

10 THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT INFORMAL SETTLEMENT UPGRADING

Presentation by Warren Smit of the Development Action Group at the Friends of DAG Seminar on the N2 Gateway Project, River Club, Observatory, 5 May 2005

There are a number of potential problems with the new emerging approach to informal settlement upgrading in SA:

- In practice the emphasis seems to be on physical development (“eradicating shacks”).
- Infrastructure provision is undertaken in a conventional way by large contractors with little scope for labour-intensive methodology or innovation.
- The approach is top-down and focused on meeting ambitious targets, resulting in inadequate community participation.
- There is an almost total focus on the role of government, with little recognition of other role-players.
- Lessons of informal settlement upgrading from elsewhere in the world (and South Africa), do not seem to have been adequately taken into account.
- The new emphasis on informal settlement upgrading may mean that other categories of housing need, e.g. backyard shacks and people living in overcrowded formal houses, are neglected.

Based on good practice and DAG’s experience of working with informal settlements for the past 19 years, we believe that the following 10 issues need to be kept in mind when becoming involved in the upgrading of informal settlements:

#1: INFORMAL SETTLEMENT UPGRADING IS ABOUT MORE THAN ERADICATING SHACKS

- Informal settlement upgrading is not about eradicating shacks, it is about an integrated approach to development aimed at addressing poverty.
- There need to be a range of complementary social, economic and physical development programmes; social and economic development programmes should not be an add-on to physical development programmes.

#2: UNDERSTAND INFORMAL SETTLEMENT COMMUNITIES

- In order to be able to undertake integrated development interventions, it is important to have reliable and up-to-date information about the community, e.g. about affordability levels.
- Sustainable livelihoods assessments are a way of gaining a better understanding of informal processes and people’s everyday lives

#3: REAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IS ESSENTIAL

- The key lesson that can be learned from international good practice is that real community participation by committees representing beneficiaries is essential, at all levels from strategy level down to project implementation level; participation in allocation processes, layout design and house design is particularly important.
- Capacity building, both on leadership skills and technical knowledge, is a prerequisite for successful community participation.

#4: PARTNERSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT

- Another lesson from international good practice is that government bodies are not able to do everything on their own - partnerships are essential, especially partnerships between government bodies, community organizations, NGOs and multilateral organizations (e.g. the Slum Networking Project in India).
- Procedures must be put in place to facilitate real partnerships.

#5: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- Over and above participation in decision-making, there should be community involvement in the actual project implementation as a way of contributing towards social and economic development.
- There is scope for community involvement in the construction of infrastructure, housing and facilities, and in ongoing maintenance of the area (e.g. refuse removal and maintenance of roads and community facilities); the opportunities created must be sustainable.

#6: FLEXIBLE LAND TENURE ARRANGEMENTS MUST BE PUT IN PLACE

- Individual ownership is expensive and complex and is not suited to the needs of the poor.
- Flexible land tenure arrangements that help bridge the gap between formal and informal land tenure systems need to be put in place.
- The range of interim tenure options includes moratoriums on evictions, temporary occupation licenses, and community and individual leases
- A degree of decentralized community-control of the tenure system is important.

#7: UPGRADE IN SITU WHEREVER POSSIBLE

- *In situ* upgrading is always preferable to relocation, in order to maintain social and economic links and networks.
- In the case of temporary structures, roll-over upgrading may be appropriate, but the negative impacts of temporary relocation should be minimized.
- If there is going to be relocation it should be to well-located land.

#8: FLEXIBLE STANDARDS FOR PLANNING, LAND USE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND HOUSING

- Flexible standards and regulations need to be developed for *in situ* upgrading (e.g. the incremental housing zone in the proposed new zoning scheme for Cape Town).
- Higher densities are important to minimize relocation – road widths and space standards for facilities are particularly important, in order to be able to increase densities so as to minimize the need for relocation.

#9: MITIGATE AGAINST THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF COMMODIFICATION

- The negative impacts of the commodification of housing (the penetration of non-monetary housing delivery processes by market forces), e.g. displacement of the poor through downward-raiding, must be mitigated against, e.g. through collective forms of tenure.

#10: INFORMAL SETTLEMENT UPGRADING MUST ALWAYS BE PART OF AN INTEGRATED HOUSING STRATEGY

- Informal settlement upgrading always needs to be part of an integrated housing strategy that includes a range of delivery options to meet different housing needs and that has clear resource allocations and time frames.
- An integrated housing strategy needs to include a managed land settlement strategy, in which people can get rapid access to land with basic services, in order to pre-empt the formation of new informal settlements.

