



16. Chris Hani Pilot Project – Taking Human Settlements Policy into Rural Subsidy Practice

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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies key human settlement policy directives leading to the design of a policy-responsive pilot project in Chris Hani District for implementation of the rural housing subsidy.

The shift from subsidised housing, in its simple form of a serviced RDP shelter, to the paradigm of human settlements - which embraces a wide range of rural development, socio-economic and livelihoods concepts - is well established in policy but there is limited practical experience - in rural South Africa.

There are sound reasons for this, including: the all-embracing scope of rural development in contrast to the practical budgetary limits of human settlement initiatives; the overlapping departmental mandates with regard to rural development; the increased complexity of a wider-reaching process than just 'housing'; and the deeply entrenched perceptions and expectations around 'housing' which is a different paradigm from human settlements.

The broader responsibilities of human settlements initiatives are embedded in the Breaking New Ground plan of 2004, and have now found firm footing in the New Housing Code of 2009 and in Eastern Cape Provincial Policy in 2010. Limited attempts at using human-settlement initiatives to catalyse rural development have illuminated some of the challenges.

Three key factors in relation to the implementation process are isolated in the analysis and addressed in the pilot project plan: the Provincial DoHS must take a lead role in cooperative governance in relation to human settlement projects, despite confusing mandate overlap with other departments; an awareness and education campaign must be developed and driven by the implementing team; and finally, a wholly revised facilitation process, based on scenario-painting and iterative feedback to participating communities on subsidy uses and consequences, must be implemented.

The traditionally isolated role of technical specialists in relation to community interactions, particularly that of civil engineers, is challenged and it is argued that policy cannot be effectively implemented unless technical specialists embrace socio-technical interfacing as a core part of their professional brief.

The paper sets out a methodology for the Chris Hani pilot project that embraces rural development through human settlements interventions, within the practical boundaries of the rural housing subsidy and other subsidy instruments that are available.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE - POLICY DIRECTIVES AND HARD LESSONS

From housing to integrated and sustainable human settlements

The National Housing Act (Act 107, 1997) and subsequent policy makes provision for more than just construction of the services and

the top structures (i.e. the house) for urban and rural housing. The Act refers specifically to the establishment and maintenance of sustainable and viable households and communities, and defines housing to include residential structures, water supply, sanitation and household energy. In doing so, the Act specifically acknowledges the need for an integrated approach to housing, albeit without definition as to how this will take effect.

Rural housing interventions that followed were predominantly uniform in their designed output of serviced RDP houses and in that sense failed to meet differing needs of communities. This was recognised during the 10 year review process and was directly addressed in the Breaking New Ground Plan (BNG) (NDoH, 2004) which responded to a wider policy brief and emphasised a move from "product uniformity to demand responsiveness" (NDoH, 2004:22). Among the new funding instruments designed to respond to the national housing challenge, the BNG sets out a rural housing policy framework to address a comprehensive range of rural housing related issues, such as tenure, livelihood strategies and broader socio-cultural issues. Diversity of need was specifically addressed and is the crux of the human settlements approach: *"The dominant production of single houses on single plots in distant locations with initially weak socio-economic infrastructure is inflexible to local dynamics and changes in demand. The new human settlements plan moves away from the current commoditised focus of housing delivery towards more responsive mechanisms which addresses the multi-dimensional needs of sustainable human settlements"* (NDoH, 2004:9).

The shift from houses to human-settlement thinking is in line with international best practice initially set out in the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements (UN-Habitat, 1976) which stated that *"Human settlements mean the totality of the human community, whether city, town or village, the social, material, organisational, spiritual and cultural elements that sustains it."* Enacting rural human settlements strategy in South Africa is well-facilitated by a number of subsidy instruments that provide implementing arms of Government with means to respond to the challenge. Yet practical responses at village level remain difficult to put into effect. Current national and Eastern Cape housing policy of 2010 has re-emphasised the priority for a more diverse response to human settlement challenges, both between communities and within any one community.

