## How to upgrade informal settlements: Lessons from Langrug

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Through the support and funding of various stakeholders, one community in the Western Cape has demonstrated that it is possible to improve its surroundings.

"Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you'll feed him for a lifetime," rings the old adage. In the case of the project in Langrug, a settlement near Franschhoek, it's more about fishing together – for the benefit not only of one community, but also of similar settlements in the region.

A partnership between the University of Cape Town (UCT), the Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC), Shack Dwellers International (SDI) and the Stellenbosch Municipality, the project hinges on community involvement and aims to improve living conditions for Langrug's population of 4,088 residents.

"We believe community centred and driven development – in partnership with local municipalities, other non-governmental organisations and stakeholders – is the best approach to upgrade informal settlements," explains Aditya Kumar, CORC technical coordinator and a Langrug project manager.

CORC piloted its unique approach in Langrug, where strong community leadership has emerged. "The Langrug residents have generated their own developmental agenda that has shifted the community mindset from 'free state-subsidised housing' to 'community-led settlement upgrading'," Kumar explains.

Community members conducted extensive research to determine their main concerns and probe for possible solutions, explains community chairperson Trevor Masiy. "We've come up with solutions, and now we're taking them to the [Stellenbosch] municipality," he says.

Some solutions have already been implemented. "They have opened access streets, relocated several families that block access to the settlement, built grey water channels, provided play parks for children, painted ablution facilities and set up health forums to assist with HIV/AIDS counselling," Kumar says.

Masiy and his team of community leaders – who are each involved in portfolios including health, education, security, mapping and block committees – are also proposing a walking tour of the settlement to increase its visibility amongst tourists and other visitors. "We're taking our proposal to the Franschhoek Tourism Bureau and the municipality, and we hope that part of the improvement will also involve better road signage to Langrug," Masiy says. A multipurpose centre has also been mooted, to host youth activities in particular.

A certain amount of funding has been secured for the project, thanks in part to the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed with the Stellenbosch Municipality late last year. "Thanks to this unprecedented agreement, the community now has access to leverage state funds for upgrading projects," Kumar says.

The MoU has also ensured the municipality's alignment with CORC's approach, evident from recent remarks by David Carolissen, the municipality's deputy director of human settlements. "If the government and other partners hope to correct social ills in places such as Langrug, it has to work with these communities instead of "talking down" to them," he is quoted as saying in a recent edition of the UCT's Monday Paper.

UCT's involvement with the Langrug project adds another distinctive dimension – by bringing research and planning rigour to the initiative.

Twenty-six master's students from the UCT's School of Architecture Planning & Geomatics (SAPG), which falls under the Engineering & the Built Environment (EBE) faculty, have been part of the project over a 16-week period as part of a course called Planning Project A. During six formal visits to and a number of informal interactions with the community, the students were required to conduct an in-depth analysis of Langrug and propose "appropriate spatial development frameworks".

Proposals and models have now been submitted, and Dr Tanja Winkler, course convener and a senior lecturer at the SAPG, says that some of these will be entered into the annual international Urban SOS competition for student designs in the fields of urban planning, design, architecture and landscape architecture, environmental restoration and engineering.

UCT's involvement has been a long time in the making. It stemmed from a 2010 MoU signed by SDI and a number of African planning schools, who pledged to teach students to plan with communities as opposed to for them, Professor Vanessa Watson, deputy dean of the EBE faculty, explains in the Monday Paper article.

It is a win-win situation. As a result of the partnership, students have received valuable hands on skills and the Langrug community has been introduced to the geographic information systems and computer-aided design laboratories used by the students. This enables them to understand and map the community and plot their proposed improvement solutions more effectively.

UCT also recently facilitated a basic planning skills course for community members. Masiy attended the course, and says that it opened his eyes to his rights in terms of legislation and the constitution but also to understanding his own community. "It was a good course that set the tone for the work we'll be doing with UCT in the future," he says.

The class of 2013 might be wrapping up their Planning Project A course, but Dr Winkler and her colleague Liana Müller will continue working with the Langrug community. "We'll be

there until the community members tell us to 'hop it'," Dr Winkler says. "It really is very rewarding when the community bring their own plans."

Masiy's dream is for the Langrug community to be skilled enough to help themselves and be self-sufficient. He would also like to see such collaborative projects being undertaken in other settlements in the Stellenbosch Municipality.

"If the poor people come together and speak with one voice, it gives strength to all our communities," he says. "Each and every one of these communities faces the same issues – and we have to see how we can help each other to improve all our lives."