EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DELIVERY SYSTEMS

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Introduction

This paper suggests how the RDP may be used to promote empowerment through the delivery of housing and housing related construction goods to low-income communities. We argue that in light of serious supply-constraints which have undermined the capacity of both the private sector and state to deliver housing to low-income communities, considerable new capacity needs to be developed. Although we argue that for developmental reasons it is best that this capacity is created in the beneficiary communities, we suggest that there remains an important role for both the state and private sector to play in the delivery of low-income housing and other developmental goods.

Before we move on to the main aspects of our presentation, it may be useful to define a number of key concepts.

By the term *delivery system*, is meant the functional differentiation of housing activities between *actors* engaged in different *activities* depending on the *ideological background* on which the governing housing policy is based (Walker et al, 1992:2).

Actors - the agents or institutions involved in housing delivery. Recent formal approaches to housing delivery have seen a combination of public and private sector housing agents performing different tasks. The informal squatter or backyard shack developments, on the other hand, have come about largely through the initiative of the individuals responsible for their erection.

Activities - the processes and operations necessary for the delivery of a housing product. These may include land acquisition, financing, project co-ordination and/or management, regulation, construction and/or upgrading/consolidation. Different activities may be performed by one or more actors in the delivery process.

Ideological background - the ideological, political and economic presuppositions which underlie the design of the delivery system. Premises influence the selection of financing mechanisms, tenure options, mix of actors, range of housing products that characterise a delivery system. For instance, the philosophy of apartheid and state restrictions on African urbanisation, gave rise to a delivery system based on the state provision, allocation and management of

conventional rental housing and the hostel system.

The term *'community participation'* refers to the involvement of the beneficiary community in the implementation and delivery of housing and other developmental goods. It should promote a 'partnership connecting horizontally amongst people of equal status, but not necessarily of equal power, and vertically between those who set policies and those who live within the framework of these policies' (Goethert and Hambdi, 1988, in Gounden, 1993:3).

Using Arnstein's framework, we may consider community participation stretching along the continuum from non-participation, manipulation, tokenism, information, consultation, placation, partnership to complete citizen control (Goethert and Hambdi, 1988, in Gounden, 1993:3). Obviously, as we move along the continuum, the role of the beneficiary community is increased such that joint decision-making between role players occurs through partnership, while decision-making is transferred to the community stakeholders when one has complete citizen control.

There is also a relationship between community participation and *'empowerment'*, the last term needing definition. As one moves along the spectrum of community participation from cost-sharing, to improving project efficiency and effectiveness, to building capacity, one reaches the empowerment of the beneficiary community (Paul, 1987, in Moser, 1989:83). As we move along the spectrum, we assume a shift in the significance of delivery agency whereby the ultimate responsibility for delivery moves from the external development agency to the beneficiary community once they are empowered (Merrifield et al, 1993:322). Empowerment also implies that the community adopts a more collective and more political stance towards external agencies, and that they may use that empowerment to challenge the conditions under which development takes place (Merrifield et al, 1993:322).

In this sense, *empowerment* can be said to involve three kinds of power (Friedmann, 1992:33):

Social power, which is concerned with the households' access to productive and reproductive resources including skills, material goods, information, and finance. As its access to these resources increases, so also does its ability to actively pursue its objectives increase.

Political power, which concerns the involvement of individuals in the decision-making processes which affect their lives. Political power is not restricted to formal elections, but through the agency of collective action, may promote the interests of those organised in the absence of, or in addition to, any formal political process.

Psychological power, which describes the individual's sense of potency, to what extent that person believes that he is able to influence the situation around

him. Psychological empowerment is often the product of social and/or political empowerment but it cannot be reduced to either.

In light of these definitions, we may say that the low-income communities have traditionally been excluded from the housing delivery process. Increasing their participation in housing and other development is likely to promote their empowerment. While this will have positive consequences in that beneficiaries will have greater control of, and involvement in, the development process, it may also carry costs in that those previously disempowered will need time to become comfortable with their new rights and responsibilities. Likewise as communities become more involved in the development process, it is likely that they will seek to define their objectives differently from those defined by external delivery agencies. We must therefore anticipate a process whereby all those involved in development, work towards defining a common set of objectives.

Background and Current Status Quo

One currently hears about proposals to build hundreds of thousands of low-income houses in the next couple of years. PWV premier Tokyo Sexwale is committed to delivering 150 000 houses in 1995 in his Province alone, and other Provincial Executives have announced ambitious housing goals. The RDP calls for a delivery rate of 300 000 housing units per year, and the delivery of at least 1 million houses within five years.

