

# TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

UNPACKING THE  
POSITIVE POTENTIAL  
OF MULTI-SECTORAL  
COLLABORATION FOR  
INFORMAL SETTLEMENT  
UPGRADING | 2015



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The aim of the Khayaletu Initiative is to advance models for participatory informal settlement upgrading through knowledge sharing, collaboration and experimentation. Isandla Institute's role in the Khayaletu 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.



Photographs by Shaun Swingler.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In South African cities inequality, manifested in poor living conditions, presents both an immense and complex challenge that can only be addressed through the involvement of multiple and diverse stakeholders who bring different competencies to bear on the development process. In informal settlement upgrading practitioners from various sectors have critical roles to play in ensuring that interventions result in significant and lasting change.

The document suggests that multi-sectoral partnerships are valuable in processes of informal settlement upgrading as it allows for the combination of approaches aimed at meeting the immediate needs of the urban poor, and those that seek to ensure democratic decision-making through participatory local governance. It acknowledges that while partnerships hold both normative and practical benefits, they are by no means easy. Drawing on the experiences of Cape Town-based practitioners the document offers some recommendations for how to mitigate challenges related to multi-sectoral partnerships, and for ensuring meaningful collaboration between diverse stakeholders.

We acknowledge the contribution made by representatives from Aurecon, ARG Design, Community Organisation Resource Centre, Development Action Group, Habitat for Humanity South Africa, People's Environmental Planning and Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading during the local Community of Practice meeting held on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2015.

## INTRODUCTION

**In South Africa the majority of the population is directly affected by poverty and inequality, manifested – in part – as a lack of access to basic services and inadequate housing. Since the advent of democracy, development policy and practice has been forced to adjust in an attempt to adequately respond to a consistent – if not growing – demand for the realisation of those rights provided for in the Constitution.**

**The scale and complexity of urban inequality in South Africa has particular implications for the practice of informal settlement upgrading in the country.**

The sheer scale of the challenge highlights the ineffectiveness of strategies that position the state as the sole provider of housing and basic services and, more broadly, the inability of a single sector to transform prevalent conditions of inequality. While the state, the private sector, and civil society work towards the transformation of South African cities, their independent efforts as of yet serve as small steps in overcoming immense obstacles to social and spatial justice. The challenge of social and spatial transformation in South Africa is also highly complex and requires the application of a range of competencies rarely possessed by a single sector.

The scale and complexity of urban inequality in South Africa has particular implications for the practice of informal settlement upgrading in the country. We suggest that this challenge necessitates the efficient and effective rollout of programmes that, on the one hand, meet the immediate needs of the urban poor and, on the other, ensure democratic decision-making through participatory local governance. For the practice of informal settlement upgrading to be truly transformative then it requires a careful balance between demand and supply; a balance, we argue, which is best achieved through multi-sectoral partnerships.

In order to unpack this argument further, and to begin to formulate strategies for improving collaboration between diverse stakeholders, this document firstly defines multi-sectoral partnership. Secondly, it sets out the differing rationalities that inform the work of public and private interest stakeholders respectively. While we acknowledge that many of the challenges that impede the success of multi-sectoral partnerships are rooted in tensions between these differing rationalities, we also show that – when carefully negotiated – collaboration between stakeholders driven by differing rationalities can also result in innovation in the practice of informal settlement upgrading. The document therefore concludes with a set of prerequisites for success that allow for the tensions between diverse stakeholders to be minimized, and for the benefits of multi-sectoral partnerships to be amplified.

## DEFINING PARTNERSHIP

### Literature on partnership in development suggests that the term is inherently ambiguous (Hastings 1996; Southern 2010).

