LANGRUG: MORE THAN MERE TAPS AND TOILETS. CREATING A COMMUNITY SPACE THROUGH COLLABORATION

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Since 1994, the South African government has progressively addressed sanitation and water supply backlogs in informal settlements. However, despite the progress made in providing adequate water and sanitation services, various socio-technical aspects, such as the production, location and maintenance of these facilities, have not been taken into account properly. It is estimated that 'as many as 26% (or about 3.2 million households) are at risk of service failure and/or are experiencing service delivery breakdowns', which, when added to the households without any services, paints a picture of 'service delivery failure on a massive scale' (Department of Water Affairs 2012). While poor planning across government may contribute to the problem of service delivery, what is most needed is to enhance the social utility and sustainability of sanitation spaces. Specifically, this means looking at the individual versus communal uses, community expectations and financial sustainability.

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GOVERNMENT CANNOT ALONE solve the service delivery problem, especially decisions on how, where and which type of service to provide in informal settlements. Government does not have sufficient socio-technical capacity, or even the capital, to guarantee the provision of adequate and dignified facilities that are acceptable to urban poor communities (Goldstein 2009). Furthermore,

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government's top-down approach does not reflect an understanding of communities and therefore cannot meet the imperatives of socio-economic sustainability. For that reason, a multi-stakeholder approach, with urban poor communities at the core, is pivotal to the sustainable delivery of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services. Such an approach enhances the dignity associated with the use of communal toilets, contributes towards place-making in communities, creates job opportunities in asset management, and informs policy and practice towards meaningful participatory upgrading of informal settlements.

This paper focuses on the informal settlement of Langrug, located in Franschhoek within Stellenbosch Municipality, where collaborative and participatory models have not only delivered WASH facilities successfully but, in the process, built a resilient community. Like many informal settlements, the community of Langrug suffers from a lack of access to adequate water and sanitation facilities.

This paper argues that community water and sanitation services should be not seen as an addition to the service-delivery statistics or as a basic constitutional right. Instead, the services provided should reflect the needs, aspirations and circumstances of the community where they are being delivered. The theory of resilience is applied in the context of collaborative partnerships as a platform for the community of Langrug to meaningfully partake in water and sanitation delivery. By forging partnerships with CORC, the Informal Settlement Network (ISN), Stellenbosch Municipality and (later) academic and research institutions, the community was able to improve their severely strained water and sanitation facilities. Various partnerships facilitated the exchanges of information and learning, which are critical aspects of this change-making process. The case of Langrug demonstrates that, by including the community in the design and implementation of the WASH project, the community was able to inform a design that resonates with local needs. Through the process, conventional approaches to water and sanitation service delivery in the settlement were challenged, in favour of a more responsive approach. The paper argues that a collaborative and participatory model of service delivery – at the heart of which lies information exchange and learning – is instrumental in building resilient communities.

The innovative design, implementation and management of the WASH facility in Langrug sets a precedent for co-producing infrastructure and services by multi-stakeholders that triggers meaningful community engagement, creates a sense of ownership and redefines government–community relations. A sense of ownership enhances the sustainability of the project and is built through nurturing social cohesion. The case study shows how the planning and building of the WASH facility produced the building blocks for emergent social cohesion in Langrug. It further illustrates that community resilience is affirmed as well as strengthened when, instead of being passive recipients, communities are actively involved in planning, implementing and monitoring services.

ENHANCING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Resilience is discussed in relation to communicative planning for two reasons. First, CORC/ISN's aim is to facilitate communication between communities

and the local government, creating community–municipal partnerships that communities can use as a platform to voice their challenges and then to construct opportunities to deal innovatively with challenges. Second, communicative planning is an important element in building resilient societies and emphasises collaborative partnerships (Goldstein 2009), whereby decisions on shared issues are made by all concerned. Therefore, the case study reflects on the value of a range of partners who collaborated in delivering services. While sustainability in communities is often defined as reaching a consensus, building resilience goes beyond consensus-making and dispute resolution to pursuing collaboration 'at multiple scales, and in diversifying practice' (Goldstein 2009: 2). Collaborative partnership acknowledges that problem resolution is always shifting and so requires ongoing engagement among key stakeholders.

