

The Peoples' Housing Process: Its meaning and Relevance

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Abstract

Currently the Peoples Housing Process is one of the programmes for housing delivery in South Africa. The PHP directorate is provided with serviced sites on which is constructed a little house costing about R18000. This includes the foundation and superstructure. The actual infrastructure costs have not been determined. The community helps build the house with the help of a PHP support centre. The support centre is a community-based organization that receives technical support from the Housing Department PHP Directorate and from the Local Council. A PHP beneficiary provides some sweat equity in the building of the house. Beneficiaries qualify if they earn R1500 or less, are cohabiting and have some dependents. The main problem with this programme is that it still replicates apartheid style housing. The idea behind this kind of housing is that the government provides a core house that the beneficiary will improve over time. Anecdotal evidence indicates that what actually happens is that additions are made ad hoc using similar materials and construction to that used in informal settlements. On the basis of current observations, it can be claimed that this kind of housing programme actually promotes further slum development. It also builds on the illusion that land is cheap, and that other settlement issues such as community facilities and infrastructure are less important than the physical house.

In a partnership with the Gauteng Housing Department, Peoples' Housing Process Directorate the T.U.T. School of Social Architecture has established an internship programme that aims to expose future architectural professionals to the low income housing environment. The School, through interned students engaging with beneficiaries, aims at establishing welfare associations through the vehicle of the PHP. This is to give the poor a platform to voice their needs and enable participation by the community in decisions that effect their environment. This is in recognition of the need to establish

a bottom up approach to designing sustainable and integrated settlements. This mechanism for community participation and administration is seen by us to foster citizenship. Given the political history of SA there is an urgent need to foster an attitude where members of society take ownership and become citizens. The interned students are exposed to the poor as a client, experience that is very lacking in the architectural profession.

In our paper we would like to share our experiences in trying to address integrated settlement issues within the PHP framework.

1 Introduction

South Africa has reached the cross roads as regards the decision to recognise the current urban sprawl in the making. The impact of this sprawl is covertly and progressively bankrupting the country in terms of the costs the country is currently incurring. The plans or the good intentions espoused in the ANC's manifesto prior to the 1994 elections have found little expression in the implementation programme. The manifesto recognised the need to build close to work and transport. However the current expansion of the urban sprawl/blight continues unabated thus flying in the face of that intention. This urban expansion is carried through self-help and site and service delivery systems under the auspices of PHP. However this system of housing delivery has long seen service in South Africa as evidenced by the Native Affairs Report of 1934 wherein

“...Stands (34x50ft) where African families could build their own shelters were also made available for rent that included sanitary and water charges” (Parnell and Hart 1999)

We however concede that the provision of housing in the current era has to be seen but also understood in the context of the election manifesto of the 1994 election:

A roof over one's head and reasonable living conditions are a basic right for every human being.

- *We will focus on the 7 million squatters and the homeless, and the upgrading of townships.*
- *We will upgrade hostels to meet the needs of the residents as part of a program to eliminate the apartheid migrant labour system.*
- *The ANC will work with building societies and other banks and financial institutions to ensure that people have the loans and means to build their own houses.*
- *Housing plans will take into account the need for people to stay close to where they work and the need to build efficient transport systems and to provide recreational and other basic facilities.*

We have calculated that, within five years, the new government can:

- *Build one million homes*
- *Provide running water and flush toilets to over a million families*
- *Electrify 2.5 million rural and urban homes*

(ANC manifesto 1994)

One approach to the delivery of the housing infrastructure required has been the People's Housing Process (PHP). Whilst having a number of flaws, this approach offers some immediate redress for the previously disadvantaged groups, but also replicates some failings of the past. It offers a short term solution and this paper indicates how the PHP can be improved through linking professionals and communities. Nevertheless this paper proposes that a longer term solution also needs to be sought.

2 Part I: Analysis of the People's Housing Process (PHP)

Currently the Peoples Housing Process is one of the government's programmes for housing delivery in South Africa. The PHP directorate is provided with serviced sites approximately 11 x 20 m in size. On these sites is constructed a little house costing – cost of land and infrastructure excluded - about R18 000 expressed as a subsidy. The above cost is inclusive of the foundation and superstructure. The actual infrastructure costs for this – “serviced site” - type of development has not been declared. The community –as individuals receiving the subsidy - “helps” build the house through the PHP support centre. The support centre is located within the community and receives technical support from the PHP Directorate in the Provincial Housing Department in conjunction with the Local Council.

