated activities.

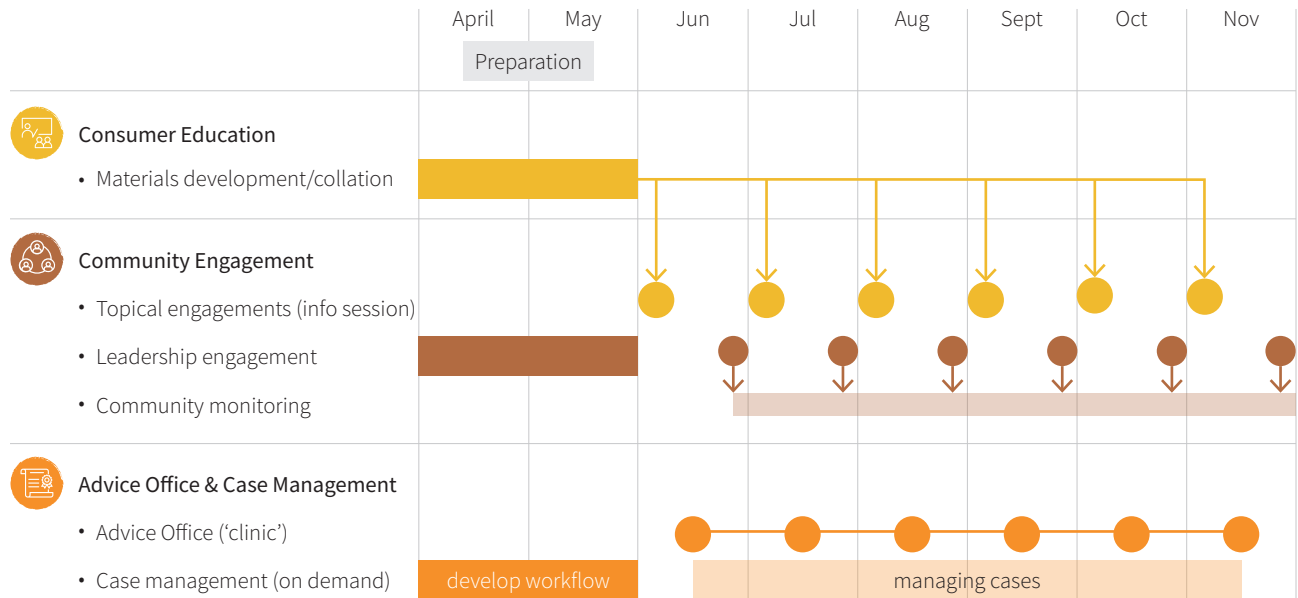|	April	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov
		Preparation						
Consumer Education								
• Materials development/collation								
Community Engagement								
• Topical engagements (info session)								
• Leadership engagement								
• Community monitoring								
Advice Office & Case Management								
• Advice Office ('clinic')								
• Case management (on demand)	develop workflow			managing cases				

Figure 4: RtBI programme overview

> The ultimate goal of the RtBI was that self-build in township areas in Cape Town is enabled and supported.

RtBI Theory of Change

A Theory of Change for the pilot (see Figure 5) assisted with developing appropriate indicators that could evaluate the pilot against the outcomes sought. These indicators were a mix of quantitative and qualitative, e.g. not only assessing attendance figures, but also increased knowledge. The consumer education function of the RtBI was aimed at increasing the knowledge of landlords and tenants so that they could act on this knowledge, while the advice office/clinic function sought to empower landlords and tenants to manage their relevant housing issues and improvements. Both had the intended longer term outcome of increased demand for specific City services and housing-related opportunities (to be tracked by assessing if there was an increase in services requests or applications). The community engagement function aimed to build the capacity and ownership of the community leadership in the two pilot areas to increase outreach and monitoring of the RtBI. The intended short-term outcomes were that community leaders would have improved capacity and feel ownership of the pilot, and were able to play a meaningful role in promoting the pilot in the community (resulting in increased demand and attendance at info sessions and clinics) and in monitoring the pilot. The intended long-term outcome was that community leaders would actively champion the value of self-build and housing support. The ultimate goals of the RtBI were a successful piloting of the HSC model of offering housing-related support in the two pilot areas, the distillation of lessons for institutionalisation and scaling, and in the longer-term, that self-build in township areas in Cape Town is enabled and supported.

Assumptions

The assumptions underpinning the pilot were articulated upfront, linked to the RtBI Theory of Change. From the City's side, a key assumption was that the pilot would provide the City with relevant expertise and insights to inform their LPSO programme, and that landlords and tenants in the two areas would recognise that it is in their interest to comply with City rules and processes. The partners assumed that there would be buy-in from community leaders, and that they would support the initiative. Another assumption was that through effective community engagement, the intended target audience would attend and those with other issues/interests outside the scope of the pilot would not attend. It was further assumed that both the community leadership and the project team had the necessary expertise and credibility to influence attendance of the intended target audience in both pilot areas. In terms of safety, the assumption was that the two areas were sufficiently safe for both community members and project partners to participate in RtBI activities.

From a data management perspective, it was assumed that the City's data management system and data management capabilities could be harnessed and augmented by the pilot. Institutionally speaking, the assumption was that there would be buy-in from senior City management and appropriate (delegated) involvement in the pilot by City officials, as well as active involvement in the review and monitoring sessions by a broader cross-section of City departments. It was further assumed that the requisite City capacity and resources would be allocated and that the BYM project team had the requisite capacity and resources to effectively execute their roles and responsibilities in the pilot. The final project assumption was that the pilot would not suffer significant disruptions or end prematurely.
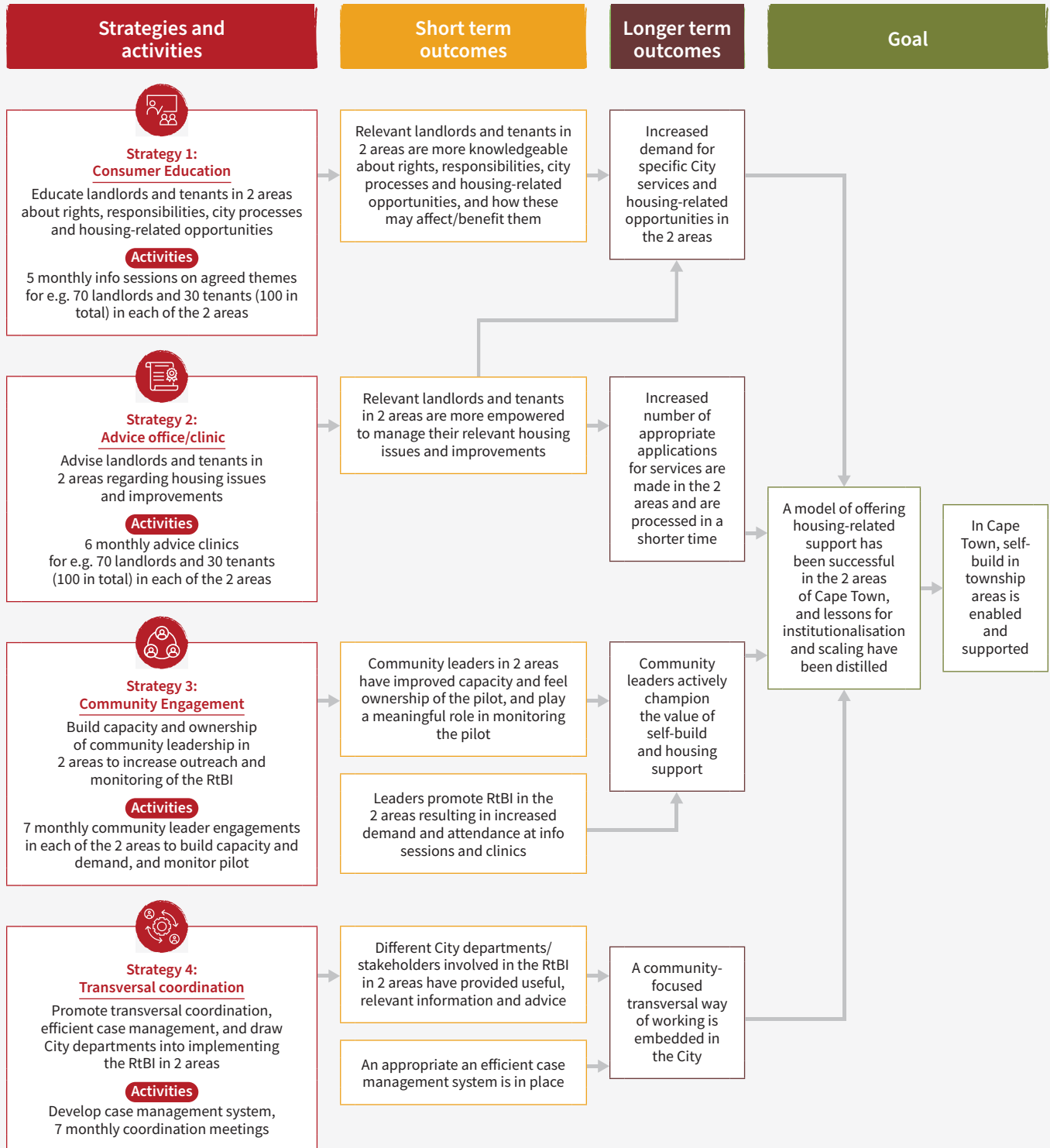
Strategies and activities	Short term outcomes	Longer term outcomes	Goal

