

LEARNING NOTE

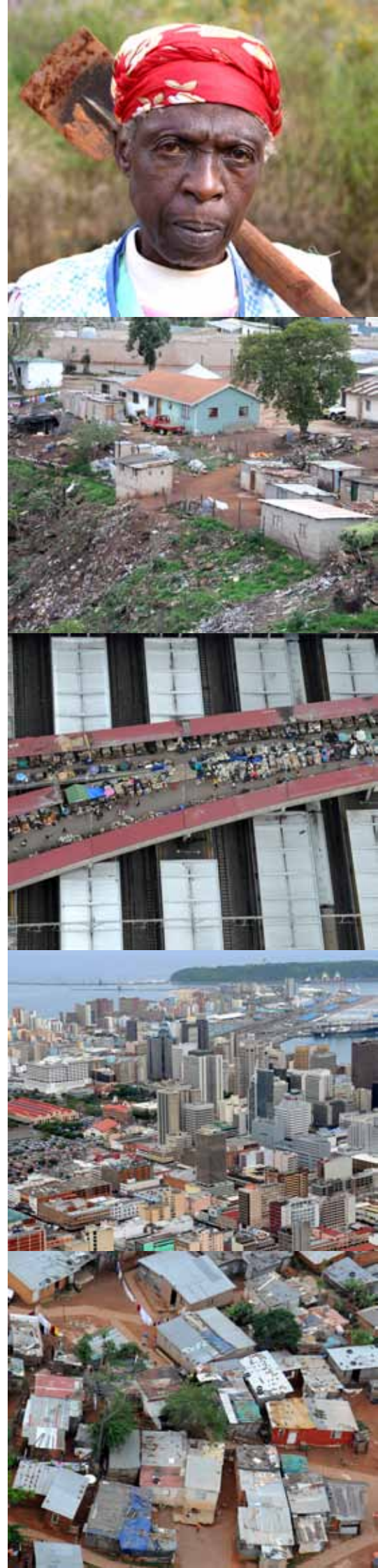
Improving the Quality of Life
and Sustainability
in Informal and
Unplanned Settlements

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Overview

The eThekweni Municipality's Imagine Durban and Municipal Institute of Learning (MILE), together with Vancouver-based Sustainable Cities International, hosted a Peer Exchange from the 21-24 February 2011 in Durban, South Africa. Peer Exchanges have been one of the key elements of Sustainable Cities International's work in Africa with the cities of Dakar, Dar es Salaam and Durban.

The theme of the Peer Exchange focused on "Improving the quality of life and sustainability in informal and unplanned settlements" and it brought together local government practitioners who are grappling with challenges posed by informal and unplanned settlements. The three main areas which were addressed during the Exchange included Urban Design and Planning, Sustainable Urban Livelihoods and Waste Management.

As Jane McRae, CEO of Sustainable Cities International, mentioned in her welcoming address, the objective of the Peer Exchange sessions is practitioner to practitioner information exchange. The sessions were conducted using a "roundtable" method, whereby practitioners involved in local governments and civil society shared best practices and learned from each other's experiences.

Each day focused on a particular theme while always keeping the overall focus of the sessions, that of informality, in mind. The sessions were held near informal settlements located in the eThekweni municipal area, allowing delegates to encounter and observe first-hand examples of settlements in the municipality. While participation in the Peer Exchange sessions are usually limited to the member cities of the Sustainable Cities International Africa Network (Dakar, Dar es Salaam and Durban), on this occasion delegates from other cities were invited to attend in an effort to enhance the learning experience. This exchange played host to delegates from Dakar, Dar es Salaam, Durban as well as Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Porto Alegre. For the first time, the conference included representatives from non-governmental organisations. A diverse array of learning tools were employed, including site visits, learning circles, discussions and presentations, in order to ensure variety in the sessions and to enrich the learning experience.

