

# INCREMENTALISM AND INFORMAL SETTLEMENT UPGRADING

TOWARDS  
INCLUSIVE URBAN  
DEVELOPMENT | 2017



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The aim of the Khayalethu Initiative is to advance models for participatory informal settlement upgrading through knowledge sharing, collaboration and experimentation. Isandla Institute's role in the Khayalethu Initiative is to inspire and inform communities of practice through research and the facilitation of engagement between practitioners in the field of informal settlement upgrading. One of these engagements takes the shape of a Cape Town-based Community of Practice. This document distils the knowledge emerging from the local community of practice engagements, and offers lessons from both theory and practice.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Those living in informal settlements are often amongst the most vulnerable and tend to live in unacceptable conditions. They face daily risks of evictions, relocation, food insecurity, unhealthy living conditions and are subject to nature's elements. Past initiatives such as the large scale implementation of housing developments has failed to appropriately address these conditions. Therefore, there has been a shift towards a more incremental approach to informal settlement upgrading, in order to tackle both the inequality and inaccessibility of South African cities.

This practice brief examines the manifestations of incrementalism as well as the potential and limitations of incremental informal settlement upgrading. The practice brief offers a reflection on the realities of implementing an incremental, co-productive and progressive approach with regards to informal settlement upgrading across South Africa, and concludes with lessons learnt from the Cape Town-based community of practice.

Isandla Institute acknowledges the contributions made by representatives from Community Organisation Resource Centre, Habitat for Humanity South Africa, Development Action Group and Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading during the local Community of Practice meeting held on 1 March 2017. Special thanks to Heinrich Wolff, Gita Goven and Rudolf Perold for their valuable input during the meeting.

## INTRODUCTION

**In the past decade, there has been a gradual shift in interventions, policies and perceptions with regards to informal settlement upgrading in South Africa, with incrementalism being put at the forefront of addressing the poor urban conditions found in informal settlements.**

In essence, rather than the mass production of a development product, an incremental approach to informal settlement upgrading is often based on process and form whereby urban development is gradual and context-specific towards eventual urban sustainability. Incrementalism presupposes collaborative planning and design in order to avoid relocation, foster adaptability/flexibility, enable tenure security, and endorse environmental responsive design (Dovey 2014). As such, **incrementalism** is meant to be an approach towards addressing both spatial and socio-economic disparities throughout South African cities.

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However, the case for incrementalism in South Africa for the most part has failed to produce the desired outcomes. At a country and city-wide scale, policy interventions have fallen short at appropriately informing practice. Therefore, it is evident that there is a need for innovative and possibly experimental methods of intervention to discover workable alternatives for both the residents and their municipalities. Hence, it is important to note that even though the concept of incrementalism is one that is progressive and could potentially improve the living conditions of the urban poor, it is not fool-proof model.

Neo-liberal capitalism and the conditions of a disorganised/weak state tend to undermine the principles and intentions of an incremental approach to informal settlement upgrading. With that being said, even though informal settlement upgrading in South Africa poses a significant challenge for urban professionals and policy makers, it plays a vital role in offering better access to liveable neighbourhoods as well as socio-economic opportunities to the urban poor.

Therefore, the purpose of this practice brief is to explore the concept of incrementalism and how incremental approaches to informal settlement upgrading inform practice and implementation in a South African context. The next section will define the concept of incrementalism with regards to informal settlement upgrading and present ways in which it manifests itself within informal settlements. Section 3 will tackle the implications and risks around an incremental approach to informal settlement upgrading for practice, planning, design, implementation, management and capacity. Given that incremental development of informal settlements is being advocated by current policy in place, this section will focus on both current upgrading strategies and realities in South Africa. This practice brief also addresses some of the challenges faced by urban practitioners and concludes with a distillation of lessons drawn from literature as well as the local community of practice meeting held on 1 March 2017.

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<sup>1</sup>The local community of practice consists of Cape Town based organisations involved in upgrading informal settlements. These include, along with Isandla Institute: Community Organisations Resource centre, Development Action Group, Habitat for Humanity South Africa, People's Environmental Planning and Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading.

# POLICY PROVISIONS

## **National Development Plan (2011)**

The National Development Plan (NDP) highlights the housing crisis as an urgent concern, and acknowledges that the current housing trajectory for housing provision needs to change if overall objectives of human settlement transformation are going to be met. The NDP views informal settlement upgrading as an entry point into the incremental housing delivery process and promotes in-situ upgrading and upgrading that causes the least amount of disruption to existing communities.

The NDP notes that upgrading informal settlements on suitably located land is a key infrastructure investment priority for South Africa. The NDP further advocates incremental tenure rights, yet acknowledges that the institutional capabilities of the state to develop appropriate regulations and management strategies for securing tenure incrementally have not yet been developed.

