

The rhetoric of participation: A study of the planning and development of low-income human settlements in the province of KwaZulu-Natal



Fazel Khan, Sultan Khan & Jayanathan Govender*

ABSTRACT

Participation in South Africa is encouraged and institutionalized in a variety of processes at different levels of government. The right of citizens and their representatives to exchange views and influence decision making at the local governance sphere such as the right to be included in decision making on the local budget, planning and development processes, and service delivery matters, is embodied in a wide range of national policies. However in reality, participation praxis appears to be theoretical, unclear, superficial and at times a tool to exercise political hegemony at the local level. This paper examines the level of people's participation in the planning and development of low-income human settlements in three research localities in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. It highlights, contrary to policy mandates to create real opportunities for participation by ordinary citizens, what one may term 'rhetoric' that best serves the hegemony of political actors.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of participation, mostly thought of as democratic practice, is also strongly associated with local development (RSA 1998:1). The South African Constitution does not include the explicit right to development, but does recognize the rights to human dignity, equality, equity, democracy and justice. The 'Bill of Rights' in the Constitution provides for social and economic rights, such as the right to basic services and health care within certain limits (RSA 1996). It is mostly the responsibility of local government to promote and fulfill these rights (RSA 1998). This paper takes the view that the 'Bill of Rights' as contained in the South African Constitution is implicitly part of the right to development, but may be subject to interpretation and contestation.

The first decade saw the establishment of a national democratic system based on an electoral process that became overwhelmingly peaceful and well organized (Piombo and Nijzink 2005:vii). The South African government's stated objective for the second decade related to

consolidating and deepening democracy. Additionally, government had to navigate the critical factors of improving the economic fortunes of the mass of the population, as well as delivering basic services to impoverished and emerging communities (Mbeki 2004:2). Accordingly, a critical approach was required to achieve multiple governance goals.

Underscoring international developments, the Constitution demands transparency, public accountability, and impartiality in service delivery. It also calls for interdependence between civil society and state, based on participation of citizens in governance (Govender 2008:96). Critically, sound policy and clear rules of engagement with civil society was required. By creating the conditions for an appropriate environment for civil society engagement, the basic conditions for governance could be advanced.

A compelling argument for the significance of participation in South Africa on development-related matters is the increasing evidence that it works better than the 'external expert stance' approach, which is often blueprinted, top-down driven and dominated by a few elites. Hence, whether one is talking about budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil or Kerala state of India, or health delivery in rural Bangladesh or urban Britain, public participation is seen as a central component necessary to meet the goal of human development (Baccus et al 2007:6). To this extent, Friedman (2006:4) argues that participation helps to bind constituencies to agreements that are based on social partnership, cooperation towards achieving common interests, and that broadens and deepens democracy by including the wide range of citizens in decision making.

The current period of reconstruction, part of which includes the provision of affordable low-cost housing, can serve as a critical strategic goal for the South African nation state to promote a sense of community and nation building through participation. Participation can serve as a key instrument to include the local community in decisions to raise consciousness towards community building, especially in light of families being relocated to new human settlements, many of whom will be for the first time exposed to formally developed living environments. Allowing democratic inputs from communities who will be affected by the planning and development of new human settlements would be a first step towards providing a sense of engagement and ownership within human settlements, easing the way for the transition from informal settlement, backyard housing and relocation from the former overcrowded, monofunctional and monolithic apartheid created townships and Bantustans. Hence, it is assumed that people's participation in the planning and development of new human settlements will derive multiple outcomes such as empowerment, community ownership, local solidarity and lower the disturbing risks of resettlement and relocation.

The aim of this paper is therefore to critically examine the chosen instrument of participation towards achieving the important goal of development *vis-à-vis* basic housing for masses of the population. The conceptual understanding of the research problem includes the assumptions made by policy; previous experience with low income housing delivery; and findings of the study undertaken by the authors. In examining the research problem, the study recognizes that reference to masses of the population includes the reality that they were deprived access to both land and housing for several generations by the apartheid system, and that they were also afflicted with deep and pervasive poverty.

The paper is structured in two parts. The first part deals with the theoretical and policy aspects of participation discourse. Developmental local government is introduced as the basis for delivering basic services and meeting aspirations of communities. The policy platform for participation is described, leading to an analysis of the popularity of participation. It highlights the rhetoric, particularly the failures of participation discourse. The second part of the paper outlines the findings of the study on the planning and development of low-income human settlements. The findings focus on the policy implementation of participation in three local communities known as Emnambithi, Indlovu Village and Mt Moriah in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

The paper concludes that contrary to the belief that participation creates opportunities for empowerment and inclusivity in decision making, citizens' representatives, namely councillors, made insignificant impact on planning and developing the low-income human settlements, thereby undermining established participatory approaches.

2. POLICY PLATFORM FOR PARTICIPATION

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa sets out the imperative for participation at the local government sphere, with particular emphasis on governance and service delivery. The Constitution clearly states that local government must consult and/or involve members of the public when taking policy decisions that fall within their jurisdiction (RSA 1996:81). The implication is that public participation should extend beyond the periodic election of local councillors. Hence, the *White Paper on Local Government* obliges municipalities to develop mechanisms to ensure citizen participation in policy initiation, formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes. Each municipality must therefore develop a localized system of participation (RSA 1998:33).

The Local Government Municipal Structures Act (1998) is one of the key legislative documents that prescribe that all municipal councils must develop mechanisms to consult and involve the community and their civil society organizations in local governance and provide mechanisms for adequate participation. More specifically, the Municipal Systems Act (1998) provides that participation by local community in the affairs of the municipality must take place through political structures, which will take the form of consultation and involvement in the activities and functions of municipalities (RSA 1998:30).

