

*Civil sector challenges
and approaches to
settlement upgrading
in South Africa*

*Insights from four
evaluations of urban
partners on behalf of
MISEREOR*

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Dialogue on Social Apartheid in South African Cities
How do we want to live, how will and how should we live?
Goedgedacht Farm, 22 – 25 October 2013

Summary

This text¹ seeks to outline future urban trends and challenges in South Africa and share central lessons and experiences relevant to urban sector Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

South Africa is currently shaped by ongoing urbanisation and the concentration of populations in cities, as well as persisting social disparities, exclusion and spatial segregation, rising levels of informality, a paternalistic state with strong policies and legislations, weak and highly politicised local governments (of which citizens rarely trust), and a significant service delivery gap.

1 The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of MISEROR.

While urban spaces are controlled by the state and commoditised by the private sector, the value of public spaces, common resources, public goods and shared identities tends to vanish and private developers tend to dominate the vision of how cities should be. CSOs are in a critical position to challenge this status quo and to propose alternative trajectories that are more inclusive and sustainable. It is also crucial that CSOs recognise and reflect upon relevant national level programmes and support efforts to activate citizenship, to increase democratic leadership, to encourage participation and to contribute to the realisation of alternative human settlements. Urban sector CSOs in the South African context (and elsewhere) have limited resources but strong values and visions. They work between advocacy and grassroots activities, social empowerment and technical support. Some of the main lessons for urban sector CSOs are:

- Development processes urgently need to be owned by the people (and partners) if the results are to be sustainable.
- A combination of demonstration projects with lobbying and advocacy work is highly efficient in order to maximise impact.
- Development processes need to be seen as participatory learning processes based at empowerment and personal development for all stakeholders (staff and project partners).
- The local government is the second most important stakeholder in the development process. Therefore it is important to know how government works.
- Existing Community Based Organisations (CBOs) are important entry points to partner with in communities and win trust within them.
- Stakeholder and process maps are valuable means of understanding the CSO's own situation, their relationship to all project partners, and for strategizing.
- A strong philosophy and core values are central elements of the success of CSO work. (For the same reason it can be a challenge to realise partnerships among them.)
- Political nonalignment and diversified activities are important strategies in order to master the highly political situation in the communities.
- Crises are a frequent reason for CSOs becoming active in communities. But

it is important that long lasting relationships are established, as local development processes need many years to unfold.

- For the same reason, long-term financial support is essential.
- Housing needs to be part of a larger development process including livelihood development, job creation, integrated urban development, etc.
- Strong and dedicated leadership is crucial for organisational resilience. It is a basis for strategy formation and the transfer of institutional memory.
- It is important to find the right mix of project components (i.e. between young and experienced staff, core and supporting activities, research and advocacy work, immediate and futures oriented measures, etc.).
- Partnerships with universities are extremely successful. They bring in fresh resources, networks, and knowledge.
- The development of open communal spaces, instead of plain housing structures and the development of the countless green buffer zones characterising South African cities, constitute crucial opportunities that should be embraced by more civil society organisations.

To be successful, urban sector CSOs need to have a good mix of the following components: research and innovation, demonstration projects, networks, future-orientated outlook, advocacy work, consciousness of their own theory of change and its relation to the desired outputs, outcomes and impact, a risk management strategy, a framework for learning, monitoring and evaluation, a system of good governance, and mediation and communication capacities.

Background and Introduction

Written on behalf of MISEREOR, this text summarises the input of the author at a visioning workshop that MISEREOR organised for its partners who work in the urban sector in South Africa from the 22nd to 25th October 2013 at Goedgedacht Farm (Malmesbury, Western Cape, South Africa). The author presented here a summary of lessons learned based on reflections of his experiences as an urban expert in South Africa (and internationally) and on four evaluations completed for MISEREOR in 2012 and 2013. The input is intended to contribute to the refinement of urban sector strategies in the country.

In this vein the main objective of the paper is to share central lessons and experiences from the four evaluations of urban sector civil society organisations (including the various contextual conversations and observations made). Accordingly, the present text neither intends to summarise the evaluation reports nor to discuss the evaluation processes, but it aims at generating food for thought, reflection, and inspiration for civil society organisations who work in the urban sector and for likeminded stakeholders. Furthermore the presentation also aims at providing a knowledge base for the discussion of urbanisation and urban futures.

