

Community Mobilisation Through Reblocking in Flamingo Crescent



An Interactive Qualifying Project submitted to the faculty of Worcester Polytechnic Institute in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Science.

Abstract

The goal of our project was to assist in the informal settlement upgrading process in Flamingo Crescent, in any way possible, by supporting the existing stakeholders. To realize this goal, we developed a working relationship with our partners to show that we could collaborate and learn together. Through this collaboration, our partnership established a sustainable playground and garden initiative, created a new and improved shack layout, and set in motion the development of a crèche in Flamingo. We also prepared a resource binder for the community and a record of the project for future reblocking. Seeing the efforts made by the community and our other partners, it is clear that the upgrading of Flamingo Crescent will continue in our absence.

This project summary is part of an ongoing research programme by students and faculty of the WPI Cape Town Project Centre to explore and develop with local partners options for sustainable community development in South Africa.

For our full project report: <http://wp.wpi.edu/capetown/homepage/projects/p2013community-mobilisation-through-reblocking-in-flamingo-crescent/>

For more about the Cape Town Project Centre: <http://wp.wpi.edu/capetown/>

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Background

Apartheid in South Africa resulted in the establishment of separated areas for the black and colored natives, removed from the urban core of white cities. This removal led many to relocate into informal dwellings near cities in order to find work. Due to the residents' lack of economic means and government services, in addition to the settlement's illegality, communities are often comprised of improvised shacks built with scrap materials. Due to overpopulation, informal settlements are becoming increasingly cramped for space. These communities thus stand to benefit considerably from an upgrading process called reblocking, which is a non-government organization (NGO) and government-supported collaboration to create sustainable communities in the existing informal settlements and provide increased access to clean water, sanitation facilities, safety and other basic human essentials (Ikhayalami, 2013).

We began our work in Cape Town in the informal settlement of 7de Laan in



Strandfontein. The project there began with profiling to identify assets and gauging the community's interest in participating in a reblocking process. When we arrived, we were welcomed and the residents were willing to engage, but when asked what contributions they would make many residents suggested they would prefer formal houses or that the city and NGOs should do the reblocking project for them. At the community meeting that was the deciding moment for their upgrading opportunity, only six residents attended, meaning that the fifty-one percent vote to continue the project could not be approved. Without community involvement, the city withdrew its reblocking proposal and our project was relocated to Flamingo Crescent.

Flamingo Crescent is an informal settlement in Lansdowne, established 12 years ago by the City, which has over time become overcrowded and unsafe. Two years ago the City of Cape Town Informal Settlement Department, in conjunction with Informal Settlement Network (ISN) and Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORG), began the process of upgrading Flamingo Crescent.

Opportunity Statement & Partnership

Informal settlements, such as Flamingo Crescent, present a variety of concerns stemming from their informality and layout, such as limited access by emergency services. Most settlements also

have limited access to water, electricity, and sanitation, and want for community spaces like gardens, parks, or a crèche. During the process of upgrading it is common for 'hard' infrastructure opportunities – sewage, water lines, and roads – to be emphasized over social development goals.

Since there is no set methodology for this new procedure of reblocking, projects have often become long and drawn out. Flamingo Crescent in particular had been involved in reblocking for more than two years, working through the initial stages of the ISN/CORG/SDI reblocking strategy (Shack Dwellers International) to conduct a community enumeration and envision a new spatial layout that makes space for social initiatives important to Flamingo's residents. The other key member of the partnership was the City of Cape Town Department of Informal Settlements, who was providing improved infrastructural services and some housing support. While these partners had already made significant progress, there was still not a buildable layout or adequate contribution towards the 20% share of the cost required from the community (City's plan to overhaul, 2013).

Mission Statement and Objectives

This project was intended to aid the City of Cape Town in continuing the reblock-



ing efforts in the Flamingo Crescent informal settlement through collaboration with the community and other stakeholders to implement sustainable initiatives. To achieve this goal, we identified seven key objectives:

1. **Relate:** Develop effective working relationships with community leaders, sponsors, and other partners
2. **Respect:** Recognize the community's voice at all points in the process in order to maintain our role in support of partners
3. **Integrate:** Gather and document stakeholders' insights and opinions to inform project decisions
4. **Design:** Develop a formal spatial layout that takes into account infrastructural and social needs as well as the community members' preferences
5. **Reinvest:** Engage and reinvest the community in the upgrading process through collaboration in sustainable social initiatives
6. **Network:** Assist the community in networking with the government, NGOs, and other potential stakeholders
7. **Implement:** Secure funding and community involvement in the development of a crèche in the public space made available through reblocking

8. **Record and Reflect:** Provide an example for future reblocking efforts by recording insights gained during the course of the project

Methodology

Project Philosophy

To accomplish the project's objectives we used the approach of Shared Action Learning (SAL), a technique for establishing relationships among partners for sustainable community development (Jiusto, 2013). This practice involves the reiterative cycle of connecting, planning, acting, observing, and reporting. Implementing this process throughout our project involved profiling, networking, community empowerment, and expanding the idea of reblocking.

