Institutionalising a Housing Support Centre Model to enable self-build

BACKYARD MATTERS
ENABLING PEOPLE, PLACE & POLICY

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SELF BUILD

The case for self-build

In South Africa, there is currently a housing shortage of approximately 3.7 million, which is estimated to be growing at 178 000 annually.[1] It is broadly accepted that state-subsidised housing programmes are not able to keep up with the growing housing shortage, while private sector housing development mostly does not cater for the majority of lower-income households. Additionally, publicly-enabled housing programmes and support (e.g. social housing, affordable housing) also leave key populations out, either because they do not meet the eligibility criteria, or because the eligibility criteria are interpreted in ways that result in de facto exclusion (think, for example, of the affordable housing income bracket of R3,501–R22,000, which can incentivise developers to provide housing for those at the higher end of this income band).

There is an emerging discourse around self-build housing construction, and the role of communities in development more broadly, but there is a risk that this, in practice, becomes state withdrawal from or neglect of housing consolidation. In the absence of state support for and enablement of self-build top-structure construction and incremental housing consolidation, people will construct top-structures to the standard that they can afford, which is likely to result in a large number of informal structures – not an ideal human settlements outcome.

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1   Centre for Affordable Housing Finance in Africa (CAHF). 2021. Housing Finance in Africa Yearbook – 12th edition

> **❝** Recognition of the right to build is not just a moral imperative, but presents an opportunity in a constrained fiscal environment."

The right to build refers to allowing people to build their own homes according to their needs and specifications, either through their own labour or through local artisans and contractors, with the necessary guidance and support from the state and other role players. The right to build allows municipalities to tap into the latent willingness and agency of communities for incremental top-structure consolidation and allows for the building of partnerships with stakeholders and role-players involved in the construction process. However, the right to build is premised on the right to occupy, and therefore tenure security is critical. Recognition of the right to build is not just a moral imperative, but presents an opportunity in a constrained fiscal environment. Housing should be viewed as a process, not a product, and should be about giving households choice in how this process unfolds. Enabling and supporting self-build in all its varieties can allow for a more demand-led housing process that acknowledges choice, people's agency and incrementalism.

The right of access to adequate housing contained in Section 26 of the Constitution has been unpacked through jurisprudence, and recognition of the right to build ('self-build') is at the centre of housing jurisprudence in South Africa. The landmark *Grootboom* judgement noted that in terms of Section 26(2), individuals must be enabled, by legislative and other measures taken by the state, to provide housing for themselves.[2] The Court further held that 'for those who can afford to pay for adequate housing, the state's primary obligation lies in unlocking the system, providing access to housing stock and a legislative framework to facilitate self-built homes through planning laws and access to finance.'[3] Therefore, there is a clear requirement for a legislative and policy framework to address the right to build. To progressively realise the right to self-build as an integral part of the right of access to adequate housing, the state must take reasonable measures within available resources. For households without sufficient financial resources to self-build, there is need for the scaling up of government subsidies, and reasonable support would include assistance with tenure security and access to basic services, advice on top-structure construction and access to pre-approved building plans, and housing consumer education among others.

Self-build is, in fact, an inherent but neglected part of current human settlements policy. The current policy and grant framework already provides some support to self-build via the Enhanced People's Housing Process (EPHP); the recently re-launched and expanded 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 (IRHSV).

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2   *Government of the Republic of South Africa and Others v Grootboom and Others (CCT11/00) [2000] ZACC.19, paragraphs 35–36.*

3   *Ibid., paragraph 36.*

Amid the growing discourse around 'self-build', especially in the context of fiscal constraints and the de-prioritisation of new large-scale public housing projects, there is an opportunity for self-build to be enabled and supported through municipal-led Housing Support Centres (HSCs). HSCs, with the required uptake in national, provincial and local policy and programmes, 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.

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 2022, Isandla Institute investigated how self-build can be enabled and supported through HSCs, inspired by the local EPHP housing support centre precedent and other Global South self-build initiatives. This resulted in three 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.

This paper draws on the research and arguments developed previously by developing a model for the institutionalisation of HSCs. This, in turn will lay the basis for policy advocacy around the uptake of the model in local, provincial and national policy and programmes.

Simultaneously, Isandla Institute has 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) concludes that, not only is there a need for the scaling up of government subsidies for households without sufficient financial resources to self-build, it is also allowed in the current policy framework.

Enabling the right to build through incremental self-build requires state guidance and support.

Why HSCs?

HSCs can play a vital role in enabling and supporting self-build in the current context where human settlements policy focus has shifted from delivery of top-structures in favour of the delivery of serviced sites (rapid serviced land release and site-and-service), with provision of subsidised housing focussed on a very narrow definition of those considered most vulnerable – the elderly, people with disabilities and military veterans.

As will be demonstrated in this paper, an HSC model can, at least initially, build on existing municipal capacity, structures and funding sources, as well partner with external stakeholders providing existing housing support services; it can be augmented and supported over time, with an increased menu of support services, and greater involvement of community members. The HSC model can serve as an opportunity to re-orient municipal administrative processes and governance mechanisms towards providing a more integrated, 'customer-centric' and efficient area-based service regarding housing support and other municipal service needs, strengthening communication and improving community trust in municipalities.

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Municipal benefits of implementing an HSC model

Municipalities may question the need for HSCs and see them as just another potentially unfunded mandate that they must take on. However, as will be made clear, an HSC model builds on existing municipal functions and programmes and can – initially at least – make use of existing staffing, funding sources and organisational systems. It can build on and link to existing or planned state, civil society and private sector initiatives that provide elements of housing support, thereby taking advantage of synergies and existing capabilities and increasing efficiency.

The potential benefits to a municipality of implementing an HSC model include:

- Improved quality and safety of new self-build building construction (top structures);

- Formalisation and regularisation of existing dwellings, and better densification control;

- Improved data on households in informal settlements, backyard landlord and tenants, their service needs and an indication of people's financial status and their appetite for self-build;

- Improved access to basic services for households in informal settlements targeted for in-situ upgrading, and areas with backyard landlords and tenants;

- More efficient and effective service provision by the municipality (including better fault reporting and resolution), as well as reduced municipal costs;

- Increased municipal revenue (which could include a larger share of the equitable share in addition to local rates, taxes and service fees);

- Administrative efficiency through streamlined internal processes and governance;

- Reducing tenure insecurity, thereby slowing informal settlement growth, land occupations and increases in homelessness;

- Enabling of township economic development and women's economic development more specifically (as the majority of backyard landlords are women);

- Increased spatial and socio-economic inclusion;

- Strengthening settlement sustainability and individual and community resilience;

- Improving community trust in the municipality, through proximity of service and responsiveness, and strengthening the relationship between municipalities and communities.