The national policy directive to respond to a wider range of rural development needs through human settlements planning and implementation, beyond just serviced housing, is clear. A responsive programme must therefore answer two questions: What are the rural development objectives; and how exactly can rural housing interventions, within the bounds of rural subsidy instruments, move to realise these objectives? Rural development priorities which are wide and all-embracing are set out in the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform Comprehensive Rural Development Programme of 2009 (CRDP). The CRDP includes three key elements:

- Agrarian transformation through economic and agricultural initiatives, appropriate technology and initiatives aiming to increase food security and rural employment.
- Rural development by enabling rural people to take control of their destiny, addressing poverty through use and management of natural resources. This element also includes the major issue of improving social and economic infrastructure.
- Land reform, which is a national priority, entrenched in the

Constitution. The rural land reform programme aims to address: the injustices of land dispossession; inequitable distribution of land ownership; security of tenure; sustainable use of land; and improved land administration systems (DRDLR, 2009).

These CRDP priorities represent the overarching targets to which human settlements interventions can directly contribute, but the CRDP is non-specific in this context. A human settlement initiative at village level can hope to address some but clearly not all of these elements. Thus the CRDP is a reference framework and outlines priorities in relation to human settlement which includes: asset development, employment, skills development, food security and empowerment (understood as increased agency over decisions and outcomes). Outcomes which have priority at local level must be established from local opportunities and preferences, as well as within the overall framework of the CRDP. Given the evident mandate overlap between multiple departments, there is also a need to gain clarity on departmental roles.

Who takes the lead in rural development aspects of human settlement?

The BNG plan states that ‘Settlements that attract housing investments from the State should have school(s), clinics, recreational facilities, running water, adequate sanitation and most importantly they *need to have access to a means to earn a living*’.

In the preamble to the Eastern Cape Human Settlement Policy of 2010, it is noted that this statement has ‘huge policy implications for rural housing’ as the onus is on the human settlements planning team to address not only asset poverty (through supply of a serviced dwelling) but other key elements of poverty including ‘the means to earn a living’ (ECDoHS, 2010:9). The implication is that the DoHS is responsible for a wide range of socio-economic and rural development activities, many of which are beyond their apparent mandate as these activities overlap significantly with other departments.

Two other departments have primary responsibilities in the same arena of rural development: the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, as set out in the CRDP, and the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (who deal with spatial development). In addition, complementary (if secondary) roles are played by the Departments of Agriculture and Forestry, Water and Environmental Affairs, and Social Development. Eglin (2010:7) comments on the negative consequences resulting from mandate overlap that is currently being observed in rural areas. He argues that, in the rural sector, confusion prevails as one department awaits action from the other, effectively resulting in a lack of co-ordinated planning and general hiatus in rural development.

The issue of ‘who does what’ and ‘who funds what’ is exacerbated by a widened mandate in the Department of Human Settlements over the last six years. In the BNG, livelihoods are defined by income, human capital (services and opportunity) and physical assets rather than the more usual five elements (DFID, 1999). The BNG limits departmental responsibilities primarily to the alleviation of asset poverty or ‘housing assets’ (NDoHS, 2004:12).

Yet currently, parallel subsidies such as the Enhanced Peoples Housing Process, the subsidy for the Housing Chapter of the IDP, and The Social and Economic Facilities Programme specifically make provision for responsibilities not adequately undertaken by other organs of State. The subsidy instruments therefore make specific provision

for the rectification of mandate failure by other State organs, and place that responsibility with the DoHS with regard to human settlement projects. The Eastern Cape MEC confirms the ‘*pivotal role of mobilising all sector departments towards the creation of sustainable human settlements*’ (Mabandla, 2010:20-21). For parallel departmental inputs and funding to be effective, the institutions of cooperation have to be practical, cost-efficient and time-efficient and function at a project level. Observation of the few attempts at taking on the human settlements challenge show that this is not easily achieved.

Project experience in Elliotdale showed that the institutional driver was a municipality, whose officials apparently neither understood the meaning of a human settlements approach nor appreciated the essential need for a different facilitation process to achieve outcomes other than RDP houses – which in the end was the main outcome (DBSA, 2008). The apparent contradiction between the broad expectations of the department (set out in policy) and the available funding instruments provided to the department can only be resolved through active co-operative governance at project level – in both the planning and implementation stages.