It was important for the author to refer to trends, challenges, lessons and good practices that CSOs¹ face in the urban sector in South Africa because the work of MISEREOR together with the civil society organisations at hand is largely geared towards civic empowerment and capacity building from below (in contrast to the work of international and bilateral organisations such as UN-Habitat, GIZ, or DFID who aim at the direct support of government structures). Moreover it is stressed that in order to have a productive dialogue on urban visions and the role of state policies on housing and settlement upgrading in South Africa, a mutual understanding (including common definitions) of key issues and terminologies such as housing, settlements and the built environment, policy and governance, and of the dynamics of civil society organisations is needed.

¹ CSOs are Civil Society Organisations, NGO's are Non-Government Organisations, CBOs are Community Based Organisations. Accordingly CSOs is an overarching term.

The paper starts in elaborating on the context, issues and trends related to urban development in South Africa and internationally. Thereafter it elaborates on the perspective the national level government has on the present challenges and potentials such as integrated urban development, urban visions, public space and participation.

A second part of the paper discusses the challenges, opportunities, risks and lessons related to practices of urban sector CSO's in South Africa (based on the four evaluations).

The conclusion presents eleven criteria of successful CSO work and seven recommendations for the organisations.



• Figure 1: An African street – urban vibrancy but also insecurity and lacking of control? (Source: Author)



• Figure 2: An "average" street in a planned township in South Africa — perfectly planned monotony and segregation? (Source: Author)

Trends in production of urban space and the pertinence of a vision for all

When discussing the future of cities, the question of how contemporary urban environments are produced is of foremost importance. If looking at the built environment, it is interesting to detect that urban landscapes planners and officials don't want are often characterised by mixed use, complexity, chaos, heterogeneity, parallel activities, overloading, and are associated with lack of control, danger, and insecurity (such as the African street market, figure 1). Meanwhile, many of the spaces that are planned and produced in reaction to these characterisations end up being highly homogeneous, monotonous, plain and segregated (for example, the planned township street in figure 2). Indeed many urban spaces today are produced by contemporary systems and processes of highly bureaucratised, rationalised and institutionalised planning. These systems and processes (owned by public organisations and private developers alike) lose track of crucial urban qualities such as mix of use, heterogeneity, density and conviviality. At the same time, development is increasingly handed over to private developers and cities become the subject of commoditised spaces and deregulated land markets. While private property dominates, the shared value of public spaces, common resources, public goods and shared identities tends to vanish. (The situation is particularly severe in South Africa, as the trend of urban privatisation goes along with a legacy of a bureaucratic and paternalistic post-apartheid state).

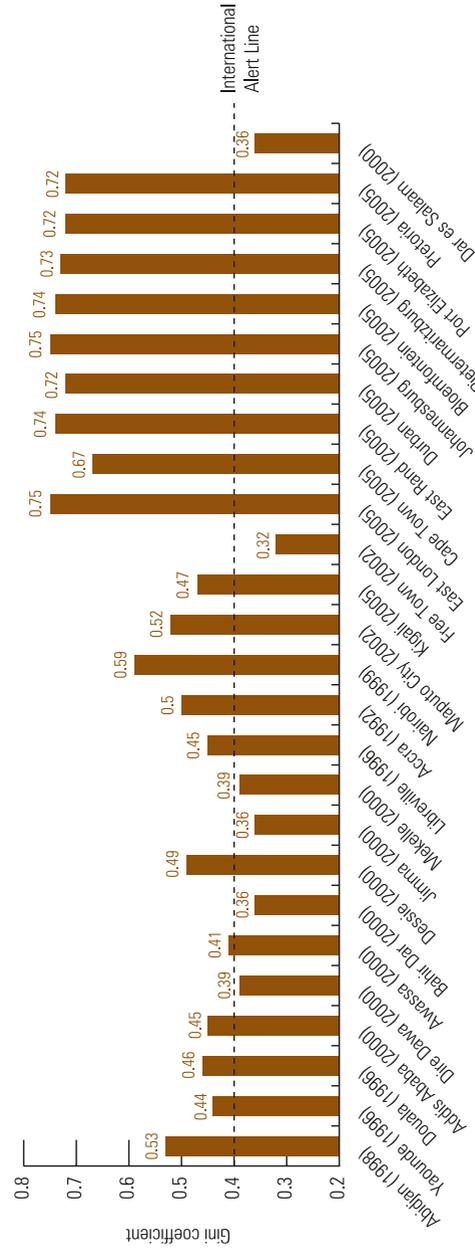
While cities became a new economic domain and a new market (and continue to be), ideas for the future remain extremely important. Visions attempt to provide direction and meaning, in a situation when developing cities experience rapid transformations, uncertain futures and blurred identities. Today the majority of these plans are produced by the private sector. The imaginary of private utopias, gated communities and enclaves dominates spaces of many cities worldwide. Privately led projects such as WeScape, a new city for a population of 800,000 in Cape Town, reflect these trends in South Africa.