HSCs have potential value and impact beyond enabling housing rights: it's a good investment!

What will HSCs do?

What HSCs will do depends on contextual factors, such as beneficiary typology and the menu of housing support services most appropriate to that typology. A number of services are common to each typology, but may differ in what they mean in each context (e.g. tenure security assistance will differ between informal settlement and more formal backyard housing contexts).

Beneficiary typologies and housing support needs

The four main beneficiary typologies are:

1 Households living in informal settlements categorised for in-situ upgrading (A & B1), and recipients of serviced sites;

2 Households living in backyard dwellings (tenants);

3 Homeowner backyard landlords (who may/may not live on the property);

4 Micro-developers.[4]

There are five broad categories under which the various types of housing support needs fall:

Tenure security (including assistance with strengthening tenure security through title deeds and occupation certificates);

Access to basic services (including applications for service connections, free basic services, and assistance with service fault reporting);

Top structure (including information on subsidies/finance, assistance with building and planning applications, access to prototype building plans and a local contractor/artisan database);

Neighbourhood improvement (including enumerations, social compacts, and sustainable livelihood plans); and,

Sector support (including capacity building/training of contractors/artisans and community representatives/groups) – which aligns with the enabling of township economic development.

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4   *Micro-developers usually build multiple rental units in the form of medium-density apartment blocks, often on properties bought specifically for this purpose where the previous structures are demolished. Compared to homeowner developers, they invest larger amounts of funding, drawn together from various sources, as part of a growing property development portfolio. They are more entrepreneurial and driven more by the pursuit of profit and wealth (Source: Turok, I, Scheba, A and du Trevou, C. 2022. Small-scale rental housing: Moving from the low to the high road. Development Action Group & Human Sciences Research Council).*

Some housing support needs may be of an individual nature (e.g. tenure security), while others may be at a community level (e.g. neighbourhood improvement). While there are common housing support needs, the variety of possible support needs across the different beneficiary typologies (including community/individual needs) will mean that the specific type of response to each housing support need will differ depending on the context.

Human settlement planning and development is, in essence, about neighbourhood development. Informal settlement upgrading is the intentional and incremental process of bringing about neighbourhoods that are well-functioning, vibrant and sustainable and that are integrated into the municipal fabric. Public housing projects in new areas and developments in existing townships also need to ensure that there are investments in the quality of the neighbourhood, including socio-economic amenities.

Research conducted by the Backyard Matters project in 2020 revealed that insecurity, crime and violence, particularly in communal areas and the public realm, are often raised as concerns by backyard residents and landlords living in townships. An area-based violence prevention approach combines physical and built environment interventions with social and economic programmes and aligns with the underlying principles and objectives of human settlements development.[5]

❝Human settlement planning and development is, in essence, about neighbourhood development.”

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5   *Isandla Institute. 2022. Backyard housing: an essential part of the solution to South Africa's housing crisis – a submission into the proposed new Human Settlements policy and Human Settlements bill (pp 26–28).*

> **66** While there may be some overlap, the support needs of micro-developers and their ability to access resources differ significantly from the other three beneficiary typologies."

Furthermore, while there may be some overlap, the support needs of micro-developers and their ability to access resources differ significantly from the other three beneficiary typologies. Therefore, it is argued that, in large cities at least, micro-developers should be supported by a separate and dedicated municipal office/desk tailored to their needs. Micro-developers are an increasing reality in cities and it is important to create an enabling dispensation for them, but not to the exclusion of the other beneficiary typologies. There is an opportunity to build on current interest and municipal efforts dedicated to supporting micro-developers and broaden this to address the more diverse needs of the other three beneficiary typologies, which represent the majority requiring housing support. As such, dedicated municipal offices/desks for micro-developers can link with (area-based) HSCs to ensure consistency of support.

Menu of housing support services

The HSC service offering (i.e. basket of services provided) must be based on identified needs and context. As the possibility of an HSC in every catchment is not viable in the short- to medium term, a housing support needs assessment must first be carried out in an area to determine the types and degree of support that will be most useful. Defining a variable size for HSC catchments will assist in this regard. As with informal settlement upgrading processes, community readiness will also need to be assessed. The form, location, size, design, staffing skills requirement and establishment and operational costs of an HSC model can then be established. In municipalities where they exist, lessons can be learnt from similar community-facing support structures, such as municipal rental housing information offices and how these can inform an HSC model.

It should be noted that an HSC model can build on and link to existing or planned state, civil society organisation (CSO) and private sector initiatives that provide elements of housing support. Examples of these include National Treasury's Informal Settlement Community Development Programme (CDP) which envisions District Community Resource Centres (DCRCs) that share similar objectives; the Technical and Operational Support Centres (TOSCs), currently being piloted by the Housing Development Agency (HDA); municipal rental housing information offices; the Development Action Group's (DAG) Contractors and Developers Academy (CDA); and the Transaction/Tenure Support Centre (TSC), established by consulting company 71point4 in partnership with the Centre for Affordable Housing Finance in Africa (CAHF).

HSCs need to be fit-for-purpose and provide services that respond to local needs and opportunities.

Table 1 offers a detailed description of what each support service (both individual and collective) entails, so that the implications of providing each can be surfaced with regard to the function an HSC can play in that service, and the municipal department or external organisation responsible for providing it.