The programme was conceived with an expectation that the PHP beneficiary would provide some sweat equity in the building of the house. It is understood that for one to qualify as a beneficiary, one needs to earn R1500 or less, the other criterion is that he/she is cohabiting and has some dependents. As part of the application process it would be expected that beneficiary would provide proof of either unemployment or receiving earnings below the stipulated category extending to no income at all. The beneficiary therefore would be required to provide proof before the subsidy is approved and a site allocated.

The idea behind this category of housing is that the government provides a core house. It is anticipated that the beneficiary will find employment or financial means and ultimately improve the core house over a period of time. The building is then placed on a given or allocated serviced site.

Our criticism is that the development of that site is such that:

- Additions cannot be conveniently made.
- The building is too low for additions to be built under the existing eaves and
- The additions are made ad-hoc using material from the adjacent informal settlement.
- Being in the income group that makes a family a beneficiary reduces the possibility of any extra money being acquired to improve the house in a qualitative way.
- The one plot one house model promotes sprawl and makes it impossible to achieve densities that enable a community to function effectively given all the communal infrastructure and services needed. “Studies in Latin America have shown that densities of 300-600 people per hectare (about 60 –120 Dwelling units per hectare) have been found to have the cheapest per capita infrastructure costs and can produce an acceptable and desirable residential environment.”¹
- Additionally the problem with this programme's implementation is that it still replicates apartheid style housing provision
- That the site and service solution for housing provision promotes future slums

¹ Warren Smit for the Urban Sector Network- Design Options and Delivery Models for Hostels Redevelopment. Urban Sector Network, April 2003.

The People's Housing Process was conceived to address the intentions of the manifesto with a view, – one assumes, – to redressing apartheid's and previous governments' ills. The incumbent ANC revolutionary movement, soon to be the first democratically elected governing party in South Africa, was appealing to its constituents. The previous governments' social planning was structured to offer service to the various racial groups by fragmenting and demarcating areas for housing on the basis of race. Historically, previous governments – pre 1994 - had “efficiently” employed the influx control system of the 50's to control demand for housing with particular reference to areas previously designated as white,

“the state was able to tighten segregationist legislation, rigidly, enforce influx control and restrict the construction of new housing for African people living in so called “white” urban areas’ (Parnell and Hart 1999)

This system on the surface successfully masked the crisis in provision. The crisis in housing was progressively revealed by the “lifting” of restrictions in the late eighties to nineties designed to quell the ungovernable conditions at that time. Unfortunately in addressing the crisis, the incumbent government has unconsciously or consciously extended both separate development and apartheid's fragmentation policy in planning and housing provision.

“The policy of establishing segregated locations for indigenous people on the periphery towns set in place the first de facto self-help housing initiatives for the urban poor.”(Parnell and Hart 1999)

This refers to “housing” at the turn of the 20th century post the discovery of gold and marked by the beginning of the creation of locations for urban blacks, like Soweto. The situation remains unresolved in that demand for housing still primarily comes from the group that was disenfranchised. As a consequence therefore it results in the “inevitability” of PHP implementation being concentrated in the areas previously designated as black by the apartheid government. Our government has responded by rolling out the seemingly endless row upon row of brick boxes to meet the demand and housing targets in as short a time as possible.

Apartheid's planning was a double-edged sword. On the one hand it created a rather cumbersome structure for managing resources. On the other hand it visited enormous blight as regards creating the basis for the current urban morphology. The dislocation particularly affected distant locations earmarked for the “urban” black population settlement. Current authority has however extended that planning and housing provision consequently laying the basis for future slums. The history of the service sites in the creation of areas like Pimville of the 20's demonstrated the folly of the system and we seem not to heed the experience. The unsanitary conditions at the time were the reason the area was declared a slum.

It is our view that programmes delivering housing should take cognisance of the fact that most beneficiaries are not going to be able to improve their livelihood in the future given current economic trends. Data from the ‘Health Systems trust’ as well as ‘The Regional Economic Focus- Global Insight’ suggest that

“Unemployment rate shows an increase over the period 1996- 2003 in all nine provinces and that ... trends indicate that, although the middle income categories have remained fairly constant, the poor have become poorer and the rich, richer.” (NHFC Policy and Research Unit)

We will return to the implementation of housing delivery programmes at the end of this paper and give some suggestions as to what we see as an effective programme of housing delivery in the conclusion at the end of our paper.