Strategy 1: Consumer Education

Educate landlords and tenants in 2 areas about rights, responsibilities, city processes and housing-related opportunities

Activities

5 monthly info sessions on agreed themes for e.g. 70 landlords and 30 tenants (100 in total) in each of the 2 areas

Relevant landlords and tenants in 2 areas are more knowledgeable about rights, responsibilities, city processes and housing-related opportunities, and how these may affect/benefit them

Increased demand for specific City services and housing-related opportunities in the 2 areas

Strategy 2: Advice office/clinic

Advise landlords and tenants in 2 areas regarding housing issues and improvements

Activities

6 monthly advice clinics for e.g. 70 landlords and 30 tenants (100 in total) in each of the 2 areas

Relevant landlords and tenants in 2 areas are more empowered to manage their relevant housing issues and improvements

Increased number of appropriate applications for services are made in the 2 areas and are processed in a shorter time

A model of offering housing-related support has been successful in the 2 areas of Cape Town, and lessons for institutionalisation and scaling have been distilled

In Cape Town, self-build in township areas is enabled and supported

Strategy 3: Community Engagement

Build capacity and ownership of community leadership in 2 areas to increase outreach and monitoring of the RtBI

Activities

7 monthly community leader engagements in each of the 2 areas to build capacity and demand, and monitor pilot

Community leaders in 2 areas have improved capacity and feel ownership of the pilot, and play a meaningful role in monitoring the pilot

Leaders promote RtBI in the 2 areas resulting in increased demand and attendance at info sessions and clinics

Community leaders actively champion the value of self-build and housing support

Strategy 4: Transversal coordination

Promote transversal coordination, efficient case management, and draw City departments into implementing the RtBI in 2 areas

Activities

Develop case management system, 7 monthly coordination meetings

Different City departments/stakeholders involved in the RtBI in 2 areas have provided useful, relevant information and advice

An appropriate an efficient case management system is in place

A community-focused transversal way of working is embedded in the City

Figure 5: RtBI Theory of Change

Project timeframe and phasing

The RtBI ran for 15 months from January 2024 to March 2025 and consisted of four phases:

1 **Design/conceptualisation (Inception phase) (January–March 2024):**
This phase aimed to define the purpose and objectives of the pilot; clarify scope, functions and target audience; develop selection criteria for pilot areas (and select pilot areas); and define roles, responsibilities, capacity and resource implications. In addition, a community accountability tool was developed. Lastly, risks and risk management strategies were identified, while a partnership agreement was developed and signed.

2 **Preparation phase (April–May 2024):**
The purpose of this phase was to determine institutional readiness and community readiness, develop an engagement/outreach strategy to engage community leaders, CSOs, the private sector operating in each focus area and the relevant subcouncils and ward councillors. A monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework was also developed as part of this phase.

3 **Implementation phase (June–December 2024):**
This phase involved holding of the various RtBI events in the 2 focus areas from June to December 2024, conducting monthly community leader reflection and engagement sessions and conducting monthly reflection and preparation meetings.

4 **Documentation and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) phase (January–March 2025):**
Lastly, the purpose of this phase was to evaluate the RtBI and distil lessons and recommendations both for the City (to inform future practice and/or replication) and for advocacy by BYM project partners. It also provided an opportunity to draw lessons from the pilot to further refine the HSC model and determine how replication at scale can be implemented, and how it can be institutionalised at a national level and have the potential to attract support form national and provincial government.

Figure 6 summarises the phases and key deliverables in each phase.

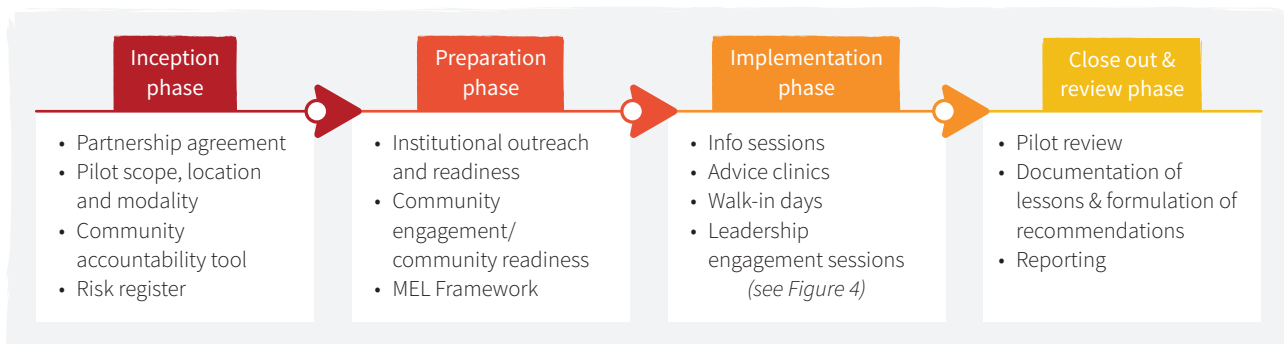| Inception phase	Preparation phase	Implementation phase	Close out & review phase
• Partnership agreement • Pilot scope, location and modality • Community accountability tool • Risk register	• Institutional outreach and readiness • Community engagement/ community readiness • MEL Framework	• Info sessions • Advice clinics • Walk-in days • Leadership engagement sessions *(see Figure 4)*	• Pilot review • Documentation of lessons & formulation of recommendations • Reporting

Figure 6. The Right to Build Initiative project phases

The next section will analyse and evaluate the roll-out of the RtBI. It will also reflect on the extent to which the risks and risk management strategies identified prior to pilot implementation materialised.

RtBI implementation

Overview

The Right to Build Initiative was implemented over a period of six months, from June until November 2025. Weather events, political dynamics and community tensions all played a part in pilot implementation.

In both pilot areas, out of six planned events five monthly information sessions were held. The June information session in Langa was cancelled due to a City Human Settlements event on housing-related issues that was to be hosted in the same week. Informed by historical anger related to housing and service delivery matters towards the CoCT, community tensions were rising at the time. It was therefore decided not to proceed with the planned event. The July information session in Eerste River was cancelled due to flooding in the area resulting in protests and affecting attendance. As attendance levels at the information events were generally lower than anticipated (see below), the decision was taken in early September to combine the information sessions (previously held on weekday evenings) and advice clinics in both areas on Saturday mornings for October and November.

All six monthly advice clinics, held on Saturdays, were convened in Eerste River, with the July advice clinic in Langa cancelled due to flooding of the venue. Walk-in days were held monthly on the Wednesday following the advice clinic.

The Community Engagement function was executed as planned. DAG convened six monthly community leader engagements in each area. These meetings reflected on preceding events (information sessions and advice clinics) using the community monitoring tool and focused on upcoming themes, to enable community leaders to communicate relevant information to community members. To support this function, the project partners jointly developed community-focused messaging advertising the RtBI and monthly events and disseminated this messaging, together with community leaders, via pamphlets, flyers (physical and digital), voice notes and loud-hailing.