In fulfilling the constitutional mandate, the Municipal Systems Act provides for all municipalities, together with their stakeholders to jointly complete their integrated development plans (IDPs) (RSA 1998:36). In addition the community has an expanded role to establish, implement and review performance management systems (PMS), prepare the local budget, and make strategic decisions relating to the provision of municipal services (RSA 1998:30).

The Local Government Municipal Finance Management Act (2003) provides for the comprehensive reform of finance management systems within local government and aims to regulate the municipal budgeting process, financial accounting, auditing, reporting and borrowing. In so far as participation is concerned, the Act stipulates that a municipal council must consult the community on the annual tabled budget. The Local Government Municipal Property Rates Act (2004) provides municipalities with guidelines on how to set rates in a local

area in consultation with local municipalities. This process therefore allows consideration for indigent property owners (Davids 2006:14).

Finally, the Draft Policy Framework for Public Participation provides a national framework for public participation in South Africa. The national policy is seen as building on the commitment of the democratic government to deepen democracy, which is embedded in the Constitution and, above all, in the concept of local government, which is closest to the people for it to engage in a form of participation that is genuinely empowering, and not token consultation or manipulation (RSA 2005:1). The process involves a range of activities including creating democratic representative structures (ward committees), assisting those structures to plan at a local level (community-based planning), to implement and monitor those plans using a range of working groups and CBOs, supporting community-based services, and to support these local structures through a cadre of community development workers (RSA 2005:1).

3. DEVELOPMENTAL RIGHTS, PARTICIPATION AND HOUSING DELIVERY

Participation is a key feature of developmental local government responsible for major aspects of delivery. For South African policy planners, ‘developmental local government is local government committed to working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic, and material needs and improve the quality of their lives’ (RSA 1998). According to Reddy (1999:209), developmental government is characterized by: exercising municipal powers and functions in a manner that maximizes their impact on social development and economic growth; playing an integrating and co-ordinating role to ensure alignment between the public and private investment; democratizing development; and building social capital through providing community leadership and vision and seeking to empower marginalized and excluded groups within the community (Reddy 1999:209).

The right to development is an important feature in policies and law in post-apartheid South Africa. The right to development became part of international law when the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Right to Development in 1986 (Daniels 2006:8). The declaration established the right to development as an inalienable human right. The institutionalization of this human right has definitive implications for all governments and their citizens, but there is particular interest among policy planners and academics in developing countries such as South Africa.

The right to development as indicated in the Constitution (RSA 1996:24), irrespective of limitations, is recognized in the Housing Bill of 1997. The preamble states that ‘the Parliament of South Africa recognizes that housing as adequate shelter fulfills a basic human need, is both a product and a process, is a process of human endeavour and enterprise, is a vital part of integrated development planning, is a key sector of the national economy, and is vital to the socioeconomic well-being of the nation’ (cited in Miraftab 2003:231).

The evolution of South Africa’s housing policies can be tracked to the Freedom Charter, which states that ‘all people shall have the right to live where they choose, be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security’ (ANC 1956:1). Just over half a century

after the African National Congress (ANC) adopted the Freedom Charter as its basic policy document, an ANC *lekgothla* (policy consultation meeting) in 2006 affirmed deepening popular participation *vis-à-vis* local government (ANC Today 2006:6). This decision not only gives effective expression to the principle that ‘the people shall govern’, which is a central theme in the same document, but announces a policy platform for earnestly meeting the basic needs of people, including housing delivery. However, as this paper shows, the implementation of policy and housing processes did not follow a neat, seamless process, but consisted of radical policy changes and delivery approaches that were required by challenges and responses from different actors, including beneficiaries. Effectively, the envisaged democratic approach and planned participative instruments were at best ineffective, or at worst dismissed.

Major policy development also took place in regard to housing provision, which previously formed a competency of provincial government. The key foci are efficient delivery of services, in line with the aspirations and participation of communities concerned. To this end, the initial Housing White Paper of 1994 stressed the significance of communities’ participation at addressing the problem of housing. It envisaged a people-centred process wherein communities as important players enter into partnership with private developers and local governments to provide shelter for low-income communities (RSA 1994:4). The White Paper stated that the government’s approach to housing was aimed at ‘harnessing and mobilizing the combined resources, efforts and initiatives of communities, the private sector, commercial sector and the state’ (RSA 1994:5).

Notwithstanding the different policy commitments for effective housing of the homeless, the rate of success of housing delivery is well documented in the literature. Miraftab (2003:231) notes that of the targeted one million housing units in the first five years of democracy, only about two-thirds (745 717) were built. The UNDP (2003:33) records that according to the Department of Housing, about 1.5 million houses were completed between 1994 and 2003. However, despite the relative success of the building of houses, the literature brings into sharp focus numerous challenges. Chief among them were the inaccurate estimation of the housing backlog, inadequate spatial planning, limitations of the housing subsidy system, and quality of housing delivery (UNDP 2003:33–35). The contradictions contributing to the paralysis of housing delivery is captured firstly by the strategy which expects communities to participate in processes originated in the public sector, but was controlled by private sector developers; and secondly, the delivery process which failed to capitalize on existing civic movements by providing institutional support to grass-roots initiatives (Miraftab 2003:232). The net result was that the role of communities was limited to *ad hoc* participation in processes formed and controlled by other actors. The reasons for the failure of participative approaches, including participation in housing provision, are examined briefly below.