3 Part II: Engaging with housing delivery through The PHP – Tshwane University of Technology School of Social Architecture’s partnership with the Gauteng, PHP Directorate

In the last four years The School of Social Architecture has been building a partnership with Gauteng Department of Housing, Peoples Housing Process Directorate through The National Department, Capacity Building.

In the new dispensation various cities in South Africa have forged relationships with other cities on the globe. For example Tshwane’s sister city is The Hague in The Netherlands, while Johannesburg’s sister city is Havana in Cuba.² About five years ago it was apparent that these sister relationships existed only in name, and that for the relationship to be effective some structured programmes would need to be implemented. A South African delegation from Johannesburg travelled to Havana, Cuba to explore possibilities of an exchange programme between the two cities. The end result of this initiative was more than a hundred architects, engineers, urbanists and planners being stationed in Gauteng (and some other parts of SA) from Cuba over a period of three years. This initiative was based on successful self-help programmes in Cuba. This initiative caused some consternation in the local architectural profession who raised concerns that the housing challenges could be met through the existing expertise of housing professionals in South Africa.

It could be equally argued that the local architects were unable to see a way of turning a profit in the low income housing sector (Initially large construction companies made money by churning out large tracts of replicated units). The Cubans, on the other hand, live in a communist country without the pressures for profit that the local professionals have. The Peoples Housing Process was to emerge as the main programme for housing delivery during the Cuban’s stay.

In line with its social aspirations The School of Social Architecture was able to establish an internship partnership with the Gauteng PHP Directorate. The Cubans mentored the first group of student interns in 2004. In this time the city of Johannesburg decided to terminate the partnership with Havana due to various logistical details. Local project managers in the first half of 2005 mentored the second group of interns. The third group has just started with the PHP Directorate. For The School of Social Architecture the thrust behind the internship programme is to expose the architecture student to the conditions of almost 90% of the built environment. The School seeks to break away from an approach which places architecture as an elitist profession serving only a small section of the population. It aspires to overcome the dislocation of the profession from the community which it serves, evidenced by the total ignorance of architecture and what architects do among the majority of the population. Exposing students at an early stage to the problems faced by this very large sector of the construction industry has the advantages of sensitising the future professional thus enabling the profession to play a constructive role in the future. This would also address the concerns expressed by some, that came with the importation of Cuban expertise as a result of lack of local interest in local problems.

² The Hague has provided expertise to Tshwane in the setting up of a Social Housing Company that has been responsible for the conversion of the Elof Building into low-income units.

Duties for the interns at the PHP Directorate involve site visits to the various areas in Gauteng where the programme is active. Each area has its own support centre where members of the public can access information on the PHP programme and the process involved in becoming a beneficiary (this was defined above). It is at the support centre that the student engages with the beneficiary helping with the choice of house plan and the placement of the building, on the 11m x 20m erf. Members of the community permanently staff the support centres. The students help to transfer skills to the community such as those required to get a beneficiary's house approved by the local council and built by local semi skilled teams. For example members of the support centre may be shown how to prepare site plans for approval, how to assess the cost of changes to a typical plan or coordinate the delivery of building materials to the construction site.

The main flaws in the PHP programme have already been identified, the most important being its promotion of the one plot one house solution through the subsidy being linked to a serviced site. Be that as it may, the PHP can still be a valuable vehicle as a welfare organization that empowers beneficiaries to participate in the design of their surroundings. Kamau and Omura's (2004) study on Self-build housing in Nairobi, Kenya have brought out the value of welfare associations. The role of the welfare association in land use, development control, infrastructure development, financing and social interaction is emphasized in their study. Fernando Murillo (2001) is clear about the improbability of success in public-private partnerships if welfare associations are not present. He writes:

"In Argentina, the absence of consolidated social contingency networks has resulted in a housing programme that emphasizes financial viability over social and environmental concerns. Negative social and environmental impacts arise from this neglect"(Murillo 2001).

It is proposed that citizenship being encouraged to the extent that the beneficiary is able to participate in decisions affecting his/her home. There is currently very little information on the needs and preferences of beneficiaries. The support centres can become community participation centres filling a crucial gap in a community empowering process. The PHP should be seen as a vehicle that facilitates welfare association recognizing the need for support structures for government policies and programmes to be implemented equitably and effectively. Implementation of ideas, programmes or policies requires social management.