Project partners held monthly meetings to reflect on the previous month's events and prepare for the upcoming events, which included briefing sessions with relevant City staff.

> "Weather events, political dynamics and community tensions all played a part in pilot implementation."

Attendance

Tables 1 and 2 indicate attendance figures in each focus area at the various events, including details on age and landlord or tenant status.[6] Attendance numbers across all events were overall consistently lower than expected throughout the pilot, and few people attended multiple events, so layering of knowledge (as envisaged through the sequencing of event themes) was therefore limited. Those that did attend multiple events were mostly community leaders (and mostly in Eerste River), who were there as part of their efforts to promote attendance. The intended target for attendees/participants in each area was 300 in total, with a desired split of 70% landlords and 30% tenants. This total was not achieved in either area, although Eerste River came close with 291 unique attendees compared to 124 unique attendees in Langa. Interestingly, the split across all events was predominantly in favour of landlords in Langa, and predominantly in favour of tenants in Eerste River (even excluding the initial information session in Eerste River, where a high proportion of tenants attended).

Table 1: Eerste River

Event Type	Nett Attendance	Unique Attendance	Age Range				Homeowners	Tenants	Unknown
			18–40	40–60	60+	Unknown			
Info Sessions	97	94	25	43	18	8	30	60	4
Advice Clinics	107	96	31	34	18	13	34	54	8
Walk-in days	113	101	27	42	30	2	55	46	0
Total	**317**	**291**	**83**	**119**	**66**	**23**	**119**	**160**	**12**

Table 2: Langa

Event Type	Nett Attendance	Unique Attendance	Age Range				Homeowners	Tenants	Unknown
			18–40	40–60	60+	Unknown			
Info Sessions	36	32	11	18	3	0	6	12	14
Advice Clinics	79	77	18	32	27	0	56	7	14
Walk-in days	15	15	0	9	6	0	9	1	5
Total	**130**	**124**	**29**	**59**	**36**	**0**	**71**	**20**	**23**

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6   As not all details were completed by attendees, there are discrepancies between columns.

As can be seen in Figures 7, 8 and 9, in both areas close to two-thirds of attendees across all events were female and over two-thirds of attendees were over the age of 40, with at least a quarter being over the age of 60. In particular, around 69% in Eerste River and 77% in Langa were over the age of 40. This demographic profile (at least insofar as it corresponds to backyard landlords) aligns with the BYM project's primary research, which indicates that the majority of backyard landlords/homeowners are older and female.[7]

Male   Female

Figure 7: Gender distribution in the RtBI pilot – Eerste River and Langa

18–40   40–60   60 +

Figure 8: Age distribution in the RtBI pilot – Eerste River

18–40   40–60   60 +

Figure 9: Age distribution in the RtBI pilot – Langa

Issues raised in pilot events

Attendees brought up several issues. Housing database queries were common, as well as issues with title deeds[8] (lack of deed, inheritance and disputes), and an inability to pay for municipal services (and related need for indigent support). The possibility of a state subsidy to buy land was queried. Planning and development-related issues included encroachments (by the erf owner or neighbouring owners), incorrect street numbers, and challenges with getting plans approved. Services-related issues included water, sewerage and electricity services, while landlord-tenant issues included rental property maintenance and landlord-tenant disagreements. Attendees also sought advice on how to access finance opportunities. The most common issues for which referrals where given were related to the housing database (Eerste River) and water, electricity and sewage (Langa). Some of the issues brought up by attendees could not be dealt with by the officials present, and appropriate referrals were given. However, for issues such as missing title deeds or inheritance issues, it became clear that the involvement of non-local government roleplayers is important in such initiatives.

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7   *Isandla Institute. 2021. Backyarding – Understanding rental markets better: A synthesis of research findings in eight neighbourhoods in Cape Town.*

8   *In the Palm Park area of Eerste River, the City's RtBI team discovered several residential erven where the City was still the registered owner, after the occupants raised title deed issues at events. The team embarked on a process of encouraging the occupants to take transfer of ownership, and in collaboration with the City's Human Settlements department, the corrective transfer of 21 properties has been prioritised, with 1 already concluded.*

RtBI project performance at a glance

Table 3 shows achievement levels against some key RtBI indicators for performance and impact (with green for achieved, yellow for partly achieved, and red for not achieved).

Table 3: Achievement levels against key RtBI indicators

Target	Eerste River	Langa
18 total events held (6 monthly info sessions, advice clinics, and walk-in days)	17 (1 info session cancelled)	16 (1 info session and 1 advice clinic cancelled)
Attendance (300 attendees across all events)	291 unique attendees	124 unique attendees
Attendee split (split 70% landlords and 30% tenants)	Predominantly in favour of tenants (57% of attendees indicating landlord/tenant status)	Predominantly in favour of landlords (78% of attendees indicating landlord/tenant status)
Increased awareness and knowledge of themes	Most evaluations marked 4 or 5 out of 5 on this indicator	Most evaluations marked 4 or 5 out of 5 on this indicator
Community leader engagement (organise 6 monthly community monitoring sessions)	6 sessions held	6 sessions held

Review

General assessment

Despite a lower than anticipated turnout, the goals of the pilot were mostly achieved. It managed to increase knowledge regarding the support needs identified as themes for the pilot, as most evaluations completed by attendees marked 4 or 5 out of 5 on this indicator. Notwithstanding significant outreach efforts by the City, the BYM project team and community leaders to drive increased attendance, the effectiveness of the pilot was hampered by the low attendance levels, which resulted in limited opportunities to increase the knowledge of community members and communicate the value of complying with City rules and processes. It was hoped that through attendance at multiple events, community members would experience a layering of knowledge. However, due to low attendance levels and the limited numbers of people who attended multiple events, this was made difficult.

Furthermore, the City has significant information materials regarding its various services and processes, but did not have the resources in this pilot to create a range of communication materials that simplified and translated these existing City materials for the target audience; this therefore also limited the impact for those who did attend events.

A key project assumption was that landlords and tenants in the two areas would recognise that it is in their interest to comply with City rules and processes and that this would result in good attendance at events. The pilot was unable to determine whether this assumption was reasonable, with other factors contributing to low attendance rates, or whether this assumption was incorrect. There was, however, a realisation that they may be unable to afford to comply with City rules and processes (among other barriers) or prefer the status quo, as it may be perceived to be in their best interest.

While activities were well-organised, the timing of events (i.e. the time of year, day of week and time of day) clearly affected the pilot, as rain, flooding and cold affected attendance at weekday evening information sessions, while attendance was marginally better at weekend advice clinics. Implementing the pilot in an election year may have also affected attendance, as the preparation phase of the pilot coincided with community-level political canvassing, which drew attention away from community engagement with the pilot. In addition, low levels of trust in the City and a history of unfulfilled expectations and (housing) promises were identified through community engagement as potential contextual factors influencing attendance at the pilot events, particularly in Langa. Lack of information and accountability regarding vacant undeveloped land and housing projects in their areas were raised as issues by the pilot communities. It was clear from responses by attendees (as well as from evaluation forms) that the project has at least helped in starting to (re)build trust between community members and the City, and many attendees that received advice communicated their appreciation.

Broader city-level involvement and buy-in

Levels of involvement and buy-in by different City stakeholders varied in the pilot, both in the inception phase and particularly during the implementation phase, with varying levels of departmental representation at events. The pilot was not completely successful in facilitating internal City coordination, despite the City having an existing coordinating mechanism for the workstreams of the SSRU element of the City's Mayoral Priority Programme on affordable housing. This was partly as a result of the City's siloed way of working, where different departments view their roles/mandates quite narrowly, and do not always appreciate the need to collaborate transversally or have the skills or flexibility to do so. Additionally, the intention was to establish an internal City working group, which did not happen as the Project Management Team mechanism of the broader small-scale rental unit (SSRU) element of the City's Mayoral Priority Programme on affordable housing was viewed as sufficient as an inter-departmental coordinating mechanism. A dedicated and formalised RtBI working group may have assisted in promoting greater internal coordination and transversal working, although the City would have had to contend with the concern of having a multiplicity of coordinating forums and (perceived) duplication. Ward councillors were informed about the pilot, and while the initial intention was to not actively involve them in the pilot due to a risk of politicisation (especially with the looming elections in May 2024), over time this view changed, and they were approached to assist with driving increased attendance. Subcouncil managers were also engaged and informed. Although not a city structure, the involvement of the Western Cape Rental Housing Tribunal in the information sessions and subsequent advice clinics on homeowner/landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities was also appreciated.

