

**LEARNING FROM SHACK-DWELLERS:  
LESSONS FOR PLANNERS AND POLICY-MAKERS IN UPGRADE PROJECTS  
IN SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning in May 1996 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master in City Planning.

**ABSTRACT**

In 1990, Oukasie, a 65 year old small, black, township with 12,000 inhabitants on the border of the white town of Brits in South Africa was illegal, lacked basic services and community facilities, and had hostile relations with the neighboring white local authority. Just three years later, Oukasie was declared a formal township by the National Party Government and every household had its own water connection, flush toilet, and access to a variety of new community facilities like schools, clinics, and recreation and sports facilities. In addition, community members had regular contact with Brits officials over issues relating to the servicing and administration of the township. By all accounts, the upgrading of Oukasie was a tremendous success.

Oukasie was successful in relative terms too. Most other similar in-situ upgrade projects in South Africa managed to accomplish far less within the same timespan. I wanted to understand why. My paper addresses this question and shows how, through using politics (e.g. political tactics and links to politicians) and storytelling about the success of Oukasie, specific forms of technical assistance like hiring their own technical review consultant to act as their watch dog and other organization-building strategies (like building alliances with influential actors and remaining accountable to their demanding and highly informed beneficiaries), the community leaders built a much more successful project than otherwise would have been the case.

Throughout the paper, I use Oukasie as a “model” to demonstrate that successful in-situ upgrading is both feasible and desirable in the South African context. The case of Oukasie is a vehicle for discussing a broader range of issues which are relevant to development projects in general and in-situ upgrade projects in particular.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ACRONYMS.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CHAPTER II OUKASIE’S STRUGGLE AGAINST FORCED REMOVALS .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>CHAPTER III THE STAKEHOLDERS.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>CHAPTER IV CHOOSING TRUSTEES STRATEGICALLY.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>CHAPTER V COPING WITH PROJECT COMPLEXITY.....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>CHAPTER VI COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION .....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>CHAPTER VII USING POLITICS AND MANAGING CONFLICT.....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>CHAPTER VIII STORYTELLING: A NEW SLANT ON OUKASIE’S SUCCESS .....</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>CHAPTER IX CONCLUDING REMARKS .....</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>INTERVIEWS .....</b>	<b>165</b>

## **ACRONYMS**

IDT - Independent Development Trust

ODT - Oukasie Development Trust

OCA - Oukasie Civic Association

SA - South Africa

TPA - Transvaal Provincial Administration

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

In 1990, Oukasie, a 65 year old small, black, township with 12,000 inhabitants on the border of the white town of Brits in South Africa was illegal, lacked basic services and community facilities, and had hostile relations with the neighboring white local authority.<sup>1</sup> Just three years later, Oukasie was declared a formal township by the National Party Government and every household had its own water connection, flush toilet, and access to a variety of new community facilities like schools, clinics, and recreation and sports facilities. In addition, community members had regular contact with Brits officials over issues relating to the servicing and administration of the township. By all accounts, the upgrading of Oukasie was a tremendous success.

In the same time period, the Oukasie leadership developed new skills and expanded the community's institutional infrastructure. They formed the Oukasie Development Trust to spearhead the upgrade project. During this process, outside advisors transferred technical knowledge to Oukasie's leaders. With the assistance of these advisors, community leaders built on their existing political and organizational skills and successfully channeled their political energies into transforming Oukasie. Despite the difficult challenges that arose

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<sup>1</sup> Because of Oukasie's close proximity to the white town of Brits which had an extremely conservative town council, the township became a target for vicious forced removals by the Apartheid government which ended only when the area was officially legalized by the cabinet in early 1991. Its legalization meant that it was now allowed to receive basic services from the state. I refer to it as an informal settlement as it did not have authorization from the government to exist.

during the upgrade program, like the challenge to get beneficiaries to accept a smaller site than they had been expecting, the leaders retained the support of most beneficiaries throughout the upgrade process.

Oukasie was successful in relative terms too. Most other in-situ upgrade projects in South Africa (projects where residential occupation of the area precedes the installation of services) with similar demographic profiles managed to accomplish far less than Oukasie within the same time-span (National Business Initiative (NBI) 1995). I wanted to understand why. From being on the ‘bucket sewerage’ system as recently as in 1992, how did the Oukasie leadership manage to carry out such a successful transformation in the township? How was so much achieved in only three years? What were the characteristics and traits that underpinned Oukasie’s success? And what can housing actors learn from Oukasie’s successes that would equip them to better handle in-situ upgrade projects in the future?<sup>2</sup> My paper addresses these questions and shows how, through using politics and storytelling, specific forms of technical assistance and other organization-building strategies (like building alliances with influential actors and facilitating contributions from ordinary beneficiaries), the community built a much more successful project than otherwise would have been the case.

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<sup>2</sup>In the literature, in-situ upgrading, shack settlement upgrading, squatter settlement upgrading and informal settlement upgrading are used interchangeably.

### **Why In-situ Upgrading?**

South Africa has a housing backlog that is estimated at between 1.5 and 3 million units (in urban areas) and that is growing at the rate of 200,000 units a year due mainly to population growth (Urban Foundation 1989). There are already well over eight million people living in shack settlements often without access to water and adequate sanitation. Yet, until 1995, less than 20,000 formal housing units were built on an annual basis. Simply put, the South African government does not have the financial resources to supply each needy family with a formal housing unit. Despite this huge backlog, in-situ upgrading--the approach used in Oukasi--has not found favor in the eyes of some influential housing actors, including the housing minister and housing officials in at least two of the country's nine provinces.

Oukasi's upgrade program was funded by a grant from the Independent Development Trust (IDT), a relatively enlightened quasi-government organization. In 1990, the IDT was formed by the apartheid regime and given the task of addressing the needs of poor people in South Africa. It was required to do this both quickly and "at scale" (meeting the needs of a large number of households). The IDT chose to address the housing needs of the poor in the country; but its mandate to deliver services rapidly and "at scale" forced it to make difficult choices. To meet the state's conditions, the IDT chose to deliver a very simple product, a serviced site, rather than a more costly spectrum of services. It also decided to focus its energies on delivering its product, rather than on process issues such



as community participation and empowerment.

For these compromises, the IDT was heavily criticized by progressive groups, including civic organizations in townships, NGOs and liberation movements. These groups supported projects that addressed a broader range of needs; they joked that IDT stood for "I delivered toilets." They pressured politicians and program funders to support more comprehensive programs.

In the highly politicized environment in South Africa, where communities were demanding "houses for all" and "the opening of the gates of education" to every citizen, the IDT's housing program stands out as a courageous and risky venture. The IDT set out to finance only a tap, toilet and title deed for each household in its 104 project areas. It did this not only because of the time and scale constraints imposed by the government, but also because it believed that in-situ upgrading was the only feasible way for the government to reach a large number of needy households, given that over 60% of the population in South Africa is poor and in need of housing assistance.

The IDT initiative was the first time that in-situ upgrading of shack settlements had been endorsed by the government at that scale. Previously, the government had provided serviced sites only to households that it had forcibly moved from one area to another. Land was always prepared before households were moved. In-situ upgrading had been rejected by the government because it implicitly sanctioned the settlement by households that had no legal right to be there. Further, the government did not believe that upgrading a township whilst the population was still resident in it was economically or technologically feasible. It was the IDT's "quasi-independence" from the government that enabled it to go ahead with this venture.

Despite the fact that shack settlement upgrading is the government's only chance of reaching the vast majority of un-housed and under-housed people in the country, many influential politicians have been unwilling to endorse its inclusion in the government's national housing policy. These politicians still need to be convinced that delivering "taps, toilets and title deeds" to highly politicized urban households is a strategy worth following; they also need to be convinced that beneficiaries *are* often satisfied with this approach, despite the rhetoric from leaders at the local, provincial and national levels who insist that black populations be provided four bed-roomed houses as all poor white households were in the past.

Vocal proponents of in-situ upgrading (The Independent Development Trust, more mainstream NGOs, and a growing number of important housing bureaucrats) argue that

supplying basic services will trigger private household investment in homes and other community facilities. Their opponents, however, are skeptical of the incremental upgrading<sup>3</sup> process and argue that it does not necessarily trigger and improvement in other aspects of the project environment (*e.g.*, housing, education and health improvements). Furthermore, they argue that beneficiaries are not satisfied with the outcomes of upgrade projects. Powerful interest groups from the construction sector, which would like to get access to state funding for a mass housing scheme, support this view.

### **Outline of Fieldwork and Major Findings**

In my study I interviewed over sixty beneficiaries in the Oukasie project as well as housing professionals involved both in Oukasie and in the housing sector in general. My aim was to show skeptical planners and policy-makers in South Africa that informal living environments can be improved over time on a progressive basis *and* that shack-dwellers value these improvements. I use the Oukasie community which received subsidies from the Independent Development Trust to demonstrate a relatively successful upgrade and consolidation process in the face of resource limitations and other obstacles. I also show that many aspects of Oukasie's success are, in fact, replicable. In this respect, Oukasie is *not* unique.

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<sup>3</sup> Incremental improvement (upgrading) of the living environments of informal (squatter) settlements is also known as consolidation in the housing literature. More recently, definitions of the term include not only physical and economic improvements in the lives of shackdwellers, but also the degree to which residents of informal settlements are able to exercise their rights as citizens. For more on this topic, see Tomlinson (1995).

The fieldwork that I conducted during South Africa in August 1995 and December 1995 through to January 1996 sheds light on the ingredients that differentiate Oukasie's successful experience from projects that have failed. I have deliberately given more attention to successful aspects of the Oukasie upgrade as I feel that there has already been significant documentation on reasons for project failures. In addition, I believe that many of the difficulties that the Oukasie community faced could have been avoided if lessons from more successful aspects of the project had been applied to other components.

One of the important factors that made the Oukasie project a success was that its leaders had already acquired political and organizational skills during an earlier struggle for survival against the state. During years of struggle against forced removals (1948-1990), the community's leaders learned to be persistent, to network with those actors with influence, and to draw on experts with the technical skills that they lacked. They also learned the importance of accountability to their constituency, without whose support the collective action against the state would have failed. These factors greatly assisted the leadership in making the transition from "struggle politics" to development challenges. In addition to these factors, I found five specific factors that help explain Oukasie's phenomenal success. These are:<sup>4</sup>

1. The leadership's strategic choice of trustees (*e.g.* they chose former enemies and people with ties to government, the white business community and other actors with

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<sup>4</sup> Note also that Oukasie had a very similar demographic profile (with respect to age composition, household income, household size, and number of family members employed) to the seven other upgrade projects studied in the NBI survey (1995). Hence, its success cannot be attributed to these factors.

access to skills and/or resources) for the community-based Oukasie Development Trust.

2. The accountability of Oukasie's leaders to one another and to their demanding and highly informed beneficiaries. Beneficiary participation was encouraged and nurtured throughout the upgrade process.
3. The step-by-step strengthening of the Oukasie Development Trust (ODT) and its sub-structures through technical assistance from its NGO advisors and its (own) technical review consultant who acted as their teacher and watchdog. Among other accomplishments, the ODT stimulated an organizational and professional culture which was used to promote discipline and organizational pride and to motivate the workforce.
4. The political strategies and tactics (like bringing in high-profile politicians at the time the latter were wanting votes from Oukasie residents) that the ODT used to manage conflict and to achieve its ends; and
5. The leadership's ability to capitalize on success stories told by itself and others and the self-fulfilling prophecy of success that resulted.

In this paper, I discuss these findings, each of which made me rethink my preconceived notions of what makes a project a success. For example, I had always thought that you build alliances with your friends, not with your enemies, and that regimen and rituals as organizing principles were out of vogue in community organizations. This was not the case in Oukasie, where inclusive coalitions and ritual activities produced tremendous

results. I also was informed by the literature that politics and development are better kept apart and that the roles and responsibilities of actors in projects should be very clearly defined. Again, the Oukasie case showed me that more subtle interpretations of these conventional “wisdoms” need to be applied on a project specific basis. In Oukasie, it was precisely because beneficiaries were confused about who was delivering services (the Oukasie Development Trust, their project representatives or the Oukasie Civic Association, their political representatives) that executive members of the two organizations were able to accept and support the upgrade project: without clear roles differentiation in the eyes of beneficiaries, both organizations could take credit for the project's success. Contrary to the literature once again, it was only because of the pragmatic political maneuvering of the leadership that conflicts in the township were preempted. Community leaders also used political tactics to acquire a wealth of community facilities relative to other communities. I learned too that there is something very powerful about linking into influential actors, who out of self interest often land up conferring benefits on beneficiaries for the greater public good.

In Oukasie I discovered how stories told by various actors (including the community leaders) about Oukasie’s early successes actually led to a self-fulfilling prophecy. This was despite the fact that Oukasie clearly had some problems that were very similar to those experienced by five other shack settlement in-situ upgrade projects in the country (NBI 1995). Like other projects, Oukasie faced labor unrest, site allocation disputes, dissatisfaction with low service standards and small sites, a lack of maintenance, land

disputes and cost overruns. Indeed, cost overruns in Oukasie were higher than in three comparable projects (interview Bleibaum 1995). Nonetheless, the perception of total success amongst influential beneficiaries (explained later) in Oukasie, despite these difficulties, generated further success.

My research in Oukasie confirmed my belief in the value of having well-informed beneficiaries. Knowledgeable project participants in Oukasie helped to ensure that their leaders were accountable. The high level of participation of beneficiaries also enabled the leaders of the township to make strategic choices with respect to the sequencing of the "goodies" they delivered to residents thus enlisting a greater level of loyalty from their support base. Listening to advice from their well informed constituency also enabled them to: pre-empt conflict, dispel destructive rumors, and create innovative and less costly alternatives to some of the problems that emerged (*e.g.* when the bones of dead residents were dug up by accident by the contractor). My findings showed that the nature of their technical support (an engineer who they hired and who was accountable only to them) as well as the committed and long-term relationships with their NGO advisors was critical to their ability as a community-based developer to drive the project and achieve the successes that they did.

### **Methodology and Rationale**

A key objective of my study was to understand the characteristics and traits that underpin successful upgrading projects. I chose to use the Oukasie case as a "model" to

demonstrate that successful upgrading is both feasible and desirable in the South African context. Models are important because they demonstrate to us what is possible and give us a framework on which we can build. I have used a specific case, Oukasie, as a vehicle for discussing a broader range of issues which are relevant to development projects in general and upgrade projects in particular.

Oukasie was the only township where I conducted in-depth interviews (forty in total) with both ordinary beneficiaries and community leaders. However, I also interviewed around twenty housing professionals (including planners, policy-makers, NGO community advocates, and engineers) who had worked closely with other in-situ upgrade projects in the country. I used these interviews to understand which aspects of the Oukasie upgrade were similar to other projects and which aspects were different. Two professionals who had worked both in Oukasie and in other projects were an important source of comparative information. I also visited two other in-situ upgrade projects that were subsidized by the IDT; I conducted secondary research on five others. Although in this paper I reflect mainly on my findings in Oukasie, I make reference to similar projects and international literature on the subject whenever I feel that it adds to the issue I discuss.

I would have liked, given sufficient time, to conduct fieldwork in a number of other successful in-situ upgrade projects in South Africa, as well as in some less successful upgrades. I would then have been able to extract the reasons for project success and failure that were similar across cases. This would have enabled me to identify with greater



certainty those aspects of in-situ upgrade projects that are successful, common and/or easily replicable. Further, if I had conducted research in Oukasie two years earlier as well, when project implementation was at its peak, I would have been able to better understand the challenges that the community was facing *at that specific time*. I can partially compensate for this because I was a volunteer and later a technical advisor to the Community's leaders between 1991, when the project began, until late 1993; I have very clear memories from this period. Another limitation of my research is that I finished my fieldwork soon after the completion of the IDT-subsidized portion of the upgrade project; as a result, I cannot fully understand the nature of the problems that may occur down the line as services and infrastructure begin to deteriorate.

Even with these limitations, I feel that I can say something about Oukasie's successes. Yet to do this, I must share with the reader how I define project success. Defining success qualitatively is always a problem for researchers. My case is no different. Reading the literature on what defines project success gave me more questions than answers. After extensive discussions with my professors and classmates,<sup>5</sup> I decided on my "bottom-line": if beneficiaries were satisfied with the upgrade project and felt that it had made a positive difference to their lives, then, in my view, the project was a success. I had two further criteria for success. First, if other stakeholders involved in the project felt the upgrade was a success, then it was probably a success, at least in terms of their criteria. Second, if the Oukasie community managed to overcome some of the difficulties that other

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<sup>5</sup>Judith Tandler's class at MIT on Analyzing Projects and Organizations was particularly helpful.

communities could not overcome in their upgrade projects, this was another indicator of success. I therefore searched the housing literature to identify the kinds of difficulties that other communities had faced. I also tried to disaggregate the specific aspects of the upgrade project in Oukasie that worked well and the specific reasons why these components, as opposed to other components, were successful.

Despite the shortcomings of my thesis, I feel that my findings will offer planners and policy-makers insight into some useful ingredients that make shack settlement upgrading work. I deliberately use the word *ingredients* as opposed to *recipe*: each upgrade project will have a unique context which planners, policy-makers, and community leaders will need to take into account as they shape programs and policies.

### **Scope and Structure of the Paper**

The main focus of this paper is the first phase of the Oukasie upgrade (the first three to four years of the project). I chose to focus on this period because I believe it encapsulates the substantive content from which planners and policy-makers can learn the most. I do, however, refer to more recent developments (like the rise of a new political party in the township) when these are relevant.

I have structured this paper in the following way. Following this introduction, I give a brief history of Oukasie and the experience that the leaders of the township gained during their struggle against forced removals. I then introduce the reader to the main actors in

the Oukasie upgrade project. The next five chapters cover my major findings: those factors I believe contributed to the success of the Oukasie upgrade project. In some of these chapters, I include a brief review of the relevant literature. My closing remarks briefly summarize my most important conclusions; these conclusions are mostly discussed in more detail in the final sections of each chapter.

## Chapter II

### OUKASIE'S STRUGGLE AGAINST FORCED REMOVALS

#### **Introduction**

Between 1953 and 1991, the government of South Africa waged a campaign to remove the entire Oukasie community from its location near the white settlement of Brits. In the fight against these "forced removals," Oukasie's leaders gained many useful skills and contacts which they would later apply to the upgrade project. For this reason, as well as to better introduce readers to the context of the Oukasie upgrade project, I give a detailed overview of the township's history. This is followed by a brief account of the experience that the leaders gained during the project and the lessons that we can learn from this.

#### **The Struggle Begins**

Until 1991, Oukasie--a 64 year old township on the border of the white town of Brits--was little more than a poorly-serviced informal settlement which housed close to 12,000 people.<sup>6</sup> In many ways, Oukasie looked like many other informal South African settlements: housing was dense, public services were almost non-existent, and living conditions were squalid. What was remarkable about Oukasie in 1991 was that it existed at all.

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<sup>6</sup>In the 1980s this number was closer to 10,000 people. The increase in the size of the settlement was due to in-migration from surrounding rural areas, normal population growth and, more recently, the influx of tenants who were evicted from surrounding farms.

In 1948, twenty years after Oukasie's official establishment, the government of South Africa formally declared its apartheid policy, which mandated the separation of the population based on race; two years later it passed the Group Areas Act, which was designed to force black populations into specified "homelands." Around this same time, white residents in the Elandsrand suburb of Brits began to feel threatened by the close proximity of their black neighbors in Oukasie, who lived just two kilometers from the Brits town center and 800 meters from Elandsrand. These conservative residents supported the National Party's policy of forced spatial segregation on the basis of race. In their view, black people did not belong in or near white areas except for the period of the day and night that they were working for their white bosses (Interview with Moatshe, 1995). As a result, between 1953 and 1990, Oukasie's inhabitants lived under the constant threat of forced removal. The threat only ended in 1991, when the cabinet decided to reinstate Oukasie as a legal black township.

From the fifties onwards, the government stopped giving Oukasie the meager physical and infrastructural support that it had been receiving prior the Group Areas Act in 1950. As one community leader explained, "this was a tactic to keep the township under-serviced and lacking in even the most basic infrastructure. The government did this to 'encourage' us [Oukasie residents] to voluntarily leave and settle in Lethlabile, a new area 25km away. They intended eventually incorporating the new area into the Bophutatswana Bantustan and thus stripping us of our South African citizenship" (Interview 1995). The Department of Training and Education (DET) withdrew the salaries of teachers who were teaching in

Oukasie. The Transvaal Provincial Administration began neglecting the maintenance of the drainage system, which was already in a state of disrepair. Even the Brits business community refused to hire any workers from Oukasie.<sup>7</sup> Oukasie residents who did have jobs turned to the growing trade union movement in the country for support, both to hold onto their jobs and to assist them in fighting their battle against forced removals.

### **Individual Households Resist the Move**

Despite the government's offer of bigger, cheaper sites in Lethlabile and compensation for their existing dwelling units, few Oukasie residents chose to leave. Instead, they made do with a bucket system for sewage removal (collected twice weekly) and 50 standpipes which supplied drinking water to the community's 10,000 inhabitants. Residents of the township regarded Oukasie as their home. As one young resident explained, "I was born here, and I will stay here, and I will die here. They [the whites] wanted Oukasie for themselves because it is such a beautiful place. They even dried up the pool where we used to swim near to where they stayed to get us to move." A survey of the township conducted in 1986 showed that over 90% of the residents in Oukasie had, in fact, been born there (Brits Action Committee et. al. 1986).

