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Sustainable Community Involvement in the Indlovu Project



ABSTRACT

This project explored ways to better engage the community of Monwabisi Park in the Indlovu Project, a community-based informal settlement redevelopment programme. We worked closely with community “co-researchers” in a mutual transfer of ideas, skills and information. We developed a participatory photography program and fostered ties between a nearby college and Monwabisi Park residents. Community members’ involvement can help identify publicly acceptable outcomes to redevelopment. However, many face many challenges that could hinder this process.

This project report is part of an ongoing research program by students of the WPI CTPC to explore and develop options for sustainable community development in the informal settlements of South Africa. For more information please go to:
<http://www.wpi-capetown.org/>

The following is an executive summary of a full project report that has been implemented as a website available at:
<http://wpi-capetown.org/projects/2009/Communications>

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

Throughout South Africa are a plethora of informal settlements that have formed from large masses of people migrating to cities. In Cape Town, there are many such settlements, populated by migrants from the Eastern Cape, a province of South Africa. The main reason for this large movement was a search for better jobs. Lack of resources forced the migrants to set up temporary housing as a place to live until they could acquire a job and move to a more permanent location. Since so many people migrated at the same time, the city was not able to keep up with the demand for jobs, and the unemployment rate in these settlements grew quite high. As a result, the temporary housing has become permanent.



Monwabisi Park is an informal settlement located on the outskirts of Cape Town. This settlement is home to almost thirty thousand people with a very low standard of living. The community lacks proper housing, universal electric service, and sanitary water conditions. Currently, the City of Cape Town, WPI and the Shaster Foundation are developing plans for the rede-

velopment of Monwabisi Park. As with all areas undergoing redevelopment efforts, there are tensions that arise. The tensions are a product of the fact that the redevelopment does not have a precise definition, and many different groups have different ideas on how to proceed (Abbott, 2000). There is not a documented or recognized way to deal with redevelopment of an informal settlement (Huchzermeyer, 1999). Huchzermeyer brings up the two main ways to explore and approach redevelopment. The first and inferior way, according to Huchzermeyer is that the government has sole control over redevelopment efforts. The government sponsored 'bulldozing upgrade' plans previously practiced are an unsuitable model to follow in the future. Huchzermeyer presents "support-based intervention" as a preferred approach. This is a non-government organization (NGO)-driven and community-based support approach. This approach is not constant throughout every redevelopment effort, but based on the same ideas and principles to "not provide for the poor, but to increase the options open for them" (Huchzermeyer, 1999).

BACKGROUND

One example of the latter approach arose when the Shaster Foundation joined the Indlovu Project in 2005 to envision and implement a sustainable "eco-village". An "eco-village" is defined as a socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable community. The Indlovu Project started as a small crèche in C section of Monwabisi Park and grew to include a soup



kitchen, health centre, backpackers lodge, and a community centre. Last year all of this work was lost in a devastating fire that spread quickly through the park destroying the Indlovu Project's buildings and some of the surrounding shacks. Currently the crèche and backpackers lodge have been rebuilt and the community centre is nearing completion.

In 2007 WPI joined the efforts of the Indlovu Project to provide research and possible solutions to the redevelopment problems in Monwabisi Park. Ultimately the WPI project team focused on a sustainable laundry facility. Then in 2008 six WPI project teams each focused on a different aspect of the community, assisting Monwabisi Park's journey to become an eco-village through a plan for community-engaged in-situ upgrading. In 2009, seven project teams continued to build on ideas presented in the previous years, touching on many aspects of sustainable redevelopment solutions.

In 2008, a group of community members who could speak English called co-researchers was hired to help the WPI teams work effectively within the community. Interactions between students and co-

researchers proved to be extremely valuable because of the co-researchers knowledge of the community and their abilities as translators. The link was important not only for the research outcomes, but also for its demonstration of community involvement in the redevelopment efforts. More specifically, the communications team worked directly with the co-researchers creating a television programme called Endlovini TV. In this initiative the co-researchers filmed talk-show style episodes focused on issues within the community. This method of video representation is called participatory video and is aimed to spark community discussion and awareness to the whole community (Lunch, 2007).