Structure and purpose of this learning note

The Sustainable Cities International Network prides itself in providing a dynamic platform for member cities to engage in a dialogue and share the successes and challenges of their sustainable initiatives. The purpose of this Learning Note is to capture some



of the key learnings from the presentations and discussions. All the presentations from the Peer Exchange will be available on the MILE website (www.mile.org.za) and therefore this document will not discuss the content of the presentations in detail, but the overall lessons and conclusions. This Learning Note is broken up into sections according to the corresponding themes. Each day was structured around a guiding question and presenting delegates were asked to reflect and inform on their experiences on the subject of the day. Key learnings from each of the four days will be identified and elaborated.

The overall objectives of the Exchange included:

1. To engage in a dialogue on the challenges, successes and lessons learned by each participating city on the themes of urban design and planning, sustaining urban livelihoods and waste management. Each subject was examined from the perspective of informal and unplanned settlements.
2. To identify approaches for local government practitioners to implement strategies with the objective of improving the quality of life for informal dwellers.
3. To provide networking opportunities for delegates and to encourage an ongoing dialogue that will equip delegates with the tools they need to serve their communities to the best of their abilities.

Please keep in mind that this is a working document and we therefore welcome your comments and suggestions in an effort to optimize the learning benefits from the conference.

Focus of the 2011 Durban Peer Exchange

High rates of rural-urban migration worldwide have created increasing pressure on cities and the services that they offer. Because of this there has been an increase in the occurrence of slums and unplanned settlements. There is an urgent need to have a better understanding of the dynamics in informal and unplanned settlements and, as local government practitioners, it is crucial that we provide leadership in developing methods to address the challenges associated with these settlements. The theme of February's Peer Exchange, "Improving the Quality of Life and Sustainability in Informal and Unplanned Settlements," indicates that the three SCI Africa cities of Dakar, Dar es Salaam and Durban are committed to developing strategies to help improve the quality of life of citizens living in informal settlements. The starting point was to focus on three themes: Planning, Sustainable Livelihoods and Waste Management.



Critical commentary/ reflections

Transforming high density, unplanned settlements into high quality, liveable and sustainable places clearly cannot be achieved overnight. When considering the context of structural and historical underdevelopment and colonisation in Sub-Saharan Africa, and indeed in the global South, redressing these imbalances requires great effort, resources, political will and the mobilisation of many stakeholders. Whilst this is accepted, planning practitioners in local government have over the last decade or so been making valiant attempts in each of the participating cities attending the Learning Exchange to make a difference in improving the quality of the lives of citizens that they serve. At the heart of the exchange however, was the issue of whether these planning practitioners were really being successful. It is this serious question that this commentary deals with.

There can be no question that planners from the participating cities have embarked on many well-intentioned upgrading projects. From the exchange however, what became clear is that despite these interventions, planning is not necessarily having the desired impact and leading to the outcomes of improved quality of life. From the Durban experience for example, it was found that in certain cases, planning approval processes itself is responsible for unreasonable delays for housing projects. From the site visits conducted too, there was a sense that there is still a long way to go in creating total living environments.

Structural Changes

During the deliberations it was agreed too that there are some fundamental structural and policy changes that have to be addressed. It was agreed that improving urban design of informal settlements was easy. Addressing spatial configurations where the majority of the urban poor are housed far away from centres of employment was a far more vexing challenge. Working within national policy frameworks over which planners have little control was also raised as an important consideration. South African planners participating in the exchange, were challenged by their out of town colleagues who asked the legitimate question around why government was investing in providing housing for citizens? Should not the focus rather be on providing the infrastructure and redirecting those resources to create jobs? With increased incomes, citizens could make their own investment into housing. Are we improving housing or improving lives? This was an interesting debate which was good food for thought.



Empowering Local Government Practitioners

Another critical reflection was on local government practitioners own abilities and capacities to effect change. The self-confession of a Business Manager who admitted to the limitation of having managers with no business experience to advise small businesses really struck a chord with the participants. The speaker's honesty and frankness (which was a common characteristic of the entire exchange) prompted others to reflect on local governments limitations in this regard.

Creating Enabling Environments for others to Act

Moving beyond paying lip-service to partnerships, to actually letting NGOs take full responsibility for drive projects came through loud and clear when local NGO SAFINA told their story of the Mikocheni project. This again raised the issue of the role of local government practitioners, and whether we are poised to truly engage with NGOs.