### **Forced Removals Begin**

In 1972, the government adopted new, harsher measures to push Oukasie residents from the area. The "forced removal" program included violence and intimidation of Oukasie

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<sup>7</sup>The DET was responsible for the education of all black Africans in South Africa

residents. The community fiercely resisted. Only 200 residents moved to Mothulung, which was later incorporated into the Bophuthatswana Bantustan. In 1979, the government attempted another forced removal. Again very few people moved. The government established a township called Lethlabile as a “catchment area,” where it could place all the people that it succeeded in moving. But, as one resident explained, the people of Oukasie felt that Oukasie was much closer to work opportunities and transport facilities. The bus journey from Lethlabile to Brits took 45 minutes, and residents regarded this as expensive at 62 cents each way. Most residents refused to move.

### **The Community Organizes Itself**

In response to residents' reluctance to move, the state stepped up its efforts to force them out. Towards the end of 1984, residents knew that the government was going to go "all out" to put an end to Oukasie. The Young Christian Workers and concerned parents in Oukasie established a committee (the Joint Parents Committee) to plan an organized response. In November 1985, the Joint Parents Committee called a meeting to elect an Action Committee. The committee was tasked with the responsibility of spearheading the fight against forced removals. Ten members were elected: Marshall Buys was elected chair; Sello Ramakobye was voted secretary; and Moshe Mahlaela became treasurer. Levy Mamabolo, a respected trade union office-bearer and resident of Oukasie was also elected onto the committee. He later became the chairperson of the Oukasie Development Trust (1992-1995), and, in October 1995, was elected mayor of the Greater Brits Area in the first democratic local government elections in South Africa. Jacob Moatshe of the

Joint Parents Committee, who later became the community liaison officer for the Oukasie Development Trust, chaired this meeting.<sup>8</sup>

The community remained focused on its primary struggle, namely, to hold onto its land; but, at the same time, the leadership broadened the community's claims and joined the trade unions and the African National Congress liberation movement in the fight against the subordination of black South Africans by the state. By strategically widening its claims, the community was able to harness a stronger support base from the larger anti-apartheid movement in South Africa.

The Roman Catholic Church was one of the first organizations to come to the assistance of Oukasie. One resident I interviewed exclaimed that "the government did nothing. ... only the Roman Catholic church provided us with a school and a clinic." In fact, the Roman Catholic Church, and particularly the Young Christian Workers, the South African Council of Churches, and the South African Catholic Bishop Conference did much more than that. For example, the Young Christian Workers provided community members with courage and support and engaged in international campaigns to draw attention to Oukasie's precarious position. The church also began training community workers and committee members in leadership skills, including negotiation, community organization, and meeting coordination. These skills were to come in very useful later in Oukasie's upgrade program (Interview with Moatshe 1996).

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<sup>8</sup> The role of the community liaison officer (CLO) in the upgrade in Oukasie was a critical one. For example, he was responsible for networking with outside actors and keeping the community fully informed of project developments.



Local trade unions, to which many Oukasie residents belonged, also supported the Oukasie community at a relatively early stage in the struggle. The unions were becoming increasingly militant in their stance against the apartheid government and were willing to assist Oukasie community leaders, some of whom were also local union office-bearers, in organizing against the forced removals. The National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA), which had established itself in the metal and motor industries in Brits in the 1970s, had a major impact on strengthening the skills base of unionized community leadership in Oukasie. Union organizers from the union's offices in Johannesburg 90km away, added their skills and support to the Brits branches of the Metal and Allied Workers Union and the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union. "The organizational skills and democratic ethos of the union advanced the level of community leadership in the area" (National Business Initiative 1995). One unionized worker from Oukasie, Levy Mamabolo, and one union organizer, Taffy Adler, would play a critical role in upgrading the Oukasie community approximately ten years later.

### **Increased State Repression Faces Collective Resistance**

In 1985, the government began demolishing the homes of residents who had left. All the buildings on former plot-holders sites were immediately destroyed, including the homes of sub-tenants who were left destitute. People grew angry as they saw brick houses razed to the ground and the government refuse to allocate vacant sites or houses to existing residents (or would-be residents) of Oukasie (Interview with community activist, 1995).

In response to the government's actions, the Brits Action Committee enlisted the assistance of the Legal Resources Center, a human rights law firm in Johannesburg, to challenge the legality of government's actions. In 1986 the *Mahlaela versus De Beer* case was brought before the Supreme Court. The Court declared the government's policy unlawful and found that the government was obliged to allocate sites to qualified applicants. As a result of this, the government stopped its forced removals for a short time (Legal Resources Center 1991).

Ironically, the official reason the government gave for its decision to move residents was the state of neglect and decline in Oukasie; according to the government, this made upgrading impossible. In the early 1980s, the Brits Action Committee and the Brits branches of the Metal and Allied Workers Union and the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union commissioned a feasibility report to disprove this claim. A professional team, consisting of five engineers, a social science activist, an economist and a sociologist, was formed to evaluate the technical feasibility and associated costs of upgrading Oukasie. They concluded that Oukasie was upgradeable at only a moderate cost to the state. These findings, however, did not deter the state from pursuing its agenda of forced removal.

Five months later, on 17 October 1986, the Minister of Constitutional Development and Planning, Chris Heunis, "disestablished" Oukasie. Occupation of sites in Oukasie was deemed illegal. He told residents that they had to move to Lethlabile. This had little effect on the residents, who still refused to leave. During this period, community leaders

fighting for the legitimization of Oukasie were imprisoned. Houses were petrol-bombed and destroyed, and those that fled had their homes destroyed (Legal Resources Center 1991). "Some like Nkele Modimoeng, Marshal Buys and Abel Molokoane were murdered in the political conflict" (Interview with Moatshe, 1995). As one resident explained: "Nobody knew who to trust anymore. The government sent in vigilantes to destroy us and turn us against each other. But we continued our struggle inside Oukasie."

The deaths, detentions and harassment of the community forced the leadership to operate underground. In 1988, when most of Oukasie's elected leaders were in prison, a rival group formed the Oukasie Residents Committee (ORC). When the original leaders were released from detention, a fierce power struggle ensued between these two groups. (As I discuss later, these tensions were still present when I visited Oukasie in 1995 and 1996.)

In April 1988, the Administrator of the Transvaal established an "emergency camp" at Oukasie under the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act. This was a last ditch attempt to criminalize the residents of Oukasie. The Transvaal Provincial Administrator, as the acting local authority in Oukasie, used a wide range of discretionary powers provided for in the Act. For example, in 1988 he increased service charges by 70%, made it a criminal offense for people other than registered residents to ever enter the area without permission, and criminalized a wide range of other conduct such as erecting or altering a building without official permission.

The Legal Resources Center once again challenged the validity of the establishment of the “emergency camp” and the regulations provided for in the Act. The *Makama versus Administrator* of the Transvaal case went before the Supreme Court in 1989. In August 1989, the Transvaal Supreme Court declared the establishment of the “emergency camp” was unlawful and declared the regulations null and void (Legal Resources Center 1991).

Oukasie’s battle for political recognition continued during 1990. In 1991, the United Democratic Front (UDF), an umbrella organization for all groups working against apartheid, began mobilizing in Oukasie. One of its objectives was to set up democratic civic structures in all African townships. The Oukasie Civic Association was elected at a community mass meeting, and it, in turn, appointed the Oukasie Peoples Delegation (OPD) as one of its sub-structures. The OPD was given the task of dealing with the health, social and welfare needs of the residents of Oukasie.

Support for Oukasie’s struggle came from outside the community too. It may have been this factor, more than any other, that differentiated Oukasie's battle from that of other townships. The Oukasie leadership established contact with a wide range of actors around South Africa and the world. Many of these actors were influential in prominent organizations; they, in turn, linked Oukasie with other powerful individuals and organizations. For example, the Legal Resources Center, through Geoff Budlender, initiated a sister-city relationship between Oukasie and Berkeley, California in the USA in 1988. Berkeley began to put pressure on the South African government to recognize

Oukasie's existence. The Young Christian Workers launched an international campaign against forced removals in Oukasie through its international office in Brussels. They too began to pressure the government (Interview with Moatshe, 1995).

On January 25, 1991, some members of the community discovered a small article in the newspaper that said that the Cabinet had officially reprieved Oukasie. Leaders in the community immediately phoned Geoff (Budlender) at the Legal Resources Center to find out what was going on. Geoff Budlender confirmed that the government had approved recommendations to commence the upgrading and expansion of the township under the control of the Transvaal Provincial Administration (TPA) (Interview with Moatshe, 1995). The community had finally won its bitter struggle.

### **A Luta Continua (The struggle continues)**

Although the political battle had been won, services in Oukasie remained rudimentary. There was still no electricity, few communal standpipes for drinking water, and sewerage removal still relied on the "bucket system." In 1991, the struggle to improve the living circumstances of Oukasie's approximately 12,000 residents was just beginning. The Transvaal Provincial Administration (TPA), the same government body that had waged the forced removals against Oukasie was appointed by the cabinet to be the acting local authority for the township. By late 1991, residents heard the familiar sound of bull-dozer entering their township--only this time, it was not to raze houses to the ground, but rather to begin the upgrade process in Oukasie.

### **The Leadership Learns From the Struggle**

Oukasie's victory over the forced removals did not depend on the community leadership telling everyone what to do. It initially depended on each individual household's commitment to a single goal, namely, to remain in Oukasie. It was ultimately *collective action* that was at the heart of Oukasie's triumph against the state.

The elected representatives of the community managed to sustain collective action over the decades precisely because the community trusted them. The leadership earned this trust through behaving in responsible and accountable ways such as reporting back to the community regularly at mass meetings. The trust that developed between the leadership and members of the community during this period contributed to the formation of a deep, complex social network that developed during the seventies and grew further in eighties and early nineties. The social capital that was embedded in the community greatly assisted the leadership as they began to organize the upgrading of their township in 1991.

Hirschman provides us with insight on this topic of collective action and social capital. He suggests in his writings (1984) that collective action is not, in itself, the juice that propels a community forward in its development endeavors. Rather, it is the unsuspected capacities (see below) that arise as a result of collective action that enable a community to break through some of its traditional constraints. He argues that collective endeavors usually arise when provoked by some common, usually adverse experience to which a

group of people is subjected. For Hirschman, Oukasie's struggle could be described as typical: "the villain who aroused the dormant cooperative spirit ...was that old-time aggressor: the State" (Hirschman 1988, pp. 38). His description of Latin American actors help the reader to understand how external forces and crises change the nature of relationships and ties between individuals and groups: "These people, without much contact with one another before this outside shock, are now brought forcibly together. It is no mystery why they should take common action (*ibid*, pp. 27)." Hirschman notes that although the poor are used to their poverty, which they bear in silence and isolation, being treated with *injustice* can bring out *unsuspected* [my emphasis] capacities for indignation, resistance and common action (Hirschman 1984, pp. 33).

It is on the latter point (the community's unsuspected capacity for common action) that Hirschman related one of his more interesting findings. During visits to rural Latin America, Hirschman noted that one kind of joint community action, (like the various strategies employed by the Oukasie community to fight against forced removals), can give rise to an extraordinary capacity for undertaking a number of other joint activities (*ibid*, pp. 36). He writes, "...having cooperated in the takeover of the land, the Cristo Rey peasants [in northern Colombia] had practiced cooperation at the most rudimentary level; having thus dispelled mutual distrust, forged a community, and--perhaps most important--created a *vision of change*, they were now ready for joint endeavors that required much greater sophistication and persistence" (*ibid*, pp. 49). Putnam (1993) makes a similar point in discussing social capital. He writes that "stocks of social capital, such as trust,

norms and networks, tend to be self-reinforcing and cumulative. Successful collaboration in one endeavor builds connections and trust--social assets that facilitate future collaboration in other, unrelated tasks" (pp. 37).

So what were the ingredients that the Oukasie leadership garnered from the struggle which were to equip it well for its "other unrelated tasks," *i.e.*, the upgrade challenges? One lesson was the value of persistence and focus on a single goal: to keep their land. Tandler (1993) has suggested that there are a number of reasons why focusing on a single goal can be useful.<sup>9</sup> First, it is simply more manageable, especially if you are engaging in an activity or set of activities that you are not familiar with. Second, by focusing your energy on a particular issue, you have more of a chance of becoming a specialist in dealing with that specific problem, thus increasing your prospects of successfully solving the difficulty. Third, trying to do a set of comprehensive tasks with which you are unfamiliar is daunting. Worse still, you raise the chances of failure in all of them (Tandler 1993). Lastly, by doing easy tasks first, you raise the chance of an "early project success." Early successes have been proven to motivate project leadership and encourage the relevant actors to pursue more difficult tasks.

A second lesson the Oukasie leadership learned from the forced removal struggle is how useful outside actors can be. During the struggle, it had called on the trade unions for

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<sup>9</sup> Tandler was referring to the importance on focusing on a single task or a manageable number of tasks in the context of project implementation. However, her rationale is just as applicable to community organization issues. Joshi (1993) also makes reference to the importance of organizing around a single manageable objective that grabs the attention of the community in her description of community organization processes in the Orangi Upgrade Project in Pakistan.



political support and requested them to put together a team of technical experts to defend the upgradeability of Oukasie. It had used the Legal Resources Center to find loopholes and facilities provided by the law to defend Oukasie's right to exist. The international community had been used to raise the profile of Oukasie and apply pressure on politicians. The media had been used wherever possible to publicize the plight of Oukasie residents. The Oukasie leaders would find many of these contacts useful in the upgrading challenges that it faced.

The forced removal battle gave the Oukasie leadership more than skills; it also gave leaders credibility with their constituents. Similarly their constituents gained more than a victory over the state in their struggle against forced removals; they gained a culture of democracy which was imbued with "citizen" participation. They developed their own check-mechanism on their leadership's actions and forced the latter into being accountable--a practice which stood them in good stead in the days that were to follow.<sup>10</sup> Whether the Oukasie community knew it or not, it understood what social capital was about in much the same way as Albert Hirschman had understood moral resources. Hirschman calls a "moral resource" a resource whose supply increases rather than decreases through use and which (unlike physical capital) becomes depleted if *not* used" (Putnam 1993 pp. 37). The community leaders drew a large number of resources (*i.e.* beneficiaries who had gained organization skills during the struggle against the state), into the upgrade project. This led to a further development of the community's skill base.

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<sup>10</sup> Abers (1996) quotes Pateman (1970) in saying that participation is itself developmental: its practice leads to improved participatory processes.

Putnam (1993) argues a related point: that the presence of social capital can greatly enhance the benefits of investment in physical and human capital. Crudely put, he argues that “working together is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital” (pp. 16). This was certainly the case in Oukasie.

Thus, by the time that the potential for an upgrade project in Oukasie first surfaced, Oukasie had the advantage of being an organized community with a rich social capital base. In addition, the leadership was well seasoned in handling both internal and external conflicts and ready to take on a new project. What the community leadership needed to do now, to prepare itself for its upgrade project, was to use the social capital and skills it had acquired from the political struggle years to build a new level of sophistication into its human capital base. The leadership had already learned how to use political pressure, the press, and high ranking officials to support their cause; now it needed to gain technical knowledge and know-how that pertained to the upgrade process. The community leadership approached individuals and groups that had assisted them in their political struggle and asked them to apply their skills, this time for the upgrade project. For example, Geoff Budlender, the lawyer who had processed the paperwork and defended their right to remain in Oukasie became their legal advisor on land and servicing agreements that needed to be drawn up for the upgrade project. Taffy Adler, a union organizer in the Brits Region, was brought on board as a technical advisor to the upgrade program.

And so, the upgrade in Oukasie got off on a sound footing. Residents of the township conflated the winning the legal battle to stay in Oukasie with the formation of the Oukasie Development Trust, the community vehicle that was to spearhead the in-situ upgrade project. This was certainly an unplanned, fortuitous confluence of events which, as Hirschman would have noted (1971), yielded a unique opportunity to enact a change--the rechanneling of the community's energies of state-resistance towards the development objectives presented by the upgrade project.

### **Closing Remarks**

On reading the history of the community's struggle above, the reader may be tempted to conclude that Oukasie is a "special case" and that unique circumstances enabled the leadership to make the upgrade project successful. It is true that the Oukasie's history was different in some respects from other in-situ upgrade projects. For example, many more high profile and well connected external actors were involved in Oukasie's political struggle than in other communities; and some of these actors played an important role later on in the upgrade project. However, Oukasie was *similar* to other upgrades in many more respects than it was different. To take three examples:

1. The demographic profile (income, age, family size, level of unemployment) in Oukasie was not substantially different from six other areas where IDT-subsidized in-situ upgrade projects were initiated by developers (NBI 1995).

2. Many other black communities also suffered vicious attacks by the government, including attempts at forced removal. Oukasie was one of a number of IDT-subsidized in-situ upgrade projects which resisted forced removal attempts by the state. Some of the others were in Phola Park, St Wendolins and Soweto-on-Sea. Forced removals were by no means uncommon. Over three and a half million black people were forcibly removed from their homes by the state during the decades preceding the first democratic local government election in April 1994 (Platzky and Walker 1985).

Housing professionals often flag Oukasie as unique because of the high degree of community cohesion and stability in the township which they attributed to the “old age” of Oukasie township (over sixty years old) and the community's collective action against the state. Yet in my interviews with beneficiaries in Oukasie, I found out that although there was a strong cohesion amongst most residents in the township, Oukasie was not always the stable and calm area that outsiders made it out to be<sup>11</sup>. In addition, the age of the Oukasie community was not unique. The Besters Camp, Soweto-on-Sea and St Wendolins IDT-subsidized upgrades, for example, were also relatively old settlements at 15 years, 21 years and 90 years old, respectively.

These similarities are not meant to negate the fact that Oukasie's history *was* important in building the community's social capital, skills base, and networks with outside actors.

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<sup>11</sup> The reasons for this are explained in a later chapter.

Yet, by pointing out them out I do mean to show that Oukasie's struggle against forced removals does not provide the full answer to the question I initially posed: What were the factors that underpinned Oukasie's success that differentiated it from other similar communities? After introducing the reader to each of the major stakeholders, I turn to consider this question.

## Chapter III

### THE STAKEHOLDERS

There were five main groups of actors that had a vested interest in the Oukasie upgrade project. Although there were differences among actors within each group, I point these out only when it makes a material difference to understanding the upgrade that took place in Oukasie. The groups are: the 12,000 residents in the community, all of whom were project beneficiaries;<sup>12</sup> the community's leaders, who served on the Oukasie Development Trust (ODT) and the Oukasie Civic Association;<sup>13</sup> the funder of the program, The Independent Development Trust (IDT); the ODT's technical advisors; the Transvaal Provincial Administration (TPA), which was the acting local authority for Oukasie, and its contractors, Bouwer Viljoen Inc.; and the Brits Local Authority, which was the neighboring white town council that was to provide services to Oukasie.

A description of each group of actors and their interests follows.

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<sup>12</sup> In the recent literature (e.g., Friedman 1993; Sheng 1990), the notion that the diverse interests of a community can be depicted through a composite term like beneficiaries, or that the different interests of residents can be represented through a single community development structure like the Oukasie Civic Association, is challenged. For the purposes of this short paper, I do not enter into this debate. Luckily, the community of Oukasie was unusually cohesive (except for a small group of opponents), and the OCA really did have the broad based support of the community.

<sup>13</sup> Note that throughout my thesis, I refer to the community based trustees as the leaders or the leadership of the community. Although the civic members were the elected leaders of the township vs. the trustees that were nominated, there was a substantial overlap in their respective membership bases. Unless I state otherwise, for the purposes of this paper the reader can broadly understand leaders as those community members involved in driving the upgrade project in the township.

## **Oukasie Residents**

By and large, Oukasie residents welcomed the IDT-subsidized upgrade project. This was a surprising finding: I did not expect that a politicized and organized community that demanded “houses for all” would come to support a project that initially promised them only taps, toilets and title deeds. It was particularly surprising because the project offered families legal sites that were smaller than the plots they had previously held illegally. Although residents clearly needed basic services, they wanted to keep their larger sites, many of which were over 450 square meters (Brits Action Committee 1988)<sup>14</sup>. By giving the go-ahead to the IDT-subsidized project, many households agreed to lose a substantial portion of their land: the layout plan prepared by the town planners cut larger stands into several smaller stands, each of around 200-250 square meters.<sup>15</sup> Residents also agreed to moderate other demands which had been voiced in their protest meetings against the apartheid government. They had wanted, for example, the same solid brick houses, schools and electricity, which had been provided to white people in the past. In the light of the above, it was remarkable to me that the leadership of Oukasie managed to work with its highly vocal constituency and retain their support throughout the process. How they actually accomplished this is explained later in the chapter on community participation.

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<sup>14</sup> The 450 square meters is well above the average plot size of households living in informal circumstances in urban areas in South Africa.

<sup>15</sup> This was more or less the standard size of most sites in less formal townships in urban areas.

There is a second reason why we should be surprised at the degree of unanimity with which households welcomed the upgrade project in Oukasie. The literature on shack settlement upgrading often points out that stark political divisions usually follow an injection of resources into resource-deprived communities (Community Based Development Program 1993). In Oukasie, this did not happen. To a large extent this was because of the unusual degree of community cohesiveness that had been established among most residents during their earlier battle against the state. The Oukasie community's pride, respect and trust in their leaders, many of whom were involved in driving the upgrade project, gave them confidence that they would all benefit from the project and that their leaders would not hijack all the benefits for themselves.