In this situation civil society organisations and social movements are in a critical position to challenge the global mainstream, to raise a critical voice, and to develop alternative development paths towards a more inclusive and sustainable future and towards cities for all. Various alternative movements and practices (e.g. on the right to the city, or on place making, on green parking, on community management and neighbourhood parks, participatory planning, urban farming, etc.) exist. We need to learn from them, to adapt these to the South African context and scale up and mainstream them. The main question for urban development today is: How to plan and build cities that will last, enhance quality of life, are socially just, create opportunities, please future generations, and handle climatic change. The task goes beyond economic development and it concerns all sectors of society, i.e. the excluded and marginalised. Among others, it will be important to understand why cities evolve in ways we don't want them to, whose city and whose imagination we are talking about, how to learn from other good practices in the Global South, and how to come up with alternative models of development and ownership.

South African urban pathways and trends

In order to develop alternative visions and paths for the future, it is essential to know the main challenges and trends that shape urban development, low-income housing, and grassroots and community initiatives in South Africa in the upcoming decades.

- **Urbanisation and concentration:** It is evident that urbanisation rates in South Africa will further increase in the next decades and that populations will concentrate in large cities and urban regions (Turok 2012). The Johannesburg/Gauteng region grew by 23% between 2001 and 2011. By 2020 more than one third of the country's population will be living here (Gauteng City Region Observatory 2012)
- **Exclusion, fragmentation and segregation, and persisting apartheid patterns:** South Africa features the highest rates of economic polarisation in the world, and spatial and economic disparities are increasing. The country's cities epitomise this trend. The legacy of apartheid is still evident in the spatial environment. A majority of people continue to live far from job opportunities, services and facilities, and usually in 'dormitory' type residential areas. Urban spaces are dominated by architectures of fear (highly segregated and monofunctional land uses, housing enclaves, walls, surveillance devices).
Most South African Metropolises feature GINI indexes higher than 0.7. This widely exceeds the UN's civil unrest alert benchmarks of a GINI coefficient of 0.4 (UN-Habitat 2008: Global Urban Observatory). (Figure 3)
- **Recent revival in some urban centres:** After a period of crisis, neglect, abandonment and decay since the early 1990's (end of apartheid), some central business districts are experiencing a recent revival (e.g. Cape Town CBD, Newtown and Braamfontein in Johannesburg).
- **Increasing densities:** In contrast to many other urban agglomerations worldwide, South African cities are experiencing a relative increase of urban densities. This is mainly due to the fact that the apartheid city has been extremely segregated and dispersed (Angel 2012).



• Figure 3: Inequality in selected African cities. According to this South African Cities are among the most unequal and insecure in the world (Source: UN-Habitat 2008; Global Urban Observatory)

- **Detached house is the ideal:** Even so, the detached single family home remains the desired form of living for the majority of South African households, whether rich or poor. (This is also reflected by the Government’s social housing programme (RDP) which hitherto supplied more than 2,5m houses for the poor) (Government of South Africa 2012).
- **Car orientation:** Likewise, the organisation of cities is based on motorised transport, e.g. private cars and taxi busses. This low-density context makes mass public transport difficult. Bicycles have a bad reputation as distances are long and bike infrastructure is lacking.
- **Fear as a main motive of urban development and design:** High economic inequalities, spatial segregation, low education levels, substance abuse, and discrimination of women come together with the apartheid legacy of structural violence to trigger many violent crimes. South Africa has very high murder rates and extreme rates of rape and abuse of women. In this context lack of trust and fear become major motives of urban development and design, generating architectures of security, fear and segregation. (Many communities tend to prefer “target hardening” activities and defensible architectures such as walls and fences, more CCTV cameras, security guards). (Lemanski 2004)
- **Bureaucratic blockages and weak government:** The legacy of apartheid promotes the expectation of a paternalistic and bureaucratic state and hinders participatory development. There is an increasing tendency towards top-down and technocratic approaches to development. Moreover, political uncertainty is on the rise. The local governments of this ten-year-old state are in the midst of a decentralisation process and remain under-capacitated and weak. Corruption and political patronage are very common. Local governments are not capable of implementing participatory processes and hear and respond to voices from the community. A recent shift of the government away from a `free housing` policy engenders many challenges for ensuring adequate alternatives (e.g. meaningful and democratic means for communities to secure in-situ upgrading).

