



WHO BUILDS THE CITY? A STUDY OF THE REDISTRIBUTION OF POWER

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True collaboration with deep levels of trust and associated accountability between different role players is essential in ensuring that the needs of citizens are met. However, collaborative efforts tend to have varying levels of success, and gaps often exist between the desires of citizens and the needs identified by government. These gaps are further widened by an unequal distribution of power between citizens and government, which results in a scenario where the rights and responsibilities around the governance of our cities are contested.



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THE PHENOMENON OF these widened gaps is particularly evident in the case of the informal settlement of Sweet Home Farm in Philippi, which was showcased early in 2017 at a collaborative (intermediary) sector engagement: the Practitioner's Platform. At this engagement the case study was used to illustrate that true collaboration requires a level of trust and compromise to allow for the redistribution of power to co-create effective solutions

through partnerships. By looking through a lens of collaboration intertwined with accountability, this paper seeks to use this case study to highlight the successes of collaborative planning processes and answers the question who builds the city?

To answer this question, this paper firstly looks more closely at the South African policy context and juxtaposes that with some theory regarding participation, developed by Sherry Arnstein (1969).

Arnstein's theory illustrates participation as a ladder with eight rungs ranging from non-participation to citizen power. The theory is then applied to the case of Sweet Home Farm, and is used to investigate how the study that was tabled at the Practitioner's Platform contributes to advancing the case higher up on the 'ladder of participation'. Finally, some recommendations are made regarding the important role that collaboration and accountability play in advancement on the 'ladder'. This paper argues that true empowerment and transformation can only be achieved through high levels of collaboration and accountability.

BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

South Africa is a country with a rich history and great diversity, but it is also a country of deeply embedded inequality and contradictions. The general narrative of our national human settlements policies and systems revolve around a collaborative people-centred development approach, but very limited evidence of these approaches can be detected in implementation on the ground. More often than not, pro-poor development interventions are characterised by mistrust, ineffective communication and low levels of true collaboration on the ground.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE COLLABORATION THROUGH TRUST

Continuous and effective dialogue is a key element to any project that needs to be utilised to ensure accountability and collaboration between government and its citizens to enhance the 'building' of sustainable cities. Collaboration is defined as on-going interactions taking place between different partners participating in a joint effort to deliver outcomes that can bring about

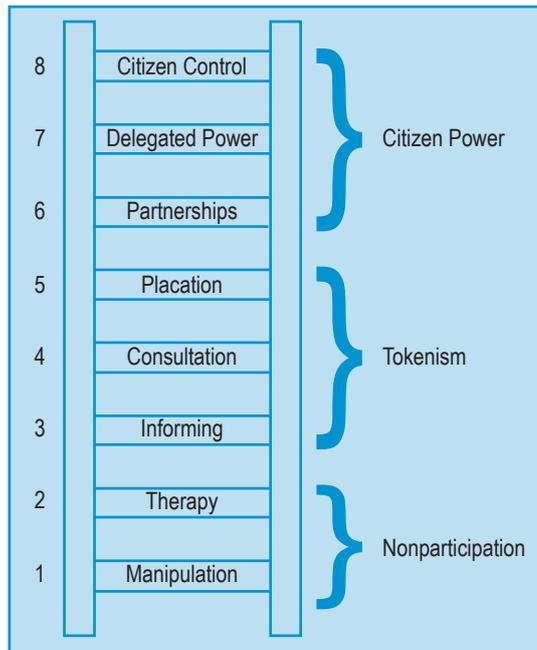
more impactful change (Zadek 2006: 2). Successful collaboration however requires high levels of trust between partners. Trust is generally understood as a firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something. Therefore partners need to continuously invest in collaborative processes to nurture trust (Vangen and Huxham 2016: 12). This level of trust within a collaborative partnership requires the individual role-players to relinquish their own power in the interest of building a more powerful partnership that reflects the shared interests of all stakeholders.

POWER THROUGH PARTICIPATION

These true collaborative partnerships – which require trust and accountability between different role players – are essential to ensuring that the needs of citizens are met. However, more often than not, current collaborative efforts are not as successful as they intended to be. There appears to be gaps between the desires of citizens and the needs identified by government. John Mac Kay (2004) refers to the writings of Sherry Arnstein (1969) and states that true participation gives power back to the citizens, who would otherwise be excluded from the planning processes.