The literature also points out that tenants and related groups often vehemently oppose in-situ upgrades because they feel threatened that they may be evicted by the site-owners or that rents may rise (Friedman 1993). In Oukasie, tenants supported the project proposal. This was because they were informed by the leadership at a very early stage in the project that the Oukasie Development Trust would try to get every household, including tenants, a serviced stand. Although owners were first in line in the site allocation process, the 800 stands on the greenfields portion of the project could accommodate most of the tenants.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>By 1991, planners had laid out a total of 2,073 sites of between 200 and 250 square meters: 1,201 of these were in existing Oukasie; and 872 were in the adjacent extension area, which was to be developed as the greenfields portion of the in-situ upgrade project (Bouwer Viljoen 1991)



Because leaders communicated effectively, they were able to address the different fears and interests of community members.<sup>17</sup>

Even members of the Oukasie Residents Committee, the small political faction that had previously tried to hijack the democratically elected leadership of the community, did not oppose the project in its early stages. This small group was significantly weakened, because its members were being investigated by the courts for their role in stirring up violence in the community. Their dissatisfaction with the project did, however, surface at a later stage.

I have referred to the above-mentioned small group of unhappy individuals as the “trouble-makers” at various points in my paper. I call them this because, in my interviews with a wide range of beneficiaries, they were seen in this light. They were largely a group of people with political aspirations who used whatever they could in the project to stir up discontent in the township. This included the reduced sizes of the sites, the fact that households did not get below-ground electrical connections, and that residents had to pay for services even though they were poor. The group's short-term goal was to overthrow the ODT that had control over the resources in the township. The long term goal of some of their executive members was to run for local government. This group emerged in various forms, first as an informal structure that met out of the public’s eye, and later as a

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<sup>17</sup> These aspects of the project were very important and are discussed in more detail in the chapter on community participation.

local political party (the African National Congress). When that also failed to bring them the results they wanted, they formed a new local party branch of an organization that was opposing the African National Congress in the North West Province (the PPP). In my interviews with them as the PPP, they expressed total dissatisfaction with every aspect of the upgrading of the township, from the mail boxes to the community facilities. Their dissatisfaction, they said, was because the services and facilities were not delivered in a participatory way and were of inferior quality when compared to what white households had. However, nearly all other beneficiaries I interviewed in the township expressed satisfaction both with the process and with most of the products delivered. The NBI survey (1995) also found a high level of satisfaction amongst beneficiaries in Oukasie.

Apart from the trouble-makers, and despite the wish expressed by residents for larger stands and more community facilities, most residents felt they had very little to lose from the proposed upgrade project in their township.<sup>18</sup> They therefore supported the project and were willing, in principle, to pay for services. This was significant, since black residents across the country had been engaged in rent and services boycotts since the mid-eighties. These boycotts were part of a deliberate effort to make the townships ungovernable, and, thus, to bring down the apartheid government. In Oukasie, however, at a time that the apartheid government was still ruling (albeit with a less firm hand),

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<sup>18</sup> After an area in a public space was delineated to show residents the size of their future stands and project leaders and their advisors gave many and repeated explanations to residents why the reduced site sizes were necessary for cost reasons, most beneficiaries accepted it. However, not all, especially those residents who stood to lose both land (which they had had de facto ownership of) and income from tenants. These residents were a captive market for any group (such as the PPP) that was trying to overthrow the leadership.

residents demonstrated at a mass meeting that they were prepared to pay for services, provided that they were affordable, well maintained, and that the administration of accounts was properly managed.<sup>19</sup> Similar developments with respect to service charges were beginning to take place in other townships.

## **The Community Leadership: The OCA and the ODT**

### **Introduction**

The Oukasie Civic Association (OCA or Civic) saw itself as a “state substitute” body, that is, “performing certain functions that were in demand by society but were not being satisfactorily performed [by the state]” (Hirschman 1993, pp. 92). Among its perceived functions, therefore, was the task of ensuring that the township had schools, clinics and basic services. The formation the Oukasie Development Trust (ODT or Trust), which had financial control over the IDT’s subsidies and many of the same objectives as the Civic, was an encroachment on the substantive territory of the Civic. This could have resulted in conflict between the two organizations, but it did not. At the outset of the project, both were supportive of the upgrade project. Yet, by 1993, the situation had changed. The Civic was suspicious of the Trust and there was hostility between the two organizations. By the end of 1994, however, relations between the two organizations were good again, and the Civic supported the upgrade project wholeheartedly. My interviews with ex-

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<sup>19</sup> The fact that, later in the project, it was the Oukasie Development Trust that represented the community’s voice over service charges, and not the Oukasie Civic Association that carried all the baggage of encouraging residents not to pay for services during the boycott years, made the negotiation with the Brits Local Authority and the Transvaal Provincial Administration much easier.

members and current members of the Civic and Trust, as well as with other residents, explained the changing dynamics between these two organizations.

In 1991, the Trust was a new actor in the community. It began taking over many of the functions for which the Civic believed it was responsible (*e.g.*, trying to get services for the township). Moreover, some of the Civic's most active members began devoting almost of their spare time to the Trust's activities, because they believed that the ODT would be able to deliver services that the Civic had so far been unable to provide. As a result, the Civic began to experience a substantial weakening in its organizational capabilities. This became worse when the competent Civic chairperson, Phineas Ngale, left Oukasi for a "better job" in Johannesburg.

As the OCA became less functional, the ODT stepped in to fill the gap and began calling its own mass meetings to discuss the upgrade project with the community. Previously, mass meetings had only been called by the Civic. In addition, since many of the sub-structures of the OCA (including the health, education and crèche committees) were not functioning effectively, the ODT took them in and gave them technical support through its active technical committee. Most of these sub-structures began reporting to the ODT, rather than the OCA. This was still the case in 1996, although many of the committees had begun to report jointly to the OCA and the ODT. Although the Trust had usurped much of the Civic's domain, relations between the Civic and the Trust were good between 1991 and early 1993. Ironically, this was because the Civic was simply too weak to fight

back; the Trust had absorbed many of its most active members. The neglect of the Civic, however, backfired when the term of office of the current executives came to an end and a new Civic was elected. At this point, tension developed between the two organizations. The mechanisms the Trust used to pre-empt, manage, and finally resolve this conflict are discussed further in the chapter of Using Politics and Managing Conflict.

### **The IDT**

The Independent Development Trust (IDT), the project funder, was operating under pressure: the government had given it R2 billion with the instruction to address poverty in the country *at scale* and *quickly*.<sup>20</sup> These requirements severely constrained the IDT in two respects. First, the “scale” requirement meant that the IDT had to go for a breadth, rather than a depth, approach. If it offered households more benefits, it could not address the bulk of the people that needed assistance. At the same time, the government’s insistence on quick delivery put the IDT under another kind of pressure: to deliver a product regardless of the process through which the delivery was secured. Yet given the political mood in the country, the IDT knew that no housing program could fly without community support and participation. To meet the scale requirement, the IDT decided to launch a capital subsidy program which would deliver only a serviced site to 100,000 households; but, to be eligible for funding, project applications had to demonstrate that the

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<sup>20</sup> *At scale* means that the IDT had to address the scale of the problem and not just make a little dent in the housing backlog of 8 million households living in informal circumstances in and around urban areas.

community had been included in the project proposal and would have a relevant role in the upgrade process.

IDT's chief objective was to show that the upgrade program was a success. The IDT's top executives were fervent believers that upgrading should form part of the country's housing solution. They hoped to show that the approach worked, even though its funding had come from the apartheid government; and they frequently boasted about projects such as Oukasie which they felt demonstrated the program's success. (This is discussed further in my chapter on Storytelling).

The IDT's yardstick for project success was technical efficiency and cost-effectiveness combined with an "adequate" level of community participation.<sup>21</sup> As long as the community was apparently satisfied (meaning that the project was not being rejected) and services of an acceptable standard were put into the ground within the R7,500 per household constraint, a project was seen to be successful. The IDT insisted that each community set up its own "community vehicle" (*e.g.*, a community development trust) through which community participation could be institutionalized.<sup>22</sup> The IDT measured its technical progress by receiving word from its technical consultants that the necessary

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<sup>21</sup> Because of the pressure to deliver sites and the IDT's lack of experience with respect to community participation, it neither effectively monitored nor substantially assisted communities in ensuring that their voices got heard. It was severely criticized for its "product" focus and its lack of commitment to ensuring that the community leadership it dealt with did, in fact, represent the interests of the respective beneficiaries in each project area.

<sup>22</sup> Problems and advantages surrounding the institutionalization of community participation are covered more fully in the chapter on community participation.

agreements had been signed and that the developer could draw down the subsidies. The IDT social consultant gave the IDT feedback on the depth of community participation in the project.

### **The TPA and its contractors**

The Transvaal Provincial Authority (TPA) was the state structure that orchestrated the forced removals during the seventies and eighties. For the Oukasie people, the TPA was a symbol of oppression and was hated. In 1991, when the cabinet legalized the township, the TPA was once again the state structure that was given the task by the national government of formally establishing the Oukasie township in terms of legal town-planning ordinances and providing it with services and facilities in line with other black townships (i.e., rudimentary services). As there was no official legitimate local government body in Oukasie, the TPA became the acting local authority for the area.

The TPA was one of the four provincial administrations in the country. Its staff complement was almost exclusively white except for its manual workers who were black and who reported to white managers. The dominant language amongst the officials was Afrikaans, although most higher ranking officials could conduct conversations in English. It is likely that before the democratic election in 1994, most TPA bureaucrats supported the National Party.

Because of my inability to track down any TPA official who had worked on the Oukasie project, it is difficult to guess exactly what the TPA's interests were regarding the upgrading of Oukasie. Initially, in January 1991, when the township was first legalized (and before the IDT's subsidies became available), the TPA did not display any real interest in ensuring that a particularly good or participatory upgrading job be done in Oukasie. For example, the TPA did not include members of the Oukasie community in the initial plans for the township. It also failed to inform the leadership when the township was legalized. The TPA simply called in one of the contracting companies that usually managed its projects--in this case, Bouwer Viljoen Incorporated (BVI)--and asked it to begin the town planning process.

BVI preferred the higher profit margins of its familiar line of construction work: highly capital intensive, large, non-residential projects. It had never undertaken an in-situ upgrade project before, nor did it particularly want to.<sup>23</sup> It was the recession in the building industry and a squeeze on its profit margins that drew it into Oukasie. From my interviews with various professionals, it was clear that BVI was in Oukasie to "make a buck" and that it would not have been involved if there had not been a shortage of other business opportunities.<sup>24</sup> Without doing much consulting with community members in Oukasie, BVI began its job.

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<sup>23</sup> BVI's lack of experience with respect to in-situ upgrade projects and its lack of commitment to a developmental approach in Oukasie had negative results for beneficiary households. Some of these are discussed later.

<sup>24</sup> My interviews with professionals involved in other upgrade projects revealed that whilst small, traditional contractors probably needed the work more desperately, larger contractors (e.g., Stocks and Stocks) who usually preferred larger and more sophisticated projects bid for small upgrade contracts and



The fact that the TPA initially had no interest in ensuring a participatory or successful upgrade project in Oukasie is hardly surprising. It had no political support among the black households in Oukasie that it was supposed to be serving. The TPA knew that residents in Oukasie associated it with the forced removals. It therefore did not feel bound for “constituency reasons” to respond to the demands of the Oukasie leadership. Because it was nominated by the central government, the TPA had none of the usual “pulls” that elected officials usually feel towards their constituencies. It is likely that Oukasie, in its eyes, was initially just another under-serviced black township that would get into queue and receive funds for services as and when they became available.

The political changes in the country, however, probably moderated the TPA’s indifference to Oukasie. With the country’s shift towards democracy, right-wing supporters across the country were becoming increasingly marginalized. It is likely that by 1993, the provincial administration’s staff complement slowly began to reflect a delicate balance of more moderate views such as those displayed by some high-ranking members of the National Party as it began negotiating away its dominance.

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sometimes performed better on the job than the smaller contractors. This was because the “big guys” knew that they had to curry favor with project beneficiaries as well as with the African National Congress officials if they wanted to receive major public works contracts from the new government in the future. It is useful for planners to understand the self-interested motives of various actors (in this case, the major construction companies and contractors) that often benefit communities as well.

This change enabled relatively more reform-minded individuals to be more open about the fact that wanted to “do good” in townships and be seen in a good light by black communities and the “new government to be.” Part of this stemmed from expedience: TPA bureaucrats believed that their jobs might be spared if they “behaved.” Part of it reflected real change on the part of officials: some, who had always wanted to "do good" in the townships, were no longer so constrained by their organizational environment; others may have shifted their political thinking as a consequence of the national discourse around the democratization of South Africa. Of course, others, especially the ultra-conservatives and those in very senior positions who were more likely to be displaced in the near future, saw that the end of apartheid and their career growth were nigh. These officials made no effort to make Oukasie’s transition into the normal budget and workings of the Greater Brits Area any easier. As a result, the management and maintenance of many of the community facilities and infrastructure were somewhat neglected.<sup>25</sup>

There were two additional circumstances that helped to change the profile of Oukasie in the eyes of the TPA. First, there was the launch of the IDT’s housing program. Second, a particular TPA official, Arnold Aab, developed a vested interest in ensuring that various community facilities made their way into Oukasie. Both are discussed below.

When the IDT made its capital subsidy scheme known, the TPA saw an opportunity to gain access to these funds. If Oukasie used these moneys rather than the TPA's, the TPA

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<sup>25</sup> Similar problems occurred in nearly all the IDT’s projects.

could use its funds to address the service needs of other communities. It therefore called a meeting with Oukasie residents, who were then represented by the Oukasie Peoples Delegation (OPD) and the Oukasie Civic Association (the Civic), to discuss applying for upgrading funds from the IDT. Consulting with the community was a prerequisite for receiving IDT funding. The TPA, the OPD and the Civic agreed to make the application for the capital subsidies in the name of a community development trust which was yet to be established. The OPD and the Civic were encouraged by their NGO advisors to participate; the TPA was willing to help form the trust in order to give the necessary assurance to the IDT that it supported the idea of community participation in the project. All parties felt that by forming a community development trust, they increased their chances for lodging a successful application with the IDT.

At the time the application was made, I do not think that either the TPA or the community's leaders in the Civic realized the full implications of their decision to make the application in the name of a community trust. Doing the application in the name of the Oukasie Development Trust (which was to be made up of a majority of township residents) effectively made Trust the developer. As such, it would have financial control over the subsidies.

One impact of this arrangement was that the TPA was strategically drawn into the operations of the Trust in a manner that was to the advantage of Oukasie residents.

Planners should note that the IDT's insistence on community participation, therefore, *did*

have a major positive impact in Oukasie: It enabled the Oukasie leadership to take control of the project and ensure that residents' views were heard. This is not the usual story that we hear about the IDT, which is often castigated for not ensuring adequate participation of beneficiaries. The Oukasie community succeeded in taking control of the project where many other communities failed for three reasons. First, unlike the greenfields projects (where unsettled land is developed), it had a resident population already on site. Second, the resident population was already highly organized with a representative and popular leadership which could eloquently represent the needs of residents. And third, because the Trust controlled the funds, it had financial control (and hence a lot of power) over the project. It was the *de jure* developer.<sup>26</sup>

The second factor that changed Oukasie's fate relative to other surrounding African townships was the fact that Arnold Aab, a government official that was near his retirement age within the TPA wanted to secure his future with Bouver Viljoen (BVI) when he retired (interview 1995). Aab, who had previously worked in the planning field in the private sector prior to joining the TPA was in the middle management ranks of the Provincial Administration. He had good contacts with senior government officials both in the TPA and in the Regional Services Council (RSC).<sup>27</sup> According to interviews with other professionals involved in the upgrade project in Oukasie, his plan was to give BVI,

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<sup>26</sup> Being a community-based developer is not advisable unless the community leadership has project management and financial skills itself, or has access to them on a sustained basis. The Oukasie leadership had the latter and, over time, developed its own skills base.

<sup>27</sup> The RSC was a state funding structure that obtained its revenue from taxes that were levied on businesses in the surrounding area. Its funds were meant for financing (both through grants and loans), bulk infrastructure projects and community facilities.

whose profits were being constrained by the slump in the building industry, as much work as possible. He did this in the hopes that BVI would offer him a job on his retirement.<sup>28</sup> Crudely then, his aim was “to fix as many state contracts as possible for BVI” (interview 1995). These included contracts for schools, clinics, a community hall and sporting facilities for Oukasie.

This cynical view of Aab, which was shared among a number of interviewees, still begged the following question: Why Oukasie? Surely, he (Aab) could have worked out similar contracts for BVI with other black townships. My research revealed two answers to this question. The first explanation (and the one that Aab himself probably wanted us to believe) was that he, in his old age, felt guilty about the role he had played in destabilizing the Oukasie township and forcing households to leave. His commitment to rebuild Oukasie (rather than other townships) was, in part, his repentance for his “wrong doings.”

The second reason for choosing Oukasie as the destination point for various state funded community facilities was that it had a high profile and was believed by a wide range of housing experts to be successful. BVI liked this, as it wanted to be associated with successful development initiatives. It was slowly becoming clear to BVI that a huge market for their project management and engineering expertise existed within African townships, which were severely under-resourced. Officials in the TPA, on the other hand, knew that their days were numbered and that apartheid would not persist forever. They

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<sup>28</sup>This is exactly what happened and Aab was offered a job with them on his retirement.

did not want to be remembered as the devil that only damaged African townships. For this reason, the TPA was happy to put resources into Oukasie and to be part of the “success band-wagon” that was developing around the Oukasie project.

The story of Arnold Aab should not be seen anomaly that pertains only to Oukasie.

Planners should rather use the experience of Oukasie to understand that projects can give space to a variety of actors, including the public sector, to “do good,” even though it is often for self-interested reasons. We often hear that private sector-led projects are better, from a cost-efficiency point of view, because firms are competing with each other for the job and want to make a profit. Simply put, individuals in private firms want to make money, and communities are supposed to benefit, because their projects get completed at a lower cost to households. In the case of Oukasie, however, we see how private incentives in public agencies can also work to benefit the greater community. For example, Aab’s wish to be seen in a good light by the community, and his wish for a job with the contractors in the future, ensured a better outcome for Oukasie residents: they got access to a wealth of community facilities that they otherwise might have struggled to acquire.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> This is discussed in more detail in the chapter on Using Politics and Managing Conflict. Also note that Oukasie’s acquisition of so many state resources was not seen in a favorable light by all actors for two reasons. First, it probably meant that some other needy communities were deprived of community facilities because of limited funds in the state’s coffers. Second, Oukasie itself should have looked at the wealth of community facilities within the Greater Brits Area to which it had access after the first democratic elections. Because of the relatively close proximity of Oukasie to many of the under-utilized facilities in Brits, (e.g., recreation facilities), it may not have been as necessary for Oukasie to have its own facilities as community leaders thought.

From the above, planners can learn the value of seeking out powerful and/or useful individuals or organizations, who, for motives entirely different from their own, may be able to contribute significantly to the project. Projects should be designed in a way that opens up opportunities for relevant actors to fulfill some of their own interests (without making beneficiaries worse-off) while they go about their daily job of providing services to townships.

### **Brits**

The neighboring town of Brits, which had a politically conservative population, was unhappy with the government's decision to allow Oukasie to remain. In fact, the National Party cabinet made the decision to legalize Oukasie around the time that it became clear to them that the more-right-wing Conservative Party was going to displace them in the next local government elections in Brits. One astute former trade-unionist that was involved in assisting the Oukasie community in its political struggle told me that, "the National Party legalized Oukasie simply to spite the Conservatives who had gained recent popularity in Brits, and to give them the headache of dealing with blacks on their doorstep"; and a "head-ache" was how the newly-elected Brits Town Council and its Conservative Party supporters viewed Oukasie. The town council wanted to have no direct dealings with Oukasie residents or their representative organizations. It preferred to deal with the TPA (the acting local authority for Oukasie) and would only do this when absolutely necessary (*e.g.*, in matters regarding the bulk infrastructure and servicing needs of Oukasie). In particular, Brits was concerned that Oukasie residents would pay the TPA for services

received. The TPA would then pass the money directly to Brits.

Unlike what was happening in some National Party-controlled municipalities, where the white towns took on the task of directly providing African townships with services, the Conservative Party-dominated Brits Town Council refused to do so. In its view, providing services directly to Oukasie was tacit acceptance that Oukasie would be part of its jurisdiction in the future--a situation which it desperately wanted to avoid, or at worst, delay, for as long as possible. As a result, it agreed only to provide services to Oukasie on behalf of the TPA. It refused to make any contributions towards bulk infrastructure costs that were incurred as a result of its expansion of its service facilities. Although white residents in Brits had been beneficiaries of substantial contributions towards their bulk infrastructure in the past, the Brits Town Council and the TPA expected Oukasie residents to pay for the entire cost of new bulk infrastructure through monthly services charges. Although Oukasie residents tried to challenge this through their legal committee (a sub-committee of the ODT) and its legal advisors, they were not successful.

The design of the IDT's subsidy scheme had an unintended positive effect that acted as a countervailing force to the reluctance of Brits to make any contributions towards Oukasie.

The ODT's review consultant, Ulli Bleibaum,<sup>30</sup> pointed out to me that although IDT's subsidies made racist local authorities irate, it also gave IDT's grant recipients such as

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<sup>30</sup> The review consultant was a reform-minded engineer who was hired by the ODT to be their advisor and to act as a check on the TPA's contractor. He played a critical role in the project. This is discussed later in the chapter on Coping with Project Complexity.