While partnership is used to describe the relationship between two or more stakeholders involved in a particular development process, this relationship can take on many forms ranging from information sharing, to joint decision making, to **co-option**. In its ideal form Brinkerhoff (2002: 21) suggests that partnership is defined as:

*'[A] dynamic relationship among diverse actors, based on mutually agreed objectives, pursued through a shared understanding of the most rational division of labour based on the respective comparative advantages of each partner. Partnership encompasses mutual influence, with a careful balance between synergy and respective autonomy, which incorporates mutual respect, equal participation in decision-making, mutual accountability and transparency'*

Numerous authors writing on the subject have also picked up on the close association of partnership with this particular set of underlying principles (Mercer 2003; Morse and McNamara 2006).

Of course, ideal types are more common in rhetoric than in practice. Indeed, the term partnership may be used to describe a situation where one stakeholder enjoys a disproportionate amount of power over the decision-making process. Those who have access to particular skills and resources are often well placed to drive their own agenda, and in doing so marginalise less powerful 'partners'. In most instances relationships between multiple and diverse stakeholders are best governed by formal agreements that ensure that the principles associated with partnership are actually honoured. Maxwell and Riddell (1998) suggest that formal agreements – which set out the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders – work towards guaranteeing reciprocity and answerability.

For the purpose of this document we define partnership as a relationship between two or more stakeholders that is initiated in order to achieve a common objective, where the roles and responsibilities of partnering actors are defined through a formal agreement that ensures decentralised decision-making.

### Co-option

refers to a situation where one stakeholder takes over control or ownership of another stakeholder's process.

## POLICY PROVISIONS RELATED TO CAPABILITY ENHANCEMENT

### *Breaking New Ground (2004)*

The document sought to provide a comprehensive approach to human settlements that would facilitate the upgrading of settlements to create sustainable, liveable and integrated living spaces. It motivates for the partnership of governments with the private sector to create sustainable human settlements. In this respect, partnerships with the private sector are viewed as necessary in order to undertake specific aspects of ISU projects, such as: construction, the provision of housing finance and project management. In terms of the implementation of upgrading projects, the document promotes that this be undertaken by way of partnerships between national, provincial and local governments.

### *The National Housing Code (2009)*

The document outlines the policy principles, guidelines and norms and standards which relate to the mechanisms that the South African government has in place to assist those in need of housing. The document motivates for partnerships across the public sector (public-public partnerships) between provincial and local municipalities. It reasons that co-operative governance mechanisms across government bodies as well as alignment between government departments are needed in order to undertake the upgrading of informal settlements. The document further encourages partnerships between local governments and communities and stipulates that informal settlement upgrading initiatives should be premised on active and extensive collaboration with communities.

### *Outcome 8 (2010)*

Outcome 8 put informal settlement upgrading on the agenda of national planning and promulgated the National Upgrading Support Programme (NUSP), which was created to promote cooperation and collaboration among NUSP partner organisations and practitioners. The NUSP further recognises that active engagement and management between actors is crucial in informal settlement upgrading. It motivates for the partnering of municipalities with residents in the upgrading of settlements. The programme encourages municipalities to build relationships with residents in order to gain their trust and integrate them into the planning and decision-making aspects of a project. This stance is taken, as it is believed that without the full participation of residents they are unlikely to view the upgrading project as their own and thus may possibly not feel obliged to maintain what it provides.

### *The National Development Plan (2012)*

This document sets out strategies for realising the South African government's objective of reducing inequality and poverty by 2030. The National Planning Commission reasons that these goals can be achieved by working with the citizens of South Africa. The document outlines that it is essential that governments (at all levels) establish partnerships with local communities in efforts to create and maintain sustainable human settlements. Moreover, the document encourages local governments to re-build relationships and trust between themselves and communities in order to establish lasting partnerships for the creation of sustainable human settlements.





**Upgrading interventions are geared towards the production of inclusive and integrated neighbourhoods where residents are enabled to access housing and basic services, as well as livelihood opportunities and opportunities to participate in local governance.**

## DIFFERING RATIONALITIES

**The transformative potential of informal settlement upgrading lies in the collaboration of stakeholders who seek to address deficiencies in the physical environment with those that seek to empower residents through participatory processes.**

While public policy in South Africa encourages such collaboration by acknowledging the importance of both technical and social expertise, the realisation of this transformative potential is largely contingent on the ability of stakeholders from different sectors to navigate differing, and often conflicting, rationalities.