Rekindling the Passion

Finally, the issue of passion, commitment and drive came to the fore during the Porto Alegre presentation. Despite the limitations of language, the Brazilian experience reminded African colleagues of the importance of passion and inspiration. It showed how ordinary people could take control of their lives, and how local government could respond.

In summary then, the exchange certainly achieved its outcomes; it engaged practitioners around content, opened up avenues for rethinking old ideas, re-inspired planners and helped forge new linkages and relationships. In the next session, detailed lessons learned will be unpacked under each of the respective themes.

Urban design and planning of informal and unplanned settlements

Key Question: To what extent can we as urban planners improve the quality of life of those living in informal and unplanned settlements?

The Durban Experience: Durban is experiencing high rates of rural-urban migration and people are settling in informal areas so that they can be close to sources of employment. In fact, Durban has the highest number of informal settlements in South Africa and the



number of people is increasing daily. People are living in vulnerable conditions in order to be close to the city centre. Land is scarce in Durban but more formal houses need to be built to accommodate the influx of people. Housing subsidies are provided to anyone earning under R3500 per month and a basic house is provided. There is a high backlog of houses that need to be built and the number is always increasing. Because of cultural reasons the houses built are free-standing and seldom multi-storied. Durban has been affected by the legacy of planning programs during the Apartheid era that forced the poorest and most vulnerable members of the population into settlements far away from the central business district. Poorly structured, inaccessible and expensive public transportation resulted in the township settlements becoming isolated from economic opportunities in the city centre. As a result, after the end of Apartheid there was an exodus of people from the surrounding township areas into the city in a relatively short period of time.

The current planning process is extremely slow and is felt by the community to be blocking their access to decent housing. New housing developments are spreading throughout the sprawling city, often in areas that are far away from facilities and economic opportunities.

The Dar es Salaam Experience: Like Durban, Dar es Salaam is experiencing high rates of rural-urban migration (Dar es Salaam receives about 150,000 immigrants annually, equivalent to a rural district). Population growth rates in Dar es Salaam are higher than anywhere else in Tanzania as Dar es Salaam is the economic hub of the region. Residents have constructed their own houses in unplanned areas, and continue to subdivide and sell plots in peri-urban areas with no infrastructure such as roads, sewer, water and public institutions such as schools and markets. A City Wide Action Plan to Upgrade Unplanned and Un-serviced Settlements was prepared together with relevant stakeholders in the city. The approach taken by the city was to upgrade the infrastructure and survey and title plots in the unplanned areas. The Community Infrastructure Upgrading Programme (CIUP) facilitated by UN-HABITAT, the Tanzanian government and the Dar es Salaam local authorities, upgraded roads and footpaths, implemented a drainage system and installed street lights, public toilets, water kiosks and solid waste containers. Unlike in Durban, the community was required to pay a certain amount for these resources and they were not provided as part of a packaged strategy with newly constructed houses. Community participatory planning instigated and managed by SAFINA, a CBO in Dar es Salaam, has ensured that people in their area of operation are consulted and involved throughout development processes.

The Dakar Experience: In similar fashion to Durban and Dar es Salaam, there is a high rate of people moving from the rural areas into the urban areas with unsuitable infrastructure to support