Oukasie considerable “leveraging power”: Even the conservative councils were beginning to realize that the black communities on their doorsteps were there to stay and would place a claim on their resources in the future. They realized too, that if white town councils cooperated with the IDT’s projects, the IDT’s capital subsidies to informal townships could substantially lessen their future financial burden. It was in part for this reason that many conservative councils reluctantly began entering into servicing agreements with black townships. Oukasie was one of them. From this, planners should note how the design of projects can be *deliberately* constructed to encourage important stakeholders in a project to get together and sort out issues of mutual concern.

After the first democratic national and provincial government elections in April 1994, the Brits Town Council had a second reason for agreeing to support Oukasie by servicing the township and managing community facilities. It knew that democratic local government elections were just around the corner and that Oukasie would officially fall within the Brits jurisdiction. If it wanted to continue to keep Brits “as white as possible,” it had to make sure that there were adequate basic services in Oukasie which would prevent residents from coming into town to use the former “whites only” facilities. It was for this reason, for example, that it decided to staff and pay for the running costs and maintenance of the newly constructed maternity clinic in Oukasie which had been closed for nearly two years because of the lack of funding for staff and operations.<sup>31</sup> Tandler (1982) makes a similar

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<sup>31</sup> The maintenance of infrastructure and the management of recently-built community facilities were neglected in Oukasie, as in many other black townships.

point when she notes that “urban elites...are less likely to appropriate the benefits of poverty-focused projects because they live and work at a good distance [from the poor]-- and want it to stay that way" (pp. 14).

As with the TPA, the political changes taking place in South Africa seeped into the conservative Brits Town Council. Most notably, two national party councilors, one of whom accepted an invitation by the Oukasie Development Trust to be a trustee (discussed later), played an important role in being the “eyes and ears” for the conservative councilors and acted as a bridge between the two communities.<sup>32</sup> Even within the bureaucracy, which was also largely made up of white, Conservative Party supporters, there were noticeable differences among the people with whom the Oukasie leadership had contact. For example, the chief electrical engineer from the Brits Town Council began attending the technical committee meetings of the ODT and tried to be supportive and helpful. Because he got very little support from his seniors, he was unable to fulfill many of the task that he was requested to do. Nonetheless, his presence did begin to break down psychological barriers between community members and officials in the lower ranks of the town council.

Finally, to understand the Brits politicians and their bureaucracy, I felt that I needed to have a better understanding of the constituency that they were serving. I therefore

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<sup>32</sup> This is discussed in much more detail in the chapter that describes the reasons underlying selection of certain key individuals to be trustees.

interviewed a couple of residents in the Brits area to see how they saw the changes that were happening in the country, and in their locality in particular. The individuals I interviewed all belonged to the dominant political party in the area, namely, the Conservative Party. My interviews with them confirmed the comments that residents in Oukasie had made regarding the racism of the Brits community. This is evident from the sentiments of one “god-fearing” Conservative Party supporter who told me the following:

“People thought that they believed in God enough, but the fruits [Oukasie’s legalization and the moves towards democracy] showed both me and them that they don’t pray enough [read: otherwise these changes would never have happened]. So now people are turning to God even more...But on the other hand, some people believe that things cannot get worse, therefore they still don’t pray to God at all. [She sighs.] And those poor people who bought property close to Oukasie because they were told that they [the blacks] were to be moved. Ag shame! You know, you need to go high up to check these things out. I am so glad I never bought there.”

Just from walking around and observing interactions between black and white people in the town, it seemed that these types of views were widespread throughout “white” Brits. Residents did not see black people as equals, and their comments to me reflected this.

One woman, on discussing her relationship with her black domestic worker commented:

“You know, when they [black servants] start working for you, you just want to get rid of them. But you know, [she sighs and smiles], you stick them out a little longer and it gets

better. After a couple of months, you *even* start to get attached a little to them... [shaking her head], but I don't understand it, they never seem to get attached to you."

Despite the obvious racism and conservatism of the Brits Town Council,<sup>33</sup> the Oukasie leadership set out to win them over. For example the Oukasie Development Trust (ODT) invited one of the National Party members of the Brits Town Council to be a trustee on the ODT. They also invited two Brits officials who worked in the City Engineers Department to attend technical committee meetings. What the Oukasie leadership was doing, probably with no idea of the sophistication of its strategy, was to disaggregate the different groups and interests in the Council and to form alliances with the more reform-minded individuals there. Since the leadership knew that any hot-headed attempts to take any power away from the Brits Town Council would be fiercely resisted, they decided to follow a step by step strategy of "slowly seeping into power." This was very much the kind of reform that Hirschman has described as far more effective and less hurtful than revolutionary changes.<sup>34</sup>

### **NGO Interests and Oukasie's NGO Advisors**

Apart from the IDT (a quasi-government/quasi-NGO organization), the Urban Foundation (UF) was the only NGO with a vested interest in the success of the Oukasie upgrade

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<sup>33</sup> A good example the racism was relayed to me by an Oukasie resident who wanted to go for a swim in the public pool in Brits which was now officially opened to all races. He was asked to show proof that he had paid his rates and taxes before he was allowed in. The same did not apply for any white folk. Ironically, this community leader who told me the story said he was please because "now the children who want to use the pool will start telling their parents to pay for services in Oukasie."

<sup>34</sup> This Other examples of how the ODT and Civic seeped into power are given in later chapters.

project. The UF was a major player in national housing policy formulation in South Africa. It wanted to show the government, political liberation parties, and other stakeholders in the housing process (*e.g.*, the loan and end-user finance providers, the construction and the building materials suppliers, and the trade unions and civic organizations) that the in-situ upgrading of shack settlements worked. It believed that the alternative, a mass-housing policy orchestrated by the state, would fail as it had done in so many other developing countries (Urban Foundation 1989). For this reason, the UF allowed two of its staff members (of which I was one) to become involved in the Oukasie project. It expected that the experience we gained from this involvement would contribute to the policy arguments put forth by the Urban Foundation's Housing Policy Unit.

The important issue to note here is that an NGO, in this case the UF, had a vested self-interest in allowing its staff members to spend part of their working day in Oukasie. Again we see how self-interest, this time of an NGO, can work to benefit a community, in this case Oukasie. The recent literature on technical training and assistance provided by NGOs, government or others to disadvantaged communities shows that the assistance works better when the provider has a vested interest in ensuring that a quality service is provided (Tendler and Amorim 1996). This occurs when the correct incentives to perform (or disincentives not to perform) are in place. In the case of Oukasie, the UF wanted all the upgrade projects that it was involved in to succeed. It was therefore

prepared to devote resources that would help ensure that this happened.<sup>35</sup>

A second point to note is that the motivation of Oukasie's advisors went beyond fulfilling the UF's objective of showing that in-situ upgrading can work. It was, in part, the commitment of these staff members, but more importantly, the links which Oukasie's advisors had to important and influential actors outside Oukasie, that may have differentiated Oukasie's upgrade experience from that of other projects.

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<sup>35</sup> Actually, the UF was a lot less involved in Oukasie than it was in the Soweto-on-Sea, Freedom Square, and Besters Camp in-situ upgrade projects. In the latter three projects, the UF was involved in a project management capacity for the Community Development Trusts in each of the three areas. In Oukasie, the UF's role was small, at least from a financial risk-exposure point of view; it was only involved in as far as two of its staff members acted as advisors to the Oukasie leadership (i.e., the ODT and its various sub-committees).

## CHAPTER IV

### CHOOSING TRUSTEES STRATEGICALLY

The Oukasie Development Trust was one of the few formalized community-based structures among the IDT upgrade projects that really worked well, in that it achieved its three main objectives, namely:

- it brought the project under community control, increased beneficiary participation, and retained beneficiary satisfaction throughout the process;
- it facilitated substantial physical improvements in the township (like recreation facilities, schools, basic services etc.); and
- it increased the level of economic and political integration with Greater Brits.

Although success in all three of its main objectives, which were typical of the objectives of community trusts in other upgrade projects, was an exception rather than the rule, housing actors can still gain useful insights which can be applied to a more general context.<sup>36</sup> In this chapter, I focus on the reasons underlying the leadership's strategic choice of trustees for their community based trust (The Oukasie Development Trust), which was the developer of the upgrade project in Oukasie, and the role that each of the trustees played in assisting the ODT fulfill its goals.

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<sup>36</sup> Both Hirschman in Getting Ahead Collectively (1984) and Piore of the Economics Department at MIT make the point that exceptions and/or particular cases are useful as a means for discussing more general issues from which we can draw lessons.

## Selecting NGO Advisors As Trustees

Very often housing actors do not realize the choices and trade-offs embedded in technical options that engineers put forward as *the* solution to a specific problem or goal. NGO advisors to communities and/or technical experts (*e.g.* a reform minded engineer from the private sector or an enlightened state engineer), whose services a community may hire or use, can play a critical role in reducing the asymmetry in technical knowledge that exists between the community and its contractors. These experts are usually also willing to understand what is best from the community's point of view, rather than putting forward the technically most efficient solution that usually gets adopted in similar types of projects.

Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly clear in the literature that the problems that housing actors often refer to as being due to a lack of maintenance of infrastructure and facilities and/or poor construction actually could have been avoided in the design phase of projects if the relevant experts had had an interest in doing so. In this respect, planners and engineers who are prepared to modify traditional solutions to technical problems can assist communities in attaining better outcomes.<sup>37</sup> If, for example, the engineers in the Freedom Square upgrade project in the Orange Free State had constructed a sewer line with a 150 mm diameter instead of the conventional 100mm diameter, far fewer blockages would have occurred. The costs of constantly unblocking and maintaining the narrow sewer pipes, while the community became accustomed to flush toilets and what could and could not be thrown into the toilet bowl,

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<sup>37</sup> This is discussed more fully in the chapter on Coping with Project Complexity.



probably far exceeded the cost of building slightly wider pipes.<sup>38</sup> An alternative would have been for the advisors to have assisted the community with an education process regarding the use of toilets before they were built. They did assist with an education process after the blockages began occurring, and, after six months, the number of blockages went down dramatically. In addition, the community would have benefited from advice recommending that the contractors close the plumbing system (by fixing the gully grids and gluing down of the vents) to reduce the potential for blockages--another design solution that would have reduced the burden of maintaining the sewer line.

Because of the highly technical nature of the project, the leaders in Oukasia Civic Association (the Civic) knew that they would benefit from having NGO experts assist them with technical and development aspects of the upgrade project.<sup>39</sup> They therefore called in their long-time allies from the political struggle, namely, Taffy Adler from the trade union movement and Geoff Budlender from the Legal Resources Center, to help them with their project as well as to assist them in deciding which other actors they should bring on board as trustees. Adler suggested inviting one of the two representatives from the Urban Foundation (UF), a nationally based NGO with informal housing expertise which was already assisting the community on technical matters pertaining to the upgrade project<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Thomas Stewart, project manager of the Freedom Square Upgrade project.

<sup>39</sup> Implicit in the IDT's capital subsidy program was the belief that providing tenure and basic services would kick-start a process of comprehensive development in the townships that it subsidized. To this end, the IDT also provided some funding (to pay the salary of the community liaison officer) and training (for both the ODT members and the Community Liaison Officer). The Oukasia case, as well as many other of the IDT's upgrade projects, did demonstrate that incremental upgrading in the townships increased in pace after services were put into the ground and households received legal tenure (NBI 1995).

<sup>40</sup> Technical Committee meetings took place between the members of the Oukasia Civic Association and the TPA and its contractors before the Trust was officially formed. The OCA had requested Adler to

Many other upgrade projects in South Africa did not bring in technical advisors to sit on their trusts to the same extent that Oukasie did. They mostly chose outsiders who had political clout and who were respected figures in the community. This differentiated the membership of the ODT from other trusts and gave the leaders in Oukasie the advantage of having easy access to well connected technical experts. It appears, from the Oukasie case, that choosing technically competent people (some of whom had process skills as well) is preferable to choosing only well respected figures who often have neither the time nor the necessary technical knowledge to assist communities in their respective upgrade projects.

We seldom see examples in the literature of how communities can assist in building the capabilities of their advisors so that the latter can *serve them better*. In Oukasie, just as the NGO advisors were able to give useful advice to the community, they, in turn, learned a great deal from the community leadership about the complexity of the community organization and mobilization aspects of the project, as well as the political difficulties that the leadership faced at various times. For example, the advisors learned that solving problems that surfaced did not automatically mean that the reasons for the conflict had been eradicated. This became clear when they assisted the leadership in opening up a new soccer area in response to a group of township residents who had gone on a rampage because they did not have a place to play soccer (the contractors had destroyed their graded field when they began their work). In this case, the soccer field was just a useful pretext around which some dissatisfied individuals could

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attend these meetings as their advisor on a fortnightly basis. Adler, in turn, encouraged (with the permission of the Oukasie Civic Association) two professionals from the Urban Foundation to assist the committee.

muster resistance against the existing community leaders. Providing a new soccer field did not really solve the problem.

The advisors, together with the community leaders, also learned that getting broad agreement over an average site-size of 220 square meters was not sufficient. Beneficiaries were unhappy about the relatively small size of some sites in all except one of the six in-situ upgrade projects that I looked into in South Africa. This is a critical issue, because, quite apart from the costs of servicing a bigger site, the in-situ nature of the project constrains the extent to which town planners can increase the site size of specific individuals without encroaching on someone else's property. The net result is that some households get smaller sites than other. It is imperative, therefore, that beneficiaries understand the constraints under which the project managers are operating and make appropriate choices. For example, in some cases in Oukasie, households which were given extremely small sites in the in-situ area could have been offered larger sites in the greenfield area of the project.

In Oukasie, the leaders discussed the average site-size issue at length in mass meetings after it became clear that some households were unhappy to have their current site reduced. They also demonstrated in an open area how big the average site would be. Despite the agreement that was reached in the mass meeting, discontent over the size of some sites continued for some time (*e.g.* x was unhappy because y's site was not reduced as much as his was, and z was unhappy because q had a far larger site *etc.*). The leaders and their advisors learned the lesson that, in future, they would be well advised to get broad community agreement over the

maximum and minimum site sizes, as well over the average site size. It does not take a genius to figure out that agreeing to an average site size is not very meaningful to a household when it is one of a large number of households which gets less far than the agreed-to average. A practical demonstration of the minimum site size, in particular, could have been helpful, although the leadership would have run the risk of stirring greater dissatisfaction in the township. Through the challenges that the leadership faced, the advisors developed a deeper understanding of the social and political dynamics of the upgrade project; they were thus able to provide the leadership with more grounded advice.

During very regular weekly meetings between the community and their NGO advisors, a strong relationship and a mutual understanding was built among all the actors. This contributed to the usefulness of the advisors' involvement and the quality of their advice. At these meetings, the advisors and community leaders discussed all matters pertaining to the project that had occurred the previous week and jointly brainstormed the major issues that they faced in the weeks ahead. The weekly meetings were almost like a ritual. Every Tuesday night for three years we held those meetings, never canceling one, whatever the circumstances. Even if only three people attended, the meeting still went forward and was co-chaired by one community member, who was also the chair of the ODT, and one NGO advisor, who was also the vice-chair of the ODT. These technical committee meetings were relaxed, yet highly disciplined. Committee members only spoke through their "comrade-chair" and only on the particular issue that was currently being discussed.

This discipline of holding these meetings weekly, ensuring that minutes were taken and that committee members reported back on tasks they had undertaken the previous week --a regimen brought to the community by their NGO advisor, Taffy Adler--went a long way toward building the organizational strength of the Trust's committee as well as solidarity among members on the committee. Taffy Adler, who was formerly from the trade-union movement, had learned these organization-building skills from the unions. Jain (1996) also stresses the importance of stimulating an organizational and professional culture which can be used to inculcate both discipline and pride in workers, as well as to motivate the workers to be more accountable and perform better.

It is worthwhile, at this juncture, to reinforce some of the different techniques that contributed to the functioning of the Trust and its ability to meet its objectives. These included giving moral support, connecting community members to influential outsiders, and leveling the asymmetry in knowledge between participants. I use the Oukasie case to illustrate some examples of effective NGO support:

1. The community's NGO advisors acted as a sounding board for the leaders of the township and provided them with advice to assist them in making many decisions which surfaced during the duration of the project. For example, the NGO advisors gave input on whether to invite a person from the TPA and the white Brits community to sit on the Trust and whether to approach the Brits Business community and demand that they "repent" and give Oukasie people jobs.

2. They provided technical advice on servicing options. They reviewed the benefits and costs of going for a labor-based brick-making project in the township using local contractors. They also gave input on whether the leadership should go for immediate ownership of sites which would take a much longer time or whether they should go for a 99 year leasehold option that would be converted automatically into full ownership within a much shorter time-span;
3. They gave the leaders moral support when they hit difficult times, including when there were rumblings in the township over the size of sites and also when some of the Trust's staff were physically threatened by a couple of dissatisfied members of the community;
4. They went to great lengths to explain the development process to the leadership and bring them up to speed on key issues around which many decisions would have to be made. For instance, they explained the trade-offs to the community in delaying the project in order to redo the township layout plan that the Provincial Agency had already completed. The Provincial Agency's plan had been created without any community consultation; and the community leadership was interested in redoing the plan in order to build more consensus around the project and improve some of its short-comings.<sup>41</sup> The alternative, as the advisors explained, was to modify the existing plan--a scenario which saved the community a lot of money and enabled the project to move ahead according to schedule without a substantial setback. The community took a decision at a mass meeting to go with this latter option.

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<sup>41</sup> This happened after the township was legalized but before the IDT funding came on line.

5. Oukasie's NGO advisors were also very well connected to outside actors and were helpful in guiding the various committees of the community with advice on who to network for resources and assistance. This is another aspect that may have differentiated Oukasie from similar upgrades. Other projects often had important people on their trusts, but not necessarily the type of people who knew how to assist the community in networking resources into their respective project areas. Oukasie's NGO advisors also suggested that the community hire its own hard-core technical consultant. This had a tremendous impact on the project's success, as is discussed later in a separate chapter.<sup>42</sup>
6. Lastly, Oukasie's advisors helped build a bridge of understanding between the community's leadership and the contractors, the TPA and the Brits local authority. This helped lessen the potential for conflicts between them based on misunderstandings and preconceptions of each other. For example, during the many "capacity building" technical committee meetings that were held by the community members of the committee, their advisors imparted technical and knowledge-based skills to the leadership. This helped them understand why the TPA and its contractors were favoring particular technical options like using machines in some parts of the project where some community members suggested that they could use labor instead.

The recent NBI study (1995) conducted among shack-dwellers in eight upgrade projects shows that in the seven projects that were subsidized by the IDT there was a very high

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<sup>42</sup> I recognize that it is inaccurate to make such a stark distinction between the advice that Oukasie's NGO advisors offered and the advice that Oukasie's technical consultant offered; yet I feel that the different roles that these actors took on in the project are better illustrated separately, even though there is some overlap.

correlation between the performance of the developer (as perceived by the beneficiaries and the outcome of the project (including whether beneficiaries felt that the project delivered a very good outcome or a very bad outcome and whether beneficiaries wished to stay in the completed project areas). In other words, the study, which used a likert scale to measure the degree of beneficiary satisfaction, showed that beneficiaries were more satisfied with the project *when they perceived that the developer did a good job*. This finding should temper the common practice of NGO advisors who often drive a wedge between the “developer and the contractors” and “the community” in an effort to protect the community’s interests from the “exploitative and extractive practices” that they attribute to for-profit developers. According to the IDT’s consultant, this practice seems to have left beneficiaries less satisfied with the project outcome as the resulting polarization of the various stakeholders caused many problems in the implementation of the project.

### **Nominating Community-Based Trustees**

In many of the IDT’s upgrade projects, local community leaders and developers chose high ranking, well respected people (often black) from outside of their community to sit on their respective trusts. Although these people gave immediate credibility to the upgrade projects, most of these trustees were already overloaded with work and were not able to give sufficient attention to “driving” the project and foreseeing and/or sorting out implementation difficulties as they arose. Amongst the professionals that I interviewed, there was a general consensus that unless “important figure” trustees had a vested interest in a particular upgrade project (as was the case in Oukasié), they contributed far less to the project than did many of the home-grown



beneficiaries who were much less well known. The community-based representatives from Oukasie had a vested interest in making their project work, as they were beneficiaries. It thus made sense to the Civic to load a significant number of them onto the Trust; they were, in fact, in the majority. Since trustees are not paid for the work that they do in projects, it is important that there are adequate other incentives which motivate them to perform effectively. The literature (Jain 1996, Lipsky 1980, Tandler 1995) points out that incentives like publicity, respect from peers, increased responsibility and discretion, and political support are under-utilized mechanisms which can be prime motivators of good performance amongst workers. The community-based trustees were driven to perform well by a combination of all of these incentives and more.<sup>43</sup>

The Civic leadership nominated the community-based trustees from a pool of “active” residents in Oukasie, many of whom had become regular attendees at the ODT’s weekly technical committee meetings and had displayed a fervent interest in the upgrading initiative. The Civics’ choice of trustee representatives was significant for two reasons, both of which could easily be applied to other projects:

1. It selected trustees from a highly mobilized and organized group of individuals who had already played an active role in organizational aspects of the project. In this way, it reduced its risk that these community activists would take on the prestigious position of being a trustee without being committed to the project.