The key feature of the housing policy post 1994 was the subsidy scheme. Low-income families were provided with subsidies graduating from R15 000 down to R12 500 where incomes ranged from R800 to R1 500. The subsidies were granted to individual households or to groups on a project basis. In the case of the latter, subsidies were allocated to the developer, who acted as a partner with communities. According to this arrangement, the developer became responsible for all aspects of the delivery process (Woolf 2009).

The operation of the project-linked subsidy relied on two assumptions (1) that communities would be active participants and equal partners with developers, and (2) that banks would provide additional loan funding to projects to complete the housing structures. However, it is well known that this approach also failed to realize the desired outcomes, due mainly to the reluctance of the private banks to grant loans to low-income earners (Woolf 2009).

In order to address the shortcomings of the subsidy scheme, government introduced the 'People's Housing Process' as an additional component to the housing policy. This policy change was influenced by civics and community-based organizations, which worked with local communities on housing provision (Woolf 2009). This policy approach included two dimensions (1) an incremental approach to building houses and (2) the reliance on self-help to complete the housing process (RSA 1998). However, once again, due to the minimal assistance received to capitalize the housing processes, the approach failed to realize a significant number of completed housing units.

In 2004, the housing policy was revised to achieve a cross-cutting set of social and economic objectives. These included accelerating housing delivery as a strategy for poverty alleviation; utilizing the provision of housing as a job creation strategy; leveraging growth in the economy; combating crime, promoting social cohesion and improving the quality of life of the poor; reducing market duality within the sector by breaking the barrier between the first economy property boom and the second economy slump; and supporting urban restructuring through the development of sustainable human settlements (DoH 2004:7). The policy approach was intended to diversify housing environments and settlement types through greater choice of housing types, densities, location, tenure options, housing credit and delivery routes (DoH 2004:8). A particular focus of the policy was to upgrade informal settlements *in situ* using a phased approach in developed or locations considered desirable. The intention of the policy was clearly to integrate communities, build networks and enhance community participation. The net result was the hope for a form of social housing that enhanced flexibility and mobility (Mistro and Hensher 2009:335).

4. ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATORY HOUSING STRATEGIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

The notion of citizen participation in a society so familiar with authoritarian top-down planning processes is bound to experience several problems and challenges. In so far as participation in the planning and design of low-income human settlements is concerned, research studies are only beginning to emerge. However, for those studies that are available, the notion of participation in planning and development of low-income human settlements has been criticized and there appears very little in the form of research to show against the laudable policy mandates on participation. A few brief reflections are made to illustrate the nature and form of participatory strategies in human settlement planning and development that have been implemented through several case studies in the country.

A study on low-income housing in Cape Town by Lizarralde and Massyn (2008) showed that a community-based approach to low-income human settlement development had unexpected

consequences, which perpetuated the shortcomings of profit-driven builders and planning approaches. The study claims that overall performance of low-income housing projects did not depend on community participation as widely suggested; and that some of the mechanisms and stated advantages of community participation need to be reconsidered (Lizarralde and Massyn 2008:1). In reference to other studies, the common constraints to the community-based approach included the difficulties to integrate the community in the design and management of the project; difficulties in building mutual trust between agencies and communities; reluctance on the part of government to give substantial power to low-income groups; and the reduction of participation to sweat equity instead of active participation in decision making (Lizarralde and Massyn 2008:2).

It is possible and even understandable that government, while maintaining a strong focus on delivery and social infrastructure, may have treated issues of participation as the ‘soft stuff’ aspect of development not requiring priority and mainstreaming. The South African Civil Society Information Service observes that earlier in the new democracy, officials took the view that the ANC had a clear mandate to govern and ought not to waste time with wide consultation on policy issues: government knew what needed to be done – what was needed was rapid delivery and strong government acting decisively (SACSIS 2008:2). Consequently, many decisions may have been based upon internal conversations and a reliance on technical inputs from the experts and formal interests groups such as funding and business formations, lending credibility to the belief that technocrats drive decision making at programme level and do not see public consultation among their core duties. Sometimes the lack of participation at community derives from political arrogance.

The reliance on the private sector and private funding to supplement housing policy processes appear to have impacted on housing delivery. Bond and Tait (1997:19–41) attribute the pressure from international agencies to adopt neoliberal policies and the internal pressure to speed up housing delivery as the key factors leading to the failure of housing delivery. The reliance on private sector developers, as well as private financial institutions to supplement the subsidy scheme to assist low-income earners clearly did not achieve the desired outcomes. The scale and dimensions of the housing delivery process also did not provide the necessary incentives and return for the private sector actors.

The second factor influencing the failure of the housing process appeared to be the institutional arrangements that were meant to lead and promote all aspects of the housing policy. The National Housing Forum comprised the construction sector, banks, and NGOs, appeared to dominate the dynamics and negotiations of the Forum (Jenkins 1999:435). The weaknesses of the community sector to articulate their needs resulted in their inability to promote their interests.

The analysis shows two critical dimensions of policy failure. The first is that the assumption of an equal relationship among the private sector, communities and the government is untenable in the policy process and in practice. As shown elsewhere in this paper, the interests of the private sector will dominate processes and will seek to extract maximum benefits from the delivery system, even those intended for low-income households and the poor.

