



*This pamphlet summarises the outcomes of three sets of dialogues in Cape Town called by the Informal Settlements Network (ISN), supported by Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC) and Isandla Institute, to have a conversation realising the Right to the City in South Africa. These outcomes and priorities were the result of free-flowing and wide-ranging debates about the most pressing needs of poor communities in Cape Town. The dialogues focused on what needs to change, how we get there and what this means in terms of the roles that the different stakeholders in society need to play. This dialogue series have been generously supported by the Foundation for Human Rights, the Department for Justice and Constitutional Development and the European Union.*



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# REALISING THE RIGHT TO THE CITY IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

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# THE RIGHT TO THE CITY IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Since 1994 the state has attempted, in many guises, to achieve greater coherence in planning the development of the urban spaces. However, the majority of initiatives that have thus far been pursued have been relatively ineffective, overly technocratic, and lack popular support from either government officials or communities.

The Right to the City has been increasingly prominent in the discourse of international organisations, national and city governments across Latin America and Europe and the organising of civil society and social movements across the world. It is being used to emphasise the full gambit of rights that urban citizens should be able to claim, the importance of truly

democratic processes of planning and decision-making, and the need for social solutions to the realization of the right of the urban poor to land and housing.

However, these rights should not be negotiated in an abstract way, or imported wholesale from international experience, and then put into practice on the ground. Due to their collective character, they have to be commonly developed. They have to be understood as rights specifically for those formerly deprived of full rights, and should resonate with local concerns and aspirations, but have implications for all urban inhabitants and their relationship with the state.

## 1. The principles of a Right to the City approach to urban development

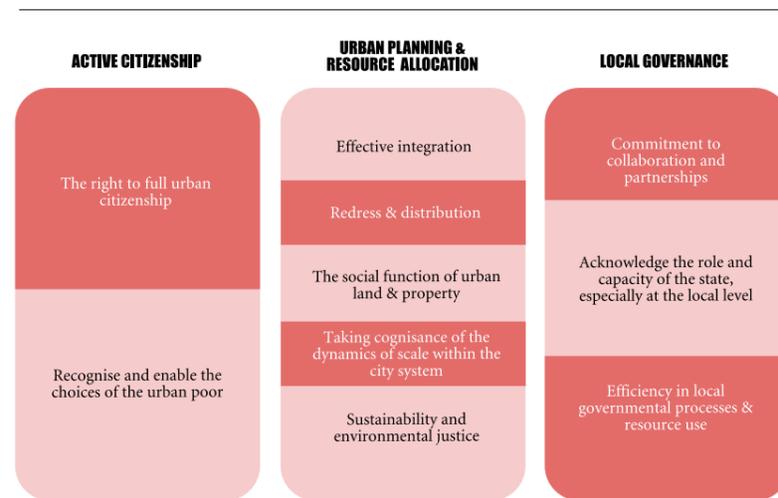
Eleven core principles were identified, drawn from South African legislation, policy, practice and the international use of the Right to the City, that should underpin a Right to the City approach to urban governance and development in South Africa. For conceptual clarity they have been grouped into three primary themes: active citizenship, urban planning and resource allocation and local governance.

**Active citizenship** is about recognising the agency and power of the urban poor to be involved in the shaping of their environment, and structuring the governance of the city to maximise citizen involvement and local innovation. This approach places a greater emphasis on the construction of pragmatic partnerships between communities, civil society, organisations of the urban poor and local government to identify and address both local and city-scale issues.

**Urban planning and resource allocation** should be used to increase integration within cities, explicitly pursue redress and redistributive goals, take a differentiated view on the effect of policy and practice on vulnerable groups, and make a substantial contribution to sustainability and environmental justice. Planning and resource allocation must be informed by a greater awareness of the dynamic interplay between different scales within the city-system – struggles for greater democracy and equality will require a more nuanced understanding of the way in which politics, systems and incentives change based on scale – and should adopt the ‘social function of land’ – paying particular attention to the social effects of the way in which land is used rather than its monetary value – as a guiding and evaluative principle when weighing different options.

**Local governance** should be focused on a collaborative approach to governance, building strategic and practical partnerships with different stakeholders to achieve overarching developmental goals. It calls for the strategic use of local government capacity and resources to maximise its effectiveness and without contravening any of the other principles, efficiency.

### PRINCIPLES TO THE RIGHT TO THE CITY



The Right to the City Principles

## 2. Consolidating and focusing the Right to the City agenda in South Africa

While these principles lay an extensive base upon which to assess and reconceptualise current practice, the scale and complexity of the urban issues facing South African cities require us to identify key current points for interventions and advocacy. The Right to the City in South Africa, therefore, can be realised by simultaneously taking concrete actions to ensure that we all have:

- **the right to be in the city**, which requires our commitment as a society to enabling poor South Africans to enter and stay in cities and devote resources to ensuring that these settlements become safer, more healthy and more productive places to live;
- **the right to access city resources and opportunities**, which requires a recognition of those aspects of South African cities that drive urbanisation – the search for employment or economic opportunities, the ability to easily access public resources and goods (including the use of public transport) and a shifting socio-spatial environment that offers genuine opportunities for social mobility and the chance to live in integrated and well-located neighbourhoods;
- **the right to city making**, which requires a recognition of the need for the active involvement of all citizens in the transformation of urban space and social patterns – it is only through the active control of ordinary citizens over systems of governance and decision-making that trade-offs and priorities can be genuinely negotiated.

All of these need to be able to be realised in the present and the future (i.e. they need to be sustainable) and should be understood as feeding into one another – each enables the greater realisation of the other.



Component rights and key issues that make up the Right to the City in South Africa © Isandla Institute, 2011

**THERE IS A STRONG NEED IN GOVERNMENT POLICY AND DECISION MAKING TO PURSUE A COHERENT AND INTEGRATED URBAN AGENDA IN SOUTH AFRICA, WHICH UNASHAMEDLY FOCUSES ON THE RIGHTS, AGENCY AND FULL PARTICIPATION OF THE URBAN POOR.**

## 3. Conclusion

There is a strong need in government policy and decision making to pursue a coherent and integrated **urban agenda in South Africa**. This agenda should unapologetically adopt a Right to the City approach that focuses on the **rights, agency and full participation** of the urban poor in South African cities. While there are a variety of ways in which existing legislation and policy can be improved, particularly the promulgation of progressive spatial planning and land governance legislation, existing policy frameworks offer a number of underexplored opportunities to pursue a Right to the City approach to development. These require a substantial shift in the **mindsets** of all stakeholders, particularly away from the existing state-centric norms; a genuine exploration of **different methodologies** that forefront questions of inequality, spatial segregation and poverty; **increased coordination** within the state and with other social partners to pursue common agendas; and clear **institutional vehicles** to achieve these outcomes. Overarching these initiatives is the need to search for new and varied models for **participatory urban governance** in South Africa.

*This document is based on a series of dialogues by NGOs working on urban issues and organisations of the urban poor, and seeks to spark a debate about the content of a Right to the City in a South African context. For more information this Dialogue Series and the other documents produced by this process, a NGO Submission and a Communiqué, see <http://isandla.org.za/>*