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<sup>43</sup> This point is covered in more detail in the chapter on Community Participation as well as in the chapter on Storytelling.

2. The OCA leadership chose individuals who had expertise and were involved in different functional areas in the community. For example, Stanley Mnisi was chosen for his community mobilization skills (*e.g.* getting people to attend mass meetings), social welfare skills (*e.g.* his knowledge on matters that were important to households like issues relating to the death of family members and homelessness), and his commitment to work to ensure that things happened. Joe Sekano and Caroline Mashike were chosen for their prominent role in education-related matters. In this way, individuals with specific skills in specific areas that would be useful in the upgrading project were brought onto Trust.

Soon after the Trust's formation, the community-based trustees assigned tasks to its various subcommittees (*e.g.* the education and health committees). Specific trustees took responsibility for driving and supporting particular committees in areas in which they were most competent. Very often in in-situ upgrades, it is relatively small unhappinesses amongst a few households that explodes into much greater controversies. This can happen if the problems are poorly handled and/or if opposition political groupings in the community use the unhappiness of a few persons as a means to stir up resentment among other people for their own political ends. Trustees took on the task of informally monitoring the activities of their assigned subcommittees in an effort to pre-empt conflict. Stan Mnisi, for example, headed up the "grave-yard" and "homeless peoples" committees in the project. These were two particularly controversial areas to work in. In the case of the graveyard committee, residents were beginning to bury their dead in the areas where pipes were to be laid, as the existing graveyards were full. In the latter committee, homeless people from neighboring rural areas began settling

in Oukasie in the hopes of getting a serviced site. Some settled in areas that were already allocated to existing residents of Oukasie and had to be moved. Mnisi's experience of dealing sensitively with community matters made the negotiations between the Oukasie Development Trust and the respective parties much easier than they otherwise would have been.

The advantage of including individuals with relevant specialized skills on a community structure is clear. The disadvantage, however, is the potential for these individuals to dominate and overpower others who have less direct expertise on the subject. The ODT overcame this disadvantage because trustees worked with subcommittees. Each subcommittee had a number of skilled individuals in the particular area, and all of the subcommittees were accountable to the Trust and the Civic, *and not* to any individual trustee. In this way, the power of community-based trustees was checked.

### **Selecting “The Outsiders”**

Hirschman's (1971) essays on “obstacles to the perception of change” made me think of the blanket of prejudice that is generally felt by black South Africans towards white Afrikaners in South Africa. This temptation also existed for the Oukasie leadership: they could have perceived everyone on the TPA (*i.e.* the Transvaal Provincial Administration) and the Brits Town Council to be conservative (“read bad”) individuals who had always been conservative and would always remain so.

If this prejudice were justified, there would be little reason to expect any Afrikaners to ever be amenable to any political or development projects that could change the status quo or make black people better off. Development actors are sometimes blind to the changes that have occurred among some Afrikaner groups, despite evidence such as ex-President F.W. de Klerk's referendum prior to the election in which most whites voted for political change. This blindness precludes development actors (including community groups) from sufficiently engaging Afrikaner people in a constructive dialogue. Hirschman warns that we can easily miss changes in other groups' behavior and attitudes, and, by missing them, lose great opportunities. Three people--two white Brits businessmen and a senior TPA official--that the Oukasie leadership selected as trustees reflect the leadership's understanding of the kind of issues Hirschman discusses. A discussion of these "outsiders" follows.

### **Inviting the TPA onto the Trust**

One would have expected the highly politicized leadership of Oukasie, which had fought against the government and which did not view capitalists in a pleasant light, to have been vehemently against initiating a working relationship with its former enemy; in fact, the opposite was true. The community leadership of Oukasie actually chose to have the TPA (which had been involved in the attempted forced removals) and white businessmen (who were associated with worker exploitation) to join them at the ODT table. Although choosing to jointly undertake a project with one's former enemies may seem strange at first, the decision to do so was the outcome of the leadership's sophisticated understanding of the value that these parties

could bring to the upgrade process. The strategy of bringing one's "enemies" on board by explicitly recognizing that they are an important part of the process (and may need to be "co-opted") is a strategy that is often used by politicians, but not as often used (at least according to the literature I surveyed) by community groups.<sup>44</sup> Notably, it was precisely because the Oukasie leadership was politicized that it was able to understand the way that power works, and how it could make it work to its advantage: namely, by bringing the "powerhouses" (a representative of the government and the powerful business community) on board.

While the politicized leadership of Oukasie initiated a working relationship with the TPA by making them trustees and drawing them firmly into the process, the opposite was occurring in a number of other IDT projects. In many of these other upgrade projects, communities (often on the advice of their NGO assistants) had antagonistic relationships with government officials and business people who were key stakeholders in the process. For example, in the Phola Park (Alberton) and Klerksdorp upgrades, NGOs (*e.g.*, Planact) that were assisting communities were hostile towards the IDT, which they saw in the same light as the apartheid government. They were also antagonistic towards government officials, such as the TPA representatives, and the contractors who they saw as exploitative and "uneducated in community-sensitive development."<sup>45</sup> At monthly trust meetings of the Klerksdorp Development Trust (KDT), the community representatives and their NGO advocates behaved in a divisive manner often calling

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<sup>44</sup> I did find one exception in the literature by Turner (1995), in which the community leadership of Central Brazil invited their "enemy" to be the president of their development association. Turner identifies this as a traditional Kayapo solution to the political clash of contradictory factions: avoid overt polarization by obliging the leader of the opposing faction to identify with the ascendant and consensual position.

<sup>45</sup> Interviews with three development consultants.

for community caucuses which excluded all the outsiders (business and government official representatives), leaving the latter waiting often up to an hour while they discussed matters which could have been discussed before the trust meeting.<sup>46</sup> This created an “us” and “them” attitude which made it difficult to pull any outsiders into the upgrade process, even those who were initially willing assist them and who had resources. The community involved in the Klerksdorp Development Trust thus ensured that very few resources were forthcoming from government and business stakeholders who could have assisted them.

Unlike the Klerksdorp Development Trust, the leaders of the Oukasie Development Trust together with their NGO advisors went out of their way to secure unity among all trustees on their vision and goals for upgrading Oukasie. They also treated everyone as “insiders” at Trust meetings. This strategy paid off as all trustees (both those from Oukasie and those from outside Oukasie) were bought into the process and were keen to contribute towards the upgrading of township.

Even though the TPA and the Brits business community could generally be described as racist, the legalization of Oukasie made it easier for slightly more reform-minded individuals both in the Brits community and in the TPA to work with the Oukasie leadership.<sup>47</sup> The leadership and its advisors saw this as an opportunity to establish a healthier connection with the Afrikaner-dominated TPA, which still held a fair amount of power over the upgrade project. The TPA still owned most of the land in Oukasie. It was also the acting local authority for the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> This point is an important one and is explained more fully in my chapter on Stakeholders.

township, and it had signing power over all agreements (*e.g.*, the service, administration, and land agreements) that had to be made on behalf of Oukasie residents. In addition, it had access to bridging finance sources from the National Housing Corporation. Bridging finance was necessary since the Independent Development Trust (IDT) paid out its subsidies only once: after the township had been officially registered; services were installed and checked off by the IDT's consultant as being up to the required standard; and the beneficiary households had taken transfer of the serviced stands.<sup>48</sup> While waiting for subsidies to be paid out, developers had to finance the operating and capital costs of the project from borrowed sources. Bridging finance was particularly difficult for community-based developers, as they did not have the credit standing that the banks demanded. This created inequality between potential players in the IDT's capital subsidy program. The ODT was totally reliant on the TPA's ability to access the necessary finance that it needed to carry out the development.<sup>49</sup> It was for these reasons that the community leadership and its advisors realized during the planning stages of the upgrade project that the TPA's commitment to the project was vital. They were, therefore, only too keen to have their former aggressor sitting at the table with them as a fully fledged ODT member.

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<sup>48</sup> Taking transfer of the stand did not mean that the beneficiary had to have taken occupation of the site. This became a problem in many upgrading projects in South Africa, as many beneficiaries who had been allocated stands, and had taken official ownership of them by signing the necessary documents, took a long time to move onto their sites. This opens up the potential for vandalism and/or theft of services (*e.g.*, toilet seats) as well as invasion by other families needing homes. However, if developers had to wait until poor tenant households occupied their sites to draw down subsidies, development finance costs could escalate substantially.

<sup>49</sup> The private sector and/or government could have greatly reduced the reliance of communities on "outsiders" if they had been more willing to provide competent community-based developers with bridging finance.

Housing actors should note that despite the fact that a fair amount of power was held by a former enemy outside of the Oukasie township (*i.e.*, the TPA), the community leaders turned the situation on its head by recruiting an official from the TPA who, for personal reasons, needed the project nearly as much as it needed him (see chapter on Stakeholders). The leadership welcomed him onto their committee and encouraged him to commit resources to the project. By signing of the Deed of Trust, the TPA committed itself to contributing to the improvement of the living environment in Oukasie and its integration into the broader economic community.

### **Reaching Out to Brits: The Beginning of Political and Economic Integration**

The community-based trustees chose two powerful Brits businessmen to sit on their Trust. The first man selected was Japie Steenkamp. He was one of the only two National Party members of the Brits Town Council. The other councilors all belonged to the more right-wing Conservative Party. He was therefore easily identified by the Oukasie community leadership as being a “more reform-minded” councilor. He also held a senior position on the Brits Chamber of Commerce. The second Brits-based trustee was also a well respected member of the business community. He held the position of Financial Director of a very prominent tire manufacturer (Firestone) in Brits. The community-based trustees selected these men for four main reasons:



1. The ODT wanted to be sure that the Brits business community began creating more job opportunities for Oukasie residents as well as contributing skills and resources to the upgrade process.
2. The ODT believed that these men could facilitate communication and contact with other key interests in Brits, including the town council and the wider business community. This contact opened the way for political and economic integration of the two areas in the future.
3. The ODT knew these men would impose financial discipline and rigor on the Trust and assist it in working as a professional organization, including ensuring that all the paper work was in order and that the organization conducted itself professionally.
4. The ODT believed these men, both members of the National Party (NP), would be less likely than their Conservative Party counterparts to refuse the invitation to be trustees.

The other more conservative councilors on the Brits Town Council were probably pleased to have Steenkamp on the ODT. They, themselves, wanted nothing to do with the township. Yet, because there was no way that they could avoid supplying Oukasie with services on an agency basis, they wanted to have enough of a finger in the pie to know what kind of “animal” was on their doorstep, especially in as far as repayment for services provided by Brits was concerned.<sup>50</sup> Steenkamp’s presence on the ODT gave them this opportunity. They no longer

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<sup>50</sup> For reasons explained in my chapter on Stakeholders, Brits reluctantly agreed to provide Oukasie with services, but it still refused to deal directly with the Oukasie community. Because the TPA was the acting local authority in Oukasie, it was responsible for providing Oukasie with services. The Brits Town Council agreed to provide the services on behalf of the TPA on an agency basis to the community.

had to guess what was happening in Oukasie. They could be adequately informed with little effort.

Steenkamp was thus an important “bridge” for Oukasie into the conservative dominated Town Council. Most community leaders that I interviewed felt that he had played an important role in introducing the council to its neighbors in Oukasie in a very unthreatening way. Beginning with this type of unthreatening contact, they felt, opened the way for more extensive communication later on, when, for example, the ODT’s advisors led a joint workshop between the council, the Civic and the ODT. In fact, when Oukasie received funding from a regional government structure for public electricity for the township, Steenkamp was instrumental in getting the mayor to come and take the credit at the ceremonial occasion when the lights were switched on for the first time.<sup>51</sup> This was a strategic gesture by the ODT to help build the relationship between the black (Oukasie) and white (Brits) townships. It was at this ceremony that the chairperson of the Oukasie Development Trust made some poignant remarks which will never be forgotten by anyone who was present at this occasion: “For the first time there is no darkness anymore. We (Oukasie) can see you (Brits), and you can see us. It’s been a struggle of many decades. Now is the time to work to take Oukasie forward.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Electricity was not included in the IDT’s capital subsidy to each household.

<sup>52</sup> Said by Levy Mamabolo, chairperson of the ODT, on the day the street lights were switched on in October 1993.

In sum, although the white businessmen were in the minority on the Trust in that most other Trustees were from the community and/or were far more progressive than these National Party supporting trustees, they had a marked impact both on:

1. the efficacy of the Trust's operations, in that they brought in a business-like professionalism which probably made the TPA, the contractors and the community-based trustees more disciplined in their respective tasks; and
2. the success of the project, in that they smoothed the way for political and economic integration between Brits and Oukasie.

Although there is currently some debate regarding the benefits of setting up specific formal community-based structures to manage a comprehensive range of different project initiatives,<sup>53</sup> where it *is* deemed desirable by housing actors, they would do well to heed the way the Oukasie Development Trust's membership body was constructed and the reasons underlying the community's choice of trustees. There is no reason why other communities cannot attempt to use some of the ODT's strategies in the future. Facilitators, advisors and donor agencies may also benefit by becoming aware of:

1. the diversity that exists among groups and individuals who are key stakeholders. Even among the safari-wearing Afrikaners in the Brits Town Council, there was diversity of opinion and "real" change that yielded many opportunities; and

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<sup>53</sup> Discussed in more detail in chapter on Community Participation

2. the advantages of forming partnerships with strategic actors and drawing them into processes where they feel good about themselves. For example, the white businessmen on the ODT felt proud that they were directly involved in finally doing something in a black community on their doorstep and felt that the process was of value to them for publicity, political or economic reasons.

## CHAPTER V

### COPING WITH PROJECT COMPLEXITY

#### **Introduction**

In-situ upgrade projects, by their nature, are technically complex and difficult for community organizations to participate in effectively, especially without external help and support. Yet, this is precisely what many funders, NGOs and government agencies are demanding of communities in their drive towards decentralized and demand-driven projects. This is rather surprising, as there is evidence in the literature that many in-situ upgrades have failed because they are too complex for governments themselves to handle.<sup>54</sup> Irrespective of whether this is true or not, it is ironic that the same body of literature is recommending that communities that are generally much less resourced than governments take on the task of upgrading themselves. Even single-component infrastructure projects like providing sewage to a community, which are supposedly far less complicated than multi-component projects, are extremely difficult for communities to manage, because they involve intricate technical processes and choices. Yet, in the past, housing agencies often preferred to plan multi-component “Christmas tree” - type upgrade projects which are characterized by a “complex design, numerous and diverse activities to implement, an ambitious set of objectives, and the involvement of many agencies and operators.”<sup>55</sup> They thus often set themselves up for failure or, at best, only partially

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<sup>54</sup> See various World Bank publications on in-situ upgrading.

<sup>55</sup> Two examples of such projects are the Lusaka upgrade in Zambia and the Baldia upgrade in Karachi, Pakistan.

fulfilling their objectives. This is because those implementing the project lose the ability to focus their attention on critical problems as they become swamped with numerous less important demands and are pulled and pushed by the multitude of actors and agencies with which they are forced to interact.

In this chapter, I discuss briefly how the IDT tried to reduce project complexity in the design of its housing program--something which has been “out there” in the housing literature for some time but has not been practiced. In part, this is because it is less attractive for politicians and funders to deliver taps and toilets to needy communities than to deliver complete houses with schools and clinics.<sup>56</sup> I then discuss how the Oukasié Development Trust (ODT) dealt with the technical difficulties and challenges posed by their upgrade project. In particular, I discuss the role played by the ODT’s technical review consultant and suggest that other communities consider this specific type of technical support as a supplement to other kinds of support that they may already be getting, for example, from NGOs.

### **The IDT Designs a Program to Reduce Complexity**

At the time that the Independent Development Trust’s (IDT) launched its capital subsidy program, a debate was raging in the country between technical experts, who favored a much less complex housing policy that provided only basic services to a wide range of households, and the liberation movements and community advocate organizations, which

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<sup>56</sup> The debate around in-situ upgrading is covered in more detail in the Introduction chapter of my thesis.

favored providing a much more comprehensive range of services, including a basic four roomed house--something that the government could not afford to provide to the bulk of needy households in the country. Although the progressives held the moral high-ground by refusing to accept that poor black households should get only taps and toilets, the IDT took the opposite stand and launched the largest upgrading program that had every been implemented in the country.<sup>57</sup>

The IDT chose to focus solely on serviced sites precisely because it understood that to deliver quickly and at scale (reaching a large number of households), while maintaining an “acceptable” level of community involvement, the product it delivered had to be relatively simple, standardized and easily implementable.<sup>58</sup> Its approach was highly standardized: the IDT set out exactly what products it would subsidize and the minimum and maximum standards attached to each product.<sup>59</sup> It also streamlined the implementation mechanisms of the project delivery. For example, it insisted that pay-outs of subsidies would go directly to the developer in one lump-sum on behalf of all beneficiaries instead of piecemeal. As a result, the IDT managed to reach households on the large scale that it had set out to achieve.<sup>60</sup> By not taking on the direct responsibility of ensuring that community

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<sup>57</sup> The reasons for this are also explained more fully in the Introduction.

<sup>58</sup> There is a vast literature available on the issue of whether or not standardization in the name of project efficiency and/or equity is a good thing. For example, standardizing project design brings with it both costs (reduction of beneficiary choices with respect to servicing options) as well as benefits (more rapid delivery of services). I do not deal with this debate in my paper. Any housing actor engaged in upgrade projects, however, should be sure to cover this territory.

<sup>59</sup> For example, the IDT stipulated that minor roads had to be graded, bus routes had to be tarred, all toilets had to be flush toilets unless the topography of the landscape made it too expensive, ownership was to be the only form of tenure transferred, and every household would have its own tap.

<sup>60</sup> This more streamlined procedure raised the bridging finance costs for the community, as the developer was only paid once all the services for each household (or, at least, a large portion of them) had been

and social facilities were delivered in addition to the taps and toilets, the IDT also limited the number of government departments with which the developer had to interact. It thus avoided the need for a high level of coordination between many government departments-- a frequent cause of delays in project implementation. By delivering a narrow range of standardized services through developer-controlled projects, the IDT subsidized a 100,000 households within a three year period--an accomplishment remarkable even by international standards. It is doubtful that the same results could have been achieved within the same time frame if it had provided a wider range of services or had allowed more flexibility with respect to its many rules, *e.g.*, allowing transfer of subsidies to beneficiaries rather than the developer or allowing forms of land tenure other than ownership. The constrained choice that beneficiaries had with respect to site size, standard of services and type of tenure enabled the IDT to achieve its primary goals: quick delivery of basic services to as many poor people as possible.

### **The ODT Hires a Review Consultant to Deal with Project Complexity**

Despite the IDT's attempts to make the process relatively easy, there actually is no such thing as a simple infrastructure project, especially in the context of in-situ upgrading where resources are bound to alter the political, social and economic balance in the township.

Community-controlled development of supposedly less complex projects (like those subsidized by the IDT) is not as easy as it may initially appear for two main reasons:

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delivered and the beneficiary household had taken transfer of them. Bridging finance refers to the working capital that developers have to have (or raise) in order for them to finance the operating costs of construction. This money had to see them through until the project funder (the IDT) paid them on behalf of beneficiaries.



1. The leadership of under-resourced communities are often ill-equipped to manage the complexities of project management;
2. Both leaders and their constituencies (the beneficiaries) are often uninformed of the social, economic and political considerations that underlie the technical choices that engineers make. This makes it even more difficult for them to know what alternative technical options might be more suitable for their needs.

As in many other upgrade projects, the community leaders relied on NGO advisors to provide them with project management insight and technical expertise. Because they were planners, Oukasie's advisors had relatively little project management experience and no engineering expertise-- skills that are critical to any developer, not least to the community-based ODT. The community-based trustees in Oukasie took an extremely significant and strategic decision when they decided a few months into the project, on the recommendation of their NGO advisors, that they should hire their own "review consultant" who would provide them with two types of support:

1. The consultant would assist the leadership in monitoring the work of the contractors that were hired by the Provincial Administration but which were ultimately being paid out of the subsidies from each beneficiary household; *and*
2. The consultant would inform and advise the leadership on matters of technical importance. For example, he/she could advise the leadership on which provider of

electricity to go for, or the alternatives for locating the footpath to the highway, taking into account the need for road-safety as well as easy access to the nearest bus route.

Oukasie was the only IDT project that hired its own review consultant and paid for it out of the IDT subsidy that each household received --a decision to which all households agreed, based on their trust in their community leaders. The residents believed, based on their leaders' advice, that hiring a consultant could actually save them money in the long run. This, in fact, did occur. One such saving resulted because the consultant showed that an additional bridge over the river running through the township was not necessary, given that there was not much vehicular traffic and the contractors were already building two other bridges. In place of another bridge, he suggested that another pedestrian path be constructed. This, too, was accepted by the community at a mass meeting. Another saving was made when he suggested that the sports grounds be located in an area where the terrain was not suitable for homes to be built; this opened up more land for other uses. He also suggested that the gravel from the excavation of the trenches be used to fill the potholes in the roads--which addressed a problem that taxi-drivers had repeatedly raised in mass meetings.