Table 1: Housing support service needs and the role of the Housing Support Centre

| Housing support need	Housing support service elements	Housing Support Centre function (what the HSC does)	Municipal department/external organisation responsible for providing the service
Tenure security	Process and issue occupation certificates and title deeds	Applications and certificates	Housing or Property Management, or provincial Human Settlements department
	Unblocking outstanding title deeds	Issue/case management (incl. "unblocking")	Housing or Property Management, or provincial Human Settlements department, in conjunction with Deeds Office
	Pro-forma lease agreements and referral to Rental Housing Tribunal	Advice office	Rental Housing Tribunal or municipal rental housing information offices. Complemented by tenant and landlord rights education by CSOs.
	Inheritance/estate advice (in terms of title deeds)	Advice office	Housing, or provincial Human Settlements department in conjunction with Master of the High Court office
	Information and training on rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords	Consumer education	Rental Housing Tribunal or municipal rental housing information offices. Complemented by CSOS (Community Schemes Ombud Service (CSOS) and CSOs
Access to basic services	Free basic services information/ education	Consumer education	Financial Services
	Advice/referral regarding indigent register	Advice office	Financial Services
	Community engagement around basic service options and implications	Community engagement	Engineering Services/Electricity/Solid Waste in conjunction with Public Participation unit
	Applications for household connections and services	Applications and certificates	Engineering Services/Electricity/Solid Waste
	Service fault reporting	Issue/case management (incl. "unblocking")	Engineering Services/Electricity/Solid Waste
	Follow-up on outstanding applications	Issue/case management (incl. "unblocking")	Engineering Services/Electricity/Solid Waste

Housing support need	Housing support service elements	Housing Support Centre function (what the HSC does)	Municipal department/external organisation responsible for providing the service
Top structure (self-build)	Information/registration on housing database, and Housing Subsidy System-related enquiries	Advice office/ Applications and certificates	Housing, in conjunction with provincial Human Settlements department
	Information on subsidies and financing options, and referrals to finance providers	Advice office	Housing, in conjunction with provincial Human Settlements department; micro-finance institutions and banks
	Subsidy applications (e.g. First Home Finance)	Applications and certificates	Housing, in conjunction with provincial Human Settlements department
	Community engagement on top structure options and/or collective housing consolidation	Community engagement	Housing in conjunction with Public Participation unit, provincial Human Settlements department, and CSOs
	Information on building and planning regulations, rights/responsibilities, application processes	Consumer education	Planning & Building Control, in conjunction with CSOs, CIDB, Construction Education & Training Authority (CETA), NHBRC, Master Builders Association (MBA)
	Information/advice on building materials and design	Advice office	Planning & Building Control
	Access to prototype building plans	Advice office	Planning & Building Control
	Assistance with building plan and land use applications (incl. building and land use regularisation	Applications and certificates	Planning & Building Control
	Access to Local contractor/artisan database	Contractor/artisan database	Planning & Building Control
Neighbourhood improvement	Service issue reporting (streetlights, waste collection, potholes, etc.)	Issue/case management (incl. "unblocking")	Engineering Services/Electricity/Solid Waste/ Transport
	Social facilitation regarding informal settlement/neighbourhood improvements (incl. enumerations, social compacts, and sustainable livelihood plans)	Community engagement	Housing in conjunction with Public Participation unit, provincial Human Settlements department, and CSOs
Sector support	Registration of local contractors and artisans	Contractor/artisan database	Planning & Building Control in conjunction with NHBRC; Economic Development
	Capacity building/training of contractors/artisans and community representatives/groups	Capacity building and training	CSOs, CIDB, Construction Education & Training Authority (CETA), NHBRC
	Housing support skills training of EPWP, CDW or Presidential Employment Stimulus beneficiaries	Capacity building and training	All municipal departments/external organisations providing HSC services

HSC functions

Table 1 distils a number of HSC functions related to specific housing support services. In addition, there are two overarching functions that are necessary for the effective operation of an HSC model, namely record keeping and data management (including the appropriateness of how data is collected and processed), and partnership/contract management of housing support service providers. Record keeping/data management (e.g. number of applications, trainees) is important for troubleshooting cases and for planning service phasing, and will require an appropriate municipal case management and data system, and associated data capabilities.

As such, the following HSC functions are identified:

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
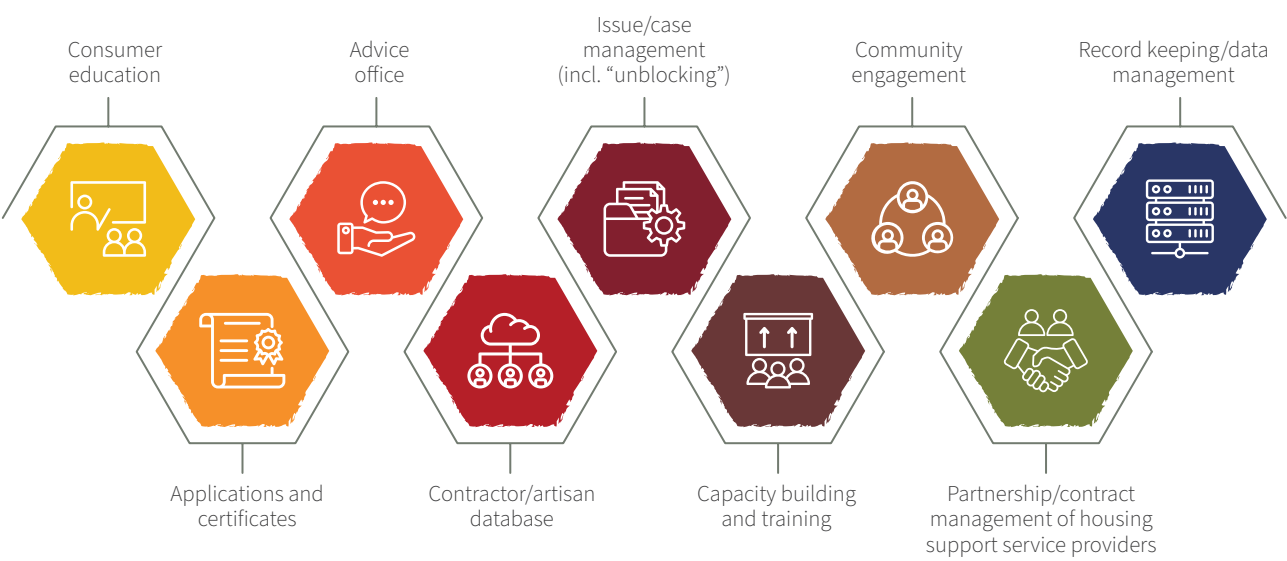
Additional functions can be added to over time. For example, in informal settlements where there is an opportunity for self-build at scale, a physical HSC can provide the role of discounted building materials bulk-buying and management (in the case of EPHP projects or aggregated materials orders from a number of households) as well as construction management – inspired by the EPHP precedent. HSCs can also provide training and incubation space for local contractors, artisans and SMMEs involved in construction materials manufacturing (e.g. bricks, aggregates, windows and doors). This role links to the aims of the Technical and Operational Support Centres (TOSCs), currently being piloted by the National Department of Human Settlements (NDHS) and the Housing Development Agency (HDA). Peri-urban and rural areas can also benefit from the expansion of HSCs to these contexts, with the requisite suitable menu of services.

