Better Homes and Policies

Spring 2006

South Africa's Housing Policies:
Past, Present, and Future

Let's Mobilize, Negotiate, and Deliver!

Letter from the Editor

As I complete my last issue of Better Homes and Policies, graduating from my position as editor-in-chief, I am reminded to take a look back on my adventures thus far to gain a perspective on where I've been and where I'm going. My interest in the subject of this season's issue—South African Housing Policy—comes directly from my experience there in 2005. I was captivated by township life and wanted to learn more about how history has created such a divided world for Capetonians, where one has the ability to move from the third to the first world by simply catching a minibus.

This issue will look at government policy on housing in South Africa, with the occasional tangent on Cape Town, from its historical foundation to its current problems and solutions, as well as some policy recommendations for the future.

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PROBLEMS OF THE PAST

The townships around Cape Town are many and house millions of Capetonians, some who have been in the area for decades, and others who are more recent residents. Today, South Africa is still highly segregated. Cape Town, which was at one point considered the most integrated, has back-pedaled to become one of the most segregated cities in the country. With little economic mobility for many people to be able to move around, people are staying where they were forced to reside during apartheid. South Africa is a classic case of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. Housing segregation, social separation, and grand oppression did not break the spirit of the people, though. A number of creative initiatives are in effect in various townships, implemented by both the city and the residents. After a decade of independence, progress is being made, slowly but surely.

EARLY SEGREGATION POLICIES

South Africa has a complex history around race relations, starting from 1652 when the first outsiders landed on its shores and began determining who was supposed to be located where. Much of the initial segregation happened informally, but with intent. As Europeans continued to settle in the Cape area and expand outward, the black population was continually relegated to peripheral land. Leading up to 1948 before the National Government came into power, a number of segregation laws had already been passed, most significantly The Natives Land Act, No 27 of 1913 and The Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923. The Natives Land Act made the sale of land from whites to blacks illegal, except in reserves. Area reserved for blacks was a mere 7% of the country! This essentially created the racially segregated landscape that can still be seen today. The Natives (Urban Areas) Act laid the foundations of the "apartheid city" in urban areas, limiting access to cities for South Africa's original inhabitants—unless, of course, they were working for the whites (Lanegran and Lanegran 2001, 673). The law was known more commonly as the "Pass Law," and it required every person to carry a book identifying their racial categorization, which would determine where they were allowed to be. If a person was somewhere without a pass book, they were sure to be arrested.

All of these policies laying the foundation for the National Party legalized a system of petit apartheid, which is the segregation of daily life spaces and resources, such as transportation, bathrooms, schools, beaches, etc. As if that was not bad enough, in 1950 a system of grand apartheid was unveiled and put into practice, completely segregating living spaces. Homelands were set aside, similar to Native American Reservations in the US, for the different black "tribes" under the reasoning that "tribalism was the basis of African culture because the great ethnologist Verwoerd [the visionary of apartheid] said it was" (Goodman 1999,151).

GROUP AREAS ACT OF 1950

The Group Areas Act became the cornerstone of apartheid, determining exactly where people could reside (Western 1996, 70). This led to numerous forced removals, including the removal of nearly 60,000 people from the vibrant, cohesive mixed community known as District Six near Cape Town's city centre after the area was zoned for whites only. The neighborhoods were split up and moved to the very peripheral and very uncompromising lands of the Cape Flats. These newly created communities lacked any kind of cohesion, and as a result, "crime, divorce, alcohol abuse and various other social problems" mushroomed (Saff 1998, 52-53). Townships today remain plagued by these same problems.

Cape Town was slow to implement the Group Areas Act, but once it began the process, it pushed through in full force, making it the most segregated major city in South Africa by 1985 (Saff 1998, 85). "Apartheid-era laws paralleled the Nuremburg laws passed by Nazi Germany" (Kulumani Support Group vs. 24 corporations, 2004).