However, recently completed research for the National Housing Forum (NHF) (Merrifield, 1994), suggests that these housing targets are unlikely to be met by the existing housing delivery systems. The problem is not merely an issue of gross capacity of individual input (labour, materials, plant), but whether the private and public sectors have the organisational capacity to execute that amount of work in a short period of time. In terms of our earlier definition of delivery systems, it must be understood that delivery requires the complex integration of numerous different actors engaged in often competing activities and influenced by varying ideological assumptions about how things should be done.

When one looks at the current status quo of development in this country, one sees that development has largely been located within a legacy of apartheid and patronage politics. The net upshot of this is that there is a plethora of delivery institutions with vastly differing, if not contradictory, objectives. If one looks at the delivery institutions which existed previously, one has the Provinces, the House of Delegates, the House of Representatives and the many private sector developers. Also arising from this fragmentation, is generally inconsistent and archaic legislation. One will know that there are different township establishment and labour laws within KwaZulu and Natal (and elsewhere), which means that contractual obligations differ from project to project, depending on whether one

is in KwaZulu or in Natal at this current stage.

There has been no clear development plan and programme to address the needs of the poor in a logical fashion. Work has been done piecemeal, and possibly on the whims and fancies of politicians at the time, and generally management of delivery has been done on a 'management by crisis' basis. What, then, is the impact on implementation and construction? The construction industry has operated within a survival mode in recent times, and this is not necessarily linked to economic factors. It is acknowledged globally that the construction industry is a cyclical one, but in this country the peaks and troughs of the construction industry have been pronounced as a result of deep politicisation of development, and in real terms, there has been no growth. There has also been the 'us and them' syndrome developing, which has not been developmental in any way and finally, planning horizons have been particularly short (restricted opportunity for meaningful forward planning).

Research indicates that existing capacity in the construction industry will soon be overstretched, since it only requires a 20-30 percent increase in current output before key personnel reach their operational limits (Merrifield, 1994). In order for the country to increase the scale of delivery therefore, new capacity has to be created. While there is no doubt that this new capacity can be created (especially from within the previously dis-advantaged communities) if sufficient resources are devoted to the task, we believe that such capacity building will take time and will lead to delays, which could seriously conflict with the political targets referred to above.

In the analysis of supply-side constraints, a number of levels of individual organisational learning may be identified. Depending on the scale of operation, it could take anywhere from two and ten years to train and develop the number of personnel required to perform the range of construction and development tasks necessary for housing delivery. Furthermore, since current proposals anticipate increasing the involvement of firms from disadvantaged communities, it is necessary to account for the learning process associated with developing a new business sector.

In addition to the development of firms and the industry, one must account for the organisational learning of other role-players. Both the state (as a regulatory and financing agency) and the recipient communities have considerable influence over the delivery process. State regulatory and financing agencies are undergoing considerable restructuring as provincial and metropolitan governments are consolidated and central powers are handed down, and it is likely that this restructuring could take three to five years before state agencies consolidate.

The history of the implementation of the Black Communities Development Act (1984) and the Less Formal Townships Development Act (1991) has shown that

it can take state officials up to four years before they are willing to act timeously on new legislation. Therefore, if there are changes in the regulatory framework (which is likely), one can anticipate even greater delays from the state sector.

Beyond the state, are the recipient communities and civil society. Since the election, there is no reason to expect that communities will be less political than before, especially if, as can be expected, the RDP promises are not met timeously. Experience over the past four years indicates that the current involvement of communities in the low-income housing delivery process may be extremely volatile, and that housing delivery agencies should not expect social compacts, negotiated at the beginning of the project, to remain effective through its duration.

Evidence from Natal site and service projects also shows that almost half these projects experienced delays of between one and two years (or more) as communities re-organised themselves and/or re-negotiated their social compacts. Experience from Natal and other areas also indicates that existing civil society structures (political organisations, civics, trade unions) are not able to maintain exclusive sanction over their areas, and as a result, carefully negotiated social compacts (some of which took up to two and three years to establish) have proved unworkable.

In considering construction growth therefore, it is necessary to anticipate delivery delays due to the volatility of community involvement. In addition to establishing the compact, companies working in joint ventures with small-scale builders from disadvantaged communities, have indicated that it takes at least two years for them to become operationally efficient within these arrangements. Since all new companies entering this market will need to go through such a learning curve, this two year period should be seen as part of the organisational learning process.

Finally, to touch briefly on the instability in KwaZulu Natal. Obviously this has an impact on infrastructure delivery and the construction industry. Two points must be mentioned - firstly, that the culture of intolerance which prevails is not developmental. Secondly, being optimistic, one can only hope that this intolerance is largely transitional, and that as one makes a full transition to a democratic government, this intolerance will wane to allow meaningful development to take place.