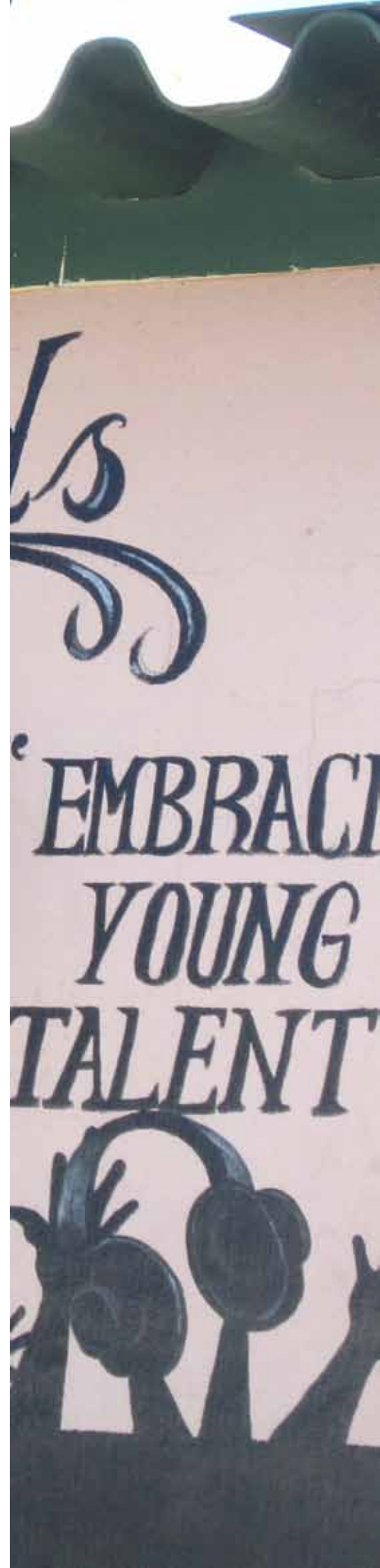
the influx of people. The occupation of dwellings is not regulated and urban planning has not been coordinated with the needs of the citizens due to the unknown numbers of people entering the city. This has led to the foundation “Droit à la Ville or Right to the City”, a partnership between the state, the municipality and other organisations to coordinate land restructuring in the unplanned settlements. Informal dwellers have been provided with land to build their own houses. Roads have been developed and this has attracted business into the unplanned areas and has made it possible for waste to be collected. A rain water sanitation system has also been developed and climate change has been taken into account. Some houses had to be removed to make way for the road system. Vacant land within the same urban zone was chosen for the relocation of these citizens. The democratically elected government approved the plan and therefore the public have accepted the project.

Key Lessons Learned:

1. Municipalities cannot provide houses independently but must think about the economic and social infrastructure that needs to accompany these houses in order for communities to be self sustaining. A **HOLISTIC** approach must therefore be adopted. Whilst the houses built in KwaMashu in Durban (site visited) looked of good quality, a lack of social and economic infrastructure was evident. Suitable infrastructure such as schools, shops and other social and public spaces must be included in the planning phase.
2. Planning for a **COMMUNITY** should be envisaged. As local practitioners we have to look beyond the provision of houses and look to develop sustainable informal communities where people want to live.
3. Free **HANDOUTS** don't always create a sense of ownership and pride. In Durban when an upgrade or development occurred in an informal area houses and the infrastructure such as sewerage, electricity and water were provided free of charge. In Dar es Salaam only infrastructure was provided in their example of upgrading an area. In addition residents were asked to pay a portion of the costs to receive these services. This debate is worth continuing.
4. The **CULTURAL CONTEXT** must be taken into account when planning a housing development. In Durban multi-storey houses are not generally accepted by the African community as certain cultural rituals require private land to conduct them appropriately. At the same time suitable land for housing is scarce, therefore planners and housing developers need to be **INNOVATIVE** and think about how these challenges can be solved.



5. The LENGTH of time that planning processes take often creates anxiety among the community. Processes need to be speeded up to ensure that basic services for the poor are provided.
6. Proper CONSULTATION with the community must take place when planning housing developments and infrastructure upgrading. Local authorities must make sure that the needs of the residents are taken into account and that those residents are fully aware of the plans for upgrading or development. In the Dar es Salaam example, communities were required to pay a set amount for the provision of infrastructure, but they were successfully engaged and informed about the use of the payment. As Jane McRae stated “a truly liveable city is one that is designed around the NEEDS of the people”. To improve the quality of life of the people in informal/unplanned settlements we need to establish what the needs of the people are and the best way to do this is through public consultation. The Porto Alegre relocation example highlights the importance of finding out the needs of the community and partnering with organisations that assist in providing resources to the community.
7. Access to ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY was identified as critical for improving the livelihoods of informal and unplanned settlement dwellers. The question of “how do we bring economic opportunities closer to where people are located to enhance their quality of life?” was raised. In Dar es Salaam and Dakar the poorest people are located closest to the city, but in Durban, because of apartheid planning many of the poor are located far out from the city and seem to be “forgotten” and marginalized.
8. SUSTAINABILITY and SUSTAINABLE PLANNING need to be incorporated when developments are planned. Planned settlements in areas that do not have an adequate employment market nearby results in residents being required to commute far distances every day. This demonstrates a lack of consideration for environmental sustainability in the planning process.
9. Relocating informal and unplanned settlement dwellers from either a vulnerable environment or because of an in-situ or infrastructure upgrade is often problematic. It is preferred that the residents are placed close to their initial dwellings, but this is often not feasible. In Dakar a road upgrade resulted in relocations, but the displaced people were relocated in the same area.