Resilience theory is also used in relation to the philosophy of 'building communities, building the nation' embraced by the South African SDI Alliance.[1] This implies that community capacitation and empowerment promotes self-reliant communities (CORC 2013). As people struggle to surmount adversity and meet challenges, the accumulation over time of skills, abilities, knowledge and insight (through community exchange of learning and information) builds capacitation and empowerment, which are factors indicative of resilience (Saleebey cited in McCubin 2001). Resilience theory acknowledges that the strength to be resilient is embedded within the individual or the community, while a community's potential to demonstrate resilience depends on social bonds and collective action based on networks of relationships, reciprocity, trust, and community norms (Van Breda 2001). The social component of resilience is the accomplishment of people's willingness and preparation to confront and overcome adversity, and involves two related elements: community cohesion and motivation (McAslan 2011). Motivation is 'the product of a common will to survive and recover' that requires effective leadership, respect and an understanding of the risks and threats, whereas community cohesion is when individuals achieve a common outcome by staying together and supporting each other, drawing on 'shared experiences, a common sense of worth and an expressed collective identity' (McAslan 2011: 11).

The aim of enabling resilience in communities is to fulfil access to infrastructure that provides individuals and groups with the means to survive and recover. Community resilience refers to 'the ability of a community facing normative or non-normative adversity or the consequences of adversity to establish, maintain, or regain an "expected" or "satisfactory" range of functioning that is equal to or is better than pre-stressor functioning' (Bowen 1998 in Van Breda 2001: 152).

The Langrug community's WASH initiative can be seen as an act of resilience, where the community proactively responded to policy, resulting in an improved state of municipal water and sanitation delivery systems. In this case, the community-driven process and the final product both built and affirmed community resilience.

THE CASE STUDY: LANGRUG INFORMAL SETTLEMENT[2]

In 1993, Langrug was established in Franschhoek, one of the most affluent farm areas in the Stellenbosch Municipality. Extreme poverty, poor

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housing and inadequate water and sanitation facilities are widespread in the settlement, which provides affordable housing to seasonal farm workers who are employed mostly in the vineyards.

Through a partnership with Stellenbosch Municipality, the community of Langrug has been active in shaping the nature of service delivery in the area. The community is included and participates in shaping a better future through incremental and in-situ upgrading of the settlement. This partnership can be traced to November 2010, when the Mayor and Council started engaging with the Slum Dwellers International, through its South African Alliance. This engagement was aligned with the National Upgrading Support Programme and the presidency-driven national programme delivery agreement to upgrade a total of 400 000 households by 2014 (Department of Human Settlements 2012). In 2011, the Stellenbosch Municipality, CORC/ISN and the broader community of poor people in the Stellenbosch signed a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the joint objective of undertaking a comprehensive process of informal settlement upgrading. One of the targets was to upgrade 7000 households in Langrug.

In March 2011, the first initiative was to carry out a profiling and enumeration exercise of Langrug.[3] The exercise found that Langrug contained 1858 households and 4088 people. The ratio of people to toilets was 49:1, and the ratio of people to water points was 72:1, which is far off the South Africa's standard of five families per toilet (SA SDI Alliance and the Municipality of Stellenbosch 2011). Further, the available services were sporadically dispersed through the settlement, and access was unequal. Clearly an upgrade of water and sanitation facilities within the settlement was urgently needed.