According to Arnstein there are however different levels of participation and not all levels are efficient enough in giving power back to citizens. The "Ladder of Citizen Participation" (Arnstein, 1969) is a typology of eight rungs on a ladder that shows participation ranging from non-participation to tokenism, and finally to citizen power. This typology is crucial in highlighting the difference between business-as-usual rituals of participation and having real power to affect the desired outcomes of citizens. The fundamental point is that participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for powerless citizens (Arnstein 1969: 217).

Figure 1: Eight rungs on the ladder of citizen participation



Source: Arnstein (1969 : 215)

According to this tool, it seems that many of government’s approaches to participation are stuck in the tokenism phase (informing, consultation and placation). At this level, government still retains most of the power. Government recognises the need for collaboration as well as accountability as core attributes of participation, but there still remains very clear limits to the level of participation from citizens; currently there are dedicated channels for feedback and citizens are able to advise or plan ad infinitum, but the power-holders (government) still reserve the right to judge the legitimacy of the advice

(Arnstein 1969: 216), and as such reserve the right to incorporate or ignore community inputs.

BUSINESS-AS-USUAL TOKENISM

To this end, the National Department of Human Settlements is currently in the process of developing a discussion document titled Towards a Policy Foundation for the Development of Human Settlements Legislation¹ (November 2015) which will provide the base for the new White Paper on Human Settlements, and ultimately replace the National Housing Act of 1997. The publishing of a draft White Paper signals the beginning of an extensive consultative legislative reform process that will culminate in the development of a Human Settlements Act in accordance with the government trajectory outlined in the National Development Plan 2030. However, evidence of the persistent Tokenism approach to participation seems to still be present in this document. The current draft document proposes solutions to address the shortcomings identified in human settlements development, but these are neither holistic enough nor sufficiently rooted in local practice of citizens on the ground, and there is still an inadequate reflection on the depth of inequality and the seriousness of the current contextual realities. The promotion of progress to reach true participation and achieve a state of Citizen Power is therefore still greatly lacking in this document and the associated policy reform discourse which signals the urgent need for substantial change.

A SHIFT TOWARDS CITIZEN POWER

A paradigm shift towards the focus of all role-players in achieving Citizen Power is urgently needed. Citizens should empowered to be on the forefront of ‘building’ their cities. Sandel (1996) writes that the ideal relationship between state and citizens should be based on the idea that government exists to

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ensure citizens can make choices that are consistent with their shared interest or goals. This collaborative relationship however requires trust and accountability from citizens and from government in order to develop a collective sense of the public interest (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000: 552).

Arnestein's Citizen Power (1969) shows that policies that are used to guide society are the outcome of a complex set of interactions involving multiple groups and interests ultimately combining in unpredictable ways. Government is no longer in charge. In this new paradigm, the primary role of government is not merely to direct the actions of the public through regulation and decree. Citizen Power transforms the role of government from one of controlling to one of agenda setting, gathering the right role-players around the table and facilitating, negotiating, or brokering solutions to public problems (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000: 554).

CITIZEN POWER IN SWEET HOME FARM - THE CASE OF SWEET HOME FARM, PHILLIPPI"

The case of the informal settlement of Sweet Home Farm in Phillippi tells the tale of a community striving to achieve Citizen Power and demonstrates the effects of an accountable and collaborative process which allowed and enabled citizens to access some power to make informed and responsible decisions regarding their own development. The case study also highlights the consequences of a lack of collaboration between citizens and their government due to government's predominantly tokenistic approach to participation.

The Sweet Home Farm informal settlement lies nestled between Duinefontein Road, the Nyanga railway line, Lansdowne Road and Vanguard Drive, and is bordered by Samora Machel to the south east, Gugulethu to the north, Brown's Farm to the east,

Manenberg to the northwest and the agricultural part of Phillippi to the west and southwest. The piece of land Sweet Home Farm is located on was formerly vacant agricultural land used as an illegal refuse dump by surrounding farmers and industries. The land was informally settled on in the early 1990s, but quickly grew into a large settlement (doubling in size between 2007 and 2011) which today houses approximately 17 000 individuals in 3 000 informal shack structures on 23 hectares of land (du Preez, 2017).