Noting the ambivalence towards informal settlements across governments, the NDP calls for the development of appropriate mechanisms, standards and instruments (including funding), as well as dedicated capacity at local level.

## **Breaking New Ground and National Housing Code (2004)**

The Breaking New Ground (BNG) strategy aims to facilitate the provision of sustainable human settlements, by providing a broader package that goes beyond the delivery of uniform housing products towards responsive delivery that is multi-dimensional and addresses needs of the urban poor. The policy is also meant to enhance the role of local government in housing delivery and acknowledges the need as well as importance of appropriate forms urban development, in order to rectify apartheid structures through in-situ upgrading via the guiding framework of the Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme (UISP) (Chapter 13 of the National Housing Code 2004). This is meant to achieve three broad interrelated objectives: incremental tenure security, health and safety, and the empowerment of communities through participatory planning and processes.

## **Upgrading Informal Settlement Programme (2009)**

The UISP is the primary policy instrument administered by the National Department of Human Settlements (DHS). The policy is meant to cater for the special requirements of informal settlements across South African cities and is in alignment with the UN Millennium Goals and other declarations under the UN Habitat Programme. The UISP is carried out on the premise of in-situ upgrading.

To further unpack this basic framework of in-situ upgrading the South African government has adopted a phased approach in line with international best practice. Interventions are required to support each of these processes. (For greater detail refer to the National Housing Code.)

- **PHASE 1:** This phase involves surveying the community to determine housing and infrastructural needs through a process of consultation and meaningful engagement, in order to determine the geo-technical and physical suitability for upgrading.
- **PHASE 2:** This phase is focused on the acquisition of land (if necessary) and geo-technical investigations. This phase is often when interim engineering services are provided.
- **PHASE 3:** This phase is focused on detailed planning and project management. This phase includes securing tenure/occupational rights, the provision of permanent basic services and bulk infrastructure and providing relocation assistance if need be.
- **PHASE 4:** Known as the housing consolidation phase, where the actual construction of top structures occur. This phase is implemented with regards to the relevant housing subsidy program. This takes form in a variety of ways where housing is delivered via mutual aid, local contractors or community self-aid.

Implementation of upgrading projects is often best done through a partnership approach. For this purpose, funding is meant to be provided to source external capacity to help with project initiation, planning and management. This requires the support of different government departments.

## DEFINING INCREMENTALISM

**The focus on incremental development offers a direct critique of modern-day planning and design practices, which have been primarily focused on the built form and the aesthetic of an end product. This has often resulted in inflexible and highly centralised urban development projects, done through master planning (Kingat 2013).**

**The over-emphasis on urban form tends to overlook social, political and economic realities.**

This approach to development often fails to grapple with the complexity and dynamics that define formal/informal settlements and cities. The over-emphasis on urban form tends to overlook social, political and economic realities. Therefore, in order to successfully plan, design and develop urban environments, realities need to be engaged with.

The concept of incrementalism can be broadly defined as the gradual building of a city, where urbanisation is not perceived as a final product, but as a continuous process rooted in citizen experience and engagement. This approach to urban development recognises the interconnectedness of place, experience and engagement. As such, it challenges conventional city plans and processes, which are often shaped and controlled by mega projects. Hence, incrementalism in its essence can be defined as gradualism (Kingat 2013).

With respect to informal settlement upgrading, incrementalism may be best described as a participatory approach underpinning state intervention that enables residents to build within their means, adding and improving their dwellings and environment step by step (Blau 2012: 254). As such, incrementalism recognises the capacities, knowledge and resources that communities have and are able to contribute in shaping their own environments (Mitlin 2007). Put differently, communities are recognised as active agents in their own development. Incrementalism also provides the opportunity to create meaningful partnerships, where contributions of each stakeholder are acknowledged and valued.

While the recognition of community agency is critical, there is a risk that this may be over-stated by the state. The assumption that poor urban communities are able to initiate and sustain the development of their own settlement, with very little to no state support and intervention, shows a belief in a false notion of resilience. In reality, this will only serve to reinforce challenges and exclusion, faced by the residents of informal settlements.

The gradual process of transforming an informal settlement into a functional neighbourhood implies that the approach is multi-faceted, involving different spheres of government, sector departments and other stakeholders. A number of key elements along this path have been identified, namely: tenure security; neighbourhood planning and design; the provision of infrastructure and services; public facilities and social amenities; and, housing consolidation (see,

amongst others, the Western Cape Informal Settlement Support Plan, adopted by the provincial government in 2017). These elements are further discussed below. While the focus of informal settlement upgrading is often on spatial and physical interventions, it is equally important to address socio-economic exclusion through community empowerment and support for local livelihood strategies.