Opportunities

There is a need to recognise that this period of our history is actually one of great opportunity, because time is available to us to critically evaluate past practices in the development field, and to change and amend the practices which are considered unacceptable or unworkable, so that all role players may benefit.

As a starting point, then, it is necessary to flag some over-arching objectives.

Firstly, development must be located within a growing and outward-looking economy. To take this a bit further, what is needed is to increase capital expenditure in the public sector and also to decrease the current expenditure in the public sector. What is meant by this? A large component of our budget has been dedicated to recurrent expenditure, largely in the sanction-busting era where a lot of money was channelled in to doing specifically this. Now this funding needs to be channeled into capital expenditure.

Some may ask, 'How long is RDP spending going to be available?' Certainly, many contractors and other delivery agents are reluctant to commit resources to capacity building unless they are assured that sufficient work will be available in the future. R6.7 billion was allocated in 1992/93 for job-creation programmes, although much of this has yet to be spent. Estimates suggest that within five years one may see an annual expenditure of R10 billion per annum directed to the low-income sector.

Secondly, the bureaucracy which exists needs to be streamlined to make it more efficient. As an example, a whole plethora of housing delivery institutions exist - only one is needed in each region. The current process of institutional amalgamation will need to be accelerated if state agencies are not to become a constraint on housing delivery.

Thirdly, there must be serious thinking and engagement in community-focused development, where the end user's needs and participation are seriously put on the table. Over the past three years and largely through the requirements of the IDT, community participation has become an acceptable element of low-income housing development. One must learn from these experiences and seek ways in which one may deepen the participation and empowerment process. To facilitate the learning process, it is likely that there will be a bias towards smaller projects which will be able to show results more quickly.

It is necessary to recognise that social compacts presume that the community can deliver, but in many instances the community-based partner cannot guarantee the maintenance of the agreements. In such instances, and there will be many, the community-based organisations will need organisational support which is best provided by non-governmental organisations which have developed considerable experience in these areas (it would be unwise to presume that either the state or the private sector could take on this support role). It therefore is necessary to ensure that adequate resources are made available to the NGO's and CBO's in order that they may continue to perform their developmental functions.

Fourthly, it is also necessary to build partnerships and share the same vision. In the past one had the 'us and them' syndrome, resulting largely from a lack of understanding of the different role players. There is a need to move away from

this and to work together as a team. Currently a number of far-sighted formal contractors are working in partnership with small-scale contractors from disadvantaged communities. These joint ventures should be encouraged as they provide a means of transferring skills between the formal and informal sector. However they will only continue to work as long as both parties treat each other as full and equal partners.

Fifthly, it is also very important to generate sustainable jobs, and one needs to be quite clear as to what one means by sustainable jobs. 'Sustainable jobs' does not mean emergency relief work, and that needs to be put on the table right up front. In order to create sustainable jobs, a training establishment is needed which will transfer and upgrade skills on an on-going basis. To be effective, it is best that training be done within the delivery process rather than at some distant training institution, therefore current training organisations are going to have to learn how to bring their training to the areas where work takes place.

Sixthly, it is necessary to recognise that different actors bring different resources to the delivery process. There is need for a partnership between state, private sector and non-governmental and community-based organisations. The state best performs the financial and regulatory functions, the private sector is best at ensuring the business efficiency of delivery, while the NGO's and CBO's have most skill in community participation and empowerment. The delivery process must accommodate all these different actors.

Community Participation in Public Works Projects

It is quite clear that public sector focus would be in the provision of basic needs, and when one talks about basic needs one is talking about water, sanitation, access and housing. If one looks at where these public sector projects are going to be located, they are going to be located where people live or where people would like to live. The bottom line is, therefore, that one is going to be dealing with communities either residing in the area or with communities identified to reside in the area.

It must be clearly understood that settlement patterns are linked to survival strategies of poor people, and that development in the urban periphery has not generally related to survival strategies of poor people; hence, developing settlements of that nature are going to stand largely barren, for example, the Illovo's of this world. The message here is that whoever envisages being involved in the public works programme would have to engage with people. There is going to be limited scope for purely technical delivery processes.

A few issues relating to community participation must be highlighted. It must be realised that community participation is not merely a tool to ensure effectiveness and efficiency of product delivery, but it also is a means to empower and

enable communities to take control of activities in their lives which they perceive to be important. This is best shown by Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (Gounden, 1993). Arnstein's ladder basically looks at the different degrees of participation which start from no participation through to manipulation, tokenism, partnerships and citizen control.