HSCs can also play an important role as the hub for the significant community engagement, negotiation, possible conflict management and preparation processes that are vital in the lead-up to an in-situ informal settlement upgrade, among others by providing space for meetings and training, and more broadly to function as a community resource. HSCs assume development will occur, so given their social facilitation and community engagement function, they could also play a role in negotiating relocation processes for sections of category A and B1 settlements (where necessary) and possibly even category B2 and C settlements in preparation for relocation (once expertise has been built).

Therefore, the community engagement and public participation element of HSCs will be important in co-producing in-situ informal settlement upgrade processes and, more broadly, providing clarity on municipal housing plans, the policy focus shift to serviced sites, self-build as a housing option, and even sharing bad news such as delays – as greater transparency and accountability will improve trust in municipalities. In so doing, the risk of politicisation of housing projects by ward councillors or committees and community structures as well as gatekeeping can also be lessened. However, it will be important, particularly in terms of consumer education, community engagement and social compacts, for HSCs to work with ward councillors and committees, as they will have a role to play in these instances.

> In the long term, HSCs can be expanded to function as community hubs that provide municipal and other state services not directly linked to housing (with a concomitant name change), to function more broadly as a 'one stop shop' in the manner of Thusong centres. This would also allow these hubs to draw on a wider array of state funding.

To allow for incremental augmentation of the menu of services provided, municipalities could consider developing basic/essential, expanded and full menus of housing support services. Incremental augmentation of services can be viewed from the perspective of the progressive realisation of rights or, alternatively, what is incremental from an administrative point of view, i.e. least onerous or demanding, yet effective. These do not have to be contradictory and can be balanced. However, a basic package must not be confused with minimalist services, which do not build relationships, so the menu of basic/essential housing support services must be designed to be provided in an engaged way. The common (though contextually nuanced) services, highlighted earlier in Table 1, that can be deemed basic/essential are those related to tenure security, access to basic services and access to information on subsidies and finance, via the functions of consumer education, advice and assistance with applications and certificates. In addition, for backyard landlords and tenants, pro-forma lease agreements, tenant and landlord rights education and referral to Rental Housing Tribunals are deemed essential. It is important to note that these are the starting point for augmented service offerings, allowing the municipality to set up the requisite systems and harness capacity and resources.

Assumptions made in this section are that municipalities have the willingness and capacity to provide these services, that interdepartmental working arrangements exist that would allow for staff from multiple departments to be drawn into providing services (or resolving specific cases/issues), and that there are suitable existing processes whereby cases/issues are referred between departments, tracked, monitored and resolved. Additionally, it is assumed that intergovernmental working arrangements allow for different spheres of government to provide these services or resolve issues, and that some form of partnership mechanism to provide HSC services can be established with external service providers, who may or may not already be providing the services proposed as part of the HSC model. The implications of these assumptions will be interrogated later in this document, as the model will have to address these to be effective.

HSC functions and service offerings can be augmented over time, depending on local needs, opportunities, capacities and resources.
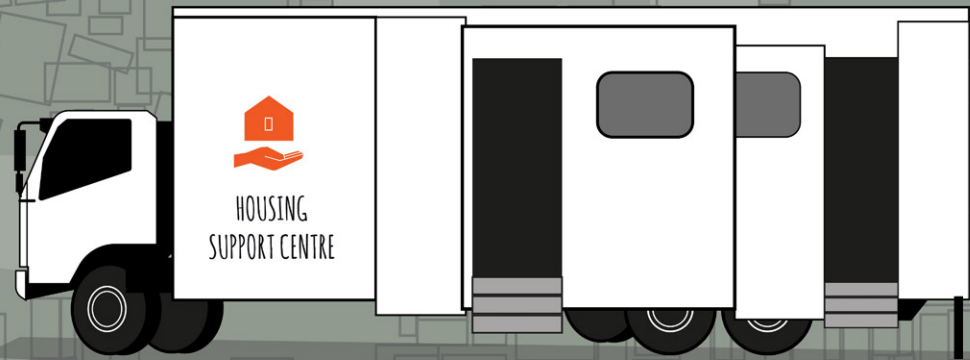
What shape and form can HSCs take?

HSCs can be

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. Given the various human settlements contexts in a municipality, particularly in cities and metropolitan areas, it is envisaged that HSCs would take on a multiplicity of forms to suit the context.

For virtual support, materials will need to be designed to not be data-heavy (or accessed via free public Wi-Fi) and in multiple languages, to allow for maximum accessibility. Virtual access to information and support or to log enquiries can take the form of frontline terminals (using off-the-shelf software) located in existing municipal buildings, mobile vans and physical HSCs.

The different forms also allow for incremental expansion of the menu of services and reach over time. Certain of the services highlighted earlier in Table 1 can be provided virtually, while others are more suited to mobile or semi-permanent outreach. Therefore, the specific choice of the menu of services may also affect the choice of HSC form.

A list of criteria has been developed to enable a decision on the appropriate form. For example, in informal settlements, where there is a possibility for self-build at scale and over a relatively long time period, as people are likely to improve their homes incrementally, a permanent HSC will be necessary, while support to backyard landlords and tenants can take the form of mobile or semi-permanent outreach, complemented by virtual support, as the types of support needed will potentially be spread over a larger geographic area (a larger catchment) and differ in when they will be required (i.e. potentially on a more ad hoc basis).

Permanent office

Semi-permanent and periodic outreach (e.g. bimonthly or monthly)

Mobile

Virtual

Ultimately, as many services as possible should be provided via a physical HSC, as a permanent community presence will make the most impact in terms of facilitative and enabling community-centred housing support and will demonstrate municipal commitment to communities as part of a broader social contract.