Roadmap to Executive Summary

Due to the complicated nature of our project, it is difficult to organize it into a document such as this. While our objectives were distinct, they were completed through a number of overlapping initiatives. In order to organize this document we will describe these in a roughly chronological order, even though many were completed simultaneously. Each initiative is also con-



nected to the objective that most closely matches it despite the fact that some could connect to multiple objectives.

Process: Narrative and Outcomes

Relate: Bridging the Cultural Divide

As we worked to establish trust with our co-researchers we did activities to get to know each other better. One activity was for everyone involved in the project

to design a nametag, personalized with color, stickers, drawings, and words to describe their personalities. Once everyone was done, each person described their nametag and how it described them as a person. People were remarkably candid, and were able to connect on a deeper level than we anticipated. This activity was the true foundation of bridging the gap between different parties. We also profiled each community leader and city worker in a quick exercise where we were able to ask a series of questions about the person and their goals for Flamingo Crescent.

Relate

Respect

Integrate

Design

Reinvest

Network

Implement

Document

Through this activity, we learned about our partners' pasts along with their perspectives on the project. We also shared information about ourselves, to help build a personal relationship. Outside of profiling, we also connected with community members simply through conversation. By bridging this divide, we were able to gain trust in each other, and open the door for the community to take the lead.

Respect: Community Takes the Lead

Early in the project, the community's Project Steering Committee (PSC) made it clear they were willing to provide any resources needed to further the reblocking. After two years of preliminary organization, the community was excited to confirm the beginning of the



reblocking process. Our role was clear – rather than leading, we worked alongside the community to support their goals.

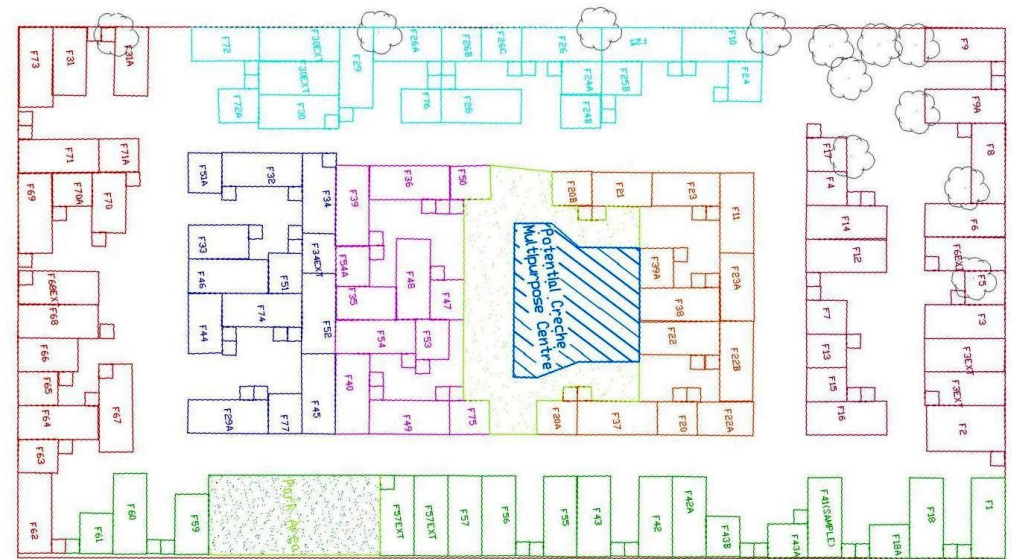
Integrate: Beyond the Top Structure

From our first discussions with community members, we were impressed by their drive to take reblocking further than its definition implies: the reconfiguring of an informal settlement by grouping shacks, or 'top structures', to optimize space usage, promote well-being, and enhance service delivery (Re-blocking of Informal Settlements Draft Policy, 2013). Their focus was on creating a park and crèche, so that their children could be educated and kept out of the nearby street. The community worked with CORC to create an initial shack layout, which served as a basis for the modifications made during this project. These alterations, made in collaboration with CORC and the community, were done to enable the pursuit of Flamingo's social priorities.

Design: Interactive Layout

The layout process began with residents placing cardboard indicators where they wanted shacks and toilets to be after the reblocking. This exercise was headed by CORC, specifically Sizwe Mxobo, to ensure that the community and NGO were on the same page. This layout was presented for approval to the city's contractors in charge of sewage, water lines, and road installation.

Although the original layout allowed



limited space for social initiatives, we worked with the community to optimize the social layout and create space for a potential multipurpose center and park.

This did change some of the infrastructure routes throughout the settlement, requiring reevaluation by the contractors.

The NGOs supported us in working with the community, and also wanted us to create a savings map to use for reference during the construction process. A savings map was needed because the construction timeline must be based around the payment status of each improved shack. This process was conducted with Elizabeth, a community leader who had been keeping track of each person's contribution and outstanding balance. Each household is

responsible for 20% of their shack's cost, with the rest paid for by CORC and ISN. The savings information was not entirely accurate, so we worked with Elizabeth to update and reorganize it for CORC's purposes. This savings information was then combined with resident's ID numbers and added to the layout.