10. Are we really improving the quality of life in informal/unplanned settlements? As one delegate stated “unplanned settlements still look unplanned after upgrading” and another commented that the area of KwaMashu looked like somewhere that you would want to escape from. The delegates were **CHALLENGED** to ask themselves this question and think about what contributes to a quality living environment in an informal and unplanned area.

Sustaining urban livelihoods

Key Question: As local government, to what extent are we actively creating entrepreneurial opportunities for informal settlement dwellers?

The Durban Experience: Large businesses make up only 0.7% of the total number of firms in South Africa. Small, medium and micro enterprises (SMME's) and the informal sector employ a large number of people in Durban and contribute to the greater economy. Starting a small business is risky and entrepreneurs face many challenges including access to finance and business skills. The eThekweni Municipality, through its Business Support and Markets Unit, provides infrastructure and capacity training for people in informal areas to trade and enhance their entrepreneurship skills. The Municipality runs 18 informal markets where the space is provided for informal traders to sell their products. The container park, hive and incubator development programmes provide the opportunity for informal settlement residents to trade in the areas where they reside. The traders are offered venue infrastructure, are provided with capacity training and are nurtured for a set period. The entrepreneurs go through a transitional period, as they move from their initial location to the new one. After the incubator period, they are left to their own devices. The Municipality has managed to form a partnership with the local university and a bank in order to assist with skills training and finance.

The Dar es Salaam Experience: The Dar es Salaam team is promoting entrepreneurship through the field of urban agriculture. Not much capital is required to start up a food garden and the food harvested contributes to a healthier population and assists in alleviating poverty. 90% of green leafy vegetables are produced in the city and a network of buyers and sellers has developed. The urban agriculture areas differ to those in the rural area by the type of space that they provide. The urban farms serve as social public spaces where people meet and gather. The farmers are able to determine what is in demand as they are close to the city centre and have easy access to the markets. At a national level urban agriculture is supported, but at a local city level it is illegal to have land to grow food. Sustainable Cities is working closely with the local municipality to legitimise urban agriculture in Dar es Salaam so that the benefits



of this agriculture are realised. Sustainable Cities in Dar es Salaam has engaged with the community and local officials and a strategy has been developed that suggests zones for urban agriculture in Dar es Salaam. By working at a strategic high level on policy issues, and at the same time working closely with the community, the Sustainable Cities Team in Dar es Salaam is achieving its goals.

The Dakar Experience: The promotion of micro-gardening in schools in Dakar has been a successful method to teach children about business skills training them to be entrepreneurs in the future and to nurture the environment. 159 schools and 9000 women in Dakar have been included in the micro-gardening project that receives overseas funding. Gardens are established to educate the children on gardening, business skills and the gardens also provide them with an after-school activity. A small piece of land is only required and the project is easy to implement. Dakar is part of a region that used to be known as “Cape Verde” which means “green peninsula”. Cape Verde used to be a green city, but today it has become a concrete jungle. The local government is proposing to implement green hubs and work on imbuing environmental sustainability back into the public consciousness. It is hoped that the project will be rolled out in the future to other areas in the city.

Key Lessons Learned:

1. **LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION.** It is vitally important that municipalities consult traders to identify their needs in terms of location. When traders are not consulted, a situation can arise where a new location is inaccessible to the potential customers or the location does not drive enough foot traffic. The Cato Manor example in Durban showed excellent physical infrastructure for informal/unplanned settlement dwellers to trade, but the market for customers had been neglected. Some of the hives stood empty when the delegates visited them and perhaps this is due to the location of the hives.
2. Providing infrastructure for small business entrepreneurs in unplanned/informal areas is not enough. **SKILLS DEVELOPMENT** for entrepreneurs needs to be explored in more depth and entrepreneurs continually nurtured so that businesses succeed.
3. **KNOWING THE MARKET** is a vital component of a successful business and it was felt that more direction should be given to the entrepreneurs in terms of what there is a demand for in the area.
4. The importance of forming **PARTNERSHIPS** with outside organisations was emphasised. The eThekweni Business



Support Unit has been able to get support from the local University and banks to assist with the development of entrepreneurs. The Municipality itself cannot do this work alone.