Despite the municipality prioritising the upgrading of WASH, the desired threshold had not been attained, and challenges remained in delivering and maintaining sanitation services in Langrug. According to community leaders (Ratana and Poni interviews 2013[4]), key challenges facing water and sanitation delivery in Langrug included inadequacy, inaccessibility (especially at night), vandalism and poor hygiene. In response, and to demonstrate that a better system of delivering these services was plausible, the initial partnership was expanded to involve academic and research institutions, including the Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) and the University of Cape Town. With the entry of the WPI, an entirely different model of a WASH facility was conceptualised. This can be interpreted as an act of affirming and building community resilience, where a community becomes integral in shaping the nature of development that government undertakes in the settlement, as well as influencing policies that result in such developments. It also demonstrates the ability of communities to partner with technical professionals to design innovative and improved systems of delivering WASH in informal settlements.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS

The partnership's first project was to design and implement a grey water[5] management project, which was long overdue. Prolonged periods of poor and inadequate grey water management in the settlement had resulted in potential health hazards. Although the health impacts of this project have not yet been assessed, the project set the momentum for the establishment of the community-led WASH intervention in the settlement.

In October 2012, the partnership conceptualised an integrated community centre that would satisfy the key needs of hygiene, safety and privacy, and serve multiple functions. The wider community accepted the idea, and WPI committed to sponsor the project. However, the identified site was highly underutilised,

overgrown with weeds, littered with solid waste and home to two vandalised toilets cubicles. The site posed a growing health hazard to the local community and carried the risk of transmittable diseases, particularly to vulnerable groups such as children who often used the site as a playground. Therefore, the partners began a design process of the proposed facility.

DESIGNING THE WASH FACILITY

The existing services were mostly accessed communally in ablution blocks, which were of a standard/uniform design. A technocratic process, not the community, had determined the design and location of these facilities. Such a top-down, technocratic and non-inclusive approach to delivering sanitation facilities had a mixed reception from the community. While the community appreciated the effort made to increase the services, it did not agree with the design and location of the facilities (Masiy interview 2013[6]). For example, in 2012 the Stellenbosch Municipality delivered chemical toilets in Langrug (at Zwelitsha) without consulting the community. Despite being in dire need of the services, the residents rejected the toilets, tipping them over 'because after delivery, the municipality never appointed anyone to clean them, so the residents saw it best to go back to using the bush than smelly toilets' (Ratana interview 2013[7]).

Thus, the underpinning principle guiding the production of the partnership's proposed facility was to design a 'unique', community-driven WASH facility that resonated with the community's preferences.

A technical team (of urban planners and architects) from CORC, community co-researchers (community members coordinating the design process between the residents, municipality and CORC) and WPI engineering students worked with a community team to develop the design of a community centre, which included a WASH facility. 'We, as the community, wanted a place that would be more than just a sanitation facility' and 'would cater for the different community needs such as showers and disability units' (Ratana interview 2013[8]).

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The final WASH design produced a product that went beyond mere toilets and taps, to meet various imperatives for social sustainability and place-making. The community centre served as a place for accessing WASH services, as a hall for community gatherings, as spaces in which to work and conduct business, and as a resource centre – a place to learn. The facility also operates as a postal delivery and distribution centre. The community's reception to the facility has been overwhelmingly positive, and the women (who are the dominant users of the facility) in particular find the facility to be the most hygienic and secure in the settlement, not to mention that it integrates multiple uses. 'Some of the residents use the facility when they have visitors' because it is provides some privacy, while 'others use it because it is cleaner than the other toilets' (Ntlikithi interview 2013[9]).

The well-ventilated facility contains five hand-washing sinks (two of which are lowered for children), four laundry basins in a central area, two showers, and a total of nine toilets stalls – three each for men and women, two for children, and one unisex cubicle, which is also suitable for handicapped users. A water tap is located at the entrance of the facility. The facility operates between 6am and 11pm and is secured at night. A space is reserved for a caretaker who is responsible for cleaning, distributing toilet

paper and soap, and maintaining and monitoring the facility, with the Stellenbosch Municipality meeting the maintenance costs. The design integrates a business space, providing a stall – preferably for a hair salon business. The community centre also includes a children's learning area (which can be seen from the central area) and serves as an informal post office.