In various independent evaluations conducted by the IDT, community organizations made it clear that they felt that they lacked the technical expertise that was necessary to participate meaningfully in projects. So why didn't these communities hire consultants as

the Oukasie community did? In exploring possible answers, I came up with two likely possibilities:

1. Communities were simply not aware that their NGO advisors might not have all the technical skills and/or the necessary time to adequately assist them with their upgrade projects. Communities often saw their advisors as *the* professionals from outside whose job it was to know these things. It seems likely, too, that many NGO advisors were not willing to admit that they did not have all the skills themselves, since they prided themselves on knowing what was best for “their community constituencies.” Thus, some communities were stuck with NGO advisors who were both ignorant of many of the technical issues pertaining to upgrade projects and, worse still, were self-styled “community advocates” who acted as gate-keepers and deliberately did not inform community leaders about other outside actors who could have been of use to them. Oukasie’s NGO advisors were different in that they were not so enmeshed in the tight network of activist/advocacy NGOs in South Africa. In addition, they did not take on the role of community activists who were there to “protect” the community from outsiders. *They* suggested to the leadership that they hire a technical consultant who would be sympathetic to their interests and knowledgeable about engineering aspects of upgrade projects. As Oukasie’s advisors were well connected, knew who was good in the field, and had no problem with suggesting someone from the private sector (something that other NGOs shied away from), they recommended to the technical committee exactly *who* the ODT should consider hiring. They brought the

potential review consultant candidate to a meeting of community members. The community leaders initially accepted him on the basis of their advisors' recommendation.

2. Communities probably did not know that their subsidy could be used towards the hiring of their own consultant. This was not something that the Independent Development Trust (IDT) had any interest in making known. The IDT had its own technical and social consultant that it paid to ensure that communities were adequately involved in projects and were aware of the technical choices (such as whether to place the toilet structure at the back or the front of each site) and social processes (such as what kind of site allocation procedure to choose). It is likely that the IDT never really considered encouraging communities to hire their own technical support, because it saw additional technical advisors as duplicating the work of the IDT consultants as well as the project manager's team.

Furthermore, the IDT probably thought that there was little need for additional technical assistance and monitoring, given that many of the projects were driven by community-based developers and not-for-profit developers, and that many communities had NGO advisors. It is quite likely that the IDT believed that these were actors with good intentions who were both unlikely to exploit communities or to require extensive technical supervision. In reality, though, my interviews with housing professionals revealed that communities registered as much dissatisfaction with not-

for-profit developers as with developers from the for-profit sector. Furthermore, the IDT consultants were not allocated sufficient time to give dedicated support to communities; and, even when they did have time, beneficiaries did not always welcome their presence, as they were associated with the apartheid government (Interview with beneficiary, 1996).

In the development literature, we often see recommendations for cutting out duplication and competition between actors. In Oukasie, for example, one of these cost-cutting proponents probably would have told the community that hiring an additional engineer was an unnecessary expense, because there were already sufficient engineers on the project management team. But the engineer hired by the Oukasie leadership, who was his own boss, was accountable to the community *only* and not to any other organization, as is often the case with NGO advisors. He also acted as a watchdog over the project managers and actually reduced overall costs to the community. Further, he built the skill base in the community through workshops that he conducted. Other illustrations of the kinds of support he provided include:

1. He monitored the contractors' time-sheets and the fees that they charged, as well as the quantity and quality of their work. Monitoring the costs charged by the project managers and the choices put forward by them was particularly important because the project engineers came from the same firm that headed up and staffed the project management. This kind of arrangement presents an opportunity for corruption,

because engineers may be tempted to over-design aspects of the project so that their colleagues must spend more time on site. Extra management hours can be lucrative when fees are calculated on an hourly basis.

2. He insisted that the project managers draw up charts to monitor the actual progress of the project versus the planned progress and the actual costs against the budgeted costs. These charts were updated and distributed to all members of the technical committee on a fortnightly basis. This enabled community members to become familiar with costing, budgeting and programming issues in a very unthreatening environment. At the same time, the project management team became aware that their activities were being carefully monitored.
3. He sent the project managers numerous memoranda reminding them of things that they had committed themselves to doing at technical committee meetings. This included following up on the different options for fencing around the canal (important since most people did not know how to swim) and doing a survey to find out why residents were taking a long time to move to sites in the greenfield portion of the project.
4. He questioned the project management team extensively on technical choices that they put forward. He often put forward other technical alternatives, some of which were less costly. For example, he suggested putting the toilet structures on two adjacent sites back-to-back to reduce the piping costs. He also provided invaluable input on

the agreement between the Transvaal Provincial Administration and the Brits Town Council governing the provision of services for Oukasie. He knew that the contractors had little interest in ensuring that the agreement made the Town Council accountable to the community. If not for him, many checks and balances in the agreement would have been neglected. He ensured, for example, that any service charges would be negotiated with the community before being imposed. He also introduced procedures for handling complaints around service provision and payment for services received (or not received).

5. Lastly, he was a source of competition for the project managers, who did not want to be outperformed by the community's consultant. This caused the project management team to be more receptive to the community's service needs and preferences and to attempt to innovate and come up with options and alternatives from which the community could choose.

The review consultant also tried to ensure that the project managers synchronized the three complex processes that always occur in upgrade projects: the legalization of township establishment (including the registration of sites), the construction process, and the site-allocation and other administrative processes. The failure to synchronize these processes was a major problem in many in-situ upgrade projects, including Oukasie. This is because there is an incentive for developers, who bear the costs of bridging finance, to shoot ahead with the relatively easy construction process and neglect the other more time-

consuming and tedious processes.<sup>61</sup> This, however, can be self-defeating, because the gains made on quick construction are lost when the project is held up down the line. For example, in the case of the IDT's upgrades, the developer was not be able to draw down funds from the subsidy program until the township establishment and site-allocation processes were completed. The consequences of not dealing adequately with the three processes from the beginning are often far worse, in terms of both the potential for conflict among beneficiaries over sites and the higher bridging finance costs that the developer incurs. This is because the developer usually has a far greater financial risk exposure as he/she proceeds into the peak construction phase. In addition, the process through which sites are allocated is likely to be much more prone to conflict at a time when the "finished goodies" are ready for the taking. It is much wiser, therefore, to get the site allocation process proceeding *before* the construction phase begins.

My observation that financial incentives cause developers to do a shoddy job on the administrative and process aspects of the project runs counter to another of my findings. I stated earlier that developers need incentives, such as bearing the penalties imposed by late delivery, to encourage them to perform efficiently. Clearly, efficient and speedy project implementation is desirable, but not at the cost of more complicated and costly problems down the line. A trade-off between the two is usually inevitable.

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<sup>61</sup> This applies to for-profit, non-profit *and* community-based developers. The former want to raise their profit margins, which are already relatively low in most upgrade projects. The latter want to reduce their high finance charges, which eat into the subsidies of beneficiaries.



It is easier to synchronize the three in-situ upgrade processes if project actors build a relationship before the actual project begins (Morkel).<sup>62</sup> This increases the communication and trust between actors that is so often missing in upgrade projects; it can also reduce the risk of conflicts and costly delays later on. Project managers, especially those in the for-profit sector, need to be convinced that putting time into township establishment and site allocation “up front” will not reduce their profit margins in the long run. If financial incentives and accountability are structured appropriately, there should be pressure for all parties involved to work together from the beginning.

Unfortunately, this was not the case in Oukasie, where lack of collaboration at the earliest stages of the project led to costly delays later on. If the project managers in Oukasie had suffered the brunt of these costly delays that were caused by site allocation problems, the problems would never have surfaced to the same extent. The project managers should have seen to it that the town planning was adequate before they ordered the construction phase to go ahead. In fact, they did not, and the town planning was not adequate. The town planners had not been on-site physically to check out each stand; instead, they worked from aerial photographs and failed to take into account the existing boundaries that neighbors had worked out between themselves.<sup>63</sup> The contractor did not pay sufficient attention to this problem in large part because of a flawed contractual arrangement between the contractors (the project management company) and the

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with Mike Morkel in January 1996. Morkel is an IDT consultant.

<sup>63</sup> Site allocation processes are often very conflictual in resource scarce environments. Relying on aerial photographs is a mistake that other town planners can avoid. I deal with it more in a later chapter.

Transvaal Provincial Administration. The contract forced both project beneficiaries and the Transvaal Provincial Administration to bear the costs of the delays; the profits of the project managers who were responsible for the delays, on the other hand, were left untouched. Thus, the project managers had little incentive to ensure that the project went smoothly from beginning to end. As Oukasie's review consultant argued repeatedly, contracts between housing actors must explicitly define who bears risks in a manner that creates the "right" incentives for good performance.

### **Closing Remarks**

Although the relationships between a community and its service-providers are not discussed frequently in either the literature on community participation or housing, it is often precisely this relationship which will determine the community leadership's impact on and level of participation in a project (Watson 1992). Reform-minded engineers can play an important role in building the capacity of communities and enabling them to participate meaningfully in upgrade processes; they can also point out where technical innovation can both reduce costs for beneficiaries and make maintenance of services easier in the future.

In the case of the upgrade project in Oukasie, it was the input from their community-friendly engineer that enabled the leaders of the township to participate meaningfully in the technicalities surrounding service provision. This engineer provided the community with the technical ammunition that it needed to fight its battles with the project manager, who,

in the initial stages of the project, wanted to steam ahead without too much attention to the community's needs. This transfer of information empowered the community leadership to take more control over decisions that the technical professionals in the project management team were making. The review consultant's expertise and support also gave the community's leaders the technical know-how to effectively fight with the various state departments for resources. His input was particularly valuable because of his background: as a white reform-minded engineer who was fluent in both Afrikaans and English, he knew the ins and outs of his profession. For example, he knew how costing should be calculated and what kinds of contracts should be drawn up to minimize the risk of contractors exploiting their clients.<sup>64</sup> He also understood the culture of the apartheid-conditioned planners and project managers who were operating in the township, and he could relate to them easily.

In conclusion, seven of my findings are worth reinforcing:

1. Communities would be well advised to try and get technical assistance from individuals with applied technical expertise and project management skills. The Oukasie community was particularly fortunate in that its technical consultant was also

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<sup>64</sup> In separate interviews, Bleibaum, the community's review consultant, and two IDT consultants (Mike Morkel and Ian Palmer) stressed the importance of well written contracts that spell out exactly who is responsible for what and exactly what kind of risks and penalties will arise if the conditions of the contracts are not met. Unfortunately, in the case of Oukasie, the Provincial Administration had an excessive amount of power over the construction and had very set ways of laying out the conditions of a contract. Bleibaum, the community's review consultant, did manage to get some aspects changed to introduce more accountability of the various role players. Where he did not manage to make changes, he heightened the trustees' awareness of problems that could arise and how they could best deal with them.

working on a number of other in-situ upgrades around the country. He was therefore able to cross pollinate ideas and expertise between the project areas. This is certainly an ideal situation, but there is no reason why communities cannot have such an ideal in mind when they select their help.

2. The locus of power and the ability to participate in and influence decisions is intimately tied up with access to critical information.<sup>65</sup> This aspect is not adequately covered in the literature, which usually conflates power with the actors that have control over financial resources. In the Oukasie project, the community's engineer provided the community leadership with the information they needed to understand technical details of the project.
  
3. Although most people say that redundancy or competition between actors should be eliminated in development projects, this case shows that competition between individuals who are working on the same project can have productive outcomes. Because the project manager in Oukasie did not want to be outperformed by the community's review consultant engineer, he took his job more seriously. Thus, the "redundant" review consultant contributed to cost-savings to the community both directly, through cost-saving recommendations, and indirectly, by making the project manager perform better.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> This is also dealt with in my chapter on Community Participation.

<sup>66</sup> There is an established literature on the value of duplication and redundancy. My ideas were triggered by an article by Landau, written in 1969.

4. A reform-minded engineer can help to mediate between a community and the traditional engineers who may have no interest in the community's well being. Watson's research (1992) reminds us that these reform-minded engineers can be found in the public sector as well. They can be an important and affordable resource to communities. Additional advantages of seeking out reform-minded engineers from the public sector are twofold: first, it is likely that they will be available to assist communities for the "long-haul," as opposed to consultants or NGOs which usually stay with projects for shorter periods of time<sup>67</sup>; second, it is possible that a city-engineer's experience will have positive spill-over effects within the municipality. For example, he/she will probably be able to assist the community in networking other actors in the government who could assist with other aspects of the upgrade project. A final benefit of working with a public-sector engineer, if the project is successful, is that the status of the engineer may increase, and this may encourage others to adopt his mode of operating.
  
5. Outside advisors can serve a monitoring function and help to contain costs. The literature tells us that monitoring projects is always a problem because of the costs involved and because some parties have a vested interest in not being monitored. This typically happens if parties to projects play more than one role. For example, a project designer could have a vested interest in not offering his/her clients less costly

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<sup>67</sup> This relates to the final point in this section.

alternatives if he/she is also responsible for the construction phase of the project and makes a bigger profit on a more costly alternative. Similarly, as in the case of Oukasie, if the project manager is also the site engineer, the project manager has little incentive to monitor the fees and check on the work performance or technical options put forward by the engineer. In Oukasie, it is likely that a far less lavish community center and hall would have been sufficient to meet the community's needs; the project management team went for more expensive options because they benefited financially. Of course, the community members also preferred a more elaborate construction to a less elaborate one, especially since the funding was grant-based from the Regional Services Council (a state structure). In this case, the community was better off, but perhaps at the expense of making another community that also applied for the funds worse off. In a different scenario, in which the community was actually bearing part of the costs of the construction, there would still be no incentive for the engineers and project management team to come in with a less costly alternative. It is here that the role of outside advice can be particularly helpful. This suggests that it is useful to have different parties doing some of the different functions involved in projects, even though this runs against the classic "economies of scale" argument that a single actor (in this case a single engineer) can perform more efficiently.<sup>68</sup>

A more enlightened review consultant is also more likely to assist community members in monitoring some of the construction and/or maintenance processes in the township.

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<sup>68</sup> See Tandler and Amorim for more on cross-monitoring by different parties.

For example, a consultant can give simple instructions to interested community members (who may be in the streets anyway, given the high unemployment) to watch that the contractors allow the cement bricks to dry sufficiently before they use them to construct toilet walls. Community members can be asked to report to the community liaison officer if this does not happen. The review consultant cannot be on-site all the time, so this is a good complement for other monitoring support that the community may have. In extremely poor communities, it can even be a good substitute, if no other resources are available. In Oukasie, the education committee, which consisted of parents, teachers and others with a real interest in better education for the community, went around with the review consultant to check on the construction on a weekly basis. They learned from him what to look for (*e.g.*, places where early cracks may appear) and often went in their own spare time to monitor the progress of the builders. As a result, the primary school was very well built. Getting those beneficiaries who have the time, the will and enough basic information about the construction process to do the monitoring is often an inexpensive and efficient way of ensuring that a good job gets done.

6. The fact that the community paid for their review consultant out of their subsidies is unusual. No other IDT project structured their relationship in this way. Yet, it was precisely because there was no ambiguity in the review consultant's accountability to the Trust that made the relationship as productive as it was. Even NGO advisors have

a more ambiguous role, because they are accountable to their own organizations, as well as to the community with which they are working.

The relationship between the community's review consultant and the community leaders was exceptionally good in part because of its long-term nature. Over a five year period (1991 - 1996), the review consultant (and later his partner who took over when he left Johannesburg) built up a strong relationship with the leadership of the community. During this period, they developed a deep-seated trust in one another, as well as a moral commitment to each other to perform their work to the best of their ability. This also assisted the community in achieving better project outcomes. Trusting white folk who are not visibly "politically correct" or aligned with the African National Congress (the dominant political party), and who look and speak like Afrikaner people, is not something that comes easily to most black people who have always seen these people as their oppressors. Moatshe (the community liaison officer) admitted to me that when the Oukasie's NGO advisors first brought the review engineer to the technical committee meeting, he thought that this man was a "real Afrikaner"; he never imagined that the community would strike up a good relationship with him. Because there was time for a relationship to solidify, the community came to value their review consultant for his integrity, commitment and expertise.



## Chapter VI

### COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

#### Introduction

The term "community participation" is used to describe any level of community involvement in a project ranging from a single community organization rubber-stamping a venture that it has hardly been involved in, to total community ownership and control over critical aspects of a project. The very consensus among all development actors that community participation is a good thing exists precisely because of the vagueness of the term. Development actors are thus able to support it for a variety of reasons, including cost reduction, community empowerment, accountability of local structures, legitimization of the need for decentralization.

The notion of "community" is no less confusing. The recent literature on community participation makes no secret of this fact (Desai 1995; Friedman 1993; Sheng 1990). Who is *the* community? And what exactly constitutes an acceptable level of participation? Clearly, in shack settlements there are different people with differing interests. Renters, for example, often have different needs from site-owners; commuters do not necessarily have the same interests as taxi owners, and so on. Does it make sense, then, to talk about "the wishes of the community" at all?<sup>69</sup> In the case of Oukasie, I believe that it does,

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<sup>69</sup> In recent fieldwork, researchers (e.g., Friedman 1993 and PhD students in MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning), are questioning whether "communities" really now enjoy a say in development or whether the identity of those who make decisions for them (be they an elected community organization or some community-friendly NGO specialist) has simply changed. The question surrounding

since most residents believed the Oukasie Civic Association represented their interests. This was not only because the leadership had led them to victory during the struggle against the state, but also because the ODT made a concerted effort to involve beneficiaries in the project in a way that was meaningful to them. Although some cynics from outside the community have argued that Oukasie's NGO advisors, and not the ODT's community leaders, directed many aspects of the project, this was not consistent with the evidence I found. The project was driven by competent community leaders who used NGO advisors just as a business would use the advice of some of their favorite consultants to guide them in making decisions in areas where they felt they needed support. With respect to the relationship between the community leadership and project beneficiaries, the role of Oukasie's advisors was minimal.

I believe there is much housing actors can learn from the type of beneficiary-centered community participation that the Oukasie leadership both encouraged and responded to. Before discussing the specifics of the Oukasie case, however, I deal briefly with some of the current debates that are raging in South Africa regarding the nature and shape that participation should take.

### **The Debates Shaping the Design of Community Participation in Future Projects**

What struck me most about the debate raging in South Africa in 1995 and 1996 was that most actors assumed that a single representative community organization was the

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the role of NGOs in demand-driven projects is a relevant one. Oukasie's advisors did play a major role in the project but always answered to the community's interests, rather than the other way round.

appropriate structure for mediating the different interests of beneficiaries. Few analysts look at beneficiaries as individual citizens with the right to direct their demands to legitimately elected local government structures.<sup>70</sup> Many of the community development trusts in IDT-subsidized projects have failed; yet there is still a perception among many progressive South Africans that diverse communities can *easily* be represented by a single forum-type structure, like a community development trust. Most progressives also believe that formalizing this structure is a way of ensuring “progressive development” with community participation.

The result of the above set of beliefs is that community-based structures were institutionalized in nearly every upgrade project that was initiated after 1990.<sup>71</sup> There were good reasons why progressive groups favored an approach that formalized community participation: such an approach ensured that beneficiaries’ views would be included in the development process, albeit through community structures. While this was certainly far better than no participation at all, it forced beneficiaries with diverse interests to be represented through a single structure which could not have possibly vocalized all the different interests of the groups and individuals that it purported to represent.

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<sup>70</sup> More recently the debate is swaying a little more towards the latter.

<sup>71</sup> When I refer to the institutionalization of the participation process, I am referring to this formalization of recognized community organizations, often through legal mechanisms (e.g., through a trust or voluntary organization) which would then be the community’s structure with whom outside actors (like developers) would be forced to interact.

Friedman (1993) contends that “to regard one organization as representative of the whole community is not to do it any favors, but to create expectations which it can never fulfill” (p. 4). The result, he argues, is not to empower community groups, but to weaken and divide them. In the Phola Park in-situ upgrade project, which was also subsidized by the IDT, migrants (illegal aliens) and criminals who felt threatened by the project used renegade ANC youth to assist them in overthrowing the democratically elected Residents Committee (which had widespread support in Phola Park). This does not mean that development should not be negotiated with particular community organizations (such as the Residents Committee in Phola Park). On the contrary, their support is crucial to the success of development projects. But it *does* mean it should not be negotiated *only* with them to the exclusion of other groups or individuals (Friedman 1993, p. 5).

Having a broad-based forum with many different interests, however, does not necessarily guarantee success either. It is often the case that less visible and less vocal groups are not included in these structures. Illegal immigrants who are entering South Africa and settling mainly in shack settlements are a case in point. Although these people may not engage in formal organization structures in a deliberate attempt to keep their visibility low, the Phola Park example shows that they will not hesitate to come together if forced to protect their interests. In so doing, they have great potential to destroy projects.

Similarly, those people who are most destitute are the least visible in the community (Tendler 1982, Graham 1994), and are, therefore, least likely to belong to any prominent

groups. Housing actors therefore need to make deliberate efforts to ensure that their voices are also heard.

Institutionalizing participation often brings with it other problems, even when formalized community organizations seem to have all the “right” variables in place. The fate of the Klerksdorp Development Trust (KDT) illustrates how a formally established community structure that *had* many of these “right variables” on its side could still fail.<sup>72</sup> The Oukasie Development Trust is often flagged as having what it takes to be successful. But the KDT, in some ways, had even more. The KDT, unlike Oukasie, was one of the few townships that had the advantage of having a sympathetic white local government structure that was prepared to service the township directly and work with the community. Oukasie had had a very bitter history with its neighboring white local authority. The KDT, like the Oukasie Development Trust also had members of the white business community and other professionals on its trustee board. In addition, the community had the assistance of committed NGO advisors. It did not succeed, however, despite all these “positives” because it did not have the trust and commitment of the Klerksdorp Civic Organization, which had considerable power over its activities.