Figure 2: A map of the area surrounding Sweet Home farm



Source: du Preez (2017)

A COMMUNITY IN UPROAR

For years, the residents of Sweet Home Farm tried unsuccessfully to engage with local government on several upgrading issues. With the exception of minor relocations of a few households to improve living conditions, the installation of basic electrical infrastructure in 2006, the creation of emergency access roads and the digging of open storm water systems, very little was achieved in terms of in-situ development, and the community began to feel isolated and excluded from decisions made regarding their lives.

In 2011 frustration started to mount amongst the residents, and the community eventually took to the streets in anger to protest the injustice they experienced. This action ultimately forced the

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ward councillor to convene engagements with the community leadership. During these engagements, firm commitments were made regarding infrastructural improvements for early 2012. However, when mid-2012 came, no sign of any development was visible and any and all signs of robust engagement around the development process vanished (du Preez, 2016). This lack of action prompted the community to publicly voice their dissatisfaction once more. A mobilised group of community members from Sweet Home Farm took to the streets to protest poor service delivery and unfulfilled promises. The violent protest actions prompted local government to immediately secure full ownership of the land Sweet Home Farm was located on, and the settlement was pipelined as an upgrading project in the 2013/14 review of the municipal Integrated Human Settlements Five-Year Strategic Plan 2012-2017. These commitments signified the real start of the engagement process around future development between the municipality and the residents of Sweet Home Farm (du Preez, 2016).

A SHIFT TOWARDS UPGRADING

An Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme (UISP) was launched in Sweet Home Farm later in 2014. The UISP is a subsidy instrument contained in the National Housing Code (which sets the underlying policy principles, guidelines and norms and standards which apply to government's various housing assistance programmes) that is specifically designed to cater for the special development requirements of informal settlements. The following text box provides a short description of the approach of the UISP.

BOX 1

The UISP puts forward a phased approach to upgrading, where Phases 1 to 3 focusses on community participation, planning and design, supply of basic services and tenure security, and Phase 4 constitutes the housing consolidation (top structure) phase – where those households that meet the qualification criteria can access government's subsidy housing assistance programmes. An alarmingly large proportion of households throughout South Africa are unable to supply in their own shelter needs, and annual budgets allocated to the provision of top structures through subsidy mechanisms are unable to keep pace with the ever growing demand. The issue of high demand is compounded by failing land and housing markets and frequent building cost escalations, which has a negative impact on the rate of delivery (du Preez, 2016).

Due to these numerous constraints and the ever-growing demand for adequate shelter, the South African government is unable to fulfil its commitment to deliver housing and services for all marginalised citizens, and many individuals on the government's housing needs register will not be afforded the opportunity to benefit from a full housing subsidy. To this end, the incremental in-situ upgrading of informal settlements has been put forward as an area of priority (du Preez, 2016).

The UISP is explicitly opposed to relocations, and indicates that this should only be pursued as the very last resort. It is clear that the UISP is premised upon extensive and active community participation. However, funding allocations to support social

processes are piecemeal and rarely accessed, which is particularly problematic if a comprehensive, robust participatory and empowerment approach is promoted throughout an upgrading intervention.

The UISP further states that community participation should be undertaken through ward committees with ongoing effort in promoting and ensuring the inclusion of key stakeholders and vulnerable groups in the process, and that the municipality must demonstrate effective interactive community participation. The experience of Sweet Home Farm however indicates that neither ward structures nor local governments are particularly effective at meaningful engagement or robust participation (du Preez, 2016).

CITIZEN POWER THROUGH SOCIAL FACILITATION

THE NEED FOR INTERMEDIARY SUPPORT

The starting point for effective participation lies in the acknowledgement that communities have various skills, competencies, capabilities and assets to bring to the table. However, there are cavities in the capabilities and capacities of informal settlement communities; to overcome this, intentional and intensive processes of social facilitation and capacity building are required to support the upgrading intervention. Empowerment and improved accountability (as implied by and contained in the UISP) are not guaranteed outcomes of participatory planning and design intervention.

Meaningful community empowerment, which allows citizens to access more decision-making power, can only be achieved when an intentional social facilitation process embedded in the participatory process is followed, with clearly identified objectives, activities and outcomes. Intermediary (support) organisations are ideally positioned to facilitate social processes and

Because in many instances, structures and procedures aimed at enabling public participation in local governance (such as ward committees, Integrated Development Plan forums, etc.) operate without truly reflecting the democratic values that gave rise to them and that they were meant to embody and express, these platforms are often experienced as ineffective, exclusionary and even illegitimate by those intended to make active use of them.

connect and broker between communities and other stakeholders. Through their relationships with communities, intermediary organisations build trust and credibility, gain critical insight into community dynamics, and are ideally positioned to provide the requisite upgrading support.