The key criteria to determine the appropriate form of an HSC are:

Amount and type of housing support needs (current and anticipated), based on the number of informal settlements and backyard landlords and tenants requiring support

Scale of (potential/anticipated) self-build – this will determine demand for housing support services, so where demand is high, a more permanent presence would be important

Timeframe of housing support need – e.g. an informal settlement upgrade (including self-build housing) takes place incrementally and over a prolonged period, while backyard landlords and tenants may require housing support services in a more ad hoc manner

Accessibility/proximity[6] – a walk-in centre close to where people live is more accessible than a centralised office in town

Affordability – this in in part linked to accessibility (i.e. the cost of getting to the HSC), but also to the cost of data, if support is provided virtually

criteria

Service quality and frequency – the frequency of outreach efforts should be balanced with the housing support needs (and their timeframe) in a catchment area to ensure an adequate level of service

Municipal capacity and resources in relation to housing support needs – the municipality's ability to leverage human and financial resources is a key factor in determining the appropriate form(s) of the HSC and how this may be expanded over time

Non-duplication of existing municipal functions and services – where proposed housing support services are existing municipal functions, the HSC will play a strong referral function

Effective utilisation of existing municipal buildings and structures – particularly those that already have an area-based or outreach function (consideration given to whether they could be used for HSC functions to avoid duplication and improve efficiency)

Non-duplication or replacement of existing community structures offering relevant support and services – this should become evident from the housing support needs assessment mentioned earlier, as well as a mapping of stakeholders and services offered

> HSCs can take different forms, depending on local conditions, but should work towards a predictable, sustained presence in local communities and neighbourhoods.

The premise is that HSCs are (or otherwise become) neighbourhood assets and that given the different human settlement contexts and realities, a multiplicity of HSCs will be established across a municipality, particularly in larger cities. Municipalities will need to ascertain under what conditions and at what scale an HSC model will be feasible at a municipal-wide level. For example, if a municipality chooses to not create permanent posts for physical HSCs across its jurisdiction, a hybrid version can be implemented, where a physical HSC hub is set up (possibly utilising an existing municipal office or centre), with mobile outreach happening from there according to demand. Ultimately, a housing support needs assessment will produce a geographic profile of demand, which will in turn inform a decision on the mode of outreach, including mobile services.

6   *CSIR Guidelines for the Provision of Social Facilities (including for Thusong Services Centres) state that an acceptable travel distance to social facilities or a municipal office in an urban area should be between 15 and 30km, with 20 km–25 km in rural areas or preferably the use of mobile services. Available at: https://www.csir.co.za/sites/default/files/Documents/CSIR%20Guidelines_revised_reprintNov2015.pdf*

What role for communities and intended beneficiaries?

Co-production and participatory development are – or should be – central features of human settlement planning and development. To enable the right to build through self-build, it is particularly important that relevant communities and households are engaged with as development actors, rather than passive recipients of government services. The HSC model provides particular opportunities to involve communities, local residents and intended beneficiaries in the design, provision and monitoring of housing support services.

First, there should be community involvement in the design and refinement/augmentation of HSCs by determining relevant housing support services and appropriate form, as their local intelligence and knowledge will assist in this regard. The housing support needs assessment would be one aspect of this, but this needs to be embedded in a broader process of (meaningful) community engagement.

Secondly, the goal of the HSC model is to transfer significant housing support skills from municipal officials and CSOs to community members, community-based organisations (CBOs) and local artisans and contractors, to build on and strengthen existing community resources and complement the housing support services of the municipality. Community-run housing committees and CBOs that already provide elements of advice and assistance to community members in engaging municipalities can be supported by and linked to HSCs. Local young unemployed built environment graduates can be employed (a goal of the NDHS' TOSCs), via internships and with the requisite training and mentoring, to provide housing support services. Similarly, EPWP, CDW or Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES)/Social Employment Fund (SEF) beneficiaries could be upskilled, providing for short term employment, community-based housing support and the strengthening of social capital. With the augmentation of an HSC model, some of these individuals could potentially become full-time municipal HSC

4 Key Elements

(1) Community involvement in the design

(2) Transfer housing support skills from officials/CSOs to community and CBOs

(3) HSC committee as an accountability and oversight mechanism

(4) Developing and/or linking with existing social accountability initiatives for improved service delivery

❝Community representation on a municipal or area-based HSC committee is critical to ensure the appropriate functioning of the HSC, identify collective neighbourhood-level issues, opportunities and concerns, and for improved governance relations.❞

employees, outside of these employment programmes. Funding for a broader sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction role for HSCs could come from, among others, the Social Employment Fund. This has implications for municipal capacity in terms of how it will coordinate the skills transfer and involvement of these individuals in providing housing support, and the degree to which they and other community representatives are involved in the functioning of HSCs, as the menu of services is augmented.

There are dynamics and challenges around using community employment programmes. Given current practice, regulations and funding, EPWP employment is contentious. EPWP involves short-term employment, and there is a requirement for randomisation and rotation in the employment of beneficiaries, while the selection process lends itself to patronage and corruption. It also requires that people from a specific community would need to be employed in that area. On the other hand, PES/SEF beneficiaries are associated with longer term employment and funding sources. The issue of remuneration for community members must be carefully considered, as it has the risk of creating community tension.

Thirdly, community representation on a municipal or area-based HSC committee is critical to ensure the appropriate functioning of the HSC, identify collective neighbourhood-level issues, opportunities and concerns, and for improved governance relations. The HSC committee would function as an accountability and oversight mechanism, whilst acting as a point of connection to other community structures (e.g. ward committees or CBOs) and mediating broader community engagement. In terms of the composition of the HSC committee, it will be important to consider local housing committee structures, adequate representation of women, community power dynamics and leadership legitimacy. Ward councillor involvement in HSC committees should be avoided for HSCs not to become politicised. Where relevant, CSOs can also be represented on the HSC committee.

Lastly, community accountability mechanisms need to be part of the model design and can include asking HSC beneficiaries for feedback on the quality of the housing support service received and how it could be improved, as well as community involvement in monitoring and evaluation of HSC services. In addition, community members can be trained to gather data for disaster risk assessments and HSCs can provide advice on disaster risk mitigation through top structure design or material choice, thus building community climate resilience. Importantly, communities can also play a role in HSCs enabling improved municipal service efficiency and access to basic services. Current service fault reporting, such as reporting a broken standpipe or uncleaned toilets via call centres or online fault logging systems is often not accessible or effective. The Asivikelane initiative[7] has created a channel between municipalities and informal settlements, via SMS/WhatsApp or telephonic surveys of basic services access. HSCs can develop and/or link with these existing social accountability initiatives, and play a role in the institutionalisation of these and other kinds of community-led and -generated data processes to improve the quality of municipal services.

HSCs can help in democratising local development and building relationships of trust between municipalities and local communities/residents.

A risk of improved household-level data is that this can be used to displace people, if used in a punitive way. Privacy, protection of personal information, and clarity and transparency about what data is used for are therefore also important considerations.