It is clear from the policy that the responsibility falls squarely on the Department of Human Settlements to effect cooperative governance at project level.

Established patterns and the rut of RDP house construction

Low density settlements on communal land in rural areas pose a challenge to conventional project-driven housing delivery. Land acquisition, utility services and cost-efficient delivery of top structures can best be managed in the context of large projects (ie. uniformity begets efficiency through economy of scale) and these face long pre-planning lead times and slow approval processes (ECDoHS, 2010:7). It follows that initiatives which respond to more diverse needs within a community will have even longer and more complicated consultation processes, and that the definition of training and skills development programmes, or construction procurement processes will have to cover a wider range of outputs (services, structures, fencing, alternative energy, other communal infrastructure). This will add further complexity, cost and time to the already long lead times and slow approval processes.

Few rural housing projects nationally have taken on the challenge and exploited the flexibility that the subsidy instruments provide. In the Elliotdale case (DBSA, 2008) the project aimed to provide the space for diverse solutions that responded to diverse needs, but conventional RDP houses resulted. There were two key factors which were out of the control of the implementing team.

First, the iterative facilitation and consultation process that was planned by the project team was cancelled by district officials who did not appreciate the importance of this element and implemented their own routine ‘housing’ facilitation process. Secondly, high-level political leadership was lacking and cooperation between agencies of the State suffered critically. The Project Steering Committee formed by the District Municipality was later contested by the Tribal Authorities with resultant tensions. The project objective of using the rural subsidy flexibly to meet diverse needs was not realised. The experiences highlight the challenge of engaging with officials, Traditional Authorities and community members who have embedded experience around subsidised housing.

Where the expectation of an RDP house is entrenched, the potential



to use rural subsidies as a catalyst for a broader rural development process is limited, as any other outcome is excluded from the start. The Elliotdale experience showed the risk of not adequately addressing preconceived ideas of what is possible, and also the importance of close cooperation within Government. This highlights the need for a directed education and awareness campaign in relation to human settlements thinking, aimed at all parties engaging in the process – government personnel, service providers and community members alike.

The technical challenges embedded in meaningful consultative planning

The Eastern Cape MEC for Human Settlements recently highlighted the lack of meaningful consultation in the human settlements process. *“There is inadequate participation of our people in housing delivery and the social ‘soft’ aspects in our housing delivery chain have not received the necessary attention they deserve.”* (Mabandla, 2010, 20-21). There are six widely accepted levels of participation (van Veldhuizen, L. 2005, UN-Habitat, 1987, Hogan, 2002 among others), moving from passive involvement, which is led and decided by outsiders, to the other extreme where people plan and decide entirely for themselves. Neither extreme is desirable or practical but a high level of interaction is required to meet the policy directive of responsiveness. It is conceivable that every community member who qualifies for the subsidy could want a different set of benefits (new structure, fence, water tank, road access, existing house renovation, alternative energy system etc.). The costs and implications of being responsive to each individual household are considered to be impractical for implementation. So some form of packaging of options will be necessary.

Arriving at such a set of packages, where people have fully understood the financial, timing and material implications, and have equitably rationalised community level differences as to how the packages should be defined, requires a substantial community facilitation effort. The interaction is necessarily a two-way process centred around new technical content and the social implications of decisions – at individual households and at community level.

It is observable that many engineers and other technical specialists routinely side-step these socio-technical communication challenges, cite their technical boundaries and decline from active involvement in community consultation work (Denison & Manona, 2007). They typically leave interactions to non-technical facilitators with a brief to get ‘buy-in’ or amendments to a desk-drawn plan. This results in a critical loss of information and the technical experts never gain sufficient insight into local conditions to properly inform design assumptions, technology choices, maintenance implications, training or spatial decisions. The refusal of many technical experts to engage outside of their technical comfort zone is well documented, as are the negative impacts of this short-sighted approach to technical and professional responsibilities (Chambers, 1984). This calls for introspection on the part of professionals who hope to apply the rural subsidy to its full human settlements potential.