Since Sweet Home Farm was prioritised as an informal settlement upgrading project, a professional team could be assigned and formally appointed. The term tender also allowed the professional team to appoint an external facilitator to work with community structures in the participatory planning process, and Ubuhle Bakha Ubuhle (UBU) was subsequently appointed to provide social facilitation services in the process. UBU plays a vital role in the process in terms of fulfilling an intermediary function between local government, the professional technical team and the community. The below text box provides a short description of UBU's approach.

BOX 2

UBU (Ubuhle Bakha Ubuhle) is an organisation focused on activating informal communities to be the drivers of their own development through effective facilitation and facilitated building. The director, Barry Lewis, is a qualified architect from the UK and believes that the lens of architecture

is a compelling tool to find the most effective strategy to encourage incremental upgrades. The foundation of UBU's work is facilitation, which has been developed in Sweet Home Farm, a community in which they have been submerged since 2009. Through this engagement, the idea of facilitated building emerged which manifested in a model for incremental housing, which starts as a shack and becomes a house, modelled and built by the community (du Preez, 2016).

SPATIAL RECONFIGURATION PLANNING

Due to high settlement density and accompanying space limitations, it was anticipated from the onset of the UISP project that a fair bit of internal movement would be required to accommodate all the households in an acceptable layout. To ease the process of spatial reconfiguration and movement of households within the project boundary, the settlement was divided into bite-sized chunks called superblocks. The superblocks form the basic skeleton plan for the settlement, and enabled detailed planning of each development square to commence. To guide and inform the detailed plan for Sweet Home Farm, an indicative superblock plan was co-developed based on a number of design informants, which were categorised in terms of physical attributes that could either be amended, or not.

To assist the community in understanding density and the implications of plot sizes and house typologies on the scale and extent of relocation, the project planner outlined the entire spectrum of housing typologies that could be accommodated in future within the superblock sections, which ranged from conventional stand-alone government subsidy homes (typically 40m² homes on individual erven [plots of land]) to higher density row housing, semi-

detached units, and multi-storey 'walk-ups' (du Preez, 2016).

The structured planning workshops predominantly focussed on practical participatory planning within the superblocks. The theoretical components dealt with the following:

- ✦ The concept of, and rationale for collaborative planning.
- ✦ The limitations of conventional government housing subsidy developments and the emphasis on settlement upgrading.
- ✦ The prescripts and objectives of the UISP.

For the practical planning part of the workshops, settlement density, housing typologies and erf (plot) sizes were workshopped by means of enlarging the relevant section of the community on a map to a scale of 1:100. On this enlarged layout, community members were encouraged to locate their dwelling and use scaled wooden blocks to create their own detailed layout plan within the superblock. After many intensive planning meetings, the professional team was able to present the whole community with a layout design which encapsulated the principles that emanated out of the participatory planning sessions (du Preez, 2016).

A CO-CREATED SUPERBLOCK AND SUBDIVISION PLAN

In mid-2014, the community members, UBU and the professional team co-created a superblock and subdivision plan which reflected the desires and needs of the community, and by October 2015 the superblock plan was approved. The City of Cape Town indicated that such an intervention within this timeframe has never before been witnessed in the City of Cape Town. In a personal communication with Mr. Barry Lewis (director of UBU) late in 2015, the City indicated that in comparison, projects of the same nature have taken up to 5 to 8 years, or even more to reach the same stage.

After many robust engagements and participatory planning workshops, the community unanimously agreed on a higher settlement density with multi-level housing typologies to ensure that relocations are kept to a minimum, and detailed planning within the superblocs officially commenced during mid-2015. The below text box highlights the successes of the co-created plan, which was able to accommodate many more households than was proposed in the city's calculations.

BOX 3

The proposed design was able to accommodate approximately 75% (2 300 households) of the households in the community, which is 1 000 households more than what the initial site yield calculations done by the city planners at the onset of the project revealed. This is a very clear indication of the efficiency of a deep engagement through an accountable and collaborative planning process, and the true value-add of the community in a planning and upgrading initiative (du Preez, 2016).

THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNEQUAL POWER RELATIONSHIPS

Despite the full support of the project team in Sweet Home Farm, the co-created plan was still opposed by the City of Cape Town, as their vision is different to what the community of Sweet Home Farm had put forward. The delays in planning approval subsequently resulted in a rather agitated and angered community leadership (du Preez, 2016). However, despite the obstacles and unbalanced decision-making processes, the combination of several collaborative efforts between active community members and key external role-players

played a pivotal role in gaining the approval on the superbloc plan in October 2015. However, the fairly rapid approval came with a cost, and 62 development conditions accompanied the approval (Bassadien, 2015). Many of these conditions are not appropriate for a first phase in-situ settlement upgrading initiative. One of the conditions with regards to the application of rezoning indicated that residential-use even have been zoned as Single Residential Zone 1 (SR1) in accordance with Section 42 of the Land Use Planning Ordinance 15 of 1985. SR1 allows for conventional housing, typically found in low density settings, whereas Single Residential Zoning 2 (SR2) which allows for incremental housing (and incremental densification by means of a second dwelling) would arguably have been a more appropriate choice for an in-situ incremental upgrading setting.

Following the approval of the superbloc plan it became apparent that the team needed to engage in a planning process to marry the approved and slightly altered plan to the one that the community had conceived. The proposed way forward was to provide a number of options in the detailed plan which could be negotiated with the city planners. Back-and-forward negotiations on the detailed plan have been on-going for over a year, and up until May of 2017, there has been no approval for a detailed subdivision (du Preez, 2016).

The case of Sweet Home Farm highlights the dysfunctional dynamic that occurs due to a lack of accountability and collaboration between the government and citizens. In the absence of true collaboration between all partners, the process of the building the city becomes greatly contested and the answer to 'who builds the city?' remains without a

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clear answer. To this point, the chairman of the Sweet Home Farm leadership, Mr Siyamboleka James, so aptly described the community's experience with the comment at an engagement held early in 2016 with an external role-player who repeatedly made decisions that undermined the community: 'You guys come in with your guitars, asking us to dance'. This statement is a true representation of what it feels like to be at the receiving end of the power imbalance, and could only be made by someone who understands the unbalanced power distribution dynamic, because they have experienced it first-hand.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

The events that transpired in Sweet Home Farm are however not isolated. The importance of collaboration in ensuring sustainable outcomes is promoted in almost every government framework, strategy and policy. We are still left asking: why are the current enabling policies not enabling citizens to access some decision-making power over their own lives? How can the voices of citizens be heard, and how can the lessons learnt in practice be elevated to the relevant levels of government to ensure that citizens can access power? As the need for collaborative development becomes more of a reality, these questions become even more pressing. Development practitioners have identified the need for more focussed collaborative action and as a result several collaborative platforms have been established in recent years to address challenges on a variety of levels.

CULTIVATING CITIZEN POWER THE PRACTITIONER'S PLATFORM

Habitat for Humanity South Africa hosts the Practitioner's Platform to convene different role-players especially to address issues regarding informal settlements. The platform currently functions

at a local and municipal scale and serves as a mutually beneficial forum that brings together sector experts, community leaders, policy decision-makers, municipal officials, private sector actors and other networks around value-adding events, products and practice-orientated capacity building. The Practitioner's Platform was established in 2014 as a dedicated space for practitioners working in informal settlements to co-identify areas of collaboration on a project-level and highlight key pressure points that need to be elevated to the relevant levels of government through robust advocacy initiatives. The platform raises pressing issues and addresses complicated challenges as a collaborative unit. True collaboration and accountability between partners also plays an important role in the success of the Practitioner's Platform. To date, the Practitioner's Platform has hosted over eight engagements and has been successful in establishing a forum dedicated to addressing issues emerging from practitioners, local government and communities alike in the implementation of UISP projects.

SEKUNJALO KE NAKO!

Over the last few years it has become evident through engagements with the Practitioner's Platform partners that there is a palpable urgency to move from dialogue into action. The partners thus started investigating emerging opportunities for more in-depth collaboration between sector partners to co-create greater initiatives that have the potential to influence change on a much larger scale. In 2016, the Practitioner's Platform launched a campaign called *Sekunjalo Ke Nako!* (Now is the Time!) which focused on developing more intensive practice-oriented partnerships and ensuring greater collaboration on project-level initiatives. It is against this background that the developments in Sweet Home Farm were tabled at the Practitioner's Platform engagement in March 2017 as a case study to be discussed.