> A dedicated and formalised RtBI working group may have assisted in promoting greater internal coordination and transversal working.

Quality and value of the partnership

The partnership between the City, DAG and Isandla Institute demonstrated significant value as it allowed the partners (City and the BYM project team) to better understand the interests, concerns and workings of the other partner, and to pilot the model for their respective objectives. The monthly partnership meetings and reflection sessions were useful in reflecting on the previous month's events, taking necessary corrective decisions/actions, and preparing adequately for the coming month's events and briefing departmental speakers and representatives. The City lead department, and particularly the departmental champion, made a significant contribution to the pilot, championing the initiative and driving internal buy-in and coordinated implementation. The quality of the partnership was high, with open and practical engagement and decision-making. The division of labour was fair, and the work done by each partner was within their scope and expertise. The partner roles were complementary, and communication was open and effective.

> 66 The pilot has brought value to the project partners in overlapping and independent ways."

The pilot has brought value to the project partners in overlapping and independent ways. The City has learnt valuable lessons in partnering with CSOs, engaging with communities and lessons to take forward into the LPSO programme. Isandla Institute has learnt lessons to inform the refinement of the HSC model, for piloting in other human settlement contexts and inclusion in human settlement policy and programming, while DAG has strengthened its community relationships and learnt lessons regarding the need to better understand underlying community issues and how these may influence a community's relationship and engagements with a municipality.

Data and case management

It is important to note that many of the data-related indicators chosen for the MEL framework (particularly for a pre- and post-pilot comparison) turned out to be difficult to source. It became evident that detailed area-based data was not available, particularly related to household profiles, land and structure use and backyard services, and that the way data is collected in the City would not allow a granular breakdown of data points in each area or for the pilot to augment this data system. It also became clear that creating a baseline would be difficult, and despite field surveys being conducted in each area, these had deficiencies that made them of little use in evaluation of the RtBI.

Linked to this, it was assumed that an RtBI case management system (which was not developed due to limited pilot resources and the pre-existence of the City's fault reporting and departmental case management systems) would be appropriate and that it would work efficiently and allow for the measurement of the indicators identified. It became clear that it would not be possible to develop and implement a case management system (even simplified and paper-based), which impacted the monitoring and evaluation of the pilot, particularly the ability to track referrals and the resolution of cases as a result of the RtBI. This was in the context of the lead City department experiencing resource constraints as the RtBI was running parallel to the LPSO programme establishment process.

"Unexpected wins"

There were a few "unexpected wins" for the RtBI. Firstly, attendees in Eerste River brought up issues related to the local Housing Office. After the engagement with this office by the RtBI City lead, attendees reported an improvement in service levels at the Office. Secondly, the City's Public Participation Unit (PPU) and translation services were drawn into the publicising of the RtBI events, which was not anticipated by the BYM team during the design phase. Lastly, the officials present at the events were often able to create a personal connection with attendees/community members and demonstrated commitment unblocking "blocked" cases or providing more information outside of the scope of the pilot. The title deed investigation and subsequent transfer processes underway in the Palm Park area of Eerste River, highlighted earlier in Footnote 8, are a good example of this.

Anticipated and experienced risks

During the inception phase, partners identified various socio-political, community, internal (organisational) and external risks that could have had a negative impact on, or derail, the RtBI. Table 4 describes the risks identified and related risk management strategies. It further indicates whether a particular risk materialised and whether the strategy was effective.

Weather risk was not identified and therefore no related risk management strategy identified. Similarly, the flooding of the Langa venue was not anticipated, which compelled the City to identify an alternative local venue.

As noted earlier the risk of implementing the pilot in an election year could not be fully managed, as the preparation phase of the pilot coincided with community-level political canvassing, which drew attention away from community engagement with the pilot. However, the RtBI itself did not become politicised.

Table 4: Risks and risk management strategies

Risk	Risk management strategy	Did the risk materialise and was the strategy effective?
Socio-political risk		
2024 is an election year, and the pilot may become politicised.	The City together with the BYM project team will facilitate engagements with ward councillors and subcouncil managers in the chosen pilot locations to communicate why areas were chosen, and to get their buy-in to attempt to de-politicise the pilot.	The pilot did not become politicised.
Local political risk ● Ward councillors who do not represent the party in power choose to oppose or disrupt the pilot.	Engagement by the BYM project team will make the benefits of the pilot clear and build community leader ownership of the pilot.	Ward councillors did not publicly oppose or disrupt the pilot.
Community tensions ● Ward 51 which makes up the western, central and northern areas of Langa was originally the target area, however community leaders highlighted that Ward 52 which makes up the eastern area of Langa should also be included to avoid tensions.	The decision was taken to include both Wards 51 and 52 in the pilot area.	The strategy was effective as no tensions between the wards were created regarding the pilot.
Community risk		
Community misunderstanding of what services the RtBI can provide (e.g. it won't be a one-stop shop and bring a house).	The partners (City and BYM project team) will need to be clear about what the RtBI is offering (and not offering) to not unfairly raise expectations.	Despite attempting to provide clarity on what the RtBI would and would not do (e.g. bring houses), significant numbers of people attended the June info session in Eerste River due to the impression that the event would "bring houses".
Community leaders and CBOs lack time and/or capacity to engage with the pilot, play a galvanising role and monitor it.	The BYM project team will capacitate community leaders to enable them to engage with, take ownership of and monitor the pilot.	The risk did not materialise.
Internal (organisational) risk		
Duplication of City services and efforts.	The City must ensure that there is no duplication of City services and efforts by engaging with all relevant City departments, and designing the pilot to complement or build on existing City services and efforts.	There was no duplication of City services and efforts.
Ineffective or confusing messaging and creating unfair expectations.	The City and the BYM project team must develop specific messaging tailored for the primary and secondary target audiences. They must be clear and concise in this messaging regarding what the pilot will and will not offer. City officials (and particularly presenters) will need to be briefed and/or trained prior to each information session advice clinic.	The risk did not materialise because the team organised briefings with relevant departments involved in the events.

Risk	Risk management strategy	Did the risk materialise and was the strategy effective?
Internal (organisational) risk		
Lack of resources to develop appropriate communication material that clearly and concisely communicates the relevant information in an accessible way, preferably in the home language of attendees.	The lead City department will attempt to source additional funding for developing appropriate communication material.	Addition funding could not be sourced for developing tailored communication material.
Uncertainty as Municipal Planning by-law regulatory changes may come into force during the pilot implementation period (June to November 2024) creating possible confusing messaging to attendees.	The information and advice given to attendees regarding building plan and land use regulations and processes will be at a generic level and will only touch on regularisation of existing structures and the building of extensions/new structures once the by-law changes have been promulgated. Thus, clear communication is needed and, once in force, people must be made aware of the changes and their implications.	Municipal Planning by-law changes did not come into force during the pilot implementation period. The information and advice given to attendees regarding building plan and land use regulations and processes was at a generic level.
External risk		
Bringing in external partners such as the Western Cape Rental Housing Tribunal (WCRHT) may create confusion regarding the purpose, objectives and scope of the pilot.	It will be important to brief external partners on the purpose, objectives and scope of the pilot to ensure consistent messaging and avoid raising expectations of what these partners will do as part of the pilot (providing information and receiving referrals but not providing e.g. financial feasibility advice at the advice clinics).	No confusion was created and attendees valued the WCRHT presentations and advice.
Safety of attendees, City employees and BYM team members ● Both areas have crime and safety concerns, and the weekday events will be held in the evenings with the sun setting earlier in winter.	Measures will need to be put in place to make events safe, and to ensure awareness. Neighbourhood watch groups will need to be identified and involved as important role players. Organisational safeguarding policies will need to be followed. Weekday events will need to start as early as possible (e.g. 17:30) and not have a duration of more than 2 hours.	No safety incidents occurred, and law enforcement officers were present outside all events.
Both areas have gangs, particularly Eerste River (where the issue was brought up by community leaders). There is thus a risk in terms of safety and derailing of the pilot.	The BYM team will work closely with community leaders to explain the benefits of the pilot, and these leaders will then take responsibility for communicating and engaging with the broader community, including gang leaders.	Gangs did not impact event safety or derail the pilot.
Process is derailed (and/or community frustration increased) because attendees raise issues outside the scope of the pilot.	The City will make sure that subcouncil managers are involved and attend each RtBI event, so that they can facilitate how those issues are addressed outside of the pilot.	The process was not derailed nor community frustration increased by raising issues outside the pilot. This was addressed via referrals. The project decided to not require subcouncil managers to attend each RtBI event.