4 Conclusions

Thus whilst addressing short term housing needs, self build, or community build is essentially problematic. The "one off" subsidy is invested in a structure built by unskilled and semiskilled labour that is inappropriate given the need to build sustainable communities. The design and quality that can be achieved with the help of welfare associations in association with professional design and construction teams far outstrips what can be achieved by the beneficiaries and semi skilled construction teams. The idea that beneficiaries will gradually improve their homes over time seems unlikely given the fact that almost all beneficiaries in the programme are unemployed or earn R1500 or less per month. Given the gradual rise of unemployment in the country the serviced site/ self-build programmes actually create slums and the subsidy spent in these programmes is merely dead capital.

It is our view that a comprehensive welfare system is the only way to guarantee that the poor and unemployed do not remain marginalized and have the opportunity to become part of the broader economic cycle. Without a system that catches those that cannot pay rent, the whole social housing sector is doomed to fail in the longer term. The contradictory situation of not being able to retrieve rent arrears and not being able to evict has not changed. Having a welfare system that provides the rent to

the housing company in case of unemployment of a tenant, leaves the system intact and enables a level of social management. In many parts of the world the poor are marginalized and slums are treated as urban blight that will in time be eradicated. Yet pretending it isn't there cannot solve a problem. A case in point is the situation in many of the large cities in Brazil. The poor communities in the *Favelas* have no legal status or a means to voice their needs and concerns (Pedro Fiori Arantes, 2004). In South Africa we see more and more walls and electric fences separating the rich from the perceived threats of the poor. To marginalize the poor by placing them on the periphery of the city far away from economic opportunity is not addressing the problem but exacerbating it. This is just evidence of an attitude that betrays a lack of citizenship and a failure to be inclusive that was so evident in the apartheid mindset.

The minister has mentioned in her last speech that new developments will have to provide 20% low income housing as part of the GFA (Gross Floor Area) of a development to achieve a particular planning gain. We assume that the low cost component is integrated into the overall design. We can imagine that one member of the public may pay a minimal rent by virtue of being in a rent control zone of the development, yet have a very similar living space to other inhabitants paying much more. This shift in policy as it shows a break from the attitude prevalent in apartheid thinking and should be applauded. It can be argued that housing policies to date have been set up in an apartheid mindset. The biggest obstacle to building sustainable communities has been this mental barrier or mindset. We can see the planning gain model as an effective means of housing delivery for low-income groups as it opens the possibility of integrated settlement where one group is not disadvantaged at the expense of another. Property developers often see the integration of low income housing into a development as detrimental. However, there are many cities in the world where rich and poor live in very close proximity to each other. As stated earlier, if my apartment is rent controlled I may pay only a small percentage of the rent that my neighbours might be paying. If low-income housing is integrated into all developments then we are guaranteed that the product delivered to a beneficiary is of a high quality in an aesthetic or design point of view as well as the quality of the workmanship, given that professional teams are involved in the design, construction and management of the development. This kind of programme will deliver housing stock that is of a consistent quality and hence tradable in a secondary market.

The current housing backlog is largely a result of the accelerated urbanization after the dismantling of influx controls to the cities by the Apartheid government. If Nepad is effective, in the future influx to South Africa from other countries will lesson and a levelling out of the rate of urbanization can be expected. Gauteng it seems already has a negative urbanization rate (Data Source: Regional Economic Focus). This means that we envisage the possibility of shrinking the current housing backlog.

Finally there it is essential to put structures in place that facilitate welfare associations such that the poor may have a voice and that all members of society participate in the decisions that shape the environment. Certain programmes like the PHP can facilitate the formation of these associations at the same time as providing a level of integration of various income groups through internship programmes. This has the effect of drawing the profession into areas where, until recently, they have played almost no role.

It is recognised that this paper sets out a broad rationale for the involvement of the trainee professionals in the PHP which is as yet untested. It is recognised that this engagement of professionals needs to be tested through empirical research as the approach taken at TUT is embedded. It is also recognised that the weaknesses in PHP developments which do not involve professionals also needs to be demonstrated through empirical research. The paper also hints that the PHP approach, focussing as it does at the level of the single plot, does not address longer-term issues relating to the

economic sustainability of the community and thus that longer-term solutions to housing need to be found.

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