5. The Dar es Salaam urban agriculture project too demonstrated the importance of partnerships. The Dar es Salaam SCI team was successful in getting different stakeholders to ENGAGE and CONNECT with each other in order to develop joint solutions. Dar es Salaam was extremely successful in balancing their twin roles of working with the community on grassroots issues and with the local council at a broader policy level. Working at both the micro community and the macro municipal levels allowed the SCI Dar es Salaam Team to work from a holistic perspective and ultimately guaranteed their success.
6. When planning an economic area or hub the community must be engaged to determine the needs of the community and the suitability of the economic hub in the area. PARTICIPATORY PLANNING is advised so that hubs do not stand empty due to a supply or demand side mismatch.
7. URBAN AGRICULTURE is a topic that is receiving much attention in the third world and is a way to provide food security to people living in informal and unplanned settlements and to ensure that residents are healthy. As the Dakar and Durban example demonstrates, schools are a good place to start gardening projects. Children learn valuable gardening and business skills and internalize an appreciation for the environment early in their lives.
8. As local government practitioners we need to think in a STRATEGIC manner and provide an ENABLING environment for entrepreneurs in the informal economy, not only through the provision of handouts.

Waste management

Key Questions: How can waste in informal and unplanned areas be managed by communities themselves? How can we provide opportunities for people in informal settlements to make a decent living from waste collection and recycling?

The Durban Example: Waste management in informal and unplanned areas is a challenge in Durban. Narrow roads make the collection of waste difficult and many people in informal areas do not know how to dispose of their waste properly. The Durban Cleansing and Solid Waste (DSW) Department contracts waste collection out



to local contractors in informal settlement areas. These contractors employ local labour and their progress, standards and employee treatment are monitored by inspectors from DSW. Disposal bags are handed out to residents and rubbish is collected once a week from central points in the settlement. Education campaigns ensure that residents put out their rubbish on the correct day and illegal dumping is minimised. The residents are also educated on the value of waste management and minimisation and many residents are involved in informal recycling which they can earn a wage from by selling this waste to buy-back centres. The informal residents do not pay for their waste to be collected but waste is collected from these areas and is subsidised from the wealthier areas. DSW does not currently work with NGOs but works with individual contractors from local areas.

The Inner City Cardboard Recycling project is an Imagine Durban demonstration project and is an example of how informal waste collectors can be assisted in the city to earn a living and be recognised as important people in our economy and environment. Asiye eTafuleni, a non-profit organisation whose name translates to “let’s come to the table”, organises the project, which aims to “test methods of improving the livelihoods of informal cardboard recyclers and better manage the cardboard collection process within the public realm.” (Asiye eTafuleni Website, 7/3/2011).

The Dar es Salaam Example: Unplanned areas in Dar es Salaam have previously been forgotten about with regards to waste management. In 2010 the region of Mikocheni was chosen as a “learning site” for community driven projects. This provided the opportunity for the development of community driven public-private partnerships to collect waste in the unplanned region of Mikocheni. Sustainable Cities International spearheaded the endeavour by providing the seed funds for SAFINA Community Empowerment and Development Trust to start the community managed solid waste collection. There is an opportunity for people in Mikocheni to earn a living from recycling and other green initiatives that have yet to be explored.