Lessons from the RtBI

Several valuable lessons and insights can be extracted from the pilot. These relate to the importance of data and evidence, community and institutional readiness, how to build and sustain an effective partnership, and resourcing of successful initiatives. In addition, useful insights can be drawn from being intentional about monitoring, evaluation and learning to allow for adaptation, when necessary or appropriate. Other insights are more practical in nature, related to when, where and how to conduct outreach activities. Notwithstanding the pilot limitations and challenges, the value and merit of the HSC model has been confirmed – which is perhaps one of the most conclusive lessons to be drawn from the RtBI.

The importance of an evidence-based approach and data management

While the project partners were aware of the importance of data when designing the pilot, it became clear during the pilot that sufficient and appropriate data, while not a pre-condition for the conceptualisation or success of such a pilot, is important. As appropriate data on the backyard housing sector, and township areas in general, is generally lacking in most municipalities, it would be preferred if both a baseline survey and a community needs survey can be conducted to inform the design, monitoring and evaluation of similar initiatives. These should be conducted prior to the design/conceptualisation phase. With informal settlements categorised for in-situ upgrading, enumerations (preferably undertaken comparatively recently) could be utilised. In addition, an analysis should be undertaken of existing municipal data points and possible sources of data from different municipal departments, to identify gaps and to come up with proxies if data is not available or innovative ways to source and harmonise data. The focus area(s) should be defined in a logical way and preferably aligned to administrative sub-districts/service regions.

Keeping records (of attendance, advice and referrals) during the implementation phase, and having municipal officials ensure that these are completed conscientiously and accurately, facilitates effective monitoring and evaluation of the initiative. Ensuring relevant demographic information (e.g. gender, age, homeowner/tenant) is captured will not only assist in developing suitable offerings but also augment existing municipal data. It is important to either link the initiative into the municipality's existing data management system (if possible) or for a simple, manageable data management system to be developed for the pilot, prior to the implementation phase. In doing so, POPIA requirements should be kept in mind.

A community needs survey can be conducted to inform the design, monitoring and evaluation of similar initiatives.

Community readiness, engagement and uptake

During the design/inception phase, selection criteria for choosing pilot areas should be developed, and these should include community readiness/capacity. It is important to choose areas where the partner CSO(s) has/have a strong relationship with the community, or where there are strong leadership structures and significant levels of community organisation. Building up relationships from scratch will be demanding and time-consuming, which is often not possible or desirable when a model or initiative is piloted.

While focus groups were held with community leaders in each area during the preparation phase to gauge interest in the RtBI, to explain the value of the RtBI and to equip leaders to drive community attendance, no community level demand survey was done prior to designing the pilot to complement this and give an indication of interest. As mentioned previously, such a survey can be useful in testing assumptions (about interest and uptake, for example) and in shaping the offering.

Clearly, the role of communication is critical in targeting the correct audiences as well as explaining what the initiative is about and the value of attending events. Similar initiatives will need to make use of specialist popular communication skills for community-focused messaging. Another key lesson is that message dissemination methods used (in the case of the RtBI these were pamphlets, physical and digital flyers, voice notes and loud hailing) are important for whether the content of the message is successfully communicated to community members and thus drives attendance. Sufficient resources need to be allocated to develop appropriate communication materials that clearly and concisely communicate the relevant information in an accessible way, preferably in the home language of attendees.

It was assumed that through effective community engagement, the intended target audience would attend, and those with other issues/interests outside the scope of the pilot wouldn't attend. However, despite targeted communication, significant numbers of people attended, for example, the June info session in Eerste River due to the impression that the event would "bring houses". Also, many issues outside the immediate scope of the pilot were raised at info sessions, advice clinics and walk-in days, which the referral system addressed. This may be because community members view housing and the housing waiting list as their primary concern and did not see the relevance of the topics that formed the scope of the pilot. Also, even with more effective communication, it would still have been very difficult to ensure that those with issues/interests outside the scope of the pilot wouldn't attend. This is due to the general lack of opportunities for engaging with municipalities on an individual basis with regard to issues, and thus people are likely to take any chance they get to engage, even if the topic/purpose is different. The lesson is that issues should be allowed to surface, and effective referral mechanisms or resources should be made available.

Lastly, activating community leaders to be champions of the initiative can be invaluable. Community leaders in the two pilot areas were actively involved and committed to the success of the RtBI. Apart from the monthly community leadership engagement sessions, a number of leaders attended multiple information sessions, advice clinics and walk-in days. They also took part in loud-hailing, distributed flyers and interacted with community members at events. They provided critical insights into community sentiment and often asked attendees how they perceived the support received, relaying this to the BYM project team and City RtBI lead.

> "The role of communication is critical in targeting the correct audiences and explaining what the initiative is about."

Institutional readiness, ownership and arrangements

It is important to get the right departments and persons (e.g. executive directors and high-level staff as well as delegated lower-level staff) involved and to secure their buy-in as early in the process as possible. Therefore the design/conceptualisation phase should be allocated sufficient time (at least 6 months) to allow the institutional 'bedding down' of the initiative to take place, so that there is clarity as well as political and administrative support for the objectives. This would allow high-level staff to fully interrogate what the initiative would mean for their department and designate sufficient staff members, as well as inculcate in them the importance and value of the initiative. It would give staff a stake in, and accountability for, the success of the initiative. In the implementation phase, this should be accompanied by the establishment of periodic reporting requirements to high-level staff so that delegated officials are obligated to devote sufficient attention and effort to the initiative.

Another useful mechanism for facilitating internal coordination and buy-in is an interdepartmental municipal working group. This can promote a more transversal rather than traditionally siloed way of working in the municipality, as well as the development of the skills and flexibility to do so. Involvement of the relevant departmental stakeholders in a working group in both the design/conceptualisation phase as well as the implementation phase can foster broader ownership of the initiative, allow for case management or area-based issues involving multiple departments to be addressed transversally and holistically, and enable oversight.

A lead department, and particularly a departmental champion, is important in driving buy-in and implementation of such an initiative. In the same way that community leadership can act as champions, the role of municipal representatives acting as champions (internally, but also in/towards communities) is vital. The City's RtBI lead played this role in an unassuming, but effective manner, enrolling other parts of the City in the delivery of the pilot. Creating a personal connection with community members and demonstrating commitment are key to building trust and unblocking "blocked" cases.

Beyond informing them, the involvement of ward councillors and other elected officials in the initiative should be carefully considered. On the one hand, the role of Councillors in driving community interest can be invaluable. On the other hand, there may be a risk of politicisation, especially during turbulent times, such as election periods.

Project partnership

A pilot such as the RtBI would not have been possible without a partnership between the City of Cape Town and DAG and Isandla Institute as the BYM project partners. The BYM project partners would not have been able to navigate the internal municipal processes required to roll-out such a pilot, whereas the CSO partners were vital for the City, given their existing community relationships and the low level of community trust in (local) government, as well as their expertise in research and knowledge production. As such, each partner contributed their unique expertise. A partnership agreement is important for any similar initiative, and the roles, responsibilities and contributions of all partners need to be captured in the agreement. Monthly partnership meetings are useful for planning, ongoing monitoring and taking corrective decisions/actions, if necessary.

Municipalities will need to acknowledge that while partnering with CSOs in a similar pilot allows for the harnessing of their skills in community engagement, social facilitation and

support, in the longer term these skills need to be developed internally to build ongoing trust and ensure sustainability, given the project-linked funding of CSOs and their limited capacity and geographic coverage. As suitably experienced and resourced CSOs are not present in all municipalities, investing in internal capacity to fulfil these roles will be even more important.

Funding and resourcing implications

As both the BYM project partners and the City's UPD department had objectives to test their HSC and LPSO models respectively, they both committed – limited – existing staff and resources to the pilot. Contributions were often in kind, and these were captured in the partnership agreement.