*Table 1* sets out the differing rationalities that inform the upgrading approaches employed by stakeholders from different sectors. On the left the table lists the characteristics of a developmental approach to informal settlement upgrading, and on the right it lists the corresponding characteristics of a technocratic approach to informal settlement upgrading. *Table 1* should be read as a caricature of these approaches, or as an illustration of two ends of a continuum. Stakeholders involved in the practice of informal settlement upgrading all lie somewhere along this continuum and may indeed embody characteristics of both approaches.

DEVELOPMENTAL RATIONALITY	TECHNOCRATIC RATIONALITY
Process driven, qualitative outcomes	Target driven, quantitative outcomes
Flexible timeframes	Rigid timeframes
Social expertise	Technical expertise
Holistic approach	Independent targets
Upgrading as strategy for integrated transformation	Upgrading as strategy for targeted transformation

**Table 1: Characteristics of differing rationalities**

As *Table 1* shows, a developmental approach to informal settlement upgrading is process driven, and seeks to achieve qualitative outcomes. Stakeholders that employ this approach utilise social expertise in order to facilitate community mobilisation, participatory planning, capacity building and conflict mediation. Social expertise allows stakeholders to co-produce responsive upgrading interventions that address the priority needs of residents living in informal settlements. The developmental rationality also propagates a holistic approach to development, and aims to enact lasting structural change. As such, upgrading interventions are geared towards the production of inclusive and integrated neighbourhoods where residents are enabled to access housing and basic services, as well as livelihood opportunities and opportunities to participate in local governance. The approach therefore also recognises the importance of enhancing the capabilities of residents living in informal settlements.

A technocratic approach to informal settlement upgrading is in turn target driven, and seeks to achieve quantitative outcomes. While the technocratic approach is often criticised for engendering a compliance mentality, particularly in state officials, its emphasis on efficiency is crucial in a context where the majority of the population do not enjoy access to the basics of life. Coupled with rigid timeframes, a target driven approach can result in significant and immediate change in residents' quality of life. A technocratic approach relies on the application of technical expertise such as urban planning, architecture and engineering. In contrast to the developmental approach to informal settlement upgrading, the technocratic approach is less concerned with the development of a neighbourhood as a whole, and instead focuses its attention on the implementation of a specific intervention.

Both approaches set out above are also associated with particular limitations that impact on their ability to address both the scale and complexity of urban inequality in South Africa. Civil society stakeholders, informed by a developmental rationality, are lauded for their value-driven and empowering practice, and yet they often struggle to meet intended targets and as such to realise immediate change in residents' living environment. And while private sector actors, informed by a technocratic rationality, are praised for their efficiency, they are criticised for ignoring the root causes of poverty and inequality (see Otiso 2003).

In order to sidestep the shortcomings of each of these rationalities, it is necessary that stakeholders find a middle ground between a developmental and technocratic approach to informal settlement upgrading. We posit that this middle ground is best negotiated through the establishment of multi-sectoral partnerships. While such a process is inevitably fraught with challenges, we suggest that it also holds significant benefits for all stakeholders.

## BENEFITS OF MULTI-SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS

### Synergy

*exists when multiple stakeholders interact in order to achieve a collective outcome that is greater than what they could have achieved individually*

Partnership, according to Glasbergen (2011), increases the efficiency of development programmes by encouraging synergy between partnering stakeholders. **Synergy** exists when partners are able to compensate for one another's shortcomings. Where one partner lacks capacity regarding a particular aspect of the upgrading process, another may step in to ensure that there are fewer blockages hindering the achievements of project objectives. Krishna suggests, for instance, that '[local] governments' stability and performance are both improved when CBOs [community-based organisations] provide access and information to citizens and when they help bring communities' social capital to bear upon local projects'. So too, 'the value and utility of CBOs are considerably enhanced when they help citizens gain access to government programmes and market operations' (2003: 362). Of course, the notion of synergy implies that there is mutual recognition of the value that each stakeholder brings to the process.