One of Cape Town's "social engineering schemes" was the creation of a development called Khayelitsha, meaning "new home," 25 miles away

Cape Flats: Khayelitsha Housing Project, August 1985

from the city on a "barren wasteland," which some denounced as a dumping ground (Goodman 1999, 345). Khayelitsha was to become part of an *orderly urbanization* program, a reactive move by the government to prevent the already forming squatter settlements on the periphery of the city. They could not prevent urbanization from happening, so had to take a different approach and just try to define its limits (Saff 1998, 56). The government built a number of shiny metal two-room houses, and legal blacks living in the city were forced to move out into those houses, against their will and with much resistance. Other people moved

in by the day and "built homes with their bare hands, using wooden poles, tin sheeting, bits and pieces of trash rescued from land-fills and plastic garbage bags to keep out the rain. Within two years, the sand dunes had vanished under an enormous sea of shacks and shanties, as densely packed as a medieval city, and populated by fantastic characters—bootleggers, gangsters, prophets, Rastafarians, gun dealers and marijuana czars, plus almost a million ordinary working people" (Malan 1994, 6). Today, fewer than 20% of the residents live in the government houses built under the housing development project when the community was just sprouting and there are still hugely inadequate sanitation services and health care. In some places, there are 105 people for every toilet provided by the government. (Thom 2006).

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FREEDOM CHARTER

Just five years after the Group Areas Act was put into effect, a document called the "Freedom Charter" came out of a multi-racial conference held near Johannesburg. It was sponsored by the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured People's Organization, and the Congress of Democrats with the common goal of uniting all peoples in support of the "elimination of apartheid and the establishment of a non-racial democratic state" (Reddy 1985, 1). The Freedom Charter laid out many virtuous declarations for South Africa, stating:

• The People Shall Govern!
• All National Groups Shall have Equal Rights!
• The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth!
• The Land Shall be Shared Among Those Who Work It!
• All Shall be Equal Before the Law!
• All Shall Enjoy Equal Human Rights!
• There Shall be Work and Security!
• The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened!
• There Shall be Houses, Security and Comfort!

• There Shall be Peace and Friendship!
(Freedom Charter 1955).

At the same time apartheid legislation was being enacted and enforced, so were strides toward the creation of a better South Africa, as can be seen in the Freedom Charter. As optimistic and noble as the declarations were, there was no way to enact them on a legal level. That does not mean people did not organize and work toward change in their personal lives, and through organizations, but it was not until 1994 when the ANC was elected into office with Nelson Mandela as the President that the legal system could support these ideals, which it has done to varying degrees. An analysis of housing policies and problems of the present can be read on the following pages.

"South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, yet its citizens daily face widespread discrimination and bigotry—especially on the grounds of race" (Williams 2000). The housing problem is no exception in that segregation of space is still almost as defined as it was under apartheid, when segregation as an institutional system was legal. South Africa has been through a great deal of trauma as a nation, and after gaining independence in 1994, has worked extremely hard to correct some of the wrongs. After a decade of independence, some progress has being made, but there is not a shortage of work to do.

South Africa was handed over to the ANC in need of major reconstruction and development. With big plans to build a million houses by 1999, the ANC would have needed a great deal of capital, energy, and other resources at their disposal. The year before their due date, only one-fifth of the promised million houses had been built, at which time the hyped plan was discarded to be met "at a later date, subject to the availability of resources" (Goodman 1999, 349).

Although there was and continues to be a backlog of houses to build, it is incredible to even realize what has been done, while plagued with numerous problems around the issue of housing,

National Housing Policy and More

One step South Africa took in addressing the housing problem was the National Housing Policy, which stemmed out of a National Housing Forum in 1992, two years before independence. A housing subsidy plan giving people opportunity for a one-time monetary subsidy from the government to build a house was decided upon, and carried into the new government through Joe Slovo, the first Minister of Housing (Lanegran and Lanegran 2001, 675). Through this subsidy program, the ANC was also trying to find a way to integrate in more community-based development work, while also trying to navigate how much influence the private sector should carry (Lanegran and Lanegran 2001, 675).

The supporting framework for the National Housing Policy was a document called "The Department of Housing White Paper: A New Housing Strategy and Policy for South Africa" (Housing Code: User-Friendly Guide 2000, 3). The preamble of the White Paper ends by saying, "The time for policy debate is now past—the time for delivery has arrived" (White Paper 1994, 2). It lays out a strategic plan to accomplish housing goals through the creation of a standard housing policy that can bridge the gap between the private sector, the government, NGOs, and communities. By allowing housing policies to cross into all these disparate sectors, Lanegran and Lanegran argue that this is innovative, but risky (2001, 672).

Their reasoning rests on the fact that to deliver houses and offer subsidies, the success of the policy's implementation is dependent on the recipient. The recipients have to be able to afford extra costs that are incurred, and in their sense of entitlement to housing, there is an expectation to have to meet. Additionally, when the responsibility to accomplish these things is so spread out over different sectors, there is a great deal of room for dissatisfaction (2001, 684).