It became clear that similar initiatives will need to dedicate a significant amount of time in the design/conceptualisation phase (e.g. 4 to 6 months) to developing a feasibility study/ detailed business plan and budget, for inclusion into the lead department and ultimately City budget, to allocate the required resources (financial and human) and time to achieving the best possible impact. A business plan will also enable all required departments to set aside budget and capacity for their involvement, as well as to allow the initiative to link into existing municipal administrative processes and timelines. Smaller municipalities may have less administrative processes to deal with, leading to lower costs and shorter timelines. Linkages with similar objectives in different departments and existing programmes/projects should be identified to avoid duplication and draw on existing budgets, resources and materials. Many municipal departments have existing public materials giving information and advice, which should be collated, simplified and translated, with specific budget and resources allocated for this purpose.

In terms of the outreach component of similar initiatives, staff involvement and participation may be outside of their normal roles and work commitments, and this must be considered in how buy-in is sought and commitment secured.

For CSOs, the designing and running of such an initiative has significant budget and staff implications, particularly the community engagement aspects, and this must be assessed and taken into consideration upfront in the design/conceptualisation phase. Having relevant language skills for the focus areas of the initiative is also an important consideration.

The importance of a MEL approach to be adaptive

Through monthly partnership meetings, the project partners systematised regular reflection and monitoring of the pilot. This, in turn, allowed the RtBI partnership to be agile and adaptive in responding to lower-than-expected attendance figures, through combining information sessions and advice clinic on weekends, as well as agreeing on additional efforts to secure City departmental and community participation. These monthly partnership meetings, as well as the parallel community leader meetings which strengthened accountability, were both key elements of the RtBI's adaptive MEL approach. This highlights the importance of the MEL approach in similar initiatives to be adaptive and the value of embedding a community monitoring component. It is important that the MEL Framework is used and referenced throughout pilot implementation, rather than shelved once developed. Having it as a standing item on monthly partnership meetings helps in being intentional about MEL, but also in reviewing and updating project assumptions and risks.

Monthly partnership meetings and parallel community leader meetings which strengthened accountability, were key elements of the adaptive MEL approach.

Practical insights

In terms of practical insights from the RtBI, perhaps the most obvious is to carefully consider the potential seasonal and weather-related impacts on logistics and attendance. While these cannot be eliminated, they can be reduced through adjusting the dates, times and venues of events as was done during the RtBI. Similarly, it is important to ensure that events do not clash with other municipal outreach activities in the area and to consider the impact elections or community-specific dynamics may have on planned events and outreach.

The demographic profile of the target group (predominantly older women in the RtBI) also brings to light the gendered implications of the planned outreach. For example, timing of the event and venue choice need to consider women's safety after dark and their likely caregiving roles.

Other important considerations are choosing a well-located municipality-owned venue in the target area(s), ensuring facilitation in an appropriate language, and allowing sufficient time during information sessions for questions. It is also important to have municipal representatives from relevant departments present at events to assist with referrals. Lastly, there may may also be the possibility of drawing in law enforcement services or neighbourhood watches to provide security at events.

Need and merit of an HSC

The importance of creating a personal connection is a key lesson, and this also assists in (re) building community trust in a municipality.

The need for and merit of housing support centres was affirmed through the pilot, as evidenced by the types of issues raised by attendees at advice clinic and walk-in days, the advice and referrals given, and the predominantly positive attendee feedback. This feedback also indicated that attendees had improved knowledge of the themes covered and felt more empowered to act on this knowledge, which are two of the short- and medium-term outcomes targeted in the RtBI Theory of Change, as well as goals of the HSC model. The issues raised by attendees highlight the importance of not only drawing in a diverse array of municipal departments to provide HSC advice and support, but also other non-municipal entities such as Rental Housing Tribunals, the Deeds Office and the Master of the High Court. The importance of creating a personal connection is a key lesson, and this also assists in (re) building community trust in a municipality. The RtBI also highlighted that the shape and form of an HSC has to be determined in context. The lessons learnt by the City, particularly regarding engaging with communities, working more transversally and providing community-level consumer education and advice, demonstrate the value of the RtBI/HSC model to the City and other municipalities, as well as to provincial and national government, in enabling and supporting self-build.

In fact, the City has confirmed that is has taken lessons from the RtBI into the planning for its LPSO programme, as the RtBI was intended as a test case for this programme. The LPSO programme has featured in the City's Human Settlements Strategy and IDP for the past few years and is one of the 10 workstreams of the small-scale rental unit (SSRU) element of the Mayoral Priority Programme on affordable housing. A new City branch was established in 2024 to run the programme, with operations expected to commence in the second half of 2025. Informed by experiences with and insights from the RtBI, the scope of the programme has broadened from providing only advice and assistance with building plan and land use-related issues to a broader set of responses, targeted at both micro-developers and homeowners.

Box 2: City of Cape Town Local Planning Support Office (LPSO) programme

The new City of Cape Town Local Planning Support Office (LPSO) branch will comprise a total of 20 staff members structured into 2 teams, comprising 8 members each (architects and town planners), supervised by a Principal reporting to the Manager. It will have four implementation functions/modes, namely Sector Support, District Office Days, Mobile Outreach and Focus Area Community Outreach.

a) Sector support

As part of a Small-Scale Rental (SSR) Sector Support Framework, the City aims to establish a database of built environment service providers (e.g. town planners, architects, land surveyors and possibly micro-developers) for homeowners to consult when needing to appoint professionals. The City also intends to provide resources for the training of built environment service providers to improve the quality of building plan and land use submissions and cooperate with professional bodies and tertiary institutions to allow for training accreditation and awarding of continuing professional development (CPD) points. The City's current support to micro-developers will continue, in partnership with and facilitated as training by the Development Action Group and the University of Cape Town. Support will also include the compilation of a homeowner/micro-developer handbook, which will include information about the City's prototypical plans, urban design guidelines, SACAP (South African Council for the Architectural Profession) work stages and regulated architectural fees.

b) District Office Days

Two LPSO staff members will be assigned to each of the eight planning district offices on one dedicated weekday per month. Their primary focus will be liaising with and assisting Development Management staff in providing pre-submission advice and guidance to homeowners wishing to submit building plans and land use applications. This amounts to 50 visits to every district office per year, or 2,000 district visits over a 5-year IDP period.

c) Mobile Outreach

The two LPSO teams will provide an advisory service in a different subcouncil area one day per month between February and November. This service will be provided in 20 wards each year, effectively one in every subcouncil area. Over a 5-year IDP period, they will have reached 100 wards, five in every subcouncil. There will be a neighbourhood focus within each ward and LPSO staff will be present in council-owned facilities to provide general advisory and professional developmental guidance. Potential linkages to existing outreach services will be explored. LPSO staff will be trained on the City's fault reporting system and property disposal process, will carry all City application forms, and will have access to relevant City databases and systems

d) Focus Area Community Outreach

A dedicated planning support service will be provided in a chosen focus area over a one-year period. The programme will comprise three stages: social preparation, outreach roll-out, and evaluation and reporting. Over time each LPSO team will at any stage be rolling out services in three focus areas, each at a different stage. Each stage is intended to take 4-months to complete and is described below:

- **Social Preparation:** This will involve outreach to the relevant subcouncil, ward councillor, ward forum, civic associations and sectoral leadership to establish a working relationship, explain the programme's intent, understand community issues, challenges, and perceived threats, and build trust and positive relationships with civil society in the area.

- **Outreach roll-out:** This phase will comprise three modes: weekly advisory clinics; fortnightly engagement with sectoral groups; and internal LSPO research and other work. The weekly advisory clinics will take place on a dedicated weekday over a 4-month period. The two eight-person LPSO teams will be present in the focus area to provide an advisory service to the local community. Sectoral engagement will include exploring issues, symptoms, challenges, and visions, and generating ideas and proposals to inform a draft high level Community Action Plan of short-, medium- and long-term priorities. The outcome would inform the compilation of a Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan; draft Local Area Action Plan; or Public Investment Framework. Internal LSPO research and other work could involve household and small-scale rental unit surveys and vacant land studies, etc.; and seeking administrative and political support for the priorities identified by the communities in the focus areas.