Because of the long process of contractor approval, the layout is still under discussion. Regardless, it is still a more finalized document that solidifies aspects that are normally accepted as ever-changing, and the process of working closely with the community ensured that it would allow for future social initiatives.

Reinvest: An Entirely Fun Park

During our first week in the settlement, the community expressed concern about their children playing in the street rather than a safe environment. The idea of building a park within the settlement was raised, to provide a safe place for children to play under parental supervision. However, with the reblocking process underway, building a permanent park was out of the question. In collaboration with the WPI Park Redevelopment Team (WPI Maitland Garden Village) and community leaders, we de-

veloped a set of low-cost, mobile play structures to build out of mostly wood and tyres.

Recognizing the need for these resources, community members used their local connections to acquire the materials. With tools provided by the WPI Project Centre and ISN, the building process quickly began as a cooperative effort among partners. Before long, half a dozen park elements had been constructed.

While this was not a permanent solution, it served as an opportunity for the entire community to work together and

make a visible difference. At the end of the day, children had a safe place to play, and community members quickly expressed interest in improving their settlement even further.

Network: New Doors Open in Flamingo

In order for the park initiative to be sustainable, it was necessary to find an outside support system. The same was true for the other needs inside the settlement. With the community we were able to connect with groups to gather plans to create a more permanent park, and work to establish relationships that could facilitate the establishment of a crèche in Flamingo Crescent.

Implement: Crèche Poised to Become a Reality

With the help of the WPI ECDC team (WPI ECDC), we were able to set up a meeting with Eric Atmore, the director of the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD). He agreed to provide funding for a crèche, as well as to help in the designing and building process. With the help of other partners, community members will have the opportunity to take courses to become a crèche teacher. Additionally, books and art supplies are planned to be donated to the community upon completion of the project. It has been apparent from the start that creating a crèche was a primary concern of the community. With

their continued financial contribution or sweat equity, the community will be able to fulfill the contribution requirement of ISN and CORC's reblocking standard and make the crèche a reality.



Process: Record and Reflect

Record: Resource Manual

As the project started to wind down, the most relevant resources were compiled into a single binder. This document was created to ensure that the community and other parties would be



able to continue the work begun together. The binder includes contact numbers of resources, guides on how to apply for identification documents and government benefits, and holds a copy of the most current enumeration and savings information. This binder will assist community members in maintaining the work that has been done and pursuing new opportunities in the future.

Record: Upgrading Anthology

To serve as an example to future reblocking endeavors, our team created an online upgrading anthology that documents our research and experiences throughout this project. The website consists of examples, resources, and advice from the lessons we learned through practice. The purpose of this anthology is to simplify the complicated reblocking process by defining and explaining the methods and events of our project. We hope that recording our process will give insight into methods for improving reblocking and aid in the success of future efforts.

Reflect: Scenes

Throughout our work we also kept track of significant events that held importance to the project. These were written in the form of scenes with detailed accounts of what occurred, how it impacted our work, and the effect we felt



it had on the parties involved. Each scene was written by a member of the team who was present and edited by other team members to ensure that our perspective on the situation was comprehensively recorded. The scenes were compiled into acts, which unified scenes around an overarching theme. These documents helped us to organize our thoughts as work progressed, and serve as reference to important occurrences.

Conclusion

This project resulted in many outcomes as a result of our stated goal to support



the upgrading of Flamingo Crescent in any way possible. We participated in an inspiring partnership that worked towards the common goal of upgrading and revitalising the community of Flamingo Crescent. While ISN and CORC worked with the community to create a usable layout, savings, and social improvements, the City pledged to bring an unprecedented level of access to public services. It was only because of the engagement the community brought that this process could be realized.

This partnership led to the completion

of several key tasks. A layout was created that maximized public space, a park was built out of recycled materials, a network of resources was created to support the community's needs, and the establishment of a crèche was definitively set in motion. Our project team was also able to record the insights gained from working within this partnership, creating a website that will act as an example for future reblocking projects.

This project served to further the establishment of a reblocking procedure done in collaboration between the City and NGO partners. Flamingo Crescent represents only the third time that reblocking has been pursued in this manner, meaning that every step taken in this process has the potential to impact the future of this new methodology. Our hope is that not only will Flamingo Crescent find success in its upgrade, but also that our work will have some small significance in the future of informal settlement reblocking.



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Acknowledgements

Our team would like to thank our partners for their many contributions to this project. It would not have been possible without their help.

Flamingo Crescent Community and its Leaders: Auntie Marie, Elizabeth, Lenrika, and Mark

The City of Cape Town Informal Settlements Department: Johan Gerber, Estralita Kwalo, Reginald O'Brien, Anneline Plaaitsies, Leon Poleman, and Levona Powell

CORC: Sizwe Mxobo

ISN: Melanie Manuel and Terrence Johnson

Cape Town students: Carin and Mekyle

Our Advisors: Scott Jiusto and Lorraine Higgins

WPI Cape Town Project Centre students specifically the following teams: Maitland Garden Village Park Redevelopment and Early Childhood Development Connection