COLLABORATIVE ENVISIONING

At this engagement, representatives from UBU and the Sweet Home Farm Project Steering Committee highlighted the intricate power relationships and tensions between communities and government and other decision-makers that are evident in the upgrading process. The question of ‘who builds the city?’ was raised on several occasions during the engagement and discussions highlighted that the redistribution of power remains essential to the co-creation of effective solutions. It was agreed that only through *true* collaboration, which is entangled with accountability, can the question regarding the building of the city be answered. It was also clear from the discussions that communities need to be capacitated to speak in technical terms to be able to engage with government and external decision-makers in order to bring about real and lasting change that respond to their needs. Development practitioners play a crucial role in this process through partnering with communities to co-identify issues, availing resources and bringing the right role-players around the table to co-create solutions which ultimately ensures that communities are capacitated to lead their own development (Habitat for Humanity South Africa, 2017).

WHO BUILDS THE CITY?

ALTERNATIVES TO BUSINESS-AS-USUAL

During the discussions of the case of Sweet Home Farm it was clearly established that there are options for taking collective, albeit alternative, steps that will allow communities to drive their own development. The facilitated participatory process that was followed in Sweet Home Farm speaks to the true collaborative intent of the UISP subsidy mechanism, and reflects its objectives and principles. The intensive social facilitation process

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that was followed ensured that the community was treated with respect and dignity, and was seen as an equal partner throughout the process. More than that, the residents of the community were active participants in creating change and not just passive recipients of a predetermined product.

The path that was taken in Sweet Home Farm is far from business-as-usual procedures, but it is the only solution to ensure meaningful change and successful project outcomes. It is only when a community has been sufficiently capacitated that they are able to be:

- ✦ Empowered.
- ✦ Resilient.
- ✦ Supportive.

A COMMUNITY IN ACTION

Even though the Sweet Home Farm residents still wait in anticipation on the finalisation of the detailed plan for their community, hope remains in an invisible energy of a mobilised and capacitated group of citizens with tremendous passion and drive. What this process has taught the stakeholders is that continual intentional decisions are required to allow for community participation at every possible juncture. When community members know what is going in and around their spaces and when they are fully versed in the limitations, then as a collective they are able to secure the best possible outcome to any project.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR POLICY-MAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS?

The case study that was discussed highlighted the urgency for deliberate and intensive social facilitation processes. These form the foundations of truly collaborative, accountable and ultimately sustainable projects. Development practitioners such as UBU greatly contribute to the success of these projects and more concerted efforts should be made – especially in policy and in the implementation of policy – to recognise their efforts. Social facilitation processes should be made mandatory for all UISP projects and project budgets need to dedicate funding to these additional services provided by development practitioners. The case of Sweet Home Farm proves that intentional social facilitation forms an intricate part achieving citizen power and building successful communities.

The value of the Practitioner's Platform lies in the fact that it provides a space where evidence-based project-level challenges which impede the successful implementation of upgrading interventions can be unpacked, and where the learnings from these engagements can be utilised to give direction to both our internal organisational practices(s) and collaborative sector-wide advocacy efforts. More should be done by practitioners to document

challenges and successes, and to utilise these findings to collaboratively formulate strategies to advocate for dedicated funding for mandatory social facilitation processes.

CONCLUSION

The case study of Sweet Home Farm, to a certain extent, serves as a 'call to action' to encourage active citizenry. Accountability and collaboration requires citizens to familiarise themselves with their environments and take action to dynamically promote the accessibility of Citizen Power in their cities and to hold government to account. Citizen Power can only be achieved if the imbalance of power distribution is addressed in a responsible, transparent and honest way. The case study of Sweet Home Farm proves that citizens should be capacitated to build their cities alongside government, and that the virtues of collaboration and accountability can (and have to) co-exist to ensure successful development outcomes for all citizens. Unless citizens are able to truly access power to build their city, the efforts of practitioners, policy decision-makers, government and private sector actors will not be impactful. Only by aligning agency, expertise and inherent knowledge, true accountable collaboration can become effective, and can real change be achieved.

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NOTES

- ¹ The document currently has no legal status and is used to facilitate discussion and solicit input for the development of the White Paper on Human Settlements.