In sum, then, an incremental approach to informal settlement upgrading is always outcome-oriented (i.e. keeping in mind the type of neighbourhood local residents aspire to live in) and allows for broader participation, co-production (whereby residents can shape the development of their neighbourhoods and unlock opportunities that tend to get lost in large-scale, product driven urban projects (Housing Development Agency 2015), appropriate financing mechanisms, strategic state investment and adaptability.

## TENURE SECURITY

**Tenure security is vital to the process of upgrading informal settlements, because giving residents the ability to perform land-related transactions creates an environment where the fear or eviction and loss of rights no longer exists (Urban LandMark 2013).**

The provision of tenure security to the urban poor in South Africa has been dominated by the individual title model implemented through large-scale titling programmes. However, recently alternative models of tenure security are being employed, focusing on incremental progression, by providing a context-specific as well as a realistic progression towards tenure security. Figure 1 illustrates an incremental approach, which prioritises increased/progression towards tenure security rather than a specific land tenure arrangement, moving from greater administrative recognition towards legal recognition. Unlike tradition large-scale titling programmes, incrementally securing tenure provides several routes to obtaining greater security (Urban LandMark 2013).



**Figure 1:** Diagram illustrating progression of tenure security  
(Source: Isandla Institute 2017 adapted from Urban LandMark 2013)

## NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING AND DESIGN

**Informal settlements are exceptionally vulnerable to health risks, violence and various socio-economic challenges. Neighbourhood planning and design plays a significant part in remedying these issues. Built form interventions have the opportunity to transform informal settlements into liveable neighbourhoods using appropriate urban design frameworks that place emphasis on quality and sustainability.**

Incremental neighbourhood planning and design focuses on the construction and the reconfiguration of the built form over time in order to meet the needs of urban communities. An appropriate urban design framework provides the opportunity to engage in participatory, incremental and city-wide upgrading. The UN Habitat Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme launched in 2008 has made a few broad recommendations to achieve sustainable and incremental upgrading, which are to be taken into account in any urban design framework.

### These include:

1. More emphasis and recognition needs to be placed on the provision of multi-dimensional public spaces in order to foster socio-economic development, the provision of utilities and waste management, mobility and infrastructure;
2. Engage with context and equitable development;
3. Recognise, preserve and support existing mixed land use;
4. Recognise, preserve and support social networks and diversity; and,
5. Promote sustainability and climate resilient designs (UN Habitat 2014).

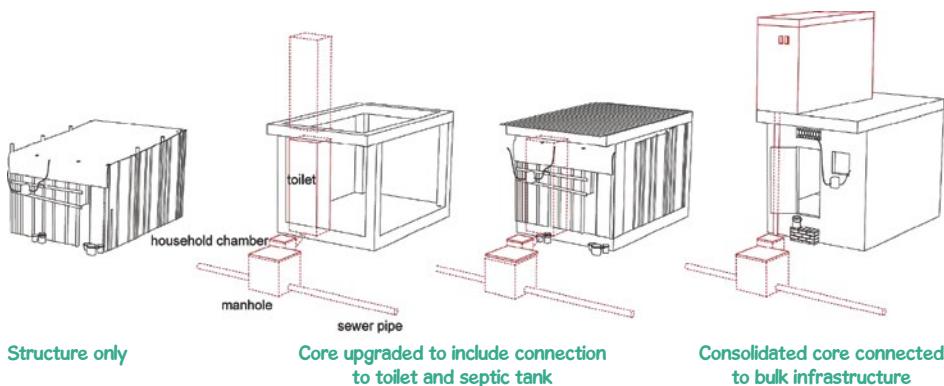
These points reinforce the notion that incremental informal settlement upgrading is a process towards neighbourhood development, whereby informal settlements are transformed gradually into functional neighbourhoods or suburbs. This is worth emphasising, because there is a risk that informal settlement upgrading becomes reduced to mere 'sites-and-services', which is a contradiction to the notion of incrementalism.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed discussion on alternative ways to advance tenure security, please refer to Isandla Institute (2017) Securing Tenure in Informal Settlements. This practice brief draws from research as well as presentations and discussions at a community of practice meeting held in Cape Town on 26 April 2016.

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

The incremental nature of infrastructure services and extension has become a significant focus in informal settlement upgrading and service provision. An incremental approach to the provision of infrastructure allows for poorer and more vulnerable communities to be a part of constructing and reconfiguring conventional urban systems (Silver 2014).

