

#11 CREATING QUALITY ENVIRONMENTS: MANAGED LAND SETTLEMENT

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Human settlement environments developed following the Managed Land Settlement (MLS) approach¹ are better than RDP² housing environments. This assertion is based on the argument that MLS environments are more adaptive to their local context and to the needs of their residents. Each house is unique - built according to the needs and aspirations of the residents concerned. RDP housing environments on the other hand provide standard solutions that are not always well adapted to local needs and aspirations. The same product is provided to all households no matter what their local circumstances - old or young, large family or small.

¹ for more on Managed Land Settlement see <http://afesis.org.za/managed-land-settlement/>

² RDP stands for Reconstruction and Development Programme (the development programme of the new South African government after the 1994 general elections), and an RDP house has come to describe a free standing house built using a government housing subsidy.

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In the RDP housing approach government aims to progressively provide everyone who needs a house with a fully packaged housing product with services per site, title deeds and a housing top structure. In the MLS approach government provides people in need of land and housing with basic services and at least some form of basic tenure recognition, and people are allowed to start to build their own houses on this land. Government also provides development support to help people to build their own houses³.

The process through which RDP neighbourhoods and MLS neighbourhoods are developed has a large influence on the quality of the human settlement environment that emerges. Table 1 on the next page, compares the processes followed in these two approaches.



³ for more on Development Support in the context of MLS see <http://afesis.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Learning-Brief-Motivation-for-a-housing-development-support-programme.pdf>

Table 1: Comparison between RDP and MLS and housing development approaches

	RDP housing development process	MLS housing development process
1	The RDP neighbourhood and houses are all planned and designed up front before any activity starts to take place on the land.	The MLS neighbourhood is planned first; house design takes place at a later stage in the development process after people have been allocated to the land.
2	The neighbourhood is planned as one large project by a single developer resulting in the plots and road layout tending to match a standard form.	The MLS approach allows for larger housing development projects to be broken up into super-blocks. Each super-block can be allocated in advance to a specific group of households, and they can have a say in how they would like to lay out their super-block, bringing their own unique insights and requirements to bare on the neighbourhood. For example some superblocks may decide to allocate more space to common play areas, whereas others may want more space for small business activities along main roads.
3	The houses are all planned before people are allocated to the houses. The house designers are not aware of the unique circumstances of the household that will be living in the house.	Each household is able to decide on how they would like to develop their own houses. The houses are designed with the involvement of the people who will be living in the houses once these people have been allocated to the land and they are ready to move onto the land.
4	People are able to make adjustments and improvements to their houses once they move in but by this stage a lot has already been decided and built on the site. Government does not help people with these improvements as people have already received a full RDP house.	With development support provided by government, each household is able to make decisions about what they would like their house to look like: what style, what materials, and what construction method they would like to use. Government is able to advise households through the development support phase on how to make the best use of what resources they have.
5	The aged and destitute receive the same form of RDP house as all the other beneficiaries of RDP houses.	Housing for the aged and destitute can be designed and built by government so as to provide adequate shelter for people who are unable to build or arrange to build their own houses. These houses can be dispersed throughout the neighbourhood thereby not resulting in certain areas all looking the same.

Promoters of the RDP approach assume that housing development operates within what complexity theorists describe as a simple environment⁴. The following are examples of assumptions made by promoters of RDP housing: there is agreement on what the goals are (everyone must get a RDP house) and how to achieve these goals (developers will build turnkey RDP houses in large projects); there is also a high certainty that following this approach will result in people living satisfied lives in new RDP housing neighbourhoods; and the skills needed to build these RDP housing neighbourhoods are concentrated within a few skilled practitioners.

Housing developers in RDP housing projects are therefore able to follow more of a 'master planning' approach to housing development⁵. In master planning approaches a few planners and designers decide what the future environment should look like and they set out all the steps in advance for how that future will be achieved. Implementation then follows - where a single large developer follows the steps as outlined in the plans to develop the neighbourhood and the houses. There are no (or very limited) opportunities for adaptation and modifications of the plan during implementation. Evaluation of the project only happens after the plan is implemented and completed.