Similar technical and financial planning challenges were addressed by the Iterative-Consultative Planning Approach (ICON Approach) (Denison & Manona, 2007). The approach is based on community scenario-painting and information feedback from a group of outside technical experts on the consequences of community-conceived plans. The planning team of ‘outside experts’ responds to concepts generated by community members, who are viewed as ‘local experts’.

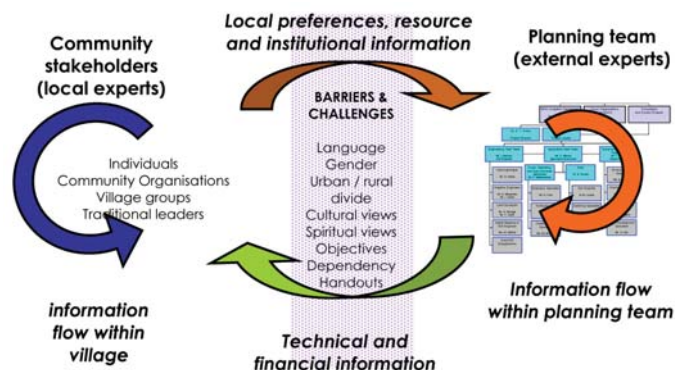


Figure 1: Information Flows in the Iterative-Consultative (ICON) Planning Approach

There is a narrowing down from initial ‘dreams’ to ‘realism’ in a participative process which takes place over a number of meetings, thus allowing people time to consider a large quantity of new information. The approach encourages dialogue around technical detail and how that will be used to contribute to peoples lives.

Implications for the Pilot Project Methodology

There are three key points which emerge from the review of literature and experiences of implementing the rural housing subsidy. Failure on any one of these seems likely to result in a fatal flaw in the project implementation process. These are then important factors to address:

- Political leadership and the driver of cooperative governance between State institutions in relation to the initiative sits squarely with the EC-DoHS. The initiative is a departmental one.
- An education campaign is needed to prompt a shift from the entrenched understanding of housing to the broader concept that human settlements investment can support livelihoods and act as a catalyst for rural development. Paradigm shifts demand creative input to stimulate changes of perception, leading to new understanding and more relevant solutions.
- The consultation methodology must allow for a two-way information flow with active involvement of technical personnel in the consultation interactions. This will ensure that the community members fully understand the different technical, financial and time implications of various options that can be funded. It also ensures that the planning team understands local complexity and can package the options pragmatically from a project management, training and contract implementation point of view.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF THE RURAL HOUSING PACKAGE

Diverse Use of the Rural Housing Quantum

The pilot project is based on an assumption that members of rural communities who are eligible for the subsidy do in fact have diverse needs which will be met by the subsidy. These expected variations, as prioritised by householders themselves, will be aligned with the Comprehensive Rural Development Plan objectives. The Rural Housing Subsidy makes provision for a number of applications including those below. Illustrative photos are shown in Figure 2:

- RDP House with services. It is possible that after the whole participative planning process, people simply want a typical serviced top structure, with the usual investment in roadworks, tertiary water supply, drainage

and sanitation. This would be a conventional outcome and if this meets the needs of the community remains a valuable one.

- Part investment in Existing House Improvement. The subsidy could be split to achieve some improvement in people's existing houses; to add on a room, or to rehabilitate an existing traditional structure. This would leave the balance of the quantum to be invested in another component.
- Part or whole investment in Food Garden development. Improved food security could be achieved through investment in guttering, water storage tanks and garden fencing. Yard connections could also be investigated should an adequate bulk water source be available.
- Part or whole investment in alternative energy systems. The subsidy makes provision for alternative energy to the household, including solar water heating, solar lighting (batteries and panels), biogas systems and wind energy. There is widespread experience of solar battery systems in rural areas, but other options would require more technical knowledge transfer. Biogas has greater potential application in agricultural communities (ideally two large livestock units per household) with potential to provide cooking gas and high grade fertilizer. Caution is required where toilets are connected to digestors. Gravel reedbeds and knowledge transfer around judicious use of bio-fertilisers would be essential elements to address.
- No house investment and a higher level of water and sanitation services. This outcome might arise where there are established traditional structures which are sufficiently well-built, so that people prioritise a higher level of service. This might include yard connections, low-volume flush toilets, and water tanks over new housing structures.