Infrastructure provision is dominated by two approaches: complete redevelopment and in-situ upgrading. Complete redevelopment often involves the relocation of residents and tends to fracture fragile social networks and livelihood opportunities, whereas in-situ upgrading is embedded in the fundamentals of incrementalism and is currently advocated as the preferred practice (Ziblim 2013). Incremental development of infrastructure services in informal settlements, such as that depicted in Figure 2, allows for a reduction in upfront costs for both the state as well as community members and stimulates further urban development, innovation and improvements (Masum 2014). It is also important to note that infrastructure and services plans need to account for future upgrading in order to continue meeting the needs of the community. Again, incrementalism does not imply an ad hoc, project-driven approach. Rather, it is very important that all spheres and relevant departments of government have a coordinated strategy, which is implemented at local level for the progressive and innovative infrastructural and basic services solutions to meet the needs to communities in informal settlements (Urban LandMark 2008).



**Figure 2:** Example of incremental development of infrastructure and basic services  
(Source: modified from Kingat 2013)

## PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SOCIAL AMENITIES

**The development of integrated public facilities and social amenities is important, because it enhances the well-being of residents by creating safe spaces and fostering community cohesion.**

An incremental and minimalistic approach to the development of public facilities allows for the evolution and improvement of an urban structure that residents can respond to, with regards to appropriating space (Mammon and Ewing 2005). This allows for the creation of dynamic spatial networks and sustainable community neighbourhoods that encourage socio-economic activity.

The incremental development of public/social facilities recognises collective need, allows for flexibility and change, reduces cost, and aids in managing dense spaces creatively, whilst maximising limited resources (d'Cruz, Patel and Mazvimavi 2014).

**Designing spaces around collective community needs.**

**Broad ways of implementing incremental development of public facilities and social amenities within informal settlements include:**

1. Consolidating lost space within a settlement/community to create useful physical spaces;
2. Realigning internal spaces and pathways to develop safe zones for socialising; and,
3. Designing spaces around collective community needs (d'Cruz, Patel and Mazvimavi 2014).



## HOUSING CONSOLIDATION

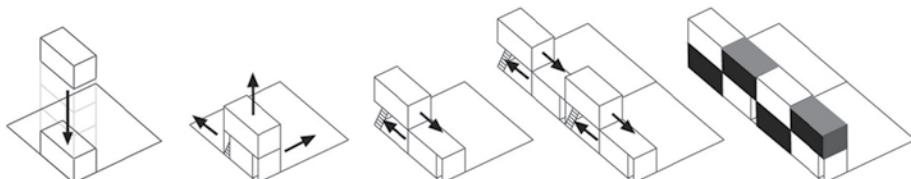
The concept of incremental housing delivery is at the centre of South African housing policy. Formal incremental housing delivery tends to manifest itself typically in two formats, namely 'site and service' and 'core housing/starter homes' programmes (Mathabela 1999).

The principle underpinning incremental housing delivery is that it increases the responsibility of households to partake in aspects of housing delivery, in accordance to their capacity (Dewar 1993). As such, the concept of housing delivery is rooted in the broader notion of 'self-help', which assumes that residents of informal settlements are willing and able to gradually expand their initial basic dwellings into adequate homes over time (Mathabela 1999). However, it is important to note that insecurities of tenure undermine the willingness of residents to invest in improving their homes and their urban environment, in fear of possible eviction and/or demolition (Wakely and Riley 2011).

Figure 3 is a representation of the Elemental incremental housing model, which has proven to be fairly successful in Chile in terms of upgrading schemes. This housing model advocates for certain design conditions that allow residents to effectively improve their dwellings over time.

### These broad design conditions include:

1. Housing model should be able to achieve appropriate densities within settlements without further encouraging overcrowding, to make the development of starter/core homes more affordable;
2. The provision of physical space is incredibly important and should promote the improvement and expansion of a household over time. It is also important to note that creating collective space (clusters of families/households with restricted access) between private and public space helps strengthen social networks; and,
3. 50% of the units' volume should be left for self-build. The initial building must have a supportive framework where the building should be secure enough for households, to expand over time (Arch Daily 2008).



**Figure 3:** Elemental starter housing model (Source: Stott 2013)

## THE EMERGENCE OF INCREMENTAL DEVELOPMENT IN DU NOON, CAPE TOWN

Du Noon is a post-apartheid settlement located in Milnerton, Cape Town near industrial, agricultural, residential and manufacturing employment opportunities. Du Noon was a part of the Provincial Government's housing roll-out programme in 1996. The programme rolled out several typical 'RDP' housing (38m<sup>2</sup> house in the centre of a 115m<sup>2</sup> plot) in the area. However, decades later this area is still characterised as predominately informal with conditions of inadequate shelter and basic services, unemployment, high levels of criminal activity and an evident vulnerability to fires.

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The intensity of economic opportunity in the area has led to a mushrooming of informal densification. This has also led to the innovative and incremental construction of rental accommodation predominately on existing 'RDP' plots, in order to meet needs of the 'gap market' as well as provide low-income housing alternatives. The financing and construction of rental accommodation has been done incrementally and within means and capacity of the 'owners'. Completed flats are rented out in order to finance the construction of new flats. Shacks are also constructed on the residential plots of subsidised housing to accommodate for backyarder market.