Glasbergen (2011) also suggests that partnerships are valuable for the transformation of actors' attitudes. This is particularly noteworthy in processes of informal settlement upgrading where compliance to contracts may prevent meaningful community participation. In her review of the Self-Employed Women's Association's experience of partnering with the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, Baruah (2007) notes that NGOs effected positive change in the attitudes of both the state and private sector actors by actively exposing partners to the value of participatory upgrading through workshops. That is not to say that only CBOs and NGOs attempt to transform the mind sets of other stakeholders.

Private sector partners may influence NGOs by illustrating the impact of efficiency and the timely delivery of services and shelter on the lives of the urban poor. Finally, partnerships allow for the maximisation of resources as various funding streams converge in the pursuit of a common objective.

## CHALLENGES RELATED TO MULTI-SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS

Because various stakeholders participating in informal settlement upgrading are informed by differing rationalities, partnerships are bound to be complicated endeavours (Dutta 2000). These differing rationalities may give rise to challenges that need to be carefully navigated throughout the partnership process.

Firstly, differing rationalities inform different visions about the desired outcomes of informal settlement upgrading processes. This may result in conflict over priority actions. While a developmental approach emphasises more time-consuming participatory processes that may hinder the rollout of services, a technocratic approach enforces rigid project timeframes that do not adapt according to the interests of residents. Stakeholders' perception of what should be in place when upgrading interventions have been completed – whether bulk and household infrastructure, public spaces and facilities, or empowered community networks – therefore influence the way that they go about doing development. When these perceptions differ, there is likely to be tension between partners. In the absence of particular prerequisites (see p10) attempts at collaboration may thus deteriorate into a struggle for power over decision-making.

**Where mismatches between competencies and responsibilities exist, upgrading interventions are not likely to have the necessary transformative effect.**



## Accountability

*is associated with responsibility. Those who are accountable commit to explaining their actions, and to changing their behaviour if it is not in line with what they had promised*

A second challenge faced when entering into multi-sectoral partnerships for informal settlement upgrading involves the mismatch of roles and responsibilities (Krishna 2003). In South Africa this mismatch is informed by two interrelated factors. One is that public policy in South Africa encourages community participation in development. As such, the state supports projects with a participation component. The second factor that contributes to the mismatch of roles and responsibilities is that the South African state prefers to partner with private sector actors. While civil society actors may be better placed to perform particular functions (such as social facilitation and community mobilisation, skills training and leadership development, community-based planning and conflict mediation), they are in many instances barred from entering into partnership arrangements with the state by restrictive legislation (see Municipal Finance Management Act 2002). As a result, private sector actors – who possess technical rather than social expertise – are tasked with the responsibility of facilitating participatory planning processes. Where mismatches between competencies and responsibilities exist, upgrading interventions are not likely to have the necessary transformative effect.

Thirdly, partnering stakeholders may also face challenges related to **accountability** and credibility. According to Krishna (2003: 368) [upwards], downwards and horizontal accountability must all be managed together at the same time. At its core, the issue of



accountability in partnership involves balancing these three different kinds and directions of accountability'. The Shelter Associates case study illustrates an instance in which restrictive project parameters and the state's inability to deliver services called into question the credibility of an NGO which served as the intermediary between local government and communities in informal settlements. Residents in these settlements had established a relationship of trust with the NGO, and when their partner was unable to deliver on its promises, the NGO was instead subjected to the criticism of the community. The case study therefore also highlights the need for adequate channels of communication between all stakeholders affected by the multi-sectoral partnership agreements.