7   Asivikelane is an initiative of the International Budget Partnership (IBP) and CSO partners that started in 2020, and has reached 400 informal settlements in 10 municipalities. See: https://asivikelane.org/about/.

What are the implications for municipal capacity and resources?

The four variables that in combination can result in different HSC scenarios are the beneficiary typologies, the HSC menu of services, the form of HSCs, and the level of community engagement and involvement in an HSC. Each has implications for municipal capacity and resources (including sources of funding) and how a municipality will coordinate and implement the support services. Decisions on HSC model design will need to align HSC offerings with HSC forms and capacity scenarios, ranging from support (as a municipal-led model) being provided primarily by municipal staff, complemented by partnerships with CSOs, CBOs, the private sector and academia, to the involvement of a greater number of community workers. The implications of partnerships are that partnership management (rather than contract management) capabilities will need to be strengthened, while the implications of using more community workers are that stronger administrative, coordination and training capacity will be required.

The municipality's role as either a coordinator or implementer, or both, must be considered in the specific institutional design. Existing and required municipal capacity and resources (including sources of funding) are factors that will influence the form, menu of services and phasing/incremental augmentation of HSCs. As housing support services will build on existing municipal functions and programmes, municipalities will need to analyse staff capacity, skills and available resources, to give an indication of what an initial phase of an HSC model could offer, and what expanded staff capacity, additional skills and additional resources will be needed to scale up in future phases.

> " The four variables that in combination can result in different HSC scenarios are the beneficiary typologies, the HSC menu of services, the form of HSCs, and the level of community engagement and involvement in an HSC."

As an HSC model will involve data collection and data management (e.g. local contractor and artisan databases, or referrals to other departments when there are issues to be resolved), there will be opportunity to learn from this data and refine the HSC model over time, and thus an appropriate municipal case management and data system, with concomitant data capabilities, will need to be established. Integration of various municipal databases will also be required. The data system will also need to allow for cross-referencing of the same customer between different municipal departments, as well as the creation of a central repository of information. Smaller and less resourced municipalities may need to be supported by provincial government to develop or strengthen these capabilities. Other important considerations are partnership coordination and contract management implications. In addition, it is important to consider the socio-technical skills needed to ensure the HSC offers reliable, quality services and support, as well as how community workers will be trained in these skills.

> (Un)learning may be required from municipalities to implement an HSC model. Internal (skills) development could include learning how to work across silos and professional/sectoral delineations, and how to manage partnerships with external organisations. Working in an area-based manner, and developing a more 'on the ground' presence in communities, will also require a change in mindset, orientation and skills.

HSCs can initially leverage existing municipal capacity and resources whilst incrementally investing in relevant capabilities to ensure the effective roll-out and functioning of HSCs.

To feasibly phase the implementation of an HSC model, a municipality will need to initially make use of existing staffing, contract management and data and case management system capacity, as well as existing funding sources. Initially, a basic/essential menu of housing support services may likely be provided in a hybrid of periodic mobile outreach and virtual forms, with a physical HSC located as a hub in an existing municipal building or at a large scale in-situ informal settlement upgrading site (perhaps initially in a shipping container). As the benefits of an HSC pilot phase become apparent (and are incorporated into a refinement of the model), the business (and political) case for HSCs will be strengthened, and increases in staffing, contract management and data and case management system capacity, as well as existing funding sources, will become possible, allowing for augmentation of the menu of services, form, reach and impact.

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How will HSCs be funded?

In terms of funding HSCs, municipalities can draw on existing grant funding, programmatic funding, municipal bonds, or local and international just urban transition/ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance)/CSI-linked funding. 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 should 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. HSCs can also draw on the NDHS' dedicated Sector Economic Empowerment and Enterprise Development Programme (SEEED) funding which seeks to mainstream economic empowerment and participation of designated groups in the human settlements value chain. SETA and EPWP funding and training capacity can be used to support funding of and training via HSCs.

State grants and funding not directly targeted at human settlements but that overlap with HSC objectives can also be drawn upon, e.g. support to co-operatives and small businesses (including small-scale contractors and building material manufacturers) can be provided via the Department of Small Business Development's (DSBD) Co-Operatives Development Support Programme (CDSP) and the Township and Rural Entrepreneurship Programme (TREP). The argument can be made that HSCs will allow more efficient and effective service provision and administrative efficiency, and therefore in the short term, no new grant funding is required for HSCs.

> 66
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However, in the longer term there is a need for additional investment in HSCs, if these are to become a key area-based human settlements intervention. Therefore, policy guidance is needed on how existing grants can be used towards the establishment and functioning of HSCs. In addition, grant conditions may need to be reviewed and amended to specify the provision of housing support services through HSCs, which will allow municipalities to utilise relevant funding. Most importantly, however, a permanent funding mechanism needs to be explored and defined so that housing rights can be enabled progressively through state support.

A potential source of own revenue, if permissible within municipal legislation and regulations, can be for HSCs to charge municipal departments, and external service providers/stakeholders, a service fee for providing referrals or the customer-facing element of their service, e.g. information, advice, assistance with applications or information and referrals to finance providers, etc. HSCs can also charge users a nominal fee for services provided, in addition to reduced application fees. Additionally, the enumerations, surveys and data capturing/management that would form part of an HSC model would enable improved planning, decision making and service provision efficiency by all levels of government; HSCs can charge fees for providing this data within the public sector, with due consideration for privacy concerns. The private sector, particularly companies in the human settlements value chain, and professional bodies can provide sponsorship or contributions to a ring-fenced municipal HSC fund, as the benefits of HSCs to the private sector, and to society as a whole, are significant.

While own revenue and grant funding can be drawn upon to establish HSCs, a national funding mechanism needs to be explored (including a possible revision of grant conditions) to institutionalise HSCs.

Enterprise development funding

Private sector/CSI resources

Climate-linked funding

Public employment funding

Municipal revenue & bonds

Conditional grants

Proposed dedicated HSC funding mechanism

Where do HSCs fit in the municipal ecosystem?

HSCs rely on internal municipal cooperation and governance mechanisms to provide integrated and effective housing support services. The internal roles and responsibilities and required governance and accountability arrangements need to be defined. This will need to include points of connection, an analysis of the current dis/enabling environment, and what needs to change to enable effective HSC functioning and support. The primary issue is that (unnecessary) barriers to self-build, to ensure dignified housing and economic opportunity, are removed.