Du Noon is formally zoned as 'Informal Residential' and this has allowed for the development of rentable housing, which has mixed functions. Most of these homes provide additional space to rent out and for economic functions such as spaza shops, shebeens, day-care centres, and so forth.

Du Noon is an example of the emergence of incrementalism in the most organic way and provides some valuable insights on how communities shape their urban environments in order to meet their immediate needs, but also promote growth beyond survival through incremental development.

However, it is important to acknowledge that rapid urbanisation of the area and the mushrooming of densities has posed difficulties for the City of Cape Town, with regards to the management of existing and emerging urban challenges.

The challenges characterised are exacerbated by the high density levels and failure of the state to address these challenges head on and appropriately, which in turn continues a cycle of systemic poverty.

*(Wolff 2014)*

## INCREMENTALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

It has been established that incremental development through in-situ upgrading and community participation is at the forefront of the current South African policy, with regards to informal settlements. The policy is meant to ensure that conditions in informal settlements improve and that socio-economic development is evident.

The state's role in informal settlement upgrading goes beyond the provision of infrastructure; it is also one of support, ensuring communities are improving their living conditions gradually on a continuous basis. This suggests that the role of the state shifts from a primary provider of housing towards an enabler of sustainable human settlements.

In fact, this is not the first time that South Africa has employed an incremental/ self-help model to address urban poverty across the country. In the 1990s, the Independent Development Trust (IDT) introduced the first standardised national site and services programme, in line with the National Housing policy at the time. The pilot was launched in 1991 and was meant to grant access to approximately 100 000 people to serviced sites. However, despite good intentions the project was considered a failure (see text box). The failure of the IDT programme can be predominately attributed to the project's lack of meaningful consideration of the challenges faced by the urban poor and the absence of an appropriate planning and design model (Western Cape Department of Human Settlements 2013).

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### Independent Development Trust (IDT): Failures and Constraints

1. The IDT model operated on a standardised delivery process and layout that did not accommodate for meaningful and active community participation;
2. IDT sites were poorly located, resulting in the perpetuation of spatial and social segregation;
3. Little consideration was given to financial constraints and technical capacity of residents; and,
4. Slow and often non-existent development on IDT sites.

(Western Cape Department of Human Settlements 2013)

In light of the IDT and the RDP models failing to appropriately address the housing crisis and broader socio-economic issues, the Department of Human Settlements (previously known as the Department of Housing) developed the Breaking New Ground (BNG) policy in 2004, which contains the Upgrading Informal Settlement Programme (UISP) and enhanced Peoples Housing Process (ePHP). The policy introduced the distinct focus on incremental in-situ upgrading, which is evident in the current National Housing Code (see box on policy provisions). However, to date the philosophy behind incremental development as embodied in policy has struggled to translate into implementation. The programmes developed tend to not be utilised at all or appropriately by municipalities when intervening in informal settlements (Western Cape Department of Human Settlements 2013).

In-situ upgrading in South Africa for the most part has been characterised by notable inconsistencies and tensions (Ziblim 2013). Amongst others, the nature of informal settlement upgrading has come to mean that when upgrading projects are eventually completed, often there is very little scope for communities to build on what has been delivered (Swilling et al. 2013). According to Swilling et al. (2013) upgrading projects can often take up ± 9 years to complete and formal housing support much longer. It is estimated that informal settlement residents in the Western Cape can wait up to approximately 32 years, before receiving some sort of formal housing. This inconsistency is embodied by the discrepancies between progressive policy and a technocratic local government (Huchzermeyer 2006).

Local government has also been pressured to a certain extent to engage in market-based approaches to governance and development in their tasks and mandates by private sector investment and the desire to create world-class South African cities. To attract foreign investment and prospects. This has led to governance structures, policy and practices being shaped/influenced by neo-liberalism, which has resulted in stumbling blocks with regards to strategic planning functions of municipalities (predominately metropolitan municipalities). This in turn has led to ad hoc, reactive crisis management based decision-making (Massey 2013) with regards to informal settlements. This has perpetuated a tick-box approach and top-down mind-set of government officials towards upgrading, creating a myriad of issues.