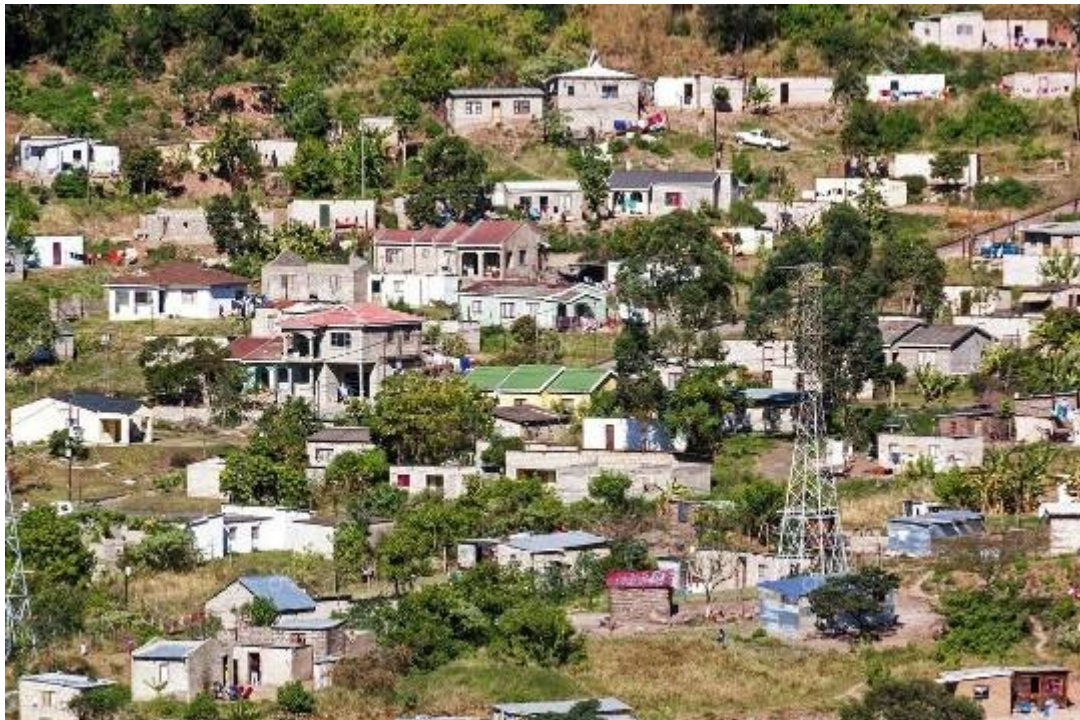


⁴ see for example: Richard Hummelbrunner and Harry Jones (2013) *A guide for planning and strategy development in the face of complexity*, ODI Background note, Available at: <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8287.pdf>

⁵ For more on master planning see page 10 of African Centre for Cities (2015) *Urban infrastructure in Sub-Saharan Africa – harnessing land values, housing and transport Literature review on planning and land use regulation*, Report 2, UK Aid.

available at: <https://www.africancentreforcities.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/DfID-Harnessing-Land-Values-Report-2-Planning-and-LUR-literature-review-20150607.pdf>

Promoters of the MLS approach, in contrast, assume that housing development operates within more complex environments⁶. Assumptions made are that there is a low level of agreement on what the goals of housing development are (larger households need more bedrooms, whereas smaller households may need space for home based businesses) and how to achieve these goals (some people want to get an established contractor to build a standard house, while others want to build houses themselves). It is assumed that even if a certain type of house is built now, it is uncertain as to whether this will meet the expectations of the household in future as their living circumstances change over time. Capacities and skills to develop quality environments rely on a range of stakeholders across a range of disciplines (builders, design professionals, etc.).



More adaptive and iterative development approaches are needed to respond to planning and development within a complex environment⁷. In an interactive and adaptive development approach, a small group of developers/ planners design a broad framework plan designating main roads and neighbourhood facilities etc. leaving the details for what the local neighbourhood and future houses will look like to be determined in consultation with the people who will be living in that environment. The planning and implementation process is iterative where first the neighbourhood framework infrastructure is planned and implemented; a further round of planning can then proceed where households plan how they would like their local super-block neighbourhood to look like which can then be implemented. Each household is then able to participate in the design of their own houses, building it in stages as they are able to arrange the necessary finances and resources. At each stage of the 'plan - implement - plan' process, the stakeholders involved are able to pause and reflect on what is needed and required to make subsequent interventions better match

⁶ see Hummelbrunner and Jones reference above

⁷ [Ward Rauws](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02513625.2017.1316539) (2017) *Embracing Uncertainty Without Abandoning Planning: Exploring an Adaptive Planning Approach for Guiding Urban Transformations*, available at:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02513625.2017.1316539>

the needs and aspirations of the people who will be using the environment⁸. Evaluation and reflection happens throughout this iterative planning and implementation process.

The context within which housing and human settlement development takes in South Africa place better matches the assumptions underpinning a complex environment. As a country we must not be scared of planning and managing housing projects within such complex environments. We need to embrace the MLS approach to settlement development. Government, planners, and developers need to 'let go' of much of what they have been doing in the planning and implementation process up to now (when building RDP neighbourhoods and houses) and open it up so that a far larger range of stakeholders can get involved in planning and building future low income neighbourhoods. There is no need to plan and design from a central point everything related to the neighbourhood and houses. More of the design and implementation decisions can be left up to the households themselves during various stages of the 'plan- implement- plan' process found in MLS development approaches.

This learning brief has made a bold assertion – that MLS environments are better than RDP environments in meeting the need and aspirations of the households involved. The only way to determine if this claim is valid is to test it. This means that the two approaches – RDP housing and MLS development - need to be evaluated and compared.

Various experts will need to be drawn on from built environment (e.g. planners and architects), social environment (e.g. sociologists and anthropologists) and economic environment disciplines to evaluate and give their opinion as to which of the RDP and MLS approaches they feel produces better quality environments according to various criteria that they feel are relevant. This will not be enough however, to determine which of these environments is better; the best way to evaluate if MLS environments are better than RDP environments is to ask the people who live in each of these environments to indicate to what extent they feel the environment within which they live meets their needs and aspirations.

We call on government to embrace the MLS approach, not only because it allows more people to gain access to land and basic services in a shorter period of time with available resources (as we have argued elsewhere⁹), but because, as we have suggested in this paper - equally or possibly even more importantly - the actual environment that is developed through MLS approaches is a qualitatively better environment than that developed through RDP housing.

⁸ For an earlier argument in support of iterative MLS approaches see: Ronald Eglin (2014) Managed land settlement: an incremental approach to human settlements, in *From Housing to human Settlements*, South African Cities Network. See page 185 on https://www.thehda.co.za/uploads/files/SACN_From_Housing_to_Human_Settlements_SouthAfricanCitiesNetwork.pdf

⁹ for more on MLS see: <http://afesis.org.za/managed-land-settlement/>