For example, administrative barriers, such as complex or lengthy planning and building plan approval processes (and associated costs for applicants), lengthy referral or case management processes, and siloed ways of working are examples of administrative procedures and hurdles that hinder self-build. HSCs can be a mechanism to streamline these, so that better quality and more effective service is given, and better outcomes are achieved. For example, through providing advice and assistance with service fault reporting and applications, as well as incentivising more inter-connected administrative processing/referral/case management and transversal working arrangements, efficiency can be stimulated, allowing for reduced application costs and service fees and reduced administrative processing/referral/case management time.

Figure 2 summarises some of the barriers and disabling factors at a municipal level that have an influence on the effectiveness of an HSC model and self-build more broadly. These need to be addressed, and an HSC model can help contribute to minimising some of these factors. The institutional issues can be addressed by the governance arrangements and mechanisms that an HSC model will require to be put in place.

> " The primary issue is that (unnecessary) barriers to self-build, to ensure dignified housing and economic opportunity, are removed."

Figure 2: Municipal barriers and disabling factors

Factors that will more directly affect the effectiveness of HSC services are township establishment issues, the title deeds backlog and the need for more streamlined internal municipal processes. Municipal workstreams to address these will need to be established. Contextually inappropriate municipal land use planning regulations can be addressed through planning by-law amendments, while an appropriate municipal case management and data system (and associated data capabilities) will need to be established as well as streamlining of processes to improve the customer-facing experience of housing support beneficiaries. Record keeping and data management will not only be important for monitoring and evaluation, but also for municipal planning purposes and for model refinement and service improvement.

For example, in terms of internal review, if approval processes take too long too often, or there is a bulk infrastructure issue, how will an issue be referred and addressed appropriately and timeously? What type of mechanism should this be? These questions will need to be addressed through new governance arrangements, such as an internal working group drawn from all departments relevant to the forms of support provided by HSCs, to both define roles and responsibilities, improve processes, reduce costs and set up revised processes where issues and cases can be logged, tracked and actioned. This group can also identify blockages and opportunities. The objective and purpose of such governance arrangements must be the best way to refer and resolve issues, such that housing support is effective as experienced by beneficiaries. So, the specific mechanism (or combination of mechanisms) needs to be decided on according to municipal context and capacity, and can include a working group, area-based management teams, or a case management or enterprise management system.

Decisions around the form, location and functioning of HSCs must also speak to the existing functional regions or areas – and physical and institutional structures – of the municipality to avoid duplication, increase efficiency and take advantage of synergies, existing capabilities and resources.

> HSCs can act as the glue connecting different municipal functions and responsibilities, thereby offering improved and streamlined services to residents.

What is the role of non-government stakeholders?

To complement and expand on municipal capacity and resources, partnerships with non-government stakeholders with a shared interest or outcomes are thus an essential element of the HSC model, and housing support services can be provided through partnerships with CSOs, CBOs, the private sector and academia. Partnerships can be context specific, linked to both beneficiary typology and city/town characteristics (e.g. whether there are CSOs with relevant expertise). The specific support services in the menu of services that can be provided in partnership with other stakeholders must be identified (see Table 1), roles outlined, services and programmes identified that are already being provided by these stakeholders and how they can be extended or linked to, and the mechanisms and procurement or contractual arrangements (and partnership modalities) to do so. Partnerships need to be managed, resourced and monitored appropriately and as such, municipalities need to ensure they have the requisite capabilities.

These partnerships can take different forms. For example, referrals can be done for services already provided by CSOs or the private sector, or they can be paid for their service (i.e. a sub-contracting arrangement). A partnership agreement with a CSO around a common purpose can be established. A partnership can be non-formalised, if a CSO is acknowledged to already be working in an area or providing a particular service. A municipality can organise a meeting platform to bring other stakeholders in on regular occasions, or a partnership platform for learning for organisations who have an interest in the human settlements sector and how they can provide support to self-build.

> The Western Cape Informal Settlement Support Programme (ISSP) is a provincial programme and associated strategic framework to enable and support incremental, participatory, in situ informal settlement upgrading. An important element of the ISSP is its NGO Framework, through which the Western Cape government has been able to effectively leverage relevant expertise and knowledge from CSOs in informal settlement upgrading efforts. It serves as a useful precedent for a metropolitan (and possibly provincial) mechanism to leverage CSOs.

Partnerships can be pursued incrementally. A municipality will need to develop an HSC partnership framework, which needs to be clear what the basis is for such partnerships and what form they will take, whether joint implementation, subcontracting or complementary engagement, where HSCs draw on and refer to work done by other organisations, such as CSOs. Municipalities have a poor track record of partnering with CSOs, particularly if this involves monetary compensation, so the details and implementation of a partnership framework are important.

The benefits of private sector involvement (and concomitant funding) in an HSC model include bulk-buying (in the case of materials suppliers, with a fee or commission charged by the HSC) and direct referrals (in the case of finance providers, also charged a fee). However, conflicts of interest and the specifics of relationships with private sector companies will need to be considered and managed.

> "To complement and expand on municipal capacity and resources, partnerships with non-government stakeholders with a shared interest or outcomes are thus an essential element of the HSC model …"

HSCs offer a strategic opportunity to draw in CSOs and the private sector as partners and service providers in realising housing rights and developing well-functioning, sustainable neighbourhoods.

What is the role of provincial and national government in creating an enabling environment for HSCs?

> 66 The successful establishment and functioning of HSCs, and the effective enabling of self-build more broadly, is contingent on whether the enabling conditions exist at provincial and national levels."

The successful establishment and functioning of HSCs, and the effective enabling of self-build more broadly, is contingent on whether the enabling conditions exist at provincial and national levels. There are a number of negative factors in this environment, including a constrained fiscus, contextually inappropriate national building regulations, and the lack of a national policy framework and adequate subsidy funding to support individual self-build at scale, particularly at the lower end of the income range.[8] The Housing Consumer Protection Bill, which removes the exemption for owner-builder enrolment with the NHBRC, will require even small incremental self-build projects to be enrolled, making it difficult for individuals wishing to self-build using artisans and small contractors. HSCs are therefore dependent on key changes in national policy and programmes.