The second is the rhetoric of community participation, where due to the unequal playing field, communities and their representative organizations were neither able to influence processes,

nor promote their own interests. While the understanding is that the private sector remained the dominant player in the processes, government also did very little to level the playing field with regard to policy processes. This outcome is surprising given the comprehensive policy platform to promote vertical and horizontal participation. An evaluation of housing delivery case studies discussed below support the disjuncture between policy and actual experience. It also demonstrates the emphasis of participation as a means rather than an end. This imbalance in the treatment of participation in praxis probably accounts for much of the losses experienced by communities compared with other delivery partners. If participation was rather treated as an end *vis-à-vis* as values and rights, communities may have gained commensurately more.

5. NATURE AND EXTENT OF PARTICIPATION PROCESSES IN LOW-INCOME HUMAN SETTLEMENT PLANNING AND DESIGN IN THE KZN PROVINCE

The finding in this section of the paper is informed by field research of three municipalities in the province of KwaZulu-Natal at a scale of rural (Mtubatuba far north), small town (Emnambithi formerly known as Ladysmith which is located west of the province) and a metropolis (eThekweni formerly known as Durban on the east coast of the province). However, given the disparate nature of the research localities, the nature, organization and structure of consultative processes varied across the three localities but they highlight certain exceptions and similarities in respect of the nature and extent of people's participation in the planning and design of low-income human settlements in the province.

The study observed that the eThekweni municipality's process of promoting people's participation in the delivery of low-income human settlements was through the respective ward councillors in keeping with the principles of representative democracy (Gobind 2009). A Housing Committee represents the view of all ward councillors on housing and related issues in the municipality. This committee meets monthly and is chaired by a councillor. Considering the size of the eThekweni municipality and the scale of housing delivery projects undertaken (some 200 housing projects at any given time), it is somewhat better resourced administratively to facilitate community participation in housing design and its location as compared with the other municipalities studied (Vumase 2009). A special administrative unit was tasked to facilitate community participation, which was superseded by a planning unit. The community participation unit identifies community needs and provides vital data to its planning unit for the management of existing informal settlements, the prevention of future informal settlements emerging, and the planning of future low-income housing settlements.

In Emnambithi, the Human Settlement Forum is chaired by the municipality's housing specialist. The forum comprises councillors, developers, contractors, provincial housing representatives and the municipality's technical staff (engineers, building inspectors and housing administrative staff) and they meet on the first Wednesday of every month. This forum is open to the public and to interested community stakeholders. A Technical Forum chaired by the mayor and comprising councillors, the amakhosi, the CEO, and planning and technical staff, meets on the first Monday of the month in Mtubatuba.

The level of people’s participation in the design of low-income housing and choice of locality depends on the nature of housing development pursued by the local authority (Byerley 2009). A distinction needs to be made between infill housing projects and *in situ* upgrades, which are determining factors on the extent to which people will participate in the design and choice of human settlements. In the localities studied, a vast proportion of low-income human settlement developments takes the form of infill projects, especially in the metropolitan area (Byerley 2009). Infill projects are based on the principle of social compaction and on increasing the economies of scale in the provision of physical infrastructure. This from an economic perspective attempts to break away from apartheid models of human settlement planning by promoting social compaction, increasing densities and desegregating human settlement spaces. However, it is contended that in infill sites one finds very little opportunity to consult with beneficiaries on the design and the location of the human settlement (Byerley 2009). This is because beneficiaries originate from different parts of the municipality and priority is often given to those who are on the housing waiting list. Considering that *in situ* development is only now beginning to take priority, it is not surprising that this approach to planning low-income human settlements is only beginning to gain some momentum and shape within municipalities. However, the viability of *in situ* housing development projects can only be made possible in informal settlements that are known to have low population densities and if the site conforms to the different technical, geographical and development planning prerequisites of the municipality to establish a housing settlement.

When *in situ* upgrades are being considered as a human settlement option it requires population densities proportionate to the available spatial landscape to accommodate development (Woolf 2009). In instances where population densities are greater than the surface area of the settlement, decongestion through relocation becomes an important prerequisite for *in situ* upgrades. In one municipality, a planner confirmed that in a settlement comprising 2 000 households, 70% of its population had to be relocated to make way for the housing needs of the remaining residents. Those with special needs (the aged, disabled and orphans) are often given priority in terms of their housing needs as they are not considered economically vulnerable and neither are they considered dependent on social and economic networks in their respective localities due to their dependence on social pensions. This assertion is confirmed by the beneficiary survey findings depicted in Figure 1 which highlights the percentage of social grants available within households. It will be noted that the number of households in receipt of child support grants and old age pensions are significantly high for all three research localities.

Type of Grant	Emnambithi	Indlovu Village	Mt Moriah
Old-Age Grant	28	17	23
War Veterans Grant	1	0	0
Disability Grant	5	8	16
Foster Care Grant	3	4	0
Care Dependency Grant	0	1	0

Child Support Grant	45	64	55
Pension	18	6	6
Total	100	100	100

Figure 1: Distribution of social grants within household

However, residents wishing to remain in *in situ* upgrade development sites were subjected to wide consultative processes through the local leadership with a view to formulating some criteria on who should be the beneficiary of *in situ* upgrade housing opportunities, considering the overwhelming demand for housing in informal settlement localities (Moloyi 2009). Very often, length of stay in the settlement, those with children in neighbouring schools and those with established social and economic networks in and around the settlement were accorded preference to continue to remain in *in situ* upgrade human settlements. Those remaining are required to relocate to other housing settlement projects within the municipality.