The WASH facility has produced a more welcoming and dynamic communal space, where community members can interact, which is crucial for sharing information and building a resilient community. The design promotes the convergence of different users, thereby enhancing social cohesion and interaction in the community.

LEARNING AND EMPOWERMENT IN THE PROCESS OF CONSTRUCTION

The construction of the facility was a true multi-stakeholder process and used local labour and 'expertise'. Two Langrug community leaders (Masiy and Ratana) with basic building skills led the community construction team. Masiy was also the community's project manager. 'Their building expertise and drive was inspirational and critical for the completion of the facility' (Tshabalala 2013) and was reinforced by technical support from CORC and WPI.

Opportunities for shared learning are important in communities where empowerment and ownership of the project are part of its intended outcomes. Therefore, the CORC technical team also built capacity among the community team, in particular in scheduling the project activities, managing procurement, technical guidance and overall project management. Community members were empowered by the transfer of skills and knowledge, often fairly technical in nature.

The construction process was not without its challenges. The design was readjusted numerous times, costs increased because of inefficient procurement, and the project took longer than initially planned because of communication breakdowns at certain stages. Nevertheless, the project was completed in six months, and the facility was opened to public in June 2013. The WASH facility is currently fully functional and operating to capacity.

The project showed that community contracting and community-led development is possible. Residents were responsible for the construction, some had been involved since the planning stages, while 'others joined in the construction process' (Madaka interview 2013[10]). In addition, the transfer of skills to the community improved the capacity of the community team to execute similar projects in the settlement.

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LESSONS FROM THE LANGRUG CASE STUDY

The Langrug case study shows that a community-led approach to WASH in informal settlements is possible and has the potential to build resilient communities in a divided urban South Africa.

The magnitude of the service delivery challenge is too great for the government to solve alone. However, local government's approach to providing these services is often top-down, subsidised, non-inclusive and inadequate. As observed in Langrug, this results in facilities that are typically unhygienic, simply undignified, and regularly subjected to vandalism or irresponsible use. Therefore, collaborative approaches are crucial, as

non-government stakeholders have the potential to up-scale the universal access to sanitation provision, enhancing the dignity of urban poor communities.

Efforts to deliver sanitation in informal settlements must be community-driven, rather than using the conservative top-down bureaucratic approach that is typical of service delivery. Even if the government had the financial resources to supply sanitation services to all, the provision would not be successful or even sustainable without meaningful community involvement. Some have argued that the top-down approach is one of the reasons that about half of government-built toilets are used for something other than their intended purpose (Trouba 2010 in WPI 2012). The approach presented in this case study may take time but, with improved efficiency in such partnerships, reasonable up-scaling would be possible.

Community participation is key to building resilient communities. Projects have a greater chance of success when community participation is at the heart of their activities and processes. In Langrug, community involvement in the WASH project illustrates that communities have the capacity to address infrastructure challenges that affect them. Involving the community also helps to eliminate, 'the municipality will do it for me' mind-set that is prevalent in many of South Africa's informal settlements. The act of the community taking lead in constructing the type of facility they desire puts across a critical policy message: that the approach is as important as the end product.

Forming partnerships and involving various stakeholders also allow resources to be pooled and the emergence of a more coordinated process to build change in informal settlements. In this context, the mutual exchange of resources is an empowerment tool for all participants in a collaborative partnership. Furthermore, when the community is involved and government plays a facilitative role, resilient partnerships are forged based on trust and reciprocity. In some cases, resources are then freed up for other settlements in need of sanitation services. In Langrug, the relationship between the municipality and the community ensured that the municipality's delivery of sanitation services was sustainable and more cost effective than if the construction had been outsourced to private firms.

Furthermore, when the community is involved and government plays a facilitative role, resilient partnerships are forged based on trust and reciprocity.

The case study illustrates that social imperatives of sanitation services are equally as important as the technical (engineering) and financial imperatives. Overlooking social imperatives is a catalyst for mistrust to develop between authorities, such as local government, and disenfranchised urban poor communities. However, if these spaces can address needs such as employment and education, in addition to sanitation, residents would be more likely to own and care for them, and state-citizen relations would improve (WPI 2012). In this particular case, community members were also involved in the management of the facility, which serves to strengthen and sustain community ownership of the project.

