

Roundtable on meaningful engagement

'Jumping the queue', waiting lists and other myths: Perceptions and practice around housing demand and allocation in South Africa

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On 13 and 18 June 2014, the Socio-Economic Rights Project of the Community Law Centre, University of the Western Cape, held roundtable discussions in Cape Town and Johannesburg on housing demand and allocation in South Africa.

The approximately 30 participants included members of civil-society organisations, policy makers, property developers, members of various communities and officials from key government departments, for e.g. the Departments of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, The Presidency: Outcomes Monitoring and Evaluation, and the Evaluation and Research Unit. Participants also included the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), the Housing Development Agency, Statistics South Africa, TopRoot Properties, Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute, FinMark Trust, Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

The discussions focused on recommendations in a research report by the Community Law Centre and the Socio Economic Rights Institute entitled *'Jumping the queue', waiting lists and other myths: Perceptions and practice around housing demand and allocation in South Africa*. It focuses on the Housing Demand Database system and housing allocation in Gauteng and the Western Cape. They were selected because of their volume of housing demands and because both provinces have their own housing databases in place.

During the open discussion, community members also shared their experiences and frustrations in attempting to access housing. Five main recommendations were made.

First, an integrated approach to housing allocation is needed. Having the provincial departments, ward councillors, accredited municipalities, community liaison officers and other government agents all involved in housing raises the danger of creating parallel systems that will further compound housing problems and create further confusion.

Second, Batho Pele (people first) principles should be fundamental elements in the delivery of housing as a public service, to ensure that the housing delivery process is not manipulated and that all relevant information is freely available. Third, research on housing allocation should include a gender dimension and examination of the role of gender in housing resources and allocation. Fourth, there is urgent need to assess the Housing Demand and Allocation Policy, the inception of which took place five years ago. Fifth, the participants acknowledged a need for continuous meaning-

ful community engagement to translate housing policy into practice.

Kelly Stone from the SAHRC made a presentation on the importance of the right to information in the realisation of the right to access housing. She demonstrated how community members can use the provisions of the Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act (PIE), to obtain useful information on housing allocations.

A presentation by Hannah Dawson and Daniel McLaren from the Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute was based on a study that monitors the right to housing in South Africa. It focused on the following three aspects of their study: government policies in relation to (constitutional) socio-economic obligations; the amounts of money spent on the realisation of the right (resource availability, allocation, and spending); and whether the money allocated and spent resulted in positive outcomes (progressive improvement). So far the study has unveiled that, despite optimal spending of the Human Settlements Development Grant by the provinces, there is massive under-delivery on houses as certain critical housing targets have not been met. While government generally meets the set target per year, the target is not in accordance with demand; only about a fifth of the existing demand is covered. Between 2003 and 2012, the number of people living in informal settlements increased by at least a million.

The roundtable ended on a good note, with officials from City of Cape Town who participated in one of the roundtable discussions committed to a follow-up meeting to facilitate meaningful engagement with communities in order to clarify existing housing allocation policies, processes, and systems. This will go a long way in educating the communities and fostering the spirit of transparency.

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Reference

Tissington K, Munshi N, Mirugi-Mukundi G and Durojaye E. 2013. *'Jumping the queue', waiting lists and other myths: Perceptions and practice around housing demand and allocation in South Africa.*