The Dakar Example: 25% of the national population of Senegal are located in the city of Dakar. High rates of rural-urban migration have resulted in congestion in the city where services and infrastructure cannot support this population. Growth is also limited by the sea and thus people are living in highly congested spaces. The population generates a large amount of waste that needs to be managed. At present waste management is led by three partners – CADAQ/ CAR (the clustering of municipalities in Dakar), The Ministry of Environment; and APROSEN (a national agency for cleaning and education) which falls under the ministry of environment but has financial and administrative autonomy. Compact trucks collect waste from unplanned areas and containers are provided in the community where trucks collect from. The two main limits to the management of waste in informal areas in Dakar are the narrow



roads that provide limited access for trucks to access household waste and the irregular collection of waste. This leads to risk of disease and contamination of the low water table. In the unplanned areas waste is informally collected by using horses and cart, or it is either burnt or buried. Alternative strategies are needed to ensure that waste management is improved in informal areas.

The composting demonstration project aims to decrease the volume of waste, to increase the production of compost, to provide opportunity for micro gardening, to use green spaces in the city for urban agriculture, create jobs, and to create awareness about environmental protection.

Key Lessons Learned:

1. **ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL.** Waste collection can be done differently in unplanned and informal settlements. Two models of waste collection emerged from the Peer Exchange. In Durban the Municipality takes responsibility for the contractors and waste collection. In Dar es Salaam a similar structure exists but when the system breaks down, as was the case in the Mikocheni example provided, the municipality must be flexible. Collaborating with NGO's like SCI, and community groups like SAFINA can provide innovative solutions such as supporting the community themselves to be responsible for waste collection and sourcing contractors. As local government practitioners we need to be mindful of **CONTEXT**.
2. **ACCESS** to houses in unplanned and informal settlements is difficult and thus measures have to be put in place that make sure that waste is collected and that it is simple for the informal dwellers to dispose of their waste. In Cato Crest in Durban central places are assigned where residents can dispose of their waste. The waste is then collected once a week. It is essential that the residents are **EDUCATED** about this service and that they know what day their rubbish is collected.
3. Waste should be looked at as an **ASSET** not a problem. The informal collection of **RECYCLING** materials provides economic opportunities for people living in informal/unplanned settlements.
4. The role of municipalities in creating the opportunity for informal dwellers to produce products from waste was highlighted. **ADDING VALUE** to materials and selling them would result in a higher amount earned. E.g. glass blowing, making furniture from recycled plastic etc.



5. The waste collection and waste disposal to landfills is a high cost service. Reduction in waste through re-cycling and re-use of waste materials can result in significant **COST SAVING** with regards to transport costs as well as lengthening landfill life.
6. When contracting business out, money must be set aside from the beginning to **MONITOR** the contractors and ensure that the people they employ are treated fairly.
7. When implementing new formalised waste management and minimisation programs the existing informal recyclers/waste collectors need to be **INCLUDED** and seen as a **VALUABLE** part of the recycling strategy. Here we can learn from the examples in Latin America and India.
8. Communities can do far more than we give them credit for and often the **POTENTIAL** of the community is underestimated.
9. **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT** is vitally important when implementing new waste management and minimisation practices. In Dakar's composting project communities were engaged from the beginning and the project was accepted by the community which resulted in less open air waste dumps, improvement in the quality of air and compost for micro-gardening.
10. Demonstration projects can help to influence policy. In the Dakar example the success of the composting project has resulted in composting being placed in the waste management strategic plan of Dakar.
11. As the value of recyclable waste increases we need to make sure as local practitioners that we **RESPECT** the activities that already exist and enhance the opportunities for informal recyclers to earn a living. It is important to **PARTNER** with community organisations and NGOs.



Conclusion

The Durban Peer Exchange provided the platform for local government practitioners, NGOs and individuals from Dakar, Dar es Salaam and Durban to exchange ideas and experiences in the field of urban design and planning, sustainable urban livelihoods and waste management in informal and unplanned settlements. In addition the exchange benefited from the contributions made by delegates from Porto Alegre, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth.

It is hoped that the conversation will continue between the cities involved in this exchange and that the discussion will be cast wider to many cities around the world grappling with these issues so that good practices can be implemented. The number of people entering our cities, especially in the developing world is not going to end in the near future and it is up to us as local practitioners that people living in informal and unplanned settlements are able to live in quality environments where they can raise their children and earn a decent living. How do we achieve this? What do these environments look like? Are there any examples we can learn from? Can we achieve truly sustainable cities? Let's keep the conversation going!

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