- **Ideology of private development:** Modern South Africa has embraced a neoliberal trajectory that believes in the power of free markets, of individual property, and of privately led development. Combined with the bureaucratic and paternalistic government, the ideology of private development tends to reinforce apartheid style patterns of exclusion, discrimination and segregation, and it prevents consensus on common resources, a public sphere and a vision of a city for all.
- **Vulnerable populations suffer most:** More than half of South Africa's population is without a regular income, and the tendency to become poor is rising. In this situation the majority of the excluded and deprived population is "locked" in peripheral settlements and precarious dwellings at peri-urban locations, most of which are remote from services and job opportunities and other amenities of urban life. In this situation the poor are the least protected from risks such as man made and natural disasters (e.g. fires and floods), joblessness and violent crimes. Rising numbers of violent protests can be seen as indicators of declining trust, a feeling of disempowerment, lack of a voice, and the rising frustration of the urban poor. (Alexander 2010)
- **Differentiation of the poorest of the poor:** As a tendency, income inequality becomes more important than ethnic inequality, and the various groups of the poor can be differentiated even further: Urban and rural poor, female poor, poor children, poor immigrants, poor elderly, poor mothers, poor homeless, poor backyard dwellers, poor slum dwellers, etc. (All these are groups which for various reasons are excluded from the mainstream economic system).

What the government says about urban visions, integrated development, sustainable neighbourhoods, participation, etc.

While South Africa's local government tends to be bureaucratic and weak, national plans, frameworks and strategy papers (such as the country's Constitution) include sophisticated approaches on social and urban development (based on the improvement of quality of life and integrated neighbourhood development, etc.) that go beyond mere housing and individual strategies. It is important that civil society organisations recognise and reflect upon the relevant strategies and policies in their role as the voice of civil society and in order to express support and critique, to remain relevant, effective and efficient. Therefore, the following paragraph summarises some of the policies that reflect urbanisation trends, integrated development, city-wide visions, and the role of participation as presented in the National Development Plan 2030 (Republic of South Africa 2012), the Medium Term Strategic Framework (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (MTSF) 2009), and Outcome 8 of the Delivery Agreement on sustainable human settlements (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (OSDA) 2010). (Other strategies that are relevant to housing and informal settlements upgrading are left out at this point.)

The policies and strategies at the national level are highly critical of South Africa's urban trajectory and the success of previous policies. They confirm present urbanisation trends and aim for neighbourhood-based visions:

Despite slower urbanisation than in other parts of Africa, another 7.8 million people will be living in South African cities in 2030 and a further 6 million by 2050, putting pressure on municipalities to deliver services. (Republic of South Africa 2012, 266)

Active citizenship in the field of spatial development will be supported and incentivised through a range of interventions including properly funded, citizen-led neighbourhood vision and planning processes and the introduction of social compacts from neighbourhood to city level. (Republic of South Africa 2012, 259)

The presidency acknowledges that sustainable human settlements require more than housing. i.e. they need suitable locations, integrated settlements, city transformation processes towards integration, and community development:

Building on the foundation of aspirations recorded in the Freedom Charter, the White Paper on Housing, the Housing Act and the Comprehensive Plan for the Creation of Sustainable Human Settlements, President JG Zuma in the State of the Nation Address of 3rd June 2009 confirmed that the human settlements future in South Africa must at least consist of:

- *Development of suitably located and affordable housing (shelter) and decent human settlements*
 - *An understanding that human settlements is not just about building houses*
 - *Transforming our cities and towns (moving towards efficiency, inclusion and sustainability); and*
 - *Building cohesive, sustainable and caring communities with improved access to work and social amenities, including sports and recreation facilities (community development and optimal access/ inclusion).*
- (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (OSDA) 2010, 7)*

Government programmes and policies reflect an impressive self-diagnosis; they are aware of most of the key challenges and contain a high level of self criticism.

The apartheid legacy of spatially and economically marginalising the poor has meant that people live far from job opportunities and major services, typically in “dormitory” type residential areas. Many of our people continue to survive without basic services in the many informal settlements. Even those of our people who have jobs and a consistent salary find it diffi-

cult to sustain a decent quality of life, as they fall outside of the subsidy bracket but at the same time are unable to afford and access the mortgage products available from commercial banks. (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (OSDA) 2010, 5)

South Africa’s towns and cities are highly fragmented, imposing high costs on households and the economy. Since 1994, densities have increased in some urban areas and there has also been partial regeneration of inner cities, coupled with the growth of housing ownership but, overall, little progress has been made in reversing apartheid geography. (Republic of South Africa 2012, 266)

The key challenges include:

- *As a consequence of rapid urbanisation, new household formation and past racially based planning, South Africa faces a significant challenge in providing affordable, suitable accommodation to poor households*
- *1.2 million poor households are in approximately 2700 informal settlements across the country, but largely concentrated in the major metropolitan areas*
- *In addition to living in poor accommodation, many households still do not have access to basic services, in respect of water, sanitation, refuse removal and electricity*
- *Annual household formation continues at some 3% (350,000 households) per annum, further contributing to housing shortages*
- *...*
- *Poor planning has resulted in a proliferation of marginalised and disconnected settlements*
- *Many informal settlements, by way of contrast, are well located with respect to social amenities and economic opportunities, but lack security of tenure and/or access to adequate basic and social services*
- *Urban sprawl and low densities contribute to unproductive and inefficient cities as poor households continue to be mar-*

ginalised by distance and transportation costs and the lack of agglomeration in many urban centres undermines economic development and efficiency. (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (OSDA) 2010, 5)

National policies such as the Outcome 8 Delivery Agreement on Sustainable Settlements have an “efficient” definition of sustainable settlements. (Nonetheless the definition is delivery oriented. It misses out on some central aspects of social and environmental development.)

Sustainable human Settlements and improved quality of household life are defined by:

- *Access to adequate accommodation that is suitable, relevant, appropriately located, affordable and fiscally sustainable*
- *Access to basic services (water, sanitation, refuse removal and electricity)*
- *Security of tenure irrespective of ownership or rental, formal or informal structures*
- *Access to social services and economic opportunity within reasonable distance.*

(The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (OSDA) 2010, 7)

The national government has also demonstrated a strong will to shift from housing delivery to in-situ upgrading. In this context, a goal of upgrading 400,000 informal settlement households by 2014 was set.

Unfortunately this goal was unrealistic, as not much has happened until today. Apparently the goal was set for political reasons, without taking into account the capacity of local level governments. This underlines the discrepancy between national and local levels of government in South Africa.

2.1 Output 1: Accelerated Delivery of Housing Opportunities Upgrading of 400.000 HH in well located informal settlements with access to basic services and secure tenure. Many of the approximately 2.700 informal settlements are in good loca-

tions (i.e. well located close to metropolitan areas and basic services), have high densities and, in 2008, housed approximately 1.2 million households. The key challenge is providing these households with adequate basic services and an improved shelter.

(The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (OSDA) 2010, 8)

The national level policies also include clear goals of achieving integration and social cohesion. The problems are clearly identified and the goals are clearly defined. (On the other hand, detailed and realistic roadmaps towards the achievement of the goals seem to be missing.)

Strategic Priority 7: Build cohesive, caring and sustainable communities

Social cohesion broadly defined as that which gives members of a society the capacity to cooperate in ways that create the possibility for positive change is important if we are to achieve development success. However, inequalities of condition (wealth, income, education, health), and inequality of opportunity and a general absence in society of being part of a common enterprise, facing shared challenges and belonging to the same democracy with a shared destiny, is placing severe stress and strain on social cohesion.

(The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (MTSF) 2009, 22)

The analysis of national level strategies and policies also brings to the fore that none of the papers elaborates on the role of the urban public sphere and public spaces. Moreover, the impression is that individual rights account for more than collective rights and that the protection of greater social values and public goods at urban and national levels tends to be lacking. Moreover, national level policies rarely speak about the importance of CSOs and civil society organisations contributing to closing the delivery gap (see below) and restoring trust between the government and citizens.

Some recent policies, such as the Integrated Urban Development Framework (a national level urban development policy, which is being elaborated upon at the moment) are working with the notion that urbanisation has not only many problems but also many opportunities and energies that need to be harnessed and used towards sustainable urban development (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs 2013).

CSOs also need to recognise and reflect, new financial programmes such as the Neighbourhood Development Programme Grant (NDPG) and the Cities Support Programme of the National Treasury in order to represent the public interests and to steer these programmes in the right directions.

The Neighbourhood Development Programme of the National Treasury aims at large scale transformations of South African urban fabrics and so presents extensive potentials to promote sustainable urban development with a focus on the vulnerable and poor. The NDPG

„... supports neighbourhood development projects that provide community infrastructure and create the platform for private sector development and that improve the quality of life of residents in targeted areas“ (National Treasury, Republic of South Africa. 2010)

Its main strategy is the integration of underserved residential neighbourhoods (e.g. former township areas) in South African cities by leveraging private sector investment through targeted investments. Due to its massive investment scale of 10bn Rand over a period of 10 years in about 100 projects, the programme is expected to trigger a significant transformation of South Africa's urban fabric. This transformation should be done in the form of bottom-up co-production and participation.