METHODOLOGY



The goal of this project was to encourage community engagement in the redevelopment process of Monwabisi Park by increasing interest in the Indlovu Project and improving responses from outside agencies. We also sought to establish multimedia communication as a sustained practice

for understanding and advancing community interests. The project was sponsored by the C Section Street Committee of Monwabisi Park. To achieve these initiatives we developed the following objectives:

- Establish photography as a sustainable community initiative
- Develop the community co-researcher program to contribute to and sustain redevelopment efforts.
- Document community members' thoughts on redevelopment including issues, concerns and opinions.
- Facilitate contact with outside agencies to establish community involvement programmes in Monwabisi Park



Establish photography as a sustainable community initiative

In order to provide an outlet for the community to become involved in the redevelopment process we introduced photography to the Indlovu Project. Through a participatory photography program the co-researchers began exploring photography through documenting their lives, the community, and the redevelopment process. We trained the co-researchers in typing and computer skills, storyboards, and photography techniques. Since the co-researchers took such a liking to using the digital cameras we expanded the project to include creating community photo boards. The experimentation with photography also developed into a photo shop set up at the Indlovu Project.

Develop the community co-researcher program

Throughout our time in Monwabisi Park, we connected with the co-researchers to create a comfortable working environment, coordinated the co-researcher program, and provided technical training. After a series of ice-breakers the co-researchers worked with WPI teams on project ideas and conducted surveys and interviews in the community. Through these relationships the WPI projects were able to advance and evolve through an exchange of knowledge and teamwork. Provided with technical training the co-researchers were able to develop skills and establish the photo shop.



Document community members' thoughts on redevelopment

To proceed with increasing the involvement of the community in redevelopment, we decided to explore the current awareness of the Indlovu Project within the community. The team started by talking with the advisers on how to approach the issue without appearing that we were promising anything or being intrusive. They prompted us to speak with Di Womersley, head of the Shaster Foundation about and other experts on the effects of living in informal settlement and community and cultural sensitivities and attitudes towards redevelopment.

To focus our inquiry, we drafted a set of questions for community interviews aimed at seeking infor-



mation to help the Indlovu Project learn more about how sandbag housing would be accepted. Through the responses we were able to learn more about the community's involvement in the redevelopment efforts in Monwabisi Park. We conducted ten videotaped interviews with community members. Each interview was run by Nodumo and videotaped by Anele, both co-researchers. Most interviews were done in Xhosa with a brief recap at the ending in English. The interview was done in Xhosa because we wanted the interviewees to be at ease and better express themselves on the community issues.

Facilitate contact with outside agencies for Monwabisi Park

Expanding on the idea of community involvement, we thought the incorporation of outside organizations would be a great way of bringing the community together as well as of raising awareness about the Indlovu Project. We researched possible outside organizations and chose two to contact; False Bay College and the University of Cape Town. We were unable to meet with the University of Cape Town due to the busy time of year, but we moved forward with two promising initiatives through False Bay College. False Bay College, a twenty minute walk from the Indlovu Project, provides a youth initiative program called MOT. We looked into ways of providing this programme for the Monwabisi Park Community. We also explored the possibility of community members taking False Bay College's entrance exams.



RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

To achieve the above objectives we created and completed several goals over the course of the term. These accomplishments included creating a photography shop, coordinating the co-researcher program, contacting outside organizations and investigating the community's feelings towards redevelopment.

Photo Shop

The Indlovu Photo Shop was created to generate job opportunities in Monwabisi Park and a photo service for guests or volunteers visiting the

community. More importantly, it provides community members an outlet to express themselves. The shop consists of a digital camera, photo printer, and two or three people to run the business. At the beginning of our work at the Indlovu Project, we trained the co-researchers to give them some basic camera skills. Using these, the co-researchers were ideal for running the





centre and will be able to keep the business running in our absence. We also developed a manual for operating the camera and printer for training and troubleshooting.

Taking photographs in the community can be seen as intrusive if conducted by outside parties. We overcame this problem by a service of the photo shop through which the co-researchers will be available to give tours to the volunteers or guests while taking pictures. After the pictures have been taken, the volunteer or guest will pay to have them printed and/or put on a flash drive to take home. After a trial run at the celebration day it became obvious that the community members were very interested in having their pictures taken. This excite-

ment could be beneficial to creating more involvement in the redevelopment process.