## Some of these key challenges include:

1. Municipal officials are still being tasked with preventing the proliferation of new shacks within existing and new informal settlements. This perpetuates the mind-set of eradication and to a large extent allows top-down strategies to dominate the upgrading processes;
2. Community participation in upgrading processes tend to be nominal/weak. Poor communication with community members, the lack of transparency, ineffective governance and management, and political infighting has led to a deep-seeded mistrust of the South African government;
3. Housing delivery in South Africa is highly politicised;
4. There is a lack of access to suitable land amidst financial constraints combined to the policy bias of providing freehold title, which tends to be expensive as well as time consuming;
5. There are both community and municipal capacity challenges that hinder timely delivery, mainly with regards to human and financial resources;
6. Rules and regulations governing funding and the approval of proposed upgrading projects tend to be complex with boundaries between the functions of the spheres of government often being blurred (Ziblim 2013: );
7. The inflexible capital subsidy aimed at individual households fails to include those who do not meet the subsidy criteria, nor does it address scale and housing demands appropriately;
8. The consolidation phase of the upgrading process requires different funding/financial mechanisms, regulations, community micro-financing and saving schemes, as well as state engagement. This phase tends to take place at a household level, which has led to a lack of support from relevant stakeholders to ensure that neighbourhoods can develop incrementally; and,
9. The current housing subsidy is not sustainable in the long-term, and there is no medium to long-term plan for upgrading that appropriately links funding mechanisms to long-term planning for informal settlements (Bolnick 2010: 7-9).

## HARRY GWALA, GAUTENG

Harry Gwala informal settlement is located in Ekurhuleni. It is adjacent to Wetville and consists of approximately 800 households and has been occupied over a decade. Harry Gwala is well-located in terms of accessibility to schools, public transport, industrial job opportunities and urban agriculture (Protea South).

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Harry Gwala is characterised by a lack of refuse removal and street lighting, inadequate pit latrines, and has only 6 communal taps servicing the entire settlement. Therefore, on October 2008 an application was made to the High Court for the installation of basic services as well as upgrading. This application was based on the residents' constitutional rights, chapters 12 and 13 of the Housing Code, and statutory rights set out in the Water Services Act.

The High Court approved the installation of 7 additional taps and refuse collection. However, the issue of lighting and sanitation has not been resolved as of yet because the municipality has argued that it requires both Eskom's approval and formal township approval. The municipality further claimed that the feasibility for upgrading Harry Gwala in-situ would result in money not spent well. Ekurhuleni drew up a purely financial interpretation of sustainability and argued that it would be unsustainable to provide basic services to Harry Gwala. The Municipality used section 152-1b of the Constitution to justify not providing basic services to Harry Gwala. This exposes the municipality's view and mind-set with regards to basic service provision and the upgrading of informal settlements.

This sheds light on the question what weight relevant housing policy has in creating sustainable human settlements and influencing the urban sector appropriately. This case study is also evidence of a silo approach to addressing challenges experienced by the urban poor and contradictions of local government interventions. Ekurhuleni Metropolitan municipality is an example in this case of how municipal officers are often not willing to engage meaningfully with communities to meet needs and avoid litigation, that housing policy is very much subjected to interpretation, and there is a lack of will from officials to take on equitable and appropriate forms of upgrading.

*(Huchzermeyer 2008)*

The Harry Gwala case study illustrates the urgent need for a reskilling of officials/implementing agencies in the urban development sector as well as re-structuring funding mechanisms. In light of this, there is a call for practice to include multi-stakeholder engagement to form an integral part of design and upgrading processes. It is also important that all these processes are community-led and implemented through a co-production process.

## KEY OUTCOMES OF INCREMENTALISM IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENT UPGRADING

Despite the failure of the IDT programme, the resurgence of incrementalism combined with the appropriate planning tools, services and expertise has the potential of transforming informal settlements into vibrant and safe urban communities (Beattie, Mayer and Yildirim 2010).

However, this shift towards incremental development of informal settlements has its own set of implications for the urban fabric and systems of South African cities. If principles of incremental development are appropriately employed in the upgrading process and there is effective and sufficient state support, where necessary, the premise of in-situ upgrading could potentially lead to a number of critical outcomes, such as:

1. The enabling of partnerships to achieve local and context-specific solutions;
2. The revision of development standards, towards standards that are flexible, realistic and effective in achieving sustainable human settlements and urban integration;
3. Workable alternatives that suit the urban landscape to implement deliverables at scale;
4. Effective spatial arrangements of informal settlements, for improved surveillance, safety and access;
5. The development of appropriate financial tools and models that allow households and the state to effectively drive development process in alignment with their financial capacity; and,
6. Shift from a demolition and rebuild upgrading model towards a socio-spatial development model (Cooke 2014).

**It is important to note that benefits cannot simply be assumed, but are contingent on appropriate programmatic and project design for a given context.**

It is important to note that benefits cannot simply be assumed, but are contingent on appropriate programmatic and project design for a given context. This, in turn, requires meaningful engagement with the ideology of incremental development and a deep understanding of systemic and situated requirements (Western Cape Department of Human Settlements 2013).

## ZWELISHA, DURBAN

In-situ upgrading of informal settlements through community participation is widely accepted as international best practice in improving the lives of millions for informal settlement residents. The case study of the recently upgraded settlement Zwelisha, Durban explores the process and impact of community participation during in-situ informal settlement upgrading, which has resulted in successful outcomes with regards to tenure security and the improvement of living conditions.