The delivery gap

South Africa is characterised by a gap created by a modern and progressive constitution, a regulative framework, and a significant informal and semi-formal base. This gap tends to hinder development because the nature of the highly formal and rationalised modern state apparatus often promotes exclusion and marginalises a large informal or semi-formal sector of society. Powerful elites use legal mechanisms to protect their status quo. A prescriptive system hinders incremental development, and excluded population groups and geographic sectors face the highest levels of violence and vulnerability.

The main challenge South Africa's government is facing is characterised by a stark delivery gap between the local level of government (districts, municipalities, towns, metros) and the services that the population receives. This delivery gap arises because local governments are under capacitated, politicized and weak.

The local level either lacks resources, or does not have the capacity to expend available means, and therefore services and capacities are unevenly distributed on the ground. For example, police stations and social service centres are in short supply in the poor and disadvantaged areas such as townships and informal settlements. The size of the geographical interface between local government and the "client" neighbourhoods and communities tends to be too large. Wards often account for 100,000 people, whereas by global standards a 'normal' urban neighbourhood normally consists of 300 to 3000 residents. In this context people-oriented service delivery and community-oriented governance is hardly achievable.

Moreover, the image of a paternalistic state is deeply entrenched in people's minds as communities tend to expect 100% delivery of services, and a local culture of participation is underdeveloped. Citizens, rich and poor, don't know how to participate. Therefore an approach to empowerment towards active citizenship and the development of democratic leadership is needed. NGOs, CBOs and semi-formal Neighbourhood Development Committees will have a significant role to play in addressing persisting service delivery gaps and in addressing civic empowerment. Partnerships between government departments, non-government organisations and civil society must be

fostered and supported by the implementation of processes of participation and co-production, supported by the common understanding of the “right to the city” for all as a public good for which all sectors of society are responsible.

Three core components of a strategy of addressing the above mentioned delivery gap are:

- Establishing intermediary development committees to bridge temporary service delivery gaps and deficient local government capacities in close collaboration with local organizations – CBOs, local NGOs, faith-based organizations and private sector bodies.
- Developing needs-based service distribution system at community level: A system of distributed and jointly run community facilities and social service centres to serve as an effective instrument to bridge the gap between service delivery and local needs. This could be realised by neighbourhood-based service outlets, which maximise efficiencies by combining several functions from social services to community policing and counselling.
- Acknowledge and employ NGOs and CBOs in service delivery: As long as there is a delivery gap, support from NGOs and CBOs needs to be factored in to the programmes. Other community energies should be tapped such as volunteerism, semi-formal institutions such as Community Development Committees, micro-finance mechanisms and participatory finance.

Urban Sector CSOs. Struggles and approaches

Context

The second part of this paper concentrates on the challenges and opportunities that urban CSOs in the South African context are facing, and it discusses some of the strategies and approaches. It draws particularly on the lessons learned from evaluations of four CSOs for MISEREOR (completed in 2012 and 2013), without using the detailed results of the evaluations in relation to the organisations.

CSOs have limited scope and capacity but seek to maximise impact, therefore a combination of demonstration projects with lobbying and advocacy work is highly efficient for them. Demonstration projects and lobbying activities are significant in order to upscale and mainstream the measures via the government in order to reach a maximum of beneficiaries.

Most often the core activities are geared at empowerment, capacity building and livelihood improvement in selected model communities.

Successful CSOs tend to feature strong and well-established linkages and central activities, such as the long lasting and powerful linkage to the university, or the strategy of working with few case study projects and to address the relationships of government and grass-root organisations. On the other hand some vital relations, such as the relationship to the private sector need more attention. In this context it may be fruitful for the organisations to make an effort to better understand the role of the private sector and of so called elite regimes (alliances or powerful stakeholders and lobby groups), as these clusters play a central role in the production of urban space. Moreover associations with international organisations are largely underrepresented.

An important message is also that the vision of equitable cities requires an understanding of relationships of all stakeholders - rich and poor, at various government levels, and at the centre and the periphery, etc.

Central values

Philosophy and values are central elements for CSOs whose motivation is social and idealistic and whose mode of operation is non-profit. In a context of competition and scarce economic capital, social, and cultural capital, all are crucial. Team spirit and volunteerism, and the feeling of a holistic learning experience are central for all stakeholders (staff and partners).

In this context, the four urban sector CSOs worked with a range of philosophies such as:

- Philosophy of formalization (“bring them to the mainstream”)
- Philosophy of empowerment
- Philosophy of social development
- Philosophy of realisation of rights
- Philosophy of sustainable development

Also, sometimes a combination of philosophies was used.