- Part or complete investment in social structures. There are many combinations of how the subsidy can be used, an example of which is a social structure of high communal priority to which the available rural subsidy is allocated in part or in whole (for example community halls, clinic renovations, livestock water supply, playgrounds, crèches, public lighting and vegetation clearing).
- Investment in new structures built using alternative building technologies. Adobe and stabilised earth houses have better thermal properties and are substantially more comfortable than RDP houses due to their thermal mass and wall thickness. Le Roux (2003) identifies this as a major deficiency in RDP houses. There is increasing precedent of a return to stabilised earth and adobe structures in formal middle and even high-income houses and Eco-estates. It is conceivable that given experiences of RDP houses in more extreme climates (such as CHDM) people may opt to build using traditional or alternative materials.
- Other variations not defined or even yet conceptualised. It is conceivable that the flexibility of the rural subsidy and the different implementation processes will allow for options not yet conceived, but which might be generated by the communities. The team would need to be open to engaging with suggestions of all types and exploring compliance with subsidy definitions.

It is intended that the project team will compile a set of well-illustrated leaflets and posters in English and Xhosa, depicting the possible applications of the subsidy and indicative costs, risks and long-term maintenance and replacement implications.

Other Subsidy Mechanisms to Achieve wider rural development targets

The ECDoHS has stated its intention, in line with the New Housing Code, to reinvigorate the Peoples Housing Process (now called the Enhanced People's Housing Process). "Human Settlements MINMEC has in August 2009 approved in principle a Rural Housing Individual Voucher Programme, wherein the government seeks to speed up improvement of housing conditions of people in rural areas. The voucher system, enables beneficiaries to claim the housing subsidy to acquire building materials that they will utilise to build their own homes." (Mabandla, 2010: 20-21) Adoption by a community of a construction approach such as this would achieve rural development targets around skills development, as well as the potential establishment of small enterprises through contractor training. This process is not new, but because fencing and the installation of water tanks and solar-electric systems are all technically and financially less challenging than building a whole house, the EPHP process becomes attractive as an implementation approach. The intention is to maximise skills development by identifying opportunities for local people to undertake training and contribute directly to the construction, maintenance and business elements of the implementation of the housing subsidy.

METHODOLOGY

- PHASE 1A - Project Establishment and Desktop Data Collection
A project office will be established within the Queenstown office of the ECDoHS and will be initiated by a round of lobbying within the Municipality and parallel departments. This will lead to the formation of a pilot project advisory group. A project culture of energetic activism will be consciously adopted and conveyed - underpinned by a professionally developed media campaign which depicts human settlements thinking and graphically portrays possible outcomes. District



Photo: J Denison, Garden Water Harvesting System Home solar system

Photo: Agama biogas, Home or group biogas digester, Higher levels of service



Photo: JP Flanigan, Improvement of existing structures

Figure 2: Some alternative applications of the rural housing subsidy



sector plans that feed into the IDP and turnaround plans for towns will be interrogated. Desktop work in relation to land tenure, land rights and resource availability will be completed.

- PHASE 1B - Liaison with Community Leadership and Intelligence Gathering

Initial interactions at villages will be low key and will be used to outline the pilot project to Ward Councillors, Traditional Authorities and local 'opinion leaders'. An inventory of locally active formal and informal institutions and groupings will be compiled and key people will be interviewed. The importance of these initial meetings requires senior, articulate, Xhosa-speaking team members. They will gather intelligence, aiming to identify tensions and risks to allow mitigation strategies to be developed before engaging in detail with the broader community. Suitably skilled local young people will be recruited to act as project liaison persons.

- PHASE 2A - General Introduction to Broader Community

The project will be formally introduced to the community and a Project Steering Committee will be formed. The introduction will emphasise a broad rural development planning process, based on the rural subsidy objectives which target improved livelihoods. The programme for future visits and meetings will be discussed and agreed. Detailed interviews will be conducted with key informants to gain insight into livelihoods.