- **Evaluation and reporting:** The programme roll-out will be recorded and monitored to enable evaluation of each outreach. This will ensure that lessons learnt can assist the LPSO branch to adapt methods and impact on new processes to promote better future outcomes.

Source: City of Cape Town. 2025. Report to Portfolio Committee: Spatial Planning and Environment, 8 January 2025.

Key recommendations

The RtBI is a specific, contextual articulation of the HSC model. Its scope, modality and effectiveness were informed by specific considerations, such as timeframe (the pilot had to be designed, implemented and concluded in 2024), organisational interests and capabilities of pilot partners, and available resources. This section distils recommendations for municipalities seeking to replicate and contextualise the HSC model, for national/provincial policy and institutionalisation, and for CSOs and other support organisations keen to partner with a municipality in piloting and/or rolling out HSCs.

Recommendations for replication and contextualisation

To refine the HSC model, it is important to pilot it in other municipalities and human settlements contexts. More pilots and more testing will allow for not only refinement of the model, but also for lessons to be drawn from different contexts and a solid evidence base to be created to inform inclusion into human settlements policy and programming.

While the RtBI was run in a metro and limited to a township/backyard housing context and 6-month implementation phase, lessons can be draw for replication and contextualisation. Other metros have similarly large institutional structures, and existing outreach programmes that can link to and inform a pilot. Therefore there are strong parallels, and the lessons from the RtBI can be easily adapted to the local context, with a similarly broader focus on housing support needs beyond building plan and land use issues. In secondary city municipalities, the institutional structures are smaller and less complex, and this may allow for more flexibility and a quicker and easier design phase and roll-out. However, these municipalities may have less funding and staff resources to allocate to a pilot; support from provincial governments may therefore be necessary.

In terms of other human settlements contexts, papers produced by Isandla Institute in 2022[9] and 2023[10] have highlighted that while HSCs should provide support to the five broad categories of housing support needs (i.e. tenure security, access to basic services, top structure, neighbourhood improvement and sector support), what these needs mean in an informal settlement context is likely to be different from a township/backyard housing context. Therefore, running a pilot in an informal settlement context, or even a mixed township/ informal settlement context, will require an acknowledgement of these differences and how they will affect the design and implementation of the pilot.

An informal settlements-focused HSC pilot would need to focus on households living in informal settlements categorised for in-situ upgrading (A & B1), and recipients of serviced sites, particularly where sites are ready for top-structure construction. As the informal settlement upgrading (ISU) process is strongly focused on neighbourhood development, a pilot would

9   Isandla Institute. 2022. *Enabling the Right to Build through Housing Support Centres.*

10   Isandla Institute. 2023. *Institutionalising a Housing Support Centre to enable self-build.*

require the prior completion of social facilitation processes regarding informal settlement/neighbourhood improvements (incl. enumerations, social compacts and sustainable livelihood plans). As tenure security would be an important pre-condition, the potential involvement of other spheres of government would be more crucial than in a township context. An informal settlements-focused HSC pilot would need to focus on advising and supporting incremental self-build housing at scale, so this would require a much more narrowly defined pilot area (e.g. just one settlement) and a much more engaged level of support than would be provided in a township context.

It is clear from the RtBI pilot that partnering with CSOs, other state entities and broader roleplayers is vital for successful implementation. As such, partnering (accompanied by clear partnership agreements) must be a central modality of similar initiatives in other contexts. Funding implications need to be considered by municipalities intending to run similar initiatives, with the lessons from the RtBI informing these considerations. Provincial and national government human settlement departments should consider allocating funding and resources, within existing budgets, to support secondary city municipalities in running their own pilots. The RtBI has proven that an HSC pilot does not require a large additional budget but can be aligned with existing functions and in-kind contributions by municipal and CSO partners. It also highlighted the importance of having political and administrative champions for such an initiative.

While the scope of the pilot was more narrowly defined than the possibilities for incremental augmentation embodied in the HSC model, this principle of incremental augmentation speaks to a possible area of innovation that should be explored when replicating and/or institutionalising the HSC model: the role of alternative and sustainable building technologies (ABTs) in self-build.[11] Given the intersecting housing, climate and economic crises that our country faces, it is vital that human settlements policy and programming recognises that ABTs, defined as non-conventional building materials or methods, can be a game changer for affordable housing that is safe, dignified, climate-resilient and potentially low-carbon.

More specifically, ABTs can play an important role in incremental self-build housing construction that responds to people's needs and aspirations and that suits their financial means. ABTs further hold great potential for job creation and local economic development. To realise the multiplier effect ABTs can have on housing, the economy and climate resilience, a fundamental rethink of the housing – climate – economy nexus is required, with significant investment in new systems, markets and value chains. Thus the current opportunity for a fundamental rethink of human settlements policy, created by the process of developing the White Paper and forthcoming Human Settlements Code, presents a window of opportunity to promote and scale up the use of ABTs in incremental self-build housing construction; Housing Support Centres can be a vital source of information and advice on, and even supply of, ABTs, as well as providing access to municipal-developed prototypical ABT building plans.

> Alternative and sustainable building technologies can be a game changer for affordable housing that is safe, dignified, climate-resilient and potentially low-carbon.

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11 Isandla Institute. 2024. *Sustainable homes: Alternative building technologies for low-carbon affordable housing construction.*

Recommendations for national/provincial policy and programme development

The 2024 White Paper for Human Settlements contains policy commitments to collaboration with the private and CSO sectors in the establishment of Housing Support Centres (referred to as Local Housing/Transactional Support Centres) to support and enable self-build housing construction (see Box 1). The White Paper will inform a new Human Settlements Code and Human Settlements Act, respectively, and therefore the RtBI and other pilots in other municipalities and human settlements contexts will allow for refinement of the model, possibly the development of a variety of models for differing contexts, and a solid evidence base to inform the more detailed human settlements policy and programming that will be contained in the Human Settlements Code. An appropriate procurement and funding mechanism will need to be developed to enable partnerships between municipalities and CSOs and other support organisations.

> **Provincial governments can create Housing Support Centre frameworks to both incentivise and provide guidance to municipalities to roll out HSCs.**

Provincial governments can not only contribute funding and resources to assist municipalities in running their own pilots, but can also create provincial Housing Support Centre frameworks to both incentivise and provide guidance to municipalities to roll out HSCs.

Existing funding mechanisms can be utilised to fund HSC pilots and broader roll-out. While the RtBI made use of existing budget within the City of Cape Town's Spatial Planning and Environment (rather than Human Settlements) Directorate, grant funding can be an important funding source for running a HSC pilot, if planning for the pilot starts early enough for it to be provided for in the municipal budget. Some of the key grant funding that aligns with HSC objectives are the Integrated Urban Development Grant (IUDG), the Neighbourhood Development Partnership Grant (NDPG), the Informal Settlements Upgrading Partnership Grant (ISUPG) and the Urban Settlements Development Grant (USDG). Provision could be made in these grant guidelines to permit their use for HSC purposes. The social facilitation allocation of the ISUPG can be used for the establishment and operation of HSCs prior to guideline changes being made. Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) guidelines can also be amended to allow non-metros to use this funding towards HSCs, despite these municipalities not having housing accreditation, as municipal HSCs would support provincial-led housing programmes and self-build more broadly. In the longer-term, national government should create provision for a dedicated funding mechanism for HSCs, aligned with the Local framework for Housing/Transactional Support Centres identified in the White Paper and which will presumably be taken through into and concretised in the forthcoming Human Settlements Code.

Recommendations for CSOs and other support organisations

Working with communities

Lessons can also be drawn from the RtBI to inform recommendations for CSOs and other support organisations looking to partner with a municipality in an HSC pilot. While CSOs may have significant experience in working with communities, the unique characteristics of each community will affect the design and implementation of an HSC pilot in their area. While DAG had a long relationship with the Eerste River community leaders, and had some previous

organisational relationships in Langa, they had to dedicate significant extra effort to engage with and capacitate the Langa community, The low levels of trust in the City by the Langa community and a history of unfulfilled expectations and (housing) promises, made these engagements and the planning and facilitation of events that much harder, possibly affecting attendance levels at RtBI events. It is thus important for CSOs to consider these characteristics and dynamics when identifying communities or areas for a pilot and conduct a thorough contextual analysis and needs assessment in partnership with the municipality. The specific support needs of each community/area will need to be considered in the pilot design. CSOs will need to assess funding and resourcing implications for the implementation phase of a pilot, including e.g. staff language skills in relation to the planned pilot area. CSOs will need to be alive to the possibility of being seen by communities as an arm of the municipality and will need to ensure that it is made clear to communities what their role is (e.g. facilitation, rather than service provision) and what the pilot will and will not bring (e.g. houses).