Field of activity

The four projects evaluated in 2012 and 2013 aimed at:

- Technical assistance to low-income communities seeking to transform slums into sustainable settlements;
- Researching alternative approaches to affordable housing;
- Promoting participatory urban development processes for poverty alleviation and sustainable human settlements;
- Building networks of urban poor;
- Promoting partnerships between organizations of the urban poor and local government towards effective settlement upgrading and;
- Strengthening low-income communities to attain sustainable development and livelihood security.

The projects of the four urban sector CSOs that were evaluated can be placed in a field between advocacy and grassroots activity, and social capacitation and technical support. This field seems to make up an important arena for urban sector CSOs. Two CSOs worked more on the grassroots side and two worked on the reflection and advocacy side. One organisation focused on technical support, two embraced social capacitation, and a fourth was located in-between. (Figure 4)



• Figure 4

Selected lessons

Based on the four evaluations of urban sector CSOs, eight core lessons have been shortlisted:

1. Poor communities have crucial knowledge and resources to be mobilised towards development. This implies that the development process urgently needs to be owned by the people if the results are aimed to be sustainable. Experience shows that if processes are „imposed“ on the people, success does not last long, even if the interventions are deemed to be highly innovative by the „experts“.
2. Community level governance is multidimensional and highly political. Councillors, ward councils, slumlords, shadow committees, small businesses, politicians, and traditional leaders are often among the main stakeholders. A highly politicised context was repeatedly an important risk factor in the development process and for the project. The main strategies to manage this risk were political nonalignment and diversification of activities. Not all CSOs evaluated have managed political risks effectively.
3. Massive crises are an important entry window of CSO work. In most instances, fires, floods, eviction threats, evictions, etc. have been a frequent reason why communities became active and why they called the NGOs to assist. It was important that an CSO establish a long lasting relationship after such as crisis so that their services remain accessible and that a long-term process is initiated.
4. The importance of knowing how government works. In addition to the people, the government is the second most important stakeholder in the process, since it is in charge of all development and regulation, and since it is under capacitated and weak. It is also the only actor who can upscale and mainstream the measures on a large scale and in the long term.
5. Existing Community Based Organisations (CBOs) are important entry points for development partnerships with communities. CBOs are crucial interfaces between Non Government Organisations (NGOs) and individual communities. They are familiar with the local context, e.g. speak the local language and know the tacit rules. If CBOs are weak and NGOs attempt to work directly with communities, they tend to be

blamed for speaking another language and for being pro government.

6. Housing is part of a larger process. Housing needs to be seen as part of a greater process including livelihood, economic, societal, and cultural development. Otherwise, it is unsustainable. If housing is implemented as a stand-alone solution, it can spawn consolidated poverty (see the discussion of South African Urban Pathways above).
7. Long-term funding is essential for making a sustainable impact in the urban sector. Urban development is path dependent and takes significant time. 14 years after the democratisation process in South Africa started, the apartheid legacy of socio-spatial segregation remains highly visible. A transformation of South African cities towards a more integrated urban fabric need a dedicated vision and enduring support, and it will take many years.
8. Strong and dedicated leadership is crucial for organisational efficiency and resilience. NGOs need a strong and dedicated leadership and a clear strategy, vision and mission. The leadership can be embodied by the Board, by a core team in the organisation, or by a „strong“ leadership personality. These are also the structures that tend to embody the institutional knowledge of the organisation.

Fields of tension

The day-to-day work of NGOs includes some crucial contradictions and fields of tensions. These have to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis and are also characteristic of many other organisations:

experience versus innovation
leader oriented versus team oriented
planning versus participation
confrontation versus collaboration
now versus future
focused versus diversified

In the best case, an organisation manages to integrate both sides, e.g. by mixing experiences and young staff, by embracing open and adaptable plans, by working on urgent problems on the ground but also looking at the future trends, by focusing on their own strengths in combination with a modest diversification of activities, etc.

Some good practice strategies

The evaluations brought to the fore a list of six good practice strategies generated among the four CBOs evaluated:

1. Strategies to cope with political risk
 2. Meaningful university partnerships
 3. Re-blocking, informal settlement upgrading, incremental development
 4. Innovation of safe and affordable shelters
 5. Practices of institutional learning
 6. Tactics of persistent lobby and advocacy work
-
1. Most (but not all) of the organisations evaluated had excellent strategies in place to cope with political risk. Mainly these consisted of political non-alignment and diversification of activities. However, it is important to note that non-alignment does not mean lack of value. The measure of lobbying and protesting also became important when a certain threshold

was passed.