In many of the IDT’s upgrade projects, community organizations (like community trusts or joint venture agreements) were put together in a great hurry. This was because the IDT pressured communities to institutionalize their participation through the creation of

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<sup>72</sup>The Klerksdorp Upgrade was also an IDT subsidized project.

legally recognizable structures. It wanted to ensure that they did not get exploited by for-profit developers. It also wanted to protect itself from the criticism that its projects were non-participatory, just like the other projects of the apartheid government. Many communities, however, were not organized or cohesive enough to form their “legal vehicles.”<sup>73</sup> As a result, developers often put together a bunch of community people from both inside and outside the beneficiary community without too much concern as to who should sit on the structure. At a training session of the Bella Bella Community Development Forum,<sup>74</sup> the lack of a common understanding as to the overall mission of their community organization was apparent. When the training coordinator asked each community representative to talk about their organization (their development forum), the trustees each started talking about their own political organizations. They did not see themselves as part of a bigger process (the upgrading of their township) encapsulated in the Bella Bella Development Forum. As a result of problems such as these, many structures that were formed to spear-head development projects failed.

Despite these problems, formalizing community participation still may be necessary and beneficial.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, institutionalizing the participation process at a very local or focused project level is often an important mechanism to ensure that beneficiaries' voices are heard and their needs, problems and complaints addressed.

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<sup>73</sup> Most communities formed Trusts.

<sup>74</sup> Bella-Bella was an IDT subsidized site-and-service upgrade project in South Africa.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Sue Rubenstein, a development consultant with special expertise in the areas of shack settlement upgrading, community participation and civil society. I interviewed her in January 1996.

Rubenstein (1996) argues that institutionalization, with the necessary support mechanisms (like access to NGO advice), can be important even *with* democratically elected local government structures. Housing actors frequently believe that grass-roots participation is a natural consequence of democracy. This is not necessarily the case because of the unequal power relationships between government structures and community groups and the lack of capacity that many community beneficiaries face. Institutionalizing “group power” is one way for communities to more easily access NGO support to counter-balance the power of other actors.

At the same time though, policy-makers and planners that should be warned that “building capacity” among beneficiaries does not mean that one must first institutionalize the relationships between actors (as in the IDT’s program) before any delivery takes place (Rubenstein 1996). On the contrary, she notes (quoting one of her colleagues) that “delivery” is one highly effective way of building a robust civil society. If service providers deliver services and send a very clear signal to citizens that individual complaints will be taken very seriously and acted upon, then individuals feel safe to air their grievances to their councilors. In this kind of environment, institutionalized community power takes on a less important role.

Furthermore making “consensus” between all stakeholders (as often epitomized by forum-type structures) a *pre-requisite* to being funded is often counter-productive. In South Africa, the new government insisted that all the stakeholders in any particular project area

form a social compact (a written agreement) which bound them into a formalized set of relationships. Unless this “consensus” was secured, the project was not allowed to go ahead. In large geographical areas, “communities” are often made up of very diverse sets of interests. Rubenstein stresses that this consensus “forces this heterogeneous group called civil society into a position in which the three most likely outcomes are that: powerful interests hijack the process and impose a consensus that does not exist (as many developers did in the IDT projects); or that civil society interests are forced to return to an adversarial and oppositional relationship with the (now democratically elected) local government as the common “enemy” necessary to create unity; or that structures are co-opted by the state as a delivery agent in the service of predetermined goals and objectives.” All three of these--hijacking by powerful people, mobilizing different interests around opposition to the state, and being cooped by the state-- are undesirable outcomes which can often be avoided if institutionalization is not forced upon beneficiaries.

Other development specialists in informal settlement upgrading in South Africa point out that it may be far better for policy-makers to encourage and support smaller project-based initiatives than to institutionalize community structures which are given the complex task of managing comprehensive plans (interview Schlagter 1996). Such plans may involve many separate project components which beneficiaries are often ill-prepared to handle. Furthermore, policy-makers and planners should encourage loosely formed civic structures (*e.g.*, a parents, teachers and student group) to work on issues that affect them directly, such as getting more desks for their school.



Rosie Gordon adds an interesting dimension to the above perspective.<sup>76</sup> She explains how specific groups of beneficiaries who have come together around a particular issue can “kick and shove” government actors who are supposed to be delivering services into producing “the goodies.” This is important in South Africa since many local government structures are currently under-resourced and confused as to what they should be doing and how they should be doing it. Thus, community members who “know the ropes” can assist weak local governments in learning what it is that they should be doing to meet the needs of their constituencies. In so doing, communities can empower their local government structures and leave departments and structures that are more competent for the future. So often in the literature we read about the necessity for government to empower civic society. Gordon (interview 1996) shares with us that the reverse is just as important, especially in developing countries where local governments are often extremely weak.

In sum, it should be clear to planners that having an institutionalized community structure per se does not automatically create unity among community members. It also does not guarantee more community participation or a better project outcome. For this reason, governments would do well to pause before enforcing social compacts<sup>77</sup> or other institutionalized participation structures on communities. Efforts should rather be focused

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with Rosie Gordon in Johannesburg in January 1996. Gordon is a development consultant who who was involved in the strategic planning of various upgrade projects in the Katorus (Kathlehong, Thokoza and Vosloorus) areas on the East Rand of Johannesburg.

<sup>77</sup> Institutionalized agreements involving a consensus between all stakeholders in any specific development project.

on providing resources for communities, by sharing information and enabling beneficiaries to express their needs in projects in which they have a stake, through, for example, ensuring that they have adequate technical support.

### **Beneficiary Participation in Oukasie**

My findings show that the participation of beneficiaries in the Oukasie upgrade project was a critical factor that led to its successes. The highly vocal residents of Oukasie demanded that they be involved in decisions that were made regarding services in the township. At mass meetings, residents also demanded information regarding the project and reports on progress that had been made. They praised their leaders when they were satisfied (*e.g.*, when the clinic and schools were constructed) and berated them when things were unsatisfactory (*e.g.*, when the rock-blasting by the contractors damaged some houses and when some bones of dead Oukasie residents were dug up by contractors laying pipes). The Oukasie leadership had to answer to everything.

The following are examples of questions that I documented at mass meetings: “Why are site sizes being reduced?”; “Why, when water is free when it comes from the sky do we have to pay so much for it when it comes out the tap?”; “Why is the contractor not employing more local labor?”; “Why is the Trust not doing anything more about the fact that my neighbor has built a wall around his property which includes my toilet, and I am a big man, yet I have no place to go and shit?” When leaders could not answer the questions to the satisfaction of beneficiaries, they brought in their review consultant, a reform-minded engineer, to come and explain the facts at mass meetings.

The township dwellers felt that they had a right and freedom to express their needs to their elected leaders. This was common in African townships and a product of the politicization processes that took hold in black urban areas from the early eighties.<sup>78</sup> Township dwellers were educated in democracy and politics by underground African National Congress (ANC) operatives, as well as trade union and civic leaders in their midst. In Oukasië, because of its history of organization against the state, the culture of grass-roots participation and leadership accountability was entrenched. The ODT leadership had no alternative but to be transparent and open with respect to the work they were doing. In particular, they laid a heavy emphasis on *communicating information* about the project to beneficiaries. They explained the trade-offs that would have to be made (*e.g.*, reducing site sizes for each household for cost reasons). They asked the beneficiaries what to do about difficulties that were constantly arising (*e.g.*, what to do about dead bodies that were scattered around that township and in danger of being unearched by the contractors). They also asked what kind of technical service options residents preferred (*e.g.*, public lighting or street lighting).

After receiving explanations from the ODT community leaders, beneficiaries usually made wise decisions. For example, they agreed to purchase cement bricks for their toilet

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<sup>78</sup> The challenge in South Africa now is for all households to begin to claim their rights as citizens to make the same demands on their local government elected leaders as they did on their civic leaders in the past. Tomlinson (1995) writes that a test of the degree of consolidation in informal settlements should extend beyond physical processes (*e.g.*, where mielies and marigolds are grown in the gardens of shack-dwellers) to include the extent to which residents have become capable of exercising their rights as citizens and accepted their obligations as citizens (*e.g.*, to pay for services received).

structures from a local labor-using cooperative, rather than going for the more prestigious-looking red bricks which were far more costly. Sometimes, however, explanations were not enough. Residents wanted to know why foundations had not been built for their toilet structures. They were informed by the community liaison officer that the structures had been designed so that moving soils would not cause the walls to crack. Residents at the meeting were angry and would not accept that, without foundations, the walls of their toilet structures (a) would not crack; and (b) would not leak when there were heavy rains. As a result of rising discontent in the community, the ODT leaders decided that they would put a toilet structure under an extraordinary amount of stress in front of beneficiaries so that they could see for themselves how durable the structure actually was. The leaders, with their review consultant and the project management team, stood one of the toilets up on its side at a 45% angle for a week (to simulate a major earth movement), dug trenches around it and filled them with water (to simulate extremely wet soil) and watered the toilet down (to simulate a heavy rain). The toilet withstood the tests and the community accepted them, albeit with a little reluctance.

Beneficiaries did more than complain at mass meetings; they also came up with innovative solutions to some of the leadership's problems. For example, part of the reason that bones were being dug up was that the contractors did not have any idea where people had been buried before the graveyard was constructed. One resident suggested that a committee of old Oukasie residents be formed that would be responsible for pointing out to the contractors where their grandparents etc. had been buried. All residents were

asked to identify the graves of any family member or friend who had been buried outside a graveyard. The contractors were then instructed to avoid excavation in that location unless it was not feasible to do so. If excavation could not be avoided, the community agreed that there would be an official reburial ceremony for any bodies that were dug up.

The above example is another case where many problems could have been avoided if the town planners had discussed their layout plans with beneficiaries. Because many design aspects of the project were not done properly, the project management team suffered extensive delays as discussions got held with the community what to do about the problems. The usual reaction of technical expert is that community participation is a waste of both time and money. Yet, project delays caused by shoddy jobs and inadequate prior consultation with communities can be far more costly. Housing actors need to take a careful decision whether to ask for permission or forgiveness from the community. One professional that I spoke to said he was really tired of talking and talking with residents and getting nowhere and that "quite frankly, it is far easier to go ahead and ask for forgiveness than it is to get permission. People are generally forgiving." The costs of this (like what happened because of the site-allocation problems in Oukasié--discussed earlier), however, can be very great.

Beneficiaries also helped to prioritize development activities. At the first mass meeting held after the township was legalized, beneficiaries stated that a clinic and a primary school were the two most urgently needed public facilities. This told the leadership how

to sequence their development tasks. They knew that they could increase beneficiary satisfaction by providing clinics and schools before tarred roads or domestic lighting. This is precisely what the Oukasia leadership did.

In part, because the community leaders managed to acquire resources for a school and other highly prioritized community facilities early on, beneficiaries were much more supportive of other projects developments than they otherwise might have been. For example, residents were ultimately willing to accept serviced sites rather than complete houses. Although the leadership had not sequenced its activities to "pacify" demands for housing, this was one outcome. There is no reason other projects cannot also plan to deliver project "goodies" that communities value most highly first.<sup>79</sup>

Through communicating and listening to beneficiaries at weekly mass meetings, the leadership gained two benefits. First, they increased the satisfaction of beneficiaries, who felt included in the process. Second, through feedback and suggestions from beneficiaries, they obtained many clues as to how they could structure the project to improve the outcomes. In addition, leaders learned that providing accurate, timely, and easily understood information to beneficiaries lessened the potential for rumors and lies that could undermine the project. When there was discontent among certain members in the community because of rumors that trustees were using all the money for themselves, the ODT's leaders managed to "win" back the support of people by explaining in great detail

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<sup>79</sup> Both Tendler (1982) and Hirschman (1971) stress the role that sequencing of project tasks and activities can play in improving project outcomes and beneficiary satisfaction.

how the money was spent. For the leaders, an additional benefit of open communication was that they became popular and important figures who were acknowledged and respected in the community.

The community liaison officer, who was paid by the Trust, played a critical role in facilitating communication between the ODT and the project beneficiaries. The IDT paid him on a full time basis to ensure that community participation happened. It is unlikely that he (or anyone else) would have been as dedicated to the task had he not been paid. Trustees were not paid, and most held regular full-time jobs. They were therefore not available--as he was--to respond to residents' demands for information and advice, or to hear their complaints, on a daily basis. It was largely through the liaison officer that the Trust managed to stay so well informed of community sentiments.

Two final points: First, ensuring beneficiary participation was made much easier for the leaders because the upgrade project gave the leaders a tangible goal around which they could elicit beneficiary interest. Furthermore, their job was made easier by the relatively small size of the Oukasie township (12,000 people) compared with some of the other IDT in-situ upgrades (*e.g.*, Besters Camp: 80,000 people; and Soweto-on-Sea: 100,000 people). It is noteworthy that out of the eight in-situ upgrade projects where NBI (1995) conducted its extensive surveys with beneficiaries, the three communities that fared the best (St. Wendolins, Freedom Square, and Oukasie) had much smaller populations than the communities that fared the worst. Planners should thus consider the benefits of

perhaps having a smaller project size and not only efficiency (gains through economies of scale that are prevalent in larger projects) when designing projects. Bleibaum, the ODT's review consultant, told me that he would have advised that Besters Camp be broken up into significantly smaller separate projects.

Second, ironically, the presence of a small group of beneficiaries who were trying to overthrow the project to further their own political careers had a positive effect on the organization of the ODT and its commitment to ensuring that it had a well informed constituency. The threat from this small group of "trouble-makers" forced ODT and its sub-committee members to meet more often to organize and strategize how best to go forward with the project. The Trust also knew that these unhappy individuals would try gain support from unhappy residents in the township (*e.g.*: from residents with site-allocation problems)<sup>80</sup>. In response, they became even more receptive to complaints and queries from residents (which were usually addressed to the CLO). They also reported more regularly at mass meetings to explain to people, why, for example, there were delays or why they could not afford a red-brick structure for their toilets etc.

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<sup>80</sup> Site-allocation problems are likely to occur in most in-situ upgrade projects where the development interferes with the relations between households and their property. Also the "allocator" of sites and services has enormous power which is also likely to upset at least some beneficiaries who are not satisfied with decisions taken. There are ways that problems can be minimized, and some of these are discussed later in this paper.



## CHAPTER VII

### USING POLITICS AND MANAGING CONFLICT

#### **The Argument for Politics *In***

Despite the fact that politics is rarely kept out of upgrade projects, most housing and development professionals believe that successful upgrading projects depend on a separation of the political “goings on” in a township and the community’s development objectives. Yet, in Oukasie, the Oukasie Development Trust (ODT) succeeded in many of its endeavors, to a great extent, because it did not totally separate its project-related technical objectives from the political structures, the political dynamics, and the politically expedient way of doing things for the residents of Oukasie. Instead of ignoring or avoiding politics, the ODT set up mechanisms to manage it.

The ODT was firmly tied to the politics of the township. Its members all supported the African National Congress and canvassed actively on its behalf in the national and local government elections. In addition, a substantial overlap existed in the membership base of the Civic and the Trust. This too was “political” since, under apartheid, civics were seen by beneficiaries to be the substitute bodies for democratically elected political structures at the local level. Despite this evidence, housing professionals, steeped as they were in their belief that mixing politics with development is a recipe for disaster, chose only to see Oukasie’s success as a result of its leaders “staying away from politics.”<sup>81</sup> One

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with several housing experts who were all consultants to the IDT.

professional housing expert that I interviewed explicitly attributed Oukasie's success to the separation between the roles and responsibilities of the Civic and the Trust as well as the fact that ODT managed to "keep politics out of its way." This was clearly inaccurate. While it is true that the ODT was concerned with the technical aspects of managing the project and did not let the politics of the township stand in the way of its work, it was also a highly political institution. It served the needs of its constituency (*i.e.*, beneficiaries) and used political tactics and connections to achieve many of its ends.

The remainder of this section is devoted primarily to shifting the debate from "politics in or politics out" to illustrating the importance of managing politics and conflict in a constructive way that increases benefits for all project participants.

### **Managing Conflict**

This section explains how the Trust managed to deal with the political rivalry and conflict that surfaced from time to time between it and the Civic. The Civic saw itself as a "state substitute" body, that is, "performing certain functions that were in demand by society but were not being satisfactorily performed (by the state)" (Hirschman 1993, pp. 92). The Civic saw itself as responsible for ensuring that the township had schools, clinics and basic services. The formation of the Oukasie Development Trust, which had many of the same objectives *and* had financial control over the IDT's subsidies, was an encroachment on the substantive territory of the Civic. This could easily have resulted in conflict between the two organizations. Despite the fact that the Trust had usurped much of the Civic's domain, relations between the Civic and

the Trust were good between 1991 and early 1993. Ironically, this was because the Civic was too weak at that stage to fight back, since the Trust had absorbed many of its most active members. The neglect of the Civic, however, backfired when the terms of office of its current executives came to an end and a new Civic was elected.

The new Civic which was elected in 1993 had to fight to regain control of what it believed was the “Civic’s turf.” Its members were very suspicious of and far less amicable towards the Trust than their predecessors. It was largely due to political strategies that the Trust adopted that relations between the two organizations normalized within an 18-month period. The truce between the OCA and the Trust was facilitated by the Trust’s NGO advisors who held workshops and encouraged open discussion and negotiations between the two groups.

The outcome of these discussions between the two executive bodies was agreement and clarity on their respective roles. The ODT would be accountable to the beneficiaries *through* the Civic and would be responsible for the upgrading and consolidation of the township. The Civic would continue to call regular mass meetings where beneficiaries could make decisions regarding the upgrading and consolidation of the township. It was also agreed that the Civic would continue its work as the *de facto* local authority. As such, its main task would be to facilitate the process of democratic local government elections. All executive members of both organizations were now in agreement that the Civic was the “people’s representative organization,” and that the Trust was the developer that was responsible for driving only the technical aspects of the upgrade project.

The reality on the ground, however, was much less clear, since most technical questions (like the type of toilet structure the community should get) were sensitive issues that needed to be taken to community mass meetings for decisions.<sup>82</sup> Since members of the Trust or their technical experts usually spoke on these issues at mass meetings (which were called by the Civic), they came to be associated with their delivery. Thus, even though ODT trustees were not elected into office, they came to be seen as the “guys who were delivering the goodies.” As such, they were respected and liked by the broader community, and, in reality, received many of the benefits that generally go with political leadership: a high profile, prestige and the opportunity to meet dignitaries visiting the township. It was probably for this reason that community trustee members did not feel at all threatened by the Civic’s official “take-back” of the community.

The Civic members were also happy with the new arrangements as they were still seen by beneficiaries as “good guys” who could represent their interests. In my interviews with beneficiary households in Oukasie in 1995, most people saw the Oukasie Development Trust (ODT) and the Oukasie Civic Association (OCA) as separate entities; but they also saw both organizations as being “the community’s leadership structures” which were assisting each other with the project. When community members had a problem with any aspect of the project, they were indifferent as to which of the two bodies they consulted for advice. This was not

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<sup>82</sup> Planners often underestimate the extent to which politics and choices are embedded in what looks like a purely technical phenomenon. As a result, community involvement on these seemingly technical matters is often ignored

surprising, as there was considerable overlap in the executive membership of the two bodies. For example, the chairperson of the Civic was also a trustee of the ODT, and the chairperson of the Trust had previously served a term of office as chairperson of the representative organization that preceded the Civic in Oukasié. The Civic, through this confusion of beneficiaries, also got credit for the upgrade project, and was, therefore, extremely satisfied with the new arrangement. Relations between the two groups became amicable once again as both derived benefits from the project.

There are at least three lessons here planners should note:

1. The usual advice given by professionals is that actors involved in a project must very carefully identify their respective roles and responsibilities. In the above example, we see that the issue is less clear-cut. While the Civic and the ODT did come to a verbal agreement on their separate roles and functions, their actions belied this separation: they both answered to resident's concerns; they both worked out of the same office; and there was a large overlap in membership. Contrary to conventional thinking, this apparent confusion was both a deliberate move *and* a good thing, as it enabled both groups to take credit for the successes of the project. A more stark definition of roles probably would have resulted in more conflict between the two organizations. It is important for planners to be aware that how projects are implemented determines who can take credit for them and subsequently become more powerful in the community. The locus of power in resource-scarce communities is very tied up with who is seen to have control over the

resources. Planners can play a role in influencing who gets credit for the project in both the project design phase and the implementation phase. In so doing, they should be guided by the objectives of maximizing beneficiary participation and minimizing destructive conflict between competing interests.

2. Despite the confusion among beneficiaries about who was doing what, the leaders of the two organizations had clarity on their respective roles. This meant that that Civic could not, for example, bring the project to a stand-still because of some political dispute within its ranks. In the Klerksdorp upgrade project, it was precisely because local civic members had *de facto* control of both their own organization (Civic and development trust) that the project stalled in the face of political difficulties among Civic members.
3. Groups and interests do not die easily, even though they may not surface at all points in time. Although the Civic had apparently died a quiet death in 1992, it was awakened with a vengeance in 1993 when the new Civic was elected. Different interests need to be openly confronted and sorted through. Unless the interests of the different groups in a township are accommodated, it is often difficult for upgrade projects to succeed.

The ODT *managed* potentially disruptive forces that emerged with surprising acumen. For example, the ODT effectively negotiated a resolution when the Civic challenged its authority and began holding mass meetings to discredit it. Similarly, it found a way to soothe community concerns when a small group of beneficiaries, who had lost part of their land as a result of the

upgrade planning process, attempted to bring the project to a temporary halt. A couple of brief examples show some of the ways that the ODT managed to pre-empt and deal with conflict.