- PHASE 2B - Detailed Discussion of Rural Subsidy Opportunities

This phase is the intensive iterative consultation process that takes place in working groups of no more than 40 households in a series of morning sessions. A team of 8 facilitators will work together in each village under supervision of a senior facilitator. In the first session, rural development issues and priorities will be discussed and ranked. Indicative data on unemployment, hunger and food security will be collected. The purpose of the rural subsidy and options for using the subsidy will be discussed. Media on options and implications will be left with people and beneficiary qualification criteria will be communicated. The second session will be held two weeks later to allow people time to process information. This second session will take place over two consecutive mornings and will include only those people who qualify for the rural subsidy - given that the process must narrow down to the application of the subsidy.

Preferences will be discussed in small groups, as to how the subsidy could be used at household level. The involvement of technical engineering and contract people in this stage is essential as the preferences have technical, training, financial and contract implications and these need to be evaluated and relayed back to the village working groups the next day. A draft set of responsive and practically implementable packages is the main outcome.

- PHASE 2C - Community Negotiation Process - Establish Set of Funded Packages

The final stage of community consultations and interactive planning takes place in a mass meeting where feedback from the earlier working groups is presented. The mass meeting is facilitated by a senior facilitator/negotiator, aiming to narrow down the packages to a set that conforms to the rural subsidy requirements and is practical to implement, but still reflects diversity and preferences of the whole group of people who qualify for the subsidy.

- PHASE 3 - Design of Project Contracting Process

The training requirements and contracting mechanisms will be defined, based on the outcomes of

Phase 2. Implementation processes are likely to include the Enhanced People's Housing Programme, with an emphasis on skills development, training and jobs and/or on more routine outsourced contracting processes. Training programme outlines, construction contracts and implementation programmes will be the final outcome of the pilot project, allowing implementation to follow in a subsequent initiative.

CONCLUSIONS

Policy Imperatives and Implications

The National and the Eastern Cape Departments of Human Settlements require that human settlement initiatives respond to opportunities that have broader rural development outcomes than just the increase of assets. The Chris Hani Human Settlements Pilot Project aims to develop an approach that uses the flexibility of the rural housing subsidy to support varied livelihoods, within set financial limits.

This has far-reaching implications for all implementing agencies, funded by the rural housing subsidy. The shift means that instead of addressing an issue of house allocation and construction, one is addressing the issue of rural livelihoods, and how the rural housing subsidy can better support those.

This is a different and broader role for the DoHS and their appointed engineers and specialists, and calls for a fundamentally different approach. Effective use of the subsidy options can only be achieved if DoHS takes a lead role in working with the District Municipality, and key government departments to build on existing validated plans where these exist.

Planned mode of community engagement - iterative planning

The established pattern of thinking relates the rural subsidy to an RDP house. Yet the rural housing subsidy makes provision for a wide range of alternatives to a serviced RDP structure, including alternative energy, house renovations, fencing, stock watering, water storage tanks and social structures (among others). It is necessary to challenge existing perceptions on the limitations of the subsidy, through information exchange with government personnel, service providers and community members. An iterative approach, based on cycles of information exchange between the technical team and smaller groupings within the community, is necessary to define a set of responsive and practicable intervention packages. Implementation and advantages of using the Enhanced Peoples Housing Process must be balanced with skills availability, interest, training costs and risks. The pilot programme will use the ICON approach, an established participative planning process, developed for socio-technical interfacing between multi-disciplinary teams of technical experts and rural communities. The time and cost implications are unavoidably higher than for routine 'housing' interventions which have simpler beneficiary education, qualification and administration processes.

Process Documentation and Likely Outcomes from the Pilot

The value and effectiveness of a more intensive and iterative interaction with communities around the rural housing subsidy needs to be validated or challenged by the pilot outcomes. The project will be monitored internally, in that the process and experiences will be documented, and externally in terms of the outcomes that are achieved for the subsidy beneficiaries. It is expected that the pilot will generate one practical and replicable approach which embraces the concept



of using human settlements initiatives as a catalyst for integrated rural development.

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