In Pune, India, a novel partnership arrangement between local authorities and eight local NGOs were put in place. The objective of the partnership was to provide basic sanitation to five hundred informal settlements in the city. One of these NGOs, Shelter Associates, had close ties with communities, especially women's savings groups, in affected settlements. Given its history in these communities, the organisation was brought on board to serve as intermediary, and to mobilise residents to participate in the project. The Pune local government aimed to have the project completed in a short period of time, between November 1999 and mid-2000. As a result, Shelter Associates were often unable to ensure the substantive participation of communities across Pune. The project parameters did not allow for more time-intensive processes of social facilitation, capacity building and conflict mediation. Furthermore, local authorities were unable to meet development target, thus leaving Shelter Associates to manage communities' expectations. Together, these challenges served to discredit the organisation in the eyes of the informal settlement residents (Hobson 2000).

Finally, a significant challenge that threatens the success of multi-sectoral partnerships in informal settlement upgrading is the inability of the state to **decentralise** power. Baruah (2007) and Dutta (2000) respectively note that the state draws power from its ability to provide services and shelter to the urban poor. While the state may recognise the need for diverse stakeholders to participate in upgrading processes, these are often employed in transactional or contracting relationships rather than collaborative partnerships. A similar reality may be observed in South Africa, where the state still struggles to distance itself from its role as sole provider. Here, partnerships, like community participation, may become tokenistic – undertaken in order to tick a box instead of enhancing the impact of upgrading interventions. This inability to share decision-making power amongst a variety of stakeholders may result in mistrust between partnering actors, and ultimately frustrate the achievement of development goals.

### Decentralise

means devolving power and resources. Instead of one stakeholder having all the power and taking responsibility for all the processes related to informal settlement upgrading, decentralisation allows for the distribution of power between multiple stakeholders.

## PREREQUISITES FOR SUCCESS

**Cape Town-based practitioners from civil society and the private sector agree that multi-sectoral partnerships are necessary for bringing about significant and lasting change in the urban environment.**

While partnerships are hardly ever easy, there are a number of strategies through which potential challenges can be mitigated. Drawing on their experiences of partnering with a variety of stakeholders, practitioners suggest that the following are prerequisites for success:

### Focused and well defined partnership goals

For a multi-sectoral partnership to work it is necessary that there is clarity about the objectives that the partnership aims to achieve (Ijsselmuiden et al. 2004). These goals should be made explicit from the outset of a partnership arrangement, agreed on, and should guide the decisions of all partnering stakeholders.

### Outline of roles and responsibilities

A clear outline of the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in the upgrading process can help to lessen conflict, and to ensure that the strengths offered by various sectors are maximised. When roles and responsibilities are allocated to stakeholders who are best suited to perform them, partners can reap the benefits of complementary expertise. As with partnership goals above, the allocation of roles and responsibilities should be negotiated and agreed upon prior to the commencement of the arrangement (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2011).

### Rules of engagement

Along with clearly defined objectives and roles, particular rules of engagement need to be put in place if multi-sectoral partnerships are to be successful. Partners must agree on core principles that will guide their actions and interactions. This also involves determining under what conditions the partnership arrangement may be dissolved.

**Through joint-decision making processes stakeholders can ensure that their interests are respected, they can negotiate acceptable trade-offs through meaningful deliberation, and they can foster collective responsibility.**

## Adaptability

While practitioners' experiences show that clearly defined objectives, roles and rules of engagement are necessary for successful multi-sectoral partnerships, it is also necessary that partners recognise the value of flexibility and adaptability throughout the duration of the partnership arrangement. Because informal settlement upgrading is a complex process influenced by numerous factors (including social, political and economic realities), things are bound to change. The agreements made at the outset of a partnership arrangement may need to be updated over time, or changes in the environment may call for new arrangements altogether. In order to adequately respond to the reality on the ground, partnering stakeholders must therefore remain adaptable.