Now when one talks about manipulation, one means that someone outside decides and tells people what they are going to get. When one talks about tokenism, one recalls the classic example of a community hall which had been designed by architects who, when asked 'did you consult with people in terms of their needs?', responded 'Yes we did, we asked them to choose the colour of the roof for the building'. If one looks at the impact of this, as one progresses up the ladder of participation, one moves from effectiveness and efficiency through to sustainability and empowerment.

It is also necessary to flag two important areas which are of concern for there is a misconception which exists within the construction industry which needs to be cleared.

Firstly, community participation does not mean patronising warlords, nor does it mean enriching local power blocks.

Secondly, there has been a concern reflected by the construction industry that participation is time consuming. International experience shows that community participation is not time consuming if managed properly. If decisions are made bottom up, and the management of the decision-making is made top down, then one does not necessarily have to compromise product delivery time. The problems surrounding community participation specifically hinge upon where one is located in this current time.

There are specific problems in that there exists a mistrust between the contractor and the end user, as contractors are perceived to be agents of the state, hence the tension. There also is confusion about the roles of the funder, the client and the end user in that the client and the end user are often in tension in this environment, and it is likely that this gap would close when one shifts to democracy where the client, who is possibly your local authority, would then represent the end user on a more meaningful basis.

Formatting of Public Works Projects

If one looks at the formatting of future public works programmes in this country, one realises that there are certain key areas on which one needs to focus.

One will examine the restructuring of contract documentation, and this will focus on labour-based methodology. It is acknowledged that premiums will be paid as part of the learning process, and this is reflected in the current accreditation programme via the Framework Agreement. In changing the contract

documentation, one may expect a strong focus on labour-based methodology which will take the Framework Agreement still further. Contractors will have to accept that skills transfer will be part of contract, and that in delivering goods they need to do it in a developmental manner.

Also to be seen will be structured participatory elements located within a contract document, which will go beyond product delivery to include human resource development such as skills transfer. It is important to note that this would need to be located within a broader regional programme in order to ensure that problems relating to absorption of skills after the product has been delivered are not acute.

There is also going to be a need to review the tender process and possibly to enhance end user participation within the tender process, at least during transition. Another important point is that adjudication would need to go beyond technical and financial assessment and also would need to look and focus on tenderer's human resource development programme. As painful as this may seem, within this country the construction industry is largely conservative. Although that occurs globally, it must be understood that the problem is more acute in this country. When one looks at the construction industry at this juncture of our history, it is largely white and male dominated, and one needs to constructively look at ways in which one could harness the potential of all the human resources in this country.

Institutional restructuring to ensure greater public sector responsibility must be examined. One may map out two possible positions which are emerging in terms of where the construction industry is located.

One of the more positive positions is that contractors are now engaging change creatively and are actually getting their hands dirty and 'paying their school fees' and developing a wealth of expertise in terms of realising their role in society as nation builders rather than product deliverers.

On the other hand, there is also a small school of thought within the construction industry which maintains that the status quo shall be preserved via tokenism and patronage, and that the world will change around them. This latter position is quite dangerous, because that is not going to happen, and at the end of the day, contractors will be measured by what they deliver and not by what they said they could deliver.

Conclusion

Several exciting opportunities exist for the construction industry in South Africa's transition to democracy and beyond. Contractors and other development workers should see themselves as part of a team of nation builders, as opposed to merely product deliverers. This calls for contractors to go beyond their

traditional role and to act as educators and trainers. Adequate latent capacity and goodwill within the construction sector exists to make this paradigm shift. There is no better time to demonstrate this than the present.

But at the same time, as South Africa warmly contemplates all these new opportunities, she needs to realise that there is only one chance, and if the RDP fails, it fails, not just for the current government or for the disadvantaged communities who will continue to be without basic facilities, but it fails for everyone. If the RDP fails, there will be no winners. It is unlikely that anyone else will be able to mobilise the disadvantaged communities into a positive developmental programme which will work to alleviate the worst aspects of inequality and deprivation experienced in this country.

In parts of the East Rand, in the Western Cape, and in Natal, one sees the origins of a civil war developing, and without the rapid and comprehensive implementation of RDP type projects which will empower local people to take control of their own lives, one can expect the control of these communities to fall into the hands of warlords, drug barons and the local Mafioso.

Notwithstanding the inconveniences and risks associated with community participation and empowerment, the private and public sector agencies traditionally involved in construction and development need to realise that there is no other way towards ensuring a better life for all in this country. To stand aloof, or worse still to actively oppose the RDP, is likely to play into the hands of those who have nothing to gain from development. It will be only through the active involvement of local communities in their own upgrading and development, that one can expect to see peace and prosperity coming to these areas.

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