Relocation from *in situ* development sites were often politically contested (Byerley 2009). When a large section of the population were targeted for relocation, political leadership in *in situ* development sites often resisted such moves, fearing the loss of their political hegemony among their informal dweller constituency. It was in such instances that community participation was found to be most heightened so that some agreement is reached with the political leadership in terms of relocating their subjects. Some of the concerns addressed through engagement in community participation processes among those identified for relocation were loss of income through informal trading, loss of revenue to the shack lord and loss of income from subletting shacks. Communities engaged in participation processes were expected to arrive at an agreement to curb any further population growth within the existing informal settlements. In instances where several housing development projects were taking place within the municipality, beneficiaries were provided with an opportunity to decide on the settlement to which they would like to be relocated. In eThekweni, for example, housing projects are taking place throughout the metropolitan area and as such, beneficiaries are given a choice to relocate to a human settlement site in any part of the city.

The data represented in Figure 2 provide insight into the extent of relocation within the different research localities derived from the beneficiary survey. It is noted that the highest level of recorded relocation is for Mt Moriah (97%) followed by Emnambithi (70%) and Indlovu Village (67%).

Figure 2 Extent of Relocation amongst Respondents

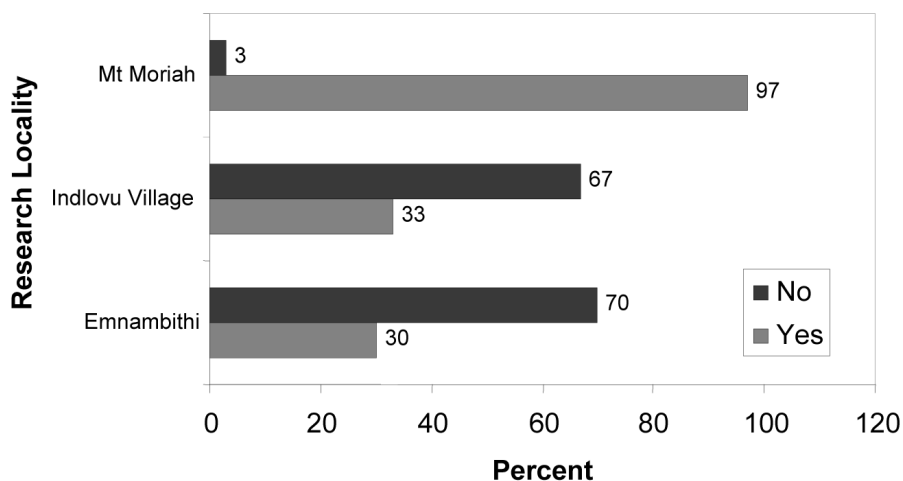


Figure 2: Extent of Relocation amongst Respondents

Considering the pressing demand for housing delivery, community participation was directed at reaching agreement for those targeted for housing and setting time frames and negotiating crucial decisions on who will be remaining and who will relocate. Since housing is a highly contested political issue and there is a need to fast-track delivery, the extent of community participation was confined largely to a consultative process. In the words of one community participation specialist, ‘community participation is a propaganda machine’ where consultation is designed to appease political interests, suggesting that the different and deeper aspects of community participation in the planning processes are hardly considered a priority despite the pressure and urgency for housing delivery (Vumase 2009). Hence, the study found that community participation at a planning level was aimed at meeting predetermined housing targets compared with conforming to the real essence of community participation as understood in the development literature. The emphasis was on meeting housing backlogs, resulting in participation processes being directed in favour of meeting the quantitative dimension of housing delivery. Considering the pressing need for housing delivery, it is not atypical to find in the beneficiary survey that the majority of those relocated to low-income human settlements have formally lived in traditional houses or informal settlements as illustrated in Figure 3.