Zwelisha is located approximately 35km north of Durban and falls under eThekwi. The settlement was selected against certain criteria such as location, the size of the settlement, and the stage of upgrade process.

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### PARTICIPATION WAS CHARACTERISED BY THREE CATEGORIES/TIERS:

1. Non-resident/built environment professionals with responsibility to provide technical support.
2. Community development committee (CDC) (approximately 10 members).
3. Ordinary residents of Zwelisha.

The three tiers participated at different capacity levels and various models of partnerships were adopted and utilised. All stakeholders worked on different elements of the upgrading process, yet not in isolation of each other. This level of engagement led to housing delivery, increased political power and improvements with regards to tenure security.

The upgrading project was launched and led by the CDC with the support of eThekwi municipality.

#### *The Approach*

The CDC was very active throughout the upgrading process. It led the residents through the housing subsidy process and compiled a list of eligible residents. Once the residents of Zwelisha were well informed about the process, construction of housing units and installation of infrastructure and basic services commenced on the site. The construction occurred through a phased approach. The finalisation of the Zwelisha upgrade was done in 2009.

Even after the finalisation of the upgrading project the CDC continues to be involved in community development, albeit in a different capacity, which has played a major role in the sustainability of the project.

(Patel 2013)

# LESSONS LEARNT AND PREREQUISITES FOR SUCCESSFUL INCREMENTAL UPGRADING

An incremental approach to (in-situ) upgrading has various advantages over the conventional approach of greenfield housing development and as such it has been endorsed in many ways as the most appropriate way to upgrade informal settlements, despite its limitations.

In-situ upgrading is a complex undertaking, however it has the promise of positive results if context is taken into consideration and certain preconditions are met appropriately (Ehebrecht 2014). The following section touches on some key lessons (drawn primarily from the Local Community of Practice meeting, 1 March 2017) and prerequisites that could form the basis for formulating new strategies and approaches to in-situ upgrading.

In-situ upgrading is a complex undertaking, however it has the promise of positive results if context is taken into consideration and certain preconditions are met appropriately.

## Key Lessons

1. **Human settlement policy supports and encourages incremental development of informal settlements, yet development and design standards do not reflect this notion.** In fact, development standards tend to be inflexible and as such are a major stumbling block to implementing upgrading strategies at municipal level;
2. **Incrementalism presupposes in-situ upgrading, in as much as possible.** Traditional upgrading approaches have resulted to large extent led to a number of relocations. This is both undesirable and unsustainable from a social, environmental and financial point of view;
3. **Incrementalism enables not only a phased approach to informal settlement upgrading, but also a multi-disciplinary, inter-sectoral, inter-governmental and multi-stakeholder approach to address informal settlements holistically.** Housing and infrastructure are often prioritised and are delivered in isolation of other important built environment, spatial and socio-economic interventions such as socio-economic development, health care, crime prevention, food security, and education;
4. **Incremental development enables residents to enact solutions they already have;**
5. **The notion of incrementalism, self-build and community agency is often misinterpreted.** This leads to a mind-set that urban poor communities have the full capacity to develop their own homes and neighbourhoods with very little state support;
6. **An incremental approach to informal settlement upgrading gives attention to human development.** It goes beyond physical improvement of a household or neighbourhood.
7. **Incrementalism implies choosing process over product,** making it time- and resource-intensive.