## Trust, respect and communication

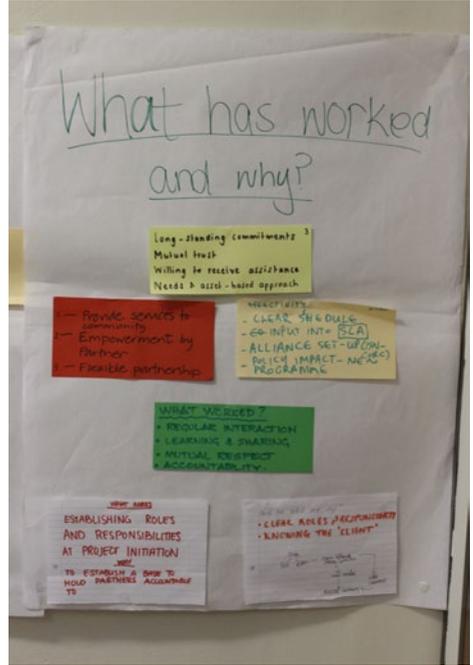
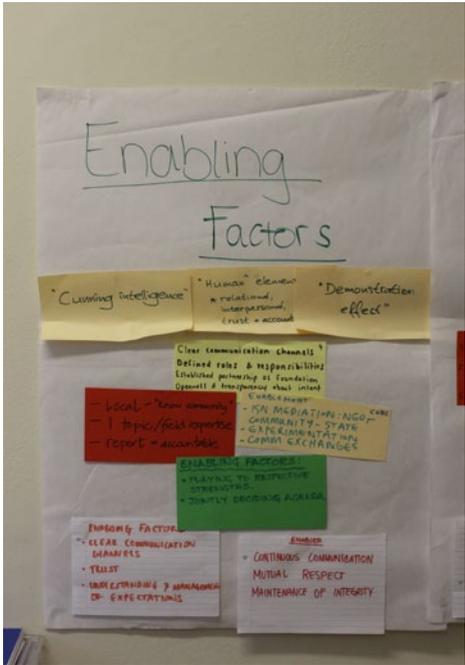
In a multi-sectoral partnership trust is not only about believing that your partners will honour formal agreements, but also they will act in the interest of the partnership. Trust is therefore contingent on respect for the value that your partners – whether civil society actors, private sector entities, or government officials – bring to the upgrading process (Jamali and Keshishian 2008). To ensure healthy, sustainable and effective partnerships all partners should feel appreciated and their opinions should be regarded as useful. This is particularly important in participatory processes involving residents living in informal settlements, as local knowledge is often considered to be less valuable than the knowledge of technical partners (Hastings 1996). But trust and respect are not always there at the outset of a partnership arrangement. Instead, trust and respect need to be cultivated and encouraged throughout the partnership process. An important way of working towards this ideal is to establish channels of communication between stakeholders so as to ensure transparency and accountability.

### Trade-offs

are compromises made between stakeholders with different interests. Each party makes some sacrifices in order to access more desirable benefits.

## Decentralisation of power

The purpose of multi-sectoral partnerships in informal settlement upgrading is to ensure that, through their collective effort, stakeholders can begin to address immense and complex challenges. For this to be done effectively it is necessary that all stakeholders share in the decision-making power. Through joint-decision making processes stakeholders can ensure that their interests are respected, they can negotiate acceptable **trade-offs** through meaningful deliberation, and they can foster collective responsibility (Wildridge et al. 2004). The decentralisation of power also allows partnering stakeholders to share risk, financial or otherwise.



Newsprint detailing some of the outcomes of the local Community of Practice meeting on the 19th of March 2015.

## CONCLUSION

**For informal settlement upgrading to result in substantial and sustainable change, it is necessary that a variety of stakeholders be drawn into the process.**

We acknowledge that the differing rationalities that inform these stakeholders may give rise to challenges that are not easily overcome. If managed carefully however, we suggest that partnership between multiple and diverse stakeholders can result in innovative upgrading practices that marry interventions addressing immediate deficiencies in the urban environment with participatory processes that seek to empower local communities. Drawing on the experience of practitioners working in the field of informal settlement upgrading, we propose a number of prerequisites for success that can be used to guide future partnerships.

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