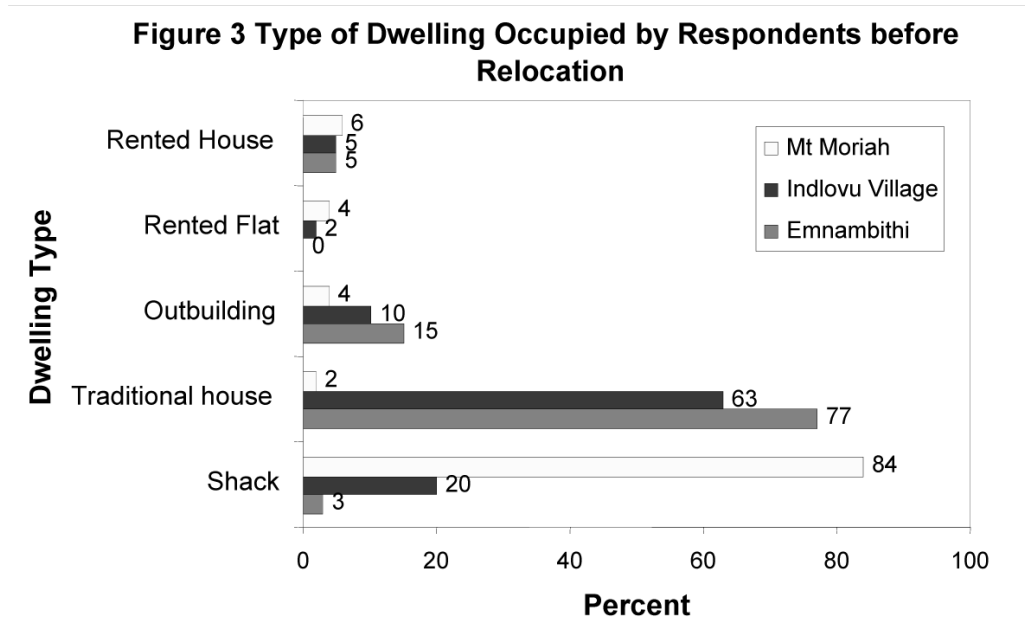


Figure 3: Type of Dwelling occupied by Respondents before Relocation

One of the major challenges facing the operationalisation of participation processes was the inability to translate the form it should take in practical terms. Several policy documents lay emphasis on community participation as a prerequisite to housing delivery, but do not translate these in practice (Woolf 2009). A housing researcher in one municipality stated that ‘we are within the institutional framework and consultation is done through representative democracy. This is at the level of councillors and politicians – our responsibility is to deliver houses’ (Byerley 2009). Similarly, a planner from a rural municipality commented that ‘participation is at a political level – providing legitimacy for development but not on the principle of promoting sustainable and livable settlements from the community’s perspective. The IDP is merely a wish list from the community and not consulted in keeping with the ideal of making priority decisions. Often their needs are interlinked and it is difficult to prioritise one from the other. Ultimately, it is the district council that makes the decision’ (Moloyi 2009).

In another municipality, the housing specialist was skeptical as to whether community consultation processes have any impact on improving community participation in the planning and delivery of low-income houses. The specialist viewed this consultative process as a political legitimacy seeking exercise, which is diligently undertaken every month within the municipality concerned. He stated that ‘we comply with the Municipal Systems Act and have a forum for participation. But what happens thereafter and who puts this back into the planning process is questionable. We don’t have the resources for such deep engagement and under the circumstance, we do our very best’ (Vumase 2009).

Community participation in *in situ* upgrade sites was also viewed by certain housing specialists as a means to gather valuable data that assisted planners in their technical task. Data collection exercises were aimed at constructing demographic profiles of informal settlement dwellers. It also served as a policing function to further contain population growth in existing informal settlements. One planner commented that the involvement of the community in the planning process reduced them to 'being active participants in community surveys and beyond this the planners take over the process. Our role is to gather vital data on community dynamics so that planning is done effectively' (Thwala 2009).

One of the reasons cited by municipal officials for the superficial nature of community participation processes was the cost to time (Vumase 2009). Too much community participation was perceived to delay housing development, considering the political pressures on municipalities to deliver on backlogs. The larger the community targeted for housing development, the more prolonged and procrastinated was the planning process, which in turn affected the speed with which housing delivery took place. To illustrate, in the Jimmy Carter housing project in Sherwood neighbouring Cato Manor, Durban, some 100 houses were built using *in situ* development frameworks. The church, universities, corporate sector and foreign volunteers engaged the local community on participation processes, directing it towards the physical delivery of houses. Each household was actively involved in the building process with the support of volunteers. One major factor that contributed to community participation in the actual construction of houses was the availability of land. Another factor was the population density. Low population densities helped create the condition for active community engagement on the different aspects of the housing delivery project. This project was considered as a best practice model in the study as it had support from a wide number of stakeholders and enjoyed a fair level of social and political profiling. However, when weighted against cost, this project appeared to be the most expensive low-income housing project as the cost of labour was not factored into the overall development cost of the settlement (Woolf 2009).

In other instances community participation principles and processes in the planning and development of Self-Help projects met with dismal failure. A case in point was the Dassenhoek Self-Help Project, in Pinetown, in which the community owned the land but required funding for the building of the top structure (Woolf 2009). After considerable planning exercises with the community, funding was provided to individual households to build houses. This project failed to realize its potential as the community underestimated costs resulting in incomplete houses. In many instances, the community requested payment for building materials through local hardware stores only to find that these materials were not being used timeously resulting in them being damaged (cement hardening, building soil washed away through heavy rainfall, and doors, windows and roofing timber rotting as these were not protected against inclement weather). It would appear therefore that very little emphasis had gone into preparing the community in identifying and managing risks at the implementation level. In Siyanda, at the entrance of KwaMashu, Durban, housing co-operative principles were used in which community members engaged in building houses for one another. This mode of delivery was found to be prolonged, resulting in the community becoming fatigued having built a few houses. There was a failure to sustain community motivation over time and as the houses progressed, the quality deteriorated due to member fatigue. A lack of commitment over time was cited to be the underlying cause,

resulting in the failure to achieve its objective. In this model of community participation in housing delivery a respondent commented that ‘members having built a few houses felt that when it was their turn to enjoy the comfort of their home, they would be too fatigued to enjoy such benefits, especially if one was at the tail end of the project life cycle’ (Woolf 2009). This suggests that a combination of labour-intensive methods and voluntarism as a form of participation in housing delivery was unlikely to work.

The demographic profile of the homeless also acts against any in-depth planning process that municipalities may intend in the establishment of low-income human settlements. In the eThekweni municipality the profile of informal settlements according to one respondent suggests that a large number of homeless people originated from the Eastern Cape. With such a large population of migrants across the province it was not known for certain whether they planned to settle permanently in the city since such a decision was contingent upon finding stable employment and establishing lasting social support networks. With such uncertainty, one planner stated that cross-provincial migrants were often not ready to provide any long term commitment to their stay in the city (Woolf 2009). Hence they are reluctant to engage in long term planning issues and often tended to remain on the periphery of any consultative process taking place in their respective informal settlements. Similar patterns have been cited for new rural migrants coming to the city from distant towns in the province and who are undecided about providing long-term commitment to permanent housing. Often they tend to keep strong family and kinship ties in their place of naturalization or birth.