Working with a municipality

The RTBI has made clear the value for CSOs in partnering with municipalities to provide housing and housing-related support to communities. Apart from considering the specific political, socio-economic and governance context of a municipality, the varying capacity and financial resources of municipalities will need to be considered, as well as the existence of any complementary municipal programmes that can be linked to. It will be important for a CSO interested in partnering in a similar initiative to consider the municipality's institutional readiness. The BYM partners chose to partner with the City of Cape Town in the RtBI partly due to alignment between the HSC model and the LPSO programme, and the progress already made in the workstreams of the small-scale rental unit element of the Mayoral Priority Programme on affordable housing. The RtBI was able to take advantage of existing political and institutional willingness, and ongoing work to evaluate the appropriateness of planning policies, by-laws and administrative processes and innovative responses arising from these evaluations. The fact that the LPSO programme was already identified in the City's IDP and Human Settlements Strategy added to the municipality's institutional readiness and receptiveness to partnering in the pilot.

> "A CSO interested in partnering in a similar initiative needs to consider the municipality's institutional readiness."

Advocacy around self-build

While incremental self-build housing construction is gaining increased and much-needed attention in the human settlements sector, and commitment has been made in the White Paper to support and enable self-build, ongoing advocacy around self-build is required from CSOs. This is to ensure that the policy commitments made in the White Paper are translated into holistic and detailed programmatic responses in the Human Settlements Code. In particular, policy development and clarity are needed to craft a Local Housing/Transactional Support Centre policy framework that details how these centres can be piloted and set up permanently (in different forms) in different types of municipalities and human settlements contexts, what types of support will be provided and how (including partnership modalities), and funding mechanisms to support their rollout. It will be important for CSOs to be deeply involved in these policy and programmatic deliberations, with the state recognising that CSOs have the understanding, experience and skills in providing community-level support vital for crafting a responsive and appropriate framework for supporting and enabling self-build.

Things to consider for an HSC pilot

An HSC needs to be 'fit-for-purpose'. Its shape, form and offering needs to be developed in relation to the local context and its intended purpose. This can be augmented incrementally, with support services added over time to allow sufficient time for the initiative to scale up and be institutionally embedded. While an assigned sector department will lead on the pilot, HSCs are a whole-of-municipality responsibility. Here are some things to consider when planning, designing and implementing an HSC pilot.

1   **Know your intended target audience** – the socio-economic profile of attendees/beneficiaries should inform outreach activities and logistics. Communication needs to be appropriate, targeted and in the dominant local language, and the timing and location of events needs to be suitable. In the case of the RtBI, the primary target audience was the backyard homeowner, which is predominately female and older.

2   **Use, collect and record data to ensure an evidence-based approach** – where possible, a baseline survey and community needs survey would be very valuable in informing the offering. Collecting data during the pilot (e.g. attendance registers, service queries, supportive and/or referral actions) can not only allow for improvements but also augment existing municipal data.

3   **Develop selection criteria for choosing pilot areas** – given the scale of need and opportunity, use a clear and transparent selection process to choose areas where the best impact is likely to be achieved. It is better to choose areas where the partner CSO(s) has/have a strong relationship with the community, or where there are strong leadership structures and significant levels of community organisation.

4   **Invest in communications and materials development** – communication is critical in targeting the correct audiences, using the most effective and appropriate communication means. Additional resources may be required, especially to produce popular outputs.

5   **Consider the gendered implications of planned outreach** – women are likely to make up a significant proportion of the participants in the pilot. Carefully consider the timing and location of activities or events and address/pre-empt potential safety concerns. Also ensure that services and facilitation are provided in a gender-sensitive manner. Other social groups (e.g. people with disabilities, the elderly) may equally require special consideration.

6   **Allow sufficient time for the institutional 'bedding down' of the initiative** – allow at least 6 months for the design of the pilot and for systems and processes to enable institutional readiness to be in place.

7   **Identify a lead department and a departmental champion** – someone who is successful in navigating the internal organisational environment and is passionate about the initiative is key to its success.

8   **Create an interdepartmental municipal working group** – this enables coordination, buy-in/support and oversight, allowing lessons and insights gained from the pilot to benefit not only the initiative, but also the municipality.

9   **Be clear about the role and level of involvement of ward councillors and other elected officials in the initiative** – getting their support can be essential to the successful implementation of the pilot, as long as the initiative doesn't become politicised.

10 **Create a business plan and budget** – ensure sufficient financial and non-financial resources are allocated for the successful implementation of the pilot.

11 **Assess what existing municipal initiatives (and potential funding) the initiative can link to or make use of** – avoid duplication of efforts, which is likely to create confusion in communities, and allow for leveraging of existing municipal capacity, structures and funding sources.

12 **Identify suitable local partners and clarify roles, responsibilities and contributions in a partnership agreement** – work with credible, respected organisations with the requisite expertise and (community) standing and co-develop a partnership agreement that clearly sets out roles and expectations. Pool resources (monetary and non-monetary) to enhance the pilot.

13 **Understand local area community dynamics and relationship with the municipality** – community dynamics (e.g. internal strife, exposure to shocks and stresses, safety concerns) can change over time and have a significant bearing on initiatives or the relationship with the municipality. In particular, frustration with the slow pace of delivery or unmet promises and commitments can result in distrust in the municipality.

14 **Activate community leaders to be champions of the initiative** – community leaders play a vital role in giving legitimacy and support to the pilot. They can act as a conduit to ensure wider community involvement and uptake. While housing support services may primarily target individual households, there are several common issues and neighbourhood level dimensions that also need to be considered in the pilot. Drawing in community leadership helps to identify and respond to those issues.

15 **Consider potential seasonal and weather-related impacts on the initiative** – depending on the shape and form of outreach, seasonal and weather-related impacts can significantly affect the successful implementation of planned activities. Consider alternative modalities as a back-up option.

16 **Allow issues to surface and make effective referral mechanisms and resources available** – anticipate that participants are likely to raise issues and concerns related to municipal/government service delivery and planning that may not be directly related to the purpose or scope of the engagement. Put in place effective referral mechanisms and consider having relevant municipal staff or councillors on hand to take ownership of those issues.

17 **Create a personal connection to create community trust in the municipality** – having a direct, personal presence (rather than virtual or paper-based communication) is a central ingredient of the success of the pilot, as it allows for targeted support to be provided. The nature of this relationship is fundamental to (re-)instilling trust in the municipality.

18 **Systematise regular reflection and monitoring and build in a community monitoring element** – a pilot is about innovation, testing, refinement and improvement. Being intentional and systematic about monitoring, evaluation and learning is therefore key. Giving the community a role in monitoring the initiative enhances accountability and contributes to a better offering.

SELF BUILD

Conclusion

Incremental self-build housing construction has a long history in the expression of people's agency in meeting their own housing needs. It has also been an inherent, but neglected, part of current human settlements policy. Self-build housing will play a major part in the future and form of human settlements development in South Africa. The critical issue is whether this is condemned (for not adhering to official 'rules' and norms and standards), whether it is tacitly accepted (with a 'laissez faire/hands-off attitude') or whether it is enabled and supported.

It is encouraging that the importance of enabling and supporting self-build has been recognised in policy commitments made in the White Paper. However, much work lies ahead in translating these commitments into detailed and holistic policy and programming in the forthcoming Human Settlements Code and ensuring the required funding mechanisms in support thereof. The RtBI served as pioneering test case for a broader Housing Support Centre programme. Lessons and insights from the RtBI, combined with lessons from similar pilots in other municipalities and human settlements contexts, serve to strengthen the evidence base for the institutionalisation of the Housing Support Centre model in policy and programming at all levels of government.

The momentum behind self-build is increasing, and an all-of-government and all-of-society response is required to drive the progressive realisation of everyone's right to safe, dignified and climate-resilient housing.

HOUSING SUPPORT CENTRE