In communities where there is a lack of community education, acceptance, entitlement and management, the durability of a government-supplied facility may be limited. To avoid this, in Langrug the community was involved early on in the design and implementation process. The partnership created community awareness and encouraged passive residents to reconsider their role in the settlement's development. This further opened discussions about

community needs that could be linked to the project while solving the sanitation issue. Such discussions helped pinpoint problems and highlight the best possible solutions. Knowledge from the community also helped CORC/ISN, WPI and the municipality to understand the existing conditions and provided a greater chance for positive and meaningful change.

Throughout the process, from planning to implementation of the WASH facility, all stakeholders shared a lot of knowledge, sometimes fairly technical in nature. Shared learning opportunities gave the community the necessary skills that would allow them to share their knowledge with other communities that wish to establish such a facility.

The MoU created a unique relationship with the community, the municipality and CORC/ISN, as the intermediate institution that links other two partners. The partnership has moved beyond the WASH facility delivery to the broader informal settlement upgrading in a sustainable incremental way. Resilience has proven not to be an outcome but a continuous multi-stakeholder engagement process. Continuous engagement enhances political sustainability of incremental upgrading of informal settlements.

The project built social cohesion in Langrug, by bringing the community together in a unique way, as all were striving towards the common goal of establishing dignified, communal, safe, hygienic and private WASH facilities. The community's involvement from the early stages established a sense of ownership in the project. Ownership ensures the longevity of the project, as well as transferability of skills and learning to other contexts of in-situ upgrading. Residents were invested in its success and motivated to participate in other developmental processes. Their shared experiences also built a collective identity. The Langrug case study shows how the strength to overcome adversity is embedded in the community. Communities that realise their strengths – through inclusion, knowledge sharing and the identification with common goals – build a resilient society (Van Breda 2001).

CONCLUSION

The collaborative and participatory approach used to deliver the Langrug WASH facility demonstrates a potentially dignified way of providing informal settlements with communal services and facilities that resonate with the preferences of communities. Such an approach reinforces community resilience, by providing a collaborative platform, where information sharing and consultation is encouraged, that enhances a strong and cohesive community. The complexities of improving WASH facilities are manageable when those affected (the community) is integrally involved in steering the process, as then the community accepts and owns the project.

Furthermore, such a process produces innovative models that positively challenge existing models of water and sanitation delivery in informal settlements. The process advances the presupposition that addressing the social imperatives of providing water and sanitation in informal settlements enhances community building and community resilience. In that regard, the Langrug case study offers an alternative and desirable method that the government can adopt for improving delivery of community facilities in informal settlements.

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NOTES

1 The South African SDI Alliance comprises CORC, ISN, FEDUP, Utshani Fund and Ikhayalami.

2 This section is adapted from the article that can be found at http://sasdialliance.org.za/the-langrug-wash-facility-a-new-common-space-for-the-community.

3 A profiling and enumeration exercise refers to a community-led process that maps out the settlement's existing infrastructure. The results serve as an empowerment tool for communities to understand their settlement better and to use this knowledge to lobby for services from the municipality.

4 Interviews with Alfred Ratana and Khungeka Poni, Ncedololuntu HIV/AIDS Group, 23 October 2013, Langrug.

5 Grey water is water that is accumulates from wash basins, showers and baths, which can be recycled.

6 Interview with Trevor Masiy, Community Leader, 23 October 2013, Langrug.

7 Interview with Alfred Ratana, Community Leader, 23rd October 2013, Langrug.

8 Interview with Alfred Ratana, Community Leader, 23 October 2013, Langrug.

9 Interview with Nomthandazo Ntlikithi, Wash Facility Caretaker, 23 October 2013, Langrug.

10 Interview Siyanda Madaka, Community Member, 24 October 2013, Langrug.