2. Partnerships with universities, where existing, have proven to be extremely successful. They supported the organisation at hand with knowledge, innovation and human resources and also served as important mechanisms for learning, mainstreaming social awareness and knowledge development.
3. Some NGOs that were evaluated have generated important innovations with in-situ re-blocking, informal settlement upgrading, and incremental development processes which bear valuable lessons for other NGOs and also for the government.
4. Likewise, among the group there was also significant innovation on safe and affordable shelters and emergency structures that can have enormous potential for up scaling and multiplication.
5. Excellent practices of institutional learning existed only in some of the cases. These have been characterised by a spirit of constant learning, the empowerment of staff and of all other stakeholders alike, and by a deep respect and solidarity among all. Even so, in the successful cases the spirit was supported by a range of institutionalised activities such as regular briefings, learning sessions, exchanges, and reflections (among others).
6. Most of the NGOs evaluated have embraced successful tactics of persistent lobbying and advocacy. A very diverse range of instruments and media was used. This ranged from newspapers, radio broadcasts, websites and blogs, and on-line movies to policy guidelines and scientific publications. Joint activities through likeminded networks have also been a good practice in order to increase the impact and weight of the activities.

Open space, not just housing. There are also significant lessons other organisations have to offer which are very interesting and which have a high potential to contribute to effective, integrated and sustainable settlements in the South African context. An NGO from Cape Town embarks on an approach based on community space and community managed basic services in an informal settlement. In order to upgrade the settlement a new system of networked pocket squares and safe nodes was introduced. This was combined with a system of fresh water outlets and playgrounds, a participation strategy (focused on women), activities for early childhood development, and a systematic integration with the adjoining areas. For South African standards this is a new and innovative approach to in-situ upgrading that is not focused on the classical approach of housing and individual services. The approach addresses the missing role that public spaces can play in South African policies and regulations as identified above. (Interestingly, the NGO has a Non-South-African background. Maybe this makes it easier for them to think out of the box.)

Buffer zones as places of connection. Another broad opportunity in the context of integrated urban development in South Africa are the countless buffer zones that often exist between isolated neighbourhoods due to the apartheid legacy. While informal settlements occupy some of the buffer zones, others remain bare. Often they are seen as dangerous no-go areas. So far the potential of these buffer zones as catalysts of local urbanity, as places to retrofit infrastructure and services into deprived areas parks, as a “glue” to re-integrate the divided city remains to be developed and explored. Good practices still have to be developed. The idea has been brought forward as part of a master thesis by Blanca Calvo in 2013. (Calvo 2013)

Urban sector NGO success criteria

Based on the experiences of the four evaluations and the above discussions, eleven criteria can be proposed that can be utilised to measure the success of an urban sector NGO. These are:

1. Research and innovation
(Is research and innovation embraced and which results does it produce? Do collaborations with academic institutions exist?)
2. Successful demonstration projects
(Have demonstration projects been conceived and implemented? With which results?)
3. Networking
(Is the organisation networked with other stakeholders, likeminded organisations – nationally and internationally. Do „weak-links“ play a role? (e.g. sporadic exchange that brings in ideas and innovation)
4. Futures
(Is the organisation aware about drivers and future trends in urban development? Is a future strategy exiting?)
5. Advocacy
(Which lobbying and advocacy activities exist? How is success measured here?)
6. Output learning and monitoring
(What has been achieved in a certain period of time? Are effective learning, monitoring and evaluation systems in place? Does a beneficiary tracking system exist? Are the beneficiaries involved?)
7. Outcomes and effects
(What are the outcomes and effects? Is the organisation aware of these? Does a theory of change exist? Are these included in the project design?)
8. Handling external risks
(What are the main risks? Are they handled successfully? Does a risk management plan exist?)
9. Crisis management

(How does the organisation handle internal crises?)

10. Good governance

(Does the organisation stand for principles of good governance – internally and externally?)

11. Mediation capabilities

(Does the organisation have good capacities to mediate between different, maybe conflicting parties?)

Seven recommendations

As a consequence of the findings of this text, seven recommendations for NGOs can be made in order to boost the significance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of NGO work in the urban sector:

1. Share work and collaborate
2. Engage on a reflected critique of government (requires understanding how government works – analysis of policy and instruments)
3. Foster capacity for research, innovation and demonstration projects
4. Embrace crisis mitigation capacities
5. Embrace good practices of Learning, Monitoring and Evaluation in the urban sector
6. Consider urban futures and sustainable development
7. Foster innovation in: participation, incremental development, sustainable settlements

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