*Example 1*

When the Civic complained that it was under-resourced and did not have adequate office equipment or facilities or technical assistance to support its work, the ODT allowed the Civic to share its office and equipment and made its advisors available to the Civic on request. This contributed to a better working relationship between the two parties. With closer proximity to one another, many rumors and suspicions surrounding each other's activities were dispelled, and cooperation grew in tandem with trust between members of the two groups.

*Example 2*

When the relationship between the Civic and the ODT was particularly strained, the ODT did not try to stop members of the antagonistic Civic from sitting in at all Trust meetings and technical committee meetings. They allowed "the opposition" in, even though they knew that some of these people were trying to sabotage their entire project. The community-based trustees believed that through exposing their "opponents" to the workings of the Trust, they would enlighten them with respect to the work they were doing. Further, if Civic members were at the meeting where decisions regarding the upgrade project were taken, it was more difficult for them

to start false rumors (for example, that the Trust was using the community's moneys to benefit trustees at the expense of other beneficiaries).

*Example 3*

In managing conflicts that related to technical issues, the Trust relied on the advice of its technical advisors. Using technical advisors or supposedly objective outsiders is a tactic that is often used to depoliticize highly contentious issues. Although, in Oukasie, the project's leaders did not use technical advisors with this in mind, it is likely that their presence did help ease political tensions and make it easier for beneficiaries to compromise on their positions.

*Example 4*

The leaders of Oukasie also invested their time in devising a dispute-resolution policy for all site-allocation disputes. First, the technical committee nominated a couple of professionals and community members onto a site allocation committee. This committee met with the unhappy parties to see if they could resolve the problem on site (*e.g.*, if there was a border dispute and both households could agreed on a new boundary). If the problem was resolved, all parties signed a document that they were happy with the outcome. If not, the problem was taken to the larger technical committee to see whether the committee, as a group, could come up with any other solution. As a last resort, the problem was given to a



mediator who was respected by both parties in the community. If this failed, the case went to the courts.

The elaborate dispute resolution procedure adopted by the ODT worked in as far as it was consistently applied. However, it broke down when the project manager began to exercise discretion and offered particular households “an extra meter of land here” and a “better located site there,” because he thought that it made no material difference to the project. The site-allocation system only worked because everybody thought that they were in the same boat, namely, that there was no room to negotiate. The moment the project manager challenged this expectation, by trying to be more accommodating and flexible to the demands of beneficiaries, site-allocation problems increased dramatically. After this, even households which had previously signed an agreement that they were satisfied with their site, tried to improve their lot.

The project manager should have noted that “start-up” conditions of in-situ upgrade projects are often not fair to begin with. For example, it is not feasible to exclude richer households, who may be located in and among poorer households, from receiving a subsidy to cover the costs of their internal infrastructure. Since the water and sewage pipes and roads go past the plots of wealthier people, it is impossible to deny these households access to the benefits of the subsidy. Similarly, households which have *de facto* ownership of more than one plot before the project was legalized often stand to lose all but one of them, as they only receive one capital subsidy and cannot afford to pay for

the infrastructure costs of the pipes and other facilities that go past their other sites. While these scenarios clearly do not strike the reader as being fair, the alternative, namely, to work out personalized solutions for each household, is too unwieldy to contemplate. Seen in this light, the project manager's attempt to be more accommodating to beneficiaries who were dissatisfied with their site size was a mistake. It resulted in a much greater level of conflict in the community than otherwise would have been the case: hundreds of households swarmed on the ODT's community liaison officer and the project management team in a "free for all" effort to increase their site sizes. Housing actors should resist the temptation to fiddle with broadly agreed upon rules that are designed to make processes easier for project actors to manage.

The above finding contradicts the literature, which suggests that discretion of development workers and public officials in localized demand-driven projects is often unavoidable, because of the non-standardized set of activities that actors need to carry out. The literature also suggests that discretion is desirable, because project workers are likely to be more motivated and do better work when they are given more responsibility (Lipsky 1980; Tandler 1996). However, effective checks and balances, for example, monitoring by other groups or individuals, needs to offset the freedom that project workers may have (Tandler 1996). Clearly, there are costs and benefits to rigid rules, as well as to discretion, that need to be taken into account when projects are designed by housing actors.

The irony is that many of the site allocation disputes that caused substantial delays in most in-situ upgrade projects in the country could have been avoided. In the case of Oukasie, for example, the town planners did a very hasty job, mainly using aerial photographs. One technical consultant guessed that the planners probably did not spend more than a day on site. Relying on aerial photography, which professionals often hail as a cost-saving technological breakthrough, had devastating effects: many sites that were allocated were unsuitable for habitation (for example, they were too rocky), and many site-boundaries that were technically defined from the photographs conflicted with what residents believed were their true site boundaries. This caused very long and costly project delays, as many conflicts had to be resolved later in the project. The nature of in-situ upgrade projects demands that town planners spend time on site and take into account the sociological and property relations that exist between households before they do their final layout plan. When the ODT received additional funds from the government to upgrade more sites, the town planners did not repeat this error, and there were far fewer site allocation problems.

In addition to managing conflict through dispute resolution, negotiation, resource-sharing, transparent processes, and rigid rules, the ODT used its connections to politicians to bring into line destructive individuals and organizations. When, for example, the Trust felt that political tensions were extremely high in the township and threatened the project, and when an opposition grouping in the township threatened the life of a member of the Trust's "work-force," the Trust called on high-ranking government officials to bring the situation under control. Similarly, the ODT used its political connections when a

destructive grouping used the name of a political organization (in this case, the African National Congress) as a license to do things that it had no right to do, including stirring up violence in the township and causing hatred to develop against particular trustees. This time, the Trust called in senior politicians of the African National Congress Party, that it knew from its days of its political struggle, to discipline its members. Bringing in high-ranking officials is useful in part because the simple threat of exposure to powerful figures often intimidates those who are trying to stir up trouble in a township.<sup>83</sup>

### **Using Politics: Persistence and Pestering, Connections and Threats**

Due to their own political exposure and experience, Oukasié's leaders were not only adept at *managing* politics and political conflict internally, but also at *using politics and political connections* to their advantage externally. The ODT's trustees and sub-committees conducted much of their work through political connections and political tactics. In fact, the ability of the ODT to secure many of the community facilities that it did for Oukasié was based on political maneuvering.

#### *Using strategic opportunities and political connections*

Arnold Aab, who worked for the TPA and sat the Trust's technical committee told the committee that the financial year of the Regional Services Council (RSC) was coming to a close and that there was still money in its coffers that it urgently wanted to spend. The

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<sup>83</sup> Tendler (1989) and Grindle (1977) make reference to the positive benefits that linking into political networks, and having elites who are interested and supportive (even if the interest and support is motivated from a self-interested point of view) can have on project outcomes.

RSC, which funded community facilities, had to get rid of its unspent funds during the current financial year if it did not want the national government to reduce its budgetary allocation for the following financial year. Aab told the ODT that there was a big chance for it to access funding for community facilities from this source. Aab did some scouting around at the RSC to find out what kind of projects they would be most likely to finance. The technical committee then requested that the project managers apply to the RSC on its behalf. Most of Oukasie's applications were successful. Apart from Aab's connections with the Regional Services Council, the community had access to another funding source. The TPA's contractor, Bouver Viljoen, had a "direct-line" through to the Administrator of the Province (the highest official). Thus, Oukasie stood a good chance of getting resources from the TPA's budget as well.<sup>84</sup>

In this way, over a three year period, Oukasie secured funding for public lighting, domestic electricity connections, sports facilities, a maternity clinic, and a public mail box facility. The community leadership did not worry about the costs of running these facilities, nor who would manage and maintain them. The money was in the Regional Services Council's coffers, and the ODT went for it.<sup>85</sup> The ODT decided to apply for funding for community facilities, even though its advisors had warned of the dangers of

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<sup>84</sup> Note that the motivations of both Aab and the TPA's contractors were largely self-interested ones. Yet, it made Oukasie better off even though one could argue that it was at the expense of other more needy communities getting the resources.

<sup>85</sup> It is important to note that these funds were for construction costs only. Operating costs were not taken into account. Neither was there a concern as to who would maintain and manage the buildings. This resulted in problems. For example, the maternity clinic could not open until two years after its construction as it had no funding for staff. Similarly, the management and maintenance of the sports facilities left much to be desired. It is only now (i.e.: 1996) with the takeover of all the facilities by the Brits Local Authority, that these problems are getting ironed out.

going ahead with the construction of buildings before making adequate plans for maintaining the facilities. The leadership felt that something was better than nothing: a well built and unmaintained structure was better than no structure at all. Furthermore, the ODT had faith that following the impending democratic national government elections, local authorities would be more willing to maintain and manage their facilities than was currently the case.

### *Creating a semblance of urgency and crisis*

When adequate opportunities for new facilities did not present themselves, the ODT created a crisis, or at least threatened one. This was a strategy used to force relevant (and often reluctant) agencies into accommodating Oukasie's needs. For example, when the ODT's initial efforts to secure schools for the township fell on deaf ears, the leaders of the Oukasie threatened to march on the Department of Education and Training (DET) and stage a sit-in which would bring negative press coverage to the DET. They also called their contacts at the press, who publicized pictures of hundreds of Oukasie kids sitting outside the dilapidated make-shift classrooms. The photographs were taken by the same press photographer who had supported Oukasie during the days of its struggle. The accompanying article spoke of the education crisis in Oukasie, which had been deprived of schools for 60 years because of attempted forced removals. The journalist also pointed out that the authorities were still doing nothing. Shortly after the press article and some additional pressure from the leadership on the Department of Education and Training, the relevant DET authorities released funds for the construction of two schools in Oukasie.

Construction of new schools was a major victory, but it was not complete: the DET had not supplied funds for teachers to go with the schools. The ODT's technical review consultant, Ulli Bleibaum, provided the community's leaders with the technical information they needed to persuade the education authorities to supply their new schools with teachers. The leadership was familiar with protest politics tactics; Bleibaum helped them to supplement these tactics with hard-core technical knowledge, including what part of the budget the authorities would be able to use to fund their schools even though they had already completed their funding allocations for the current year. The community leaders began by pestering the local education officer for the area. When he could no longer tolerate the Oukasie leadership's complaints, he sent them to a higher ranking official in the Provincial Administration. This official, in turn, sent the leaders up another level. Finally, a very high-ranking official in the DET promised Oukasie that teachers would be provided. However, he never fulfilled his promise. At this point, the Oukasie leadership decided to take matters into their own hands. They advertised for teachers and filled all the positions that the high-ranking official had promised them in their meeting. They then presented this as a *fait-accompli* to the DET and demanded that the teachers be paid. After three months, the DET reluctantly added them to their payroll.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Watson (1992), in her research among low-income communities lacking basic services in Sao Paulo in Brazil, also found that community pressure on carefully targeted "resistant" individuals (e.g. politicians) and agencies orchestrated at key intervals can make these providers of services more accountable to their constituencies' service needs.

A final point to note with respect to managing conflict is that Oukasie's leaders were acutely aware of the merit in timing their interventions strategically. They had learned this trick during their political struggle against the state, when they had used international pressure to persuade the government to legalize the township at a time when the cabinet was already weak. In Oukasie, they used the same tactic. For example, they called in African National Congress office-bearers to help them sort out the political problems in their township at a time when these office-bearers were participating in provincial elections and were particularly concerned that a newly launched opposition political party was making inroads into ANC strongholds, of which Oukasie was one. The high-ranking officials were thus very eager to come and assist the leadership of Oukasie in a display of commitment to their constituency. After a short period, they succeeded in ironing out the problems. If Oukasie had had these political problems after the senior ANC office bearers had been elected into office, it is doubtful that they would have had the same level of support from them. Again we note how self interest, this time of a liberation movement, can work in the public interest.<sup>87</sup>

### **Summing Up Oukasie's Strategic Politics**

From Oukasie we learn that, "strategic politics," rather than *no* politics at all, can be the key to success. We learn, too, that timing interventions strategically, using "elites" (*e.g.*,

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<sup>87</sup> Hirschman (1971) stresses the importance that timing can play. Often, windows of opportunity exist for only short periods of time, and housing actors need to be aware of them so that they can use them to their advantage



senior politicians), and carefully managing political conflicts that surface in upgrade projects can be far less dangerous than ignoring them. In resource-scarce environments, political conflicts over the control of resources are bound to emerge. Community organizations and others involved in these projects need to manage them.

It is doubtful, though, whether all of the ODT's strategies are easily replicable. For example, it would be chaotic if every community that needed schools suddenly marched up to the DET's doors and demanded them. Despite this, planners and project advisors can certainly examine these strategies for clues as to how they can assist resource-deprived communities to achieve their objectives.

## CHAPTER VIII

### STORYTELLING: A NEW SLANT ON OUKASIE'S SUCCESS

My story so far tells of Oukasie's success: leaders took control of the project through the Oukasie Development Trust which was managed by a highly effective caucus of community members, their NGO advisors, and representatives selected by the community from the Brits Town Council, the Brits Chamber of Commerce and the Transvaal Provincial Agency. The ODT managed to get many community facilities for Oukasie, *and* they included beneficiaries in their decision-making. Throughout the process, beneficiaries remained very loyal to the ODT and the Civic. The few tense periods lasted a relatively short time due to the ability of the leaders to contain and pre-empt conflict. By all accounts, these factors made Oukasie stand out as a success among the IDT's upgrade projects. But there was a more "submerged" second story which accounted for Oukasie's success and which explained why the professionals that I interviewed did not mention the less successful aspects of the Oukasie upgrade project.

Oukasie did not only have successes. My research revealed that the township suffered from a range of problems that surfaced in many of the IDT's other in-situ upgrade projects. This included problems around land jurisdiction matters, laborer disputes with contractors, initial beneficiary dissatisfaction with the relatively small size of their sites (which were around 250 square meters) and the lack of accountability by contractors. But, since my research revealed that Oukasie actually experienced worse cost overruns and site allocation disputes than was the

case in other in-situ upgrade projects, I found its reputation among housing professionals as a “total success” rather surprising. As I dug deeper, I found that story-telling played a role in bringing about this convergence of opinion among all housing actors regarding Oukasié’s success. I also found that this had positive impacts on project outcomes. I found that a wide range of actors, following their self-interest, chose to call the upgrade initiative “a success” very soon after the project was launched; they continued to do so even though there was substantive evidence to the contrary later on, including cost overruns, land disputes, site allocation conflicts and a lack of contractor accountability.

The well known truth is that everybody likes a successful housing project. Funders like it because it makes them feel good about where they are placing their money. Politicians like it because they get votes when people are happy. The construction sector likes it because they get more work. And beneficiaries like it because they are able to attract more resources into their community. It is not surprising, therefore, that at the first sign that one of its one hundred and four projects was doing “well,” the Independent Development Trust was keen to use it to demonstrate that its capital subsidy housing program was a success.

In the remainder of this chapter, I deal with the above-mentioned points through two different but interrelated themes:

1. *The self-interest of housing actors in their search for successful projects and the socially beneficial consequences that such self-interest brought about for project beneficiaries;*  
*and*
2. *The role that storytelling played in helping the Oukasie leadership fulfill its vision of improving the living environment of beneficiaries.*

### **The IDT Spreads the Word**

Oukasie, with its well organized community structures, its newly constructed clinic, and its ability to “get its contractors moving on the ground” quicker than other projects, provided the IDT with a perfect opportunity to show that its program was working according to plan.

Oukasie was an especially good “success” example for the IDT to publicize, especially in light of the criticisms it was facing (discussed below). It advertised Oukasie’s success in its written reviews and monthly newsletters which it circulated to a wide range of actors. It also spread the word about Oukasie’s success in the numerous meetings that it held with politicians, NGOs, and other housing stakeholders in the country. It suited the IDT to do this for three reasons.

1. Beneficiaries had a high degree of community control over the project through the Oukasie Development Trust. In the prevailing political environment, progressive groupings saw community-based control as a good thing, and they criticized the IDT for not ensuring that communities had a real say in most of its projects. The IDT could point to the Oukasie

upgrade, in which there was a high degree of beneficiary control over the project, to counter these accusations.

2. Oukasie, with its newly constructed schools and clinics, was an example of a community that had used the IDT's capital subsidy for services as a catalyst to begin its own comprehensive upgrading of the township. This was important to the IDT, as NGO community advocacy groups and activist civic organizations were criticizing it for delivering only taps and toilets instead of proper housing structures and community facilities like crèches, schools and clinics. Oukasie illustrated the IDT's formal position that, given scarce resources and the large number of needy households, it was sufficient to finance only basic services and grant legal tenure to households. Oukasie seemed to demonstrate that subsidizing these would set in motion a process of incremental holistic development by the community itself.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> There is a vast literature dealing with the extent to which legalizing tenure and/or the state investment in infrastructure in a project area brings about further upgrading of homes and an improvement in the living environment of beneficiaries. There is also evidence to show that the reverse is also sometimes true (i.e. that individual household consolidation of and investment in their homes leads to de facto or de jure authorized tenure). Although this is not the topic of this paper, in as far as Oukasie was concerned, my interviews revealed that households that had less strong (or no) ties to their former rural dwellings did invest and/or plan to invest in their homes, mainly as a result of the legalization of the township and the services and facilities that the government had provided through the IDT. From my interviews with housing professionals who had been involved in around five other in-situ upgrade projects and from the NBI survey (1995), this appeared to be true for these areas too, although the rate at which households invested varied.

3. Oukasie provided the IDT with the opportunity to be among the first to demonstrate that in-situ upgrading was a viable housing option in the South African context, just as it was in developing countries abroad.<sup>89</sup>

Another important actor was also interested in Oukasie's "success story." The Urban Foundation (UF), a prominent housing NGO in South Africa, had been instrumental in designing the IDT's capital subsidy program. It too wanted to be among the first to demonstrate that in-situ-upgrading was a viable solution to the housing crisis in the country.<sup>90</sup> Since both the IDT and the UF were extremely well known in the housing sector, what they said counted. They told the story of Oukasie's early achievements (high beneficiary participation, community control over the project, acquiring of a clinic, *etc.*) to their colleagues, who, in turn, told their colleagues. And so the word of Oukasie's success spread.

### **The Oukasie Development Trust Boosts Itself**

The IDT and UF were not the only "boosters" of Oukasie's success. The Oukasie community, through the ODT, also did a very good job of publicizing its success story. The ODT distributed newsletters widely in the community, as well as to influential housing actors inside and outside of government. Members of the ODT also invited and hosted numerous dignitaries in Oukasie and invited the press to publicize these events. In 1995 alone, President

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<sup>89</sup> There is a large literature on the upgrading and consolidation of shack settlements, for example see Ward 1989, Varley 1987, Skinner 1988, World Bank 1995, Hasan 1986, Nientied 1982, Hardoy and Saitterthwaite 1989.

<sup>90</sup> Over 8 million people were living in informal circumstances, mainly in shacks, mostly without access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities.

Mandela visited the community twice. The ODT invited the press to attend all its “good news” events in the township, including the launch of the ODT and the opening of the clinic. The ODT nurtured its relationship with the press, and this paid off in the form of numerous reports about the success of the development in newspapers, financial journals and community development magazines.<sup>91</sup>

### **Bedtime Stories for the Stakeholders**

Carol Rose (1990) writes about the role that storytelling can play in making one’s position more easily understood and in getting others to be sympathetic and have more of a moral obligation to do the ‘right’ thing. She also explains how the dominant storyteller(s) can make his/her/their position seem to be the more natural one, even though the opposite may be true. The leaders of the Oukasië community told stories to the press, their advisors, the IDT, and potential funders about how their stable, peaceful and cohesive community, which had once fought off the state so successfully, was now achieving notable successes in its upgrading endeavors.

“Stability” and “peacefulness,” however, were not two words that came up often in my conversations with numerous beneficiaries. On the contrary, there was always at least one mention in each interview of political tension in the township and of a level of discomfort associated with it. For this reason, residents chose high mast lights over street lighting at a

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<sup>91</sup> Recently, development researchers and academics (e.g. Tandler and Amorim 1995) are increasingly paying attention to the value of the media and publicity in development projects.

community mass meeting. This surprised me, since high mast lights were associated with apartheid planning and had been put up by the government in black townships to lower costs and improve control over the townships. Given a choice, therefore, it was reasonable to expect the community to choose street lighting. However, they chose the high mast lighting, not to lower costs, but to increase their sense of security, which they valued very highly.<sup>92</sup> As a resident said in an interview, “We wanted the whole township lit up at night to enable them to see who was moving around.”

The above-noted finding directly contradicted what most of my professional interviewees had told me. I had been informed numerous times that Oukasie was a peaceful, closely knit community, that was free of any trouble. I had read it in the press, and I had heard community leaders repeating it to others. Yet, not one of the leaders in the township chose to expose these conflicts to outsiders, although they were well aware of them. Though they had not taken a united decision to remain silent about the internal problems of the township, there was an unspoken understanding among the leaders that internal political problems should be sorted out without outside interference. This culture of “non-disclosure of dirty linen” had an unintended benefit to the community. Since everyone believed that the township was more peaceful and stable than it actually was, because of the stories that they had heard, they were more willing to visit it and devote resources to it. During their visits to Oukasie, they heard the same stories first-hand. It is well known that investors and funders prefer