Co-Researcher Programme

The co-researcher programme worked very well this year. At first, the co-researchers were shy while talking to a group of students. As time went on the co-researchers became more comfortable with every project team and meaningful relationships were formed. They taught us a lot about the community members and challenges facing them. These challenges include the lack of knowledge for educational opportunities, availability of employment and crime rate. They also were the ones who informed us about the desire

to pursue further education. They were very quick to pick up specific skills we wanted to teach and were a valuable and essential part of the WPI projects.

Outside Organizations

The best and most meaningful relationship we established with an outside organization was through the False Bay College, Good Hope Campus within walking distance from Monwabisi Park. The college provided assessment tests for community members interested in further education. Many were very interested in this opportunity although some could not afford the R200 fee or were not ready to become fully involved in school again. Out of the 16 applicants to sign up for the assessment, eight reported back to say they took the exam. Out of the eight, three passed and scheduled an admissions interview. Six reported that the test was very difficult and three of them said that if they had not been out of school for so long they believe they would have passed the exam. We still believe that this is a great opportunity and we suggest that the learning center at the Indlovu Project offer a programme for people wishing to prepare for the assessment test.



We also contacted the MOT program at False Bay College. We drafted and submitted a proposal for the program expansion to the Indlovu

Project. They will make a decision about their programme status after their summer break ends.



Community views about redevelopment

Several interesting points were drawn from our interviews and work with the community throughout our seven weeks. First, many Monwabisi Park residents know little about the services, wants and plans of the Shaster Foundation. Many of the people being interviewed were surprised to learn of the project's plans to include other sections of the Park in the future. Distributing facts like these might go far to help alleviate some of the existing tensions.

Another piece of information we found was that the community is willing to participate in building their own housing within the redevelopment effort. However, before people are going to start building, they must see a proof of concept combined with the belief that the effort will continue. Over the past few years there has been a perception in the community that promises of housing and other redevelopment benefits have been broken in the past. Once the Indlovu Project starts building in a simple way, that makes it

easy for community members to contribute their efforts we believe that people will actively participate.

Recommendations

Although we believe that our project benefited the residents of Monwabisi Park, there is still much work left to do. The photo shop should continue to run as long as it is financially feasible and still serves the community well. We also hope that next year's team will follow up on expanding the photo shop to take portraits of kids in the crèche, and other schools in Monwabisi Park. Now that a photography service has been set up, we believe participatory video should be pursued in the future to complement it. Before coming to Cape Town, we decided that co-researchers should help identify possible topics for airing. They would then film and edit the shows themselves. The videos would then be able to be watched in the community centre for a community based discussion. At first, co-researchers were very timid on using a video camera and brainstorming topics. We decided that it was better to explore photography as an alternative if video wasn't generating a response. As the term went along, co-researchers showed more interest in using the camera and planning out different things to film. It can be a worthwhile endeavour if pursued and implemented correctly.

The connection that can be made in the future between False Bay College and Monwabisi Park should not be ignored. MOT has not committed to anything at this point, but they are a good programme to involve in the community. There may be future pro-

grammes False Bay College offers that will be of even better use. The large opportunity for financial aid also makes the programmes very appealing.

The co-researcher programme should continue as currently operated. Four co-researchers allow teams to utilize them if needed, but also gives a lot of time for training. Having four general co-researchers to be utilized by all teams and managed by the communications team is favorable. Only if a team has a need to train co-researchers for their project specific purposes should the co-researcher programme expand to incorporate more co-



re-searchers.

The co-researchers were very knowledgeable and passionate about the community and its redevelopment. Co-researchers should all share these qualities, and also a firm grasp on English. The only real problem we faced dealing with co-researchers was their occasional shyness. This should not be unexpected when dealing closely with new people. As soon as they were comfortable enough to answer questions, they were paramount in our efforts. The co-researchers were reliable and valuable teammates during our work in Monwabisi Park.

We hope that these recommen-

dations will continue to pave the way for a successful redevelopment strategy for the residents of Monwabisi Park. We also think that a better flow of information to the community could help show the Indlovu Project's plan and their hard work to have that come about.



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