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8   *First Home Finance and the individual subsidy programme are not a realistic option for the majority of the urban poor living in informal settlements and backyard housing, given their income levels and lack of income security. Isandla Institute has completed research in 2023 on financing for self-build, which indicates that there is a need for the scaling up of government subsidies for households without sufficient financial resources to self-build.*

However, HSCs can be implemented prior to some of these slower changes coming to fruition, for example, by applying for municipal exemptions from national building regulations to establish municipal building regulations more appropriate to specific informal and township contexts, with a focus on health, safety, and acceptable quality standards.

The positive factors include a growing acknowledgement of the importance of self-build, particularly in the shift in emphasis to serviced sites, and political will to improve tenure security (by addressing the title deed backlog) and simplify application processes, through Operation Vulindlela. Nonetheless, a national HSC policy framework is needed, so that municipalities are guided in terms of the imperative and operational possibilities (including financing) of HSCs.

Provincial governments can play a beneficial oversight and support role to municipalities in terms of an HSC model, particularly for less well-resourced municipalities. Provinces will need to provide HSC establishment and operational support, particularly in smaller, less well-resourced and under-capacitated municipalities. These municipalities generally don't have municipal staff or NGOs experienced in social facilitation and housing support, so provincial government (and district municipalities) would have to provide significant resource and capacity support to assist municipalities in providing housing support services. It is important to note that housing accreditation and/or access to certain grants gives some municipalities more responsibilities and resources in terms of housing-related functions than others. In these case of the latter, provinces can be expected to play a more significant role in supporting the establishment of local HSCs. Also, in the absence of national policy on self-build and HSCs – or for a contextual provincial interpretation of such a policy, once formulated – a provincial policy or strategy can be developed.

A national HSC policy and programme is needed to institutionalise HSCs and enable the right to build.

Risks and issues

Human settlements is not uncontested terrain, and certain risks and issues that would have an influence on the effectiveness of an HSC model, and self-build more broadly, need to be acknowledged and addressed. They need to be considered in a self-build policy framework, and the institutional design and governance of an HSC model. These include:

Maintaining the 'public housing myth' – there is still widespread public expectation that being on a housing waiting list means that you will one day receive a house; there has not been broad public discussion, participation and debate, or awareness raised, on the improbability of receiving a public house and the shift from top-structure provision to serviced sites. Maintaining the 'public housing myth' aligns with political interests and currency and, as such, Councillors and other politicians in particular need to become more realistic and candid about housing provision

Community resistance – there may be resistance to self-build and HSCs due to unmet expectations, vested interests (e.g. 'shack lords'), feelings of being 'left behind' (if the municipality fails to meaningfully engage residents on planned interventions) or if existing (informal) community structures and processes are undermined

Clarity, transparency and managing expectations – it must be made clear that HSCs don't bring houses; they are a mechanism for supporting self-build

The **human settlements value chain is a corruptible environment –** there is thus a risk of criminal encroachment, patronage and corruption

'Construction mafia' – construction projects in the public and private sectors are being delayed, and contractors threatened into paying protection money and submitting to demands; as the HSC is intended to boost local economic development opportunities it will be important to safeguard it from similar practices

Gatekeeping – HSCs could been seen to disrupt community power dynamics, and challenge the control of existing gatekeepers

Disruption – all of the above point to the fact that larger scale self-build, and the HSC model specifically, will disrupt vested interests, and existing ways of working and engaging, which will require a change in mindsets, and may lead to contestation and conflict

> Doing a risk assessment and developing a risk mitigation strategy is vital to the effective functioning of HSCs and, by implication, the realisation of the right to housing.

It will be important to do a risk assessment, test assumptions, and develop a risk mitigation strategy in relation to the institutionalisation of an HSC model.

The way forward

The argument is clear, particularly given fiscal constraints, for supporting and enabling self-build in the context of an increased human settlement policy focus on rapid land release and site-and-service, to allow for housing consolidation in both informal settlements and in established neighbourhoods where backyard housing is providing, or can provide, affordable housing for rent. The HSC model provides an exciting opportunity to cater for the housing support needs of individuals and communities, contributing to increased housing supply to meet the urgent housing need and transforming and improving neighbourhood quality and safety. Increasing the provision of affordable rental housing through self-build also contributes to household income, local livelihood opportunities and local economic development, through enabling a local housing construction value chain.

HSCs can build on existing municipal capacity, structures and funding sources and become embedded within the municipal ecosystem. HSCs will allow more efficient and effective service provision and administrative efficiency, and therefore in the short term, no new grant funding is required for HSCs. However, in the longer term there is a need for additional investment in HSCs, if they are to become a key area-based human settlements intervention. They can serve as a mechanism to re-orient municipal administrative processes and governance mechanisms towards providing a more integrated, 'customer-centric' and efficient area-based service regarding housing support and other municipal service needs, strengthening communication and improving community trust in municipalities.

It will be important for HSCs to be piloted in willing municipalities, with the required preparatory work done to assess need, existing capacity and resources, and to map stakeholders. These and the other criteria highlighted in this paper can inform decisions taken on the menu of services, form (or rather multiplicity of forms) and role of communities, and their associated implications for municipal capacity and resources. A successful pilot will allow for the building of consensus around the utility and operational sustainability of HSCs and how they can be incrementally augmented.

However, national, provincial and local policy and regulatory changes are needed to enable the effective functioning (and resourcing) of HSCs and, more critically, to support and advance the right to build through incremental self-build.

Ultimately, institutionalisation of HSCs, as part of a required broader self-build policy framework and the scaling up of government subsidies to vulnerable households for self-build, can play a vital role in assisting municipalities to progressively realise the right to build as an integral part of the right of access to adequate housing.

> "The HSC model provides an exciting opportunity to cater for the housing support needs of individuals and communities, contributing to increased housing supply to meet the urgent housing need and transforming and improving neighbourhood quality and safety."

Research process

This paper draws on previous research, interviews and consultations that informed Isandla Institute's 2022 outputs on *Enabling the Right to Build through Housing Support Centres* and further extensive opportunities for co-designing the HSC model via interviews with key experts, an online roundtable with municipal practitioners and a Community of Practice event with representatives from CSOs, research institutions and provincial government.

Many thanks to the following research participants:

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Organisations represented at a Community of Practice event hosted by Isandla Institute, 1 August 2023

Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC)

Development Action Group (DAG)

Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)

Legal Resources Centre (LRC)

People's Environment Planning (PEP)

Ubuhle Bakha Ubuhle (UBU)

Western Cape Department of Infrastructure (Human Settlements)