IN PROFILE: SERVICE DELIVERY IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

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Zwanga Mukhuthu

The Constitution of South Africa guarantees the right to access basic services such as water, sanitation, education, primary healthcare, adequate shelter, etc. for all citizens. It compels government to make the necessary efforts towards basic service provision. Many municipalities argue against the provision of interim basic services in informal settlements, claiming that these are temporary and are in transition. They argue that informal settlements are not permanent and that government's ultimate aim is to move people out of informality into RDP houses. There are many who argue, Afesis-corplan included, that irrespective of how long people have been living in informal settlements, government has a responsibility to either demonstrate when it would move them out of informality - if that is the argument government wants to raise for not making basic services available in the short-term - or that government must provide basic services as mandated by the Constitution.

This article attempts to shine the spotlight on challenges faced by people living in informal settlements. There are a lot of misconceptions about the service delivery needs, calibre and character of people in informal settlements. More often than not, they are believed to be difficult, demanding, lazy and all-things-bad. This article seeks to highlight that they are not as unreasonable as others may think and that in spite of all the disappointments, they are still hopeful. Of importance, this article highlights that people in informal settlements

understand that government may never be able to deliver the dream of an RDP house to all, and they are open to alternatives.

In order to better understand the plight of people living in informal settlements and as a way of getting their voices heard, I visited the community of Phola Park, an informal settlement located in the Scenery Park suburb of the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM). I spoke to Yandisa Monakali (not his real name), a 38 year old father of two who had been residing in Phola Park since 1997 (22 years). Phola Park is home to 200 shacks (housing structures made mainly out of corrugated iron sheets), each with an average occupation of five persons. There are ten communal toilets in the area which are to be shared by all 200 shacks (approximately 1 000 people) and three water standpipes all of which were provided by BCMM.

Monakali indicates that for the past 15 years he and his neighbours had been attempting to engage the municipality through the formally legislated processes, starting with ward committee meetings, to get the municipality to address the community's service delivery plight. He indicates that, to date, they were yet to see the municipality's strategy and norms and standards for service provision in informal settlements. He argues that they were still not sure what criteria the municipality uses to determine that informal settlement 'A' deserves 10 toilets for its 1 000 people while informal settlement 'B',

for example, gets 20 toilets for 500 people.

Monakali indicated that he was part of a process to develop basic upgrading plans in 2014 that was led by CS Consulting and Afesis-corplan on behalf of BCMM and the National Upgrading Support Programme (NUSP). He indicated that at that time the community had hoped that, for a change, the municipality was addressing their concerns. He says the community was optimistic about the final basic upgrading of informal settlement plans when they were presented to them and that they were told that the plans would be submitted to the municipality for implementation. Years later, he says, nothing has come of that process.

Monakali argues that the municipality has no plan or strategy to: a) curtail the growth of informal settlements; b) upgrade the informal settlements; and c) provide basic services for those locked in informal settlements for years just like he has been. He says that most people in informal settlements are realistic, logical thinking beings who are just trying to provide for their families. They know that government cannot provide RDP houses for everyone and they know that many of them will be left out of the houses government is building. He argued that most of the people in informal settlements would actually prefer to remain where they are, where access to work is relatively cheaper and easier than a far flung area to which government often moves people.

He advocated for the implementation of the upgrading of informal settlement plans as they promised both the provision of basic services, as well as an incremental process of formalising the living conditions of each household without moving people from where they currently live.

In recent years the upgrading of informal settlements programme has been high on the agenda of government and has received prominence as a dedicated programme geared towards improving the living conditions of citizens such as Monakali. The national Department of Human Settlements, working with the NUSP, had partnered with municipalities such as BCMM to provide the skills and technical support needed to improve the upgrading process and to boost municipal capacity. However Monakali believes that BCMM has been dragging its feet in implementing the upgrading plans. He said while budget allocations are made for the upgrading of informal settlements in BCMM, it was not clear which informal settlements were being upgraded and at what pace. He claims it was "infuriating" when you reside in an informal settlement not to know who to ask these questions of.

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He believes that the municipality has been tight-lipped as to which informal settlements will benefit first from its upgrading of informal settlements budget. Monakali said "we don't know what service delivery is in my community. The only time there was service delivery here was when the municipality was installing these toilets and water taps. We have never seen them again. We have no access roads or electricity here, we cannot find work, one cannot even afford toilet paper or refuse bags. I am worried because the inequality gap in our country just keeps on growing wider and wider every day". He said high unemployment in his community had led to the rise in crime. Because the shacks

are densely clustered together he claimed he could hear footsteps in his sleep all around his house, of people potentially scouting for things to steal.

While growing discontent in informal settlements usually manifests itself in violent service delivery protests, Monakali said he and his community have recently found alternative mechanisms to engage the municipality, including gathering evidence through social audit[1] before engaging the municipality through a community participation process. "Not all of us want to protest all the time. There is no solution in violent protests because we end up damaging the very same facilities that we need. This social audit is a creative and innovative way for us to show the municipality our plight" he said.

A big take-away from this conversation is that people in informal settlements are not as unreasonable as some would like to believe and that they are not just waiting for government to do things for them, but are willing to negotiate, get involved and explore different approaches to settlement development. All they seem to ask for is to be heard.

[1] A **social audit** is a community-led process of reviewing crucial documents to determine whether the public expenditure and service delivery outcomes reported by the government really reflect the public money spent and the services received by the community. Members of the community collectively participate in a process of verifying government (or private company) documents by comparing them with the realities on the ground and the experiences of the community."
Source: **https://socialaudits.org.za/**