Another key housing policy program addressing a number of other issues was the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The RDP worked toward the goal of the National Housing Policy, as well as building off the Freedom Charter to create "an actual programme of government," going past the words and enacting them formally (White Paper 1994, 3).

"What has Changed?"

Though the National Housing Policy has a great deal of support by having a number of other initiatives and policies working for the same goal from different angles, a chief concern is that the government is ignoring past trends in making provisions for affordable housing (Morse 2005, 93). Also, on the ground level, little change is being seen. In an interview David Goodman conducted with a resident of Khayelitsha, he asked what had changed since independence when Mandela took power, and the answer was, "I don't see any change" (1999, 347). Goodman's concern for South Africa is expressed below:

What was once an expression of the warped geography of apartheid is now simply the natural landscape. That is one of my fears for South Africa: that after the initial outpouring of energy to redress the problems spawned by apartheid, poverty will begin to

look normal... Compassion fatigue will set in. What follows will be apartheid in black-face: the new South Africa will differ from the old South Africa only in the darker skin of the new elite. For the masses, little else will change (1999, 347)

Goodman voices the growing understanding of many around the political bargain that ended white minority rule. "Whites were guaranteed their economic privilege in return for giving up political power.... South Africa has had a dramatic political revolution, but no parallel economic revolution" (1999, 349)

Positive Efforts Toward a Positive Future

There is a great deal of energy being put into positive urban planning and building up the Cape Metropolitan Area, especially in terms of improving spaces to accentuate the character and heritage of the area. John Abbott, author of *Upgrading an Informal Settlement in Cape Town, South Africa*, points out that the perception many people hold toward townships and informal settlements is that they are just temporary and money should not be invested in them (2004, 199). More recently a move has been made to recognize the continued permanence of the communities and the importance of putting capital into development projects in townships.

In 1997, the Cape Metropolitan Council (CMC) came out with a document called, "Townships and Informal Settlements in the Cape Metropolitan Region," which is simply to provide history, background, and present issues in the townships found in the Cape Metropolitan Region (Townships and Informal Settlements 1996). Townships and informal settlement are defined: *township*-a formally laid out township with serviced residential erven [a garden plot, usually about half an acre] whether or not the erven has been surveyed; *informal settlement*-a group of informal houses (structures) which are not situated on serviced residential erven but which may be partially serviced by means of communal services (Townships and Informal Settlements 1996, 2). With this information, it becomes much more plausible to create other programs and initiatives that will be more effective due to the information provided.

In 2000, the CMC came out with a Cape Character Study of the Cape Metropolitan Region (CMR), under the department of "Planning, Environment & Housing Directorate: Spatial Planning." In such a region as Cape Town, which is so thick with cultural and historical significance, there has been great effort put into urban planning around cultural heritage. Cultural aspects of the area are worked into the planning to preserve the character of the area (Cape Character Study 2000).

The City of Cape Town Urban Design branch also put together a Dignified Places Programme in 2003 in response to the growing disadvantage of the city's citizens. It was mentioned in the report that the city's natural environment is steadily destructing, spaces are being monopolized by the rich minority, the city continues to have a horrible disparity between the rich and poor including access to resources. The public transportation system is addressed, noting that it "negatively impacts on every aspect of life in the city [leading to] the fragmentation of the city into isolated, functionally discreet and inwardly focused communities." (Creating a Dignified City for All 2003, 4). Many areas are catered to cars, but a significant proportion of people in those areas do not have cars. Inappropriate planning, access to services and facilities, and inadequate public open spaces are also gone

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into in depth in a fairly comprehensive report. Public space becomes a major focus for positive improvement in communities, and is achieved through the planning and building of some new town centers in various disadvantaged areas.

Most recently in late February, early March of 2006, Cape Town hosted the ICLEI World Congress. ICLEI (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives): Local Governments for Sustainability is "an international association of local governments and national and regional local government organizations that have made a commitment to sustainable development."[1] Out of the congress came several new initiates around sustainable growth and other topics, among which came The Cape Town Plan, a strategic six-year plan for the city.[2] One of the goals is to build sustainable "communities and cities by addressing key barriers to sustainability such as poverty; injustice, conflict and insecurity; vulnerability to extreme events; and environmental degradation" (Cape Town Plan 2006, 9).