Participation in newly established human settlements presented different challenges in reaching consensus on formulating any uniform plans for development related projects to be implemented. This was particularly true in settlements where residents were relocated from different informal settlements and geographical areas. In Mt Royal, adjacent to Mt Moriah in the eThekweni municipality, the community organiser for the locality found it easier to facilitate planning decisions for projects as most of those resettled originated from a common area in KwaMashu, hence they tended to have greater levels of community solidarity, social cohesiveness, political allegiance and trust among themselves. In this area, a school building was already in progress and several urban gardening projects were initiated soon after the community relocated to the area.

However, a stark contrast was noted in Mt Moriah, which is adjacent to Mt Royal. It was characterised by challenges that were more pressing given the heterogeneous social composition of the community. The councillor for Mt Moriah described it as a ‘potpourri’ lacking a sense of community impacting negatively on any constructive collective engagement to suggest any creative forms of development to ameliorate the misery of poverty pervading the area (Gobind 2009). He stated that it was a ‘mish-mash’ made up of people from adjacent Phoenix, the different informal settlements in the city and foreign migrants (Gobind 2009). The area was divided by strong ethnic social networks and differing political allegiances. Although the African National Congress (ANC) was the dominant political party, the area had little pockets of COPE, Democratic Alliance (DA), Minority Front (MF), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and United Democratic Movement (UDM) supporters scattered throughout the housing settlement. Development Forum meetings were often characterized by conflict with each party contesting party political leadership positions instead of working towards the common good of the

community. The community organiser for the area identified the source of such intense political engagement within the community resulting from high unemployment rates in the area causing extreme financial vulnerability. People were led to believe that by engaging at a party political level, they stand a better chance to benefit materially in the future should their leader succeed in gaining political control over the area. This sense of political engagement, according to the community organizer, was further strengthened by residents of Mt Moriah having the luxury of time at hand to engage and pursue narrow political interests in order to keep busy instead of directing their energies through participation in constructive development and housing-related issues in the area to promote a quality of life for all, post relocation.

One may ask what role the ward councillor plays in promoting and sustaining community participation in these human settlements in terms of development-related issues. In the beneficiary perception study on the question of whether councillors in the respective study locality provided feedback on development and future plans for the newly established human settlements, cumulatively 76% of the respondents reported that they received no such feedback. For Mt Moriah, the response was the strongest (85%), followed by Indlovu Village (71%). However, in Emnambithi the level of contact between councillors and beneficiaries on matters of development appeared fairly positive as illustrated in Figure 4.

Feedback	Emnambithi	Indlovu Village	Mt Moriah
Yes	42	29	15
No	58	71	85
Total	100	100	100

Figure 4: Figure 4 Distribution of Responses in Respect of Development related. Feedback from Councillors to Beneficiaries

As far as the relationship between councillors, ward committees and the community is concerned as agents to promote community participation, respondents in the beneficiary study provided diverse perceptions. A total of 35% of respondents in Indlovu Village stated that they ‘had no relationship with their councillor’ and 21% reported ‘not seeing nor hearing about their councillor’ for their ward in Mt Moriah. However, in Emnambithi only 29% of the respondents reported having a ‘very good relationship with their councillor’.

Participation by beneficiaries on development-related issues for the different study locality varies. In Emnambithi more than half (54%) of the respondents in the beneficiary study reported attending community meetings on development-related issues as compared with 35% in Indlovu Village. Only 5% of the respondents reported attending community meetings in Mt Moriah. Some of the broad reasons cited by respondents for not participating in development-related community meetings were attributed to the absence of notice about meetings and personal constraints preventing them from participating. Interestingly, an overwhelming number of respondents (95%) in all the study localities stated that they did not attend any IDP meetings for their locality. When asked why people did not participate in IDP processes, 77% in Emnambithi,

58% in Indlovu Village and 77% of respondents in Mt Moriah reported that they ‘did not know what this was about’ or ‘never heard about it’.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study are viewed through the lens of participation in development discourse and participation policy in the South African context. Participation theory and policy are well developed in the South African context. The democratic transition has also provided an ideal basis for implementing participatory approaches. This is generally evident in the constitutional, legislative and policy framework, where governance institutions (local government) and delivery areas (housing, municipal rating systems, IDP planning) have been allocated participative functions and responsibilities. However, despite the strengths of the South African approach to participation, there are serious flaws and shortcomings in the manner in which participation is being operationalized in different aspects of governance and service delivery.

In respect of South Africa’s participation policy platform and in particular, participation in housing delivery, the paper discussed the comprehensiveness of both political intent on the part of government to include citizens in decision making, and the trust placed upon key actors in participatory processes. However, the research has shown that the nobility of the participatory project, in respect of housing delivery, has been severely compromised, depriving potential beneficiaries of both rights and development.

The research into the three human settlements project showed two sets of problems: first, the lack of implementing the principles and spirit of participation in the housing delivery process; and second, a set of challenges encountered by beneficiaries who contributed directly and indirectly, to failures in the participation approach. There were also inconsistencies with the nature, organization and structure of consultative processes across the three research localities of the study. A distinction was made between infill housing projects and *in situ* upgrades, which were determining factors as to the extent to which people will participate in the design and choice of housing settlements.

