

Houses for members of saving scheme

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02 March 2012

www.joburg.org.za

SCORES of people will now have decent roofs over their heads after a non-governmental organisation, Federation of Urban Poor (Fedup), handed over new houses to delighted beneficiaries in Orange Farm on 1 March.

They came from various informal settlements and other poor communities across the country. In Gauteng, they came from Joburg and neighbouring areas including Slovoville, Poortjie and Katlehong. They were gathered at Stretford Park in Extension 6, where they sang and chanted slogans while waiting for the deputy minister of human settlements, Zoe Kota-Fredericks, to arrive.

Kota-Fredericks officially unveiled and handed over the projects. She was accompanied by the MEC for housing, Humphrey Memezi. "We are encouraged that people take their own initiatives rather than waiting for the government to come to them. Through your savings you were able to build ourselves better houses, much better than the RDP houses that the government provides.

"The government needs this kind of commitment from the community so that we can be able to provide services faster and more efficiently," she said.

Memezi also encouraged Fedup members to stay organised. "Unity is power," he said. "Together we can achieve more as the people of Gauteng and of South Africa."

Decent housing

Fedup, which dates back 20 years, is an organisation made up of low income earners, pensioners and the unemployed. It was started by nine people, each from the nine provinces; they all had a common goal of building decent houses for their families, a far-fetched dream for a black South African in those days.

In the quest to realise their dream, they organised themselves to start a savings scheme with branches in all nine provinces. Membership grew over time as more and more people bought into the idea. They adopted a savings model along the lines of a stokvel, to which members contribute money each month.

The former minister of housing, Joe Slovo, pledged with R10-million to the group through the government's People Housing Process, or PHP. The programme encourages people to initiate and drive housing delivery by empowering them with skills to maximise their housing subsidies to build their own homes.

Slovo died in the interim and the money was handed over by Sankie Mthembu-Mahanyelele, who took over as housing minister. Mthembu-Mahanyelele injected another R4-million into the PHP, according to the national leader of Fedup, Rose Molokoane.

Building of houses started in 1995 in Gauteng; the other provinces followed later. Derek Hanekom,

who was minister of land affairs at the time, also came to their aid by buying land.

Government

When Lindiwe Sisulu became minister of housing, the relationship between Fedup and the government was formalised. She called all the stakeholders on board to sign a memorandum of understanding committing the provinces to pledge money into Fedup branches in all nine provinces.

Gauteng pledged R50-million, which at the time was equal to 1 500 housing subsidies.

Houses built by the organisation are larger than 50m² and are fitted with bathrooms, kitchens and two bedrooms each. They are fully electrified. Finishing includes plastering inside and outside exterior painting. They are also fitted with bigger windows.

The Department of Human Settlements has endorsed the federation and through its PHP it has provided housing subsidies to the federation. There are 30 PHPs countrywide. In Orange Farm, approximately 386 houses were built out of the initiative between 1995 and 1999. There are two Fedup savings schemes in Orange Farm – Thusang and Tswelopele.

Building was stopped when the non-profit organisation, uThsani, which provided subsidies, withdrew following cash flow issues. But work resumed in 2006 when Sisulu invested R285-million in PHP. Since then, another 50 houses have been completed and 30 trenches have been dug in Orange Farm.

Together, Fedup and the Department of Human Settlements formed a structure called the Joint Working Group, through which stakeholders meet monthly to discuss their programmes.

Funds

To date, the organisation has R1,3-million in voluntary savings and R1,8-million from the Urban Poor Development Fund in its coffers and membership has grown to more than 30 000 practical savers. Part of the money is also used to buy land.

Molokoane said that although immense success had been achieved, a lot still had to be done as many people still did not have proper housing. “There majority of our people are still poor and can’t afford proper houses. They are living in appalling conditions in informal settlements. But we are confident that our partnership with the government will grow stronger and will achieve more.

“When we started banks could not loan us money as we were regarded as high-risk customers. But we have never lost hope, we decided to do it on our own and it worked,” she concluded.