Although on a legislative level, major strides are being made in repealing apartheid-era laws that uphold segregation in favor of new laws that will create a better South Africa for all, with accompanying programs to carry out the legislation. Housing for many is being effected, but the major criticism is that it is not effecting *enough* people. Another problem with housing policies is that in "the large mix of the national government, private sector, NGOs, World Bank, and even local government, the agency and autonomy of the squatters themselves is often forgotten" (Morse 2005, 98).

In response to the above-mentioned problems, the Minister of Housing reported that through the Housing Code, a major focus would be fostering and forming workable partnerships between communities and all the other players in housing policy. She says, "This is seen as a fundamental prerequisite for the sustained delivery of housing. It requires all parties not only to argue for their rights, but also to accept their respective responsibilities and to work together in unity and with a common purpose" (Housing Code 2000, 1)

In addition to the initiatives being taken by the national government to create better housing policies, private sector businesses putting on conferences, and local governments making more specific plans of action, community organizations are also stepping up to effect change for themselves, which I argue is the key to not only better housing project implementation, but also community-building. The importance of community-building cannot be overlooked, as it has potential to reduce crime, poverty, despair, and bitterness, all of which effect both the community and the broader society.

COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES

One initiative called the *Peoples Housing Process of Assisted Self-Help* recognizes the frailty of supporting systems, writing, "Government is short of funds. Local authorities are emerging from a process of wrenching change, and many NGOs still struggle to survive."[3] Knowing that, they have taken matters into their own hands, creating a "ReadyKit" that can bring the cost of a house to R500, using the housing subsidy program laid out in the National Housing Policy. A partnership is evident in the creation of the Housing Process, where it is said the "government [has] given us the best opportunity yet, to solve our problems."[4]

Another organization that has emerged to bring in the community perspective and agency of the those whose lives are most effected by housing policy, is the coalition of Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), started in Cape Town, South Africa. Their aim is to bring their voice to the discussion on housing policy—a voice that has so often been silenced in the past. Currently SDI can be found in 21 countries, which all have a focus on savings and credit programs, enumeration as a technique for community mobilization, reorganization of communities to ensure women's central participation, security of tenure, exchange programs, housing models and construction, water and sanitation, brokering deals, and international advocacy.[5] Through such organization, people learn numerous skills, become aware of their rights, and have the opportunity to get involved in their community.

There are also a number of other social organizations and movements that have been formed and are continuing to form that promote alternative housing development plans. The People's Dialogue on Land and Shelter that took place in South Africa in the early 1990s led to the creation of the Homeless People's Federation, which specifically focuses on active savings and credit groups to spur development (Huchzermeyer 2002, 93). The Federation advocated strongly for community-based housing strategies, and were gradually accommodated by the government, which has tended to have a strong central government (Huchzermeyer 2002, 94).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

With continued energy going into the community-level development projects and strategies, South Africa will keep on seeing progress, which will not only effect housing statistics and reduce the housing backlog, but will create change in every level of society. If people feel less *entitled* to housing, relying on the government to provide it, and begin feeling more *responsible* for the change with the support of the government, quicker and more effective change is likely to occur.

The government needs to remain involved, rectifying past legislation and its resultant problems, but a greater agency and support system needs to be granted to the

Before and After: ReadyKit house in Langa, built in 19 days.

communities who are most effected by the housing policies, so they can effectively implement their housing strategies. Workable partnerships need to be fostered between all levels of involved players and sectors, so that housing policies can be created and implemented with everyone's voice present and heard.

In a speech given by Lindiwe Sisulu, Minister of Housing, in February 2006, she praises efforts and progress made in a housing project, commenting, "All the initiatives, therefore, have their origins in this community. The community mobilized. It negotiated. And it delivered. For me the actions are an apt, the most relevant and in fact most needed adaptation of the very old youth slogan of Learn, Fight and Produce. So in today's circumstances we adapt the slogan to now read: Mobilise, Negotiate and Deliver!"[6]

Let it continue!

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(Footnotes)
[1] http://www.iclei.org
[2] http://www.iclei.org/index.php?id=3577#6838
[3] http://www.readykit.co.za/peopleshousing.html
[4] ibid.
[5] http://www.sdinet.org/home.htm
[6] Sisulu, Lindiwe. 2006. Keynote address by Minister of Housing at the ceremony to launch the Solomon Mahlangu Housing Project; Uitenhage, South Africa.