In the end, the extraordinary finding of the study was that despite strong institutional resources such as municipal-wide housing committee, an administrative unit to facilitate participation, and a planning unit, community participation did not occur beyond consultation with municipal (ward) councillors. An associated finding involved the political contentiousness of ownership of participatory processes, where municipal councillors manipulated the process to advance and entrench their political hegemony. Worse still, planners and development workers pointed out that participation processes were promoted to expediently meet IDP goals rather than to genuinely promote sustainable human settlements. In the final analysis, participation was seen by some implementers as delaying, if not hindering, the delivery process. Finally, within the broad perspective of ideal participation, the study found that some communities did not fully understand participative and IDP processes, or been exposed to mundane administrative process such as being invited to attend meetings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The authors would like to thank the KwaZulu-Natal Planning and Development Commission for access to the data and funding for the field research, which was completed in 2009.

NOTES

- * F. Kahn, City of Durban, (fazel@dut.ac.za)
- S. Kahn, Department of Sociology, UKZN, (khans@ukw.ac.za)
- J. Govender, NMMU, (jay.govender@nmmu.ac.za)

INTERVIEWS:

1. Byerley, M. 2009. Interviewed by F. Khan, S. Khan, M. Wallis, transcript recording. 19 March, Ethekewini Housing Research Office, Durban.
2. Gobind, R. 2009. Interviewed by F. Khan, S. Khan, transcript recording. 18 June, Councillors Mount Moriah office, Durban.
3. Moloyi P. 2009. Interviewed by F. Khan, S. Khan, M Mtshali, transcript recording, 25 March, Emnambithi Municipality Office, Ladysmith.
4. Thwala Z. 2009. Interviewed by F. Khan, S. Khan, M Mtshali, transcript recording. 27 March, Mtubatuba Municipality Office, Mtubatuba.
5. Vumase, S. 2009. Interviewed by F. Khan, S. Khan, transcript recording. 21 April, Ethekewini Community Participation Umlazi Office Durban.
6. Woolf, P. 2009. Interviewed by F. Khan, S. Khan, transcript recording. 29 May, KZN Provincial Housing Office, Durban.

REFERENCES

- African National Congress. 1956. The Freedom Charter. Congress of the People. Kliptown. South Africa. <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/charter.html> (accessed 20 May 2009).
- ANC Today. 2006. Online Voice of the African National Congress. 6(3). 27 January 2 February 2006. <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/anctoday/2006/at03.htm#art1> (accessed 20 June 2009).
- Baccus, I., Hemson, D., Hicks, J. and Piper, L. 2007. *Public participation and local governance*. Research Report prepared by the Centre for Public Participation in association with Human Sciences Research Council and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), May 2007. Durban: Centre for Public Participation. Durban.
- Bond, P. and Tait, A. 1997. The failure of housing policy in South Africa. *Urban Forum* 8(1):19–41.
- Daniels, J., Habib, A. and Southhall, R. 2003. *State of the nation, South Africa 2003-2004*. Cape Town: Human Science Research Council.
- Davids, I. 2006. *Learning about local government: A first step towards active engagement*. Cape Town: Foundation for Contemporary Research.

- Friedman, S. 2006. *Participatory governance and citizen participation in post-apartheid South Africa*. Discussion Paper (DP/164/2006). International Labour Organization (International Institute for Labour Studies). Geneva. <http://www.ilo.org/inst> (accessed 21 January 2010).
- Govender, J.P. 2008. New spaces for participation in South African local government. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Jenkins, P. 1999. Difficulties encountered in community involvement in delivery under the new South African housing policy – an assessment of the first two years 1994–96. *Habitat International* 23(4):431–446.
- Lizarralde, G. and Massyn, M. 2008. Unexpected negative outcomes of community participation in low-cost housing projects in South Africa. *Habitat International* 32(1):1–14
- Mbeki, T. 2004. Address to parliament. Cape Town, May 21. South African Government Information. Pretoria. South Africa.
- Miraftab, F. 2003. The perils of participatory discourse: housing policy in post-apartheid South Africa. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 22:226–239.
- Piombo, J. and Nijzink, L. 2005. *Electoral politics in South Africa, Assessing the first democratic decade*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Reddy, P.S. 1999. South Africa: Local government democratization and decentralization revisited. In *Local government democratization and decentralization: A review of the Southern African Region*(ed.) PS Reddy. Kenwyn: Juta.
- Republic of South Africa. 1994. *The housing white paper: A new housing policy and strategy for South Africa*. Pretoria: Department of Housing.
- Republic of South Africa. 1996. *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, No 108*. Pretoria.
- Republic of South Africa. 1998. *Local Government Municipal Structures Act, No 117*. Pretoria: Department of Provincial and Local Government.
- Republic of South Africa. 1998. *The White Paper on Local Government*. Department of Pretoria: Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development.
- Republic of South Africa. 2003. *Local Government Municipal Finance Management Act No. 56*. Pretoria: Department of Provincial and Local Government.
- Republic of South Africa. 2004. Breaking New Ground, 2004 as approved by MINMEC. Pretoria: Department of Housing. <http://www.nwpg.gov.za/DDLG&TA/acts/Breaking%20New%20Grounds.pdf> (accessed 21 January 2010)
- Republic of South Africa. 2004. *Local Government Municipal Property Rates, No 6*. Pretoria: Department of Provincial and Local Government.
- Republic of South Africa. 2005. *Draft National Policy Framework for Public Participation*. Pretoria: Department of Provincial and Local Government.
- The South African Civil Society Information Service. 2008. The root of our political crisis lies in our government undermining public participation. <http://sacsis.org.za/site/article/120.1> (accessed 3 May 2010).
- United Nations Development Programme. 2003. *South Africa Human Development Report – The challenges of sustainable development: Unlocking people’s creativity*. New York: Oxford University Press.