## Potential Prerequisites

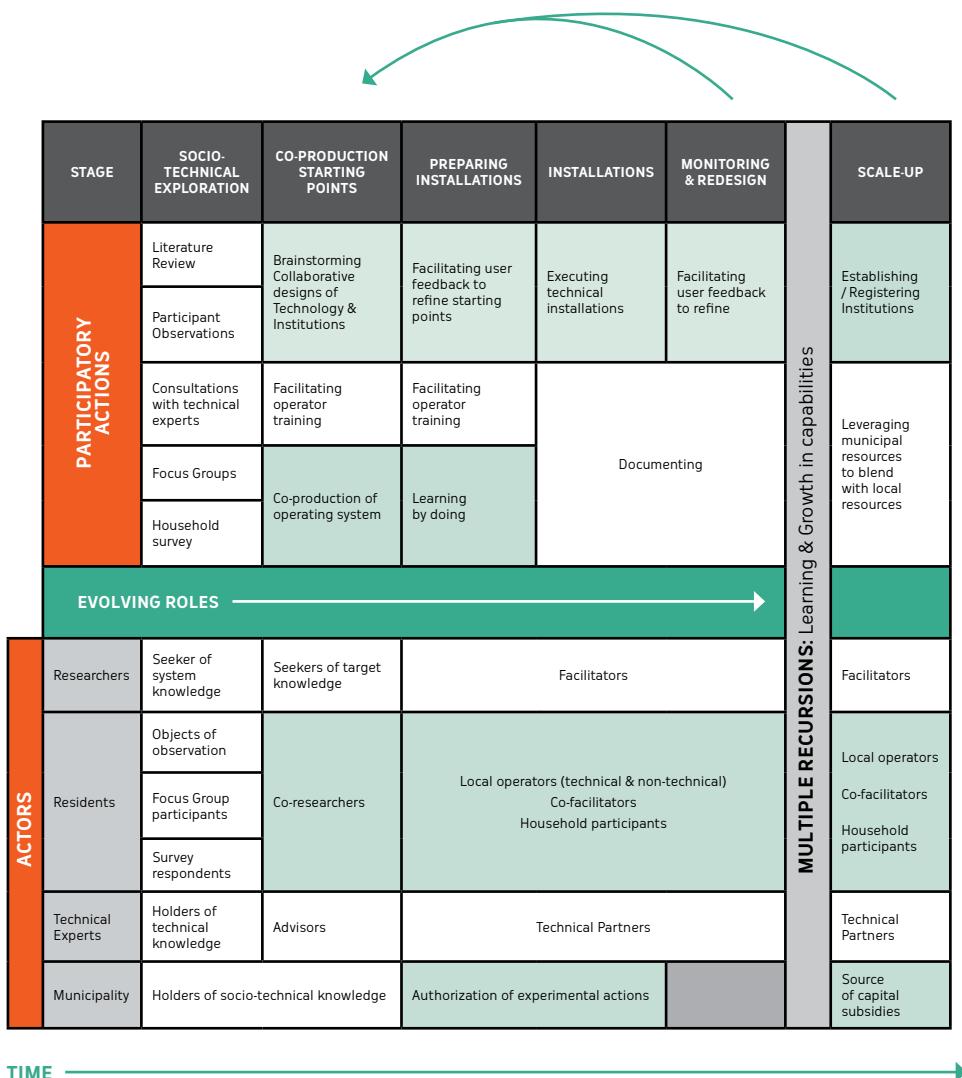
Throughout this practice brief a number of potential prerequisites for an incremental approach to in-situ upgrading of informal settlements have been identified. These relate to physical interventions, socio-economic development, participation, capacity building, the protection of both social and livelihood networks, and managing, maintaining and financing interventions (Ehebrecht 2014).

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- It is also vital that stakeholders have a good and true understanding of the context of the community and specific needs. This is where it is important to have an extensive survey of relevant qualitative and quantitative information (Ehebrecht 2014).
- Land ownership and land availability is another significant aspect to take into consideration. This influences strategies with regards to engineering services, security of tenure, types of housing interventions, and cost.
- Infrastructure and basic services are crucial to improving the standard of living conditions within informal settlements. Therefore, it often important to have the installation of proper drainage systems, sanitation facilities and access to drinkable water made available to residents as soon as possible.
- Political will is a critical, yet often overlooked, aspect to the success of an incremental project; however this requires a mind-set change among municipal leaders and officials, reflected in a willingness to adopt the progressive intent of human settlement policy and see the incremental development of a settlement through.

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The above is contingent on effective community participation. Participation and engagement also need to consider limitations and recognise different levels of decision-making and different roles of stakeholders. This is crucial to the effectiveness and long-term success of any upgrading.



**Figure 4:** Diagram illustrating a participatory and incremental upgrading framework  
(Source: Swilling et al 2013)



## CONCLUSION

**Despite national policy propagating an incremental approach to informal settlement upgrading, in practice this has not been widely pursued.**

On the one hand, instead of in situ upgrading (after all, this is what incrementalism suggests), eradication of informal settlements, 'greenfields' housing projects and/or relocation have taken prominence in human settlements practices. On the other hand, where informal settlement upgrading has been pursued it very often does not move significantly beyond a 'site-and-service' approach. In such instances, there is little to suggest that the settlement will gradually transform into a fully functional neighbourhood.

A different mindset brings with it different possibilities: incremental tenure will not only provide people with a sense of recognition and peace of mind; it will also allow them to invest in their shelter and community, free of the fear of eviction or demolition. Similarly, there are many advantages to incremental service provision, public infrastructure, settlement design and housing consolidation.

Not only does incrementalism apply to physical improvements, it also refers to a fundamentally different process. As echoed throughout the practice brief, incrementalism in upgrading is closely linked to community-centred strategies for upgrading.

In conclusion, the re-emergence of incrementalism provides the prospect of developing flexible, context-specific and co-produced design models for upgrading that are affordable, equitable and adaptable to the dynamic nature of settlements, towns and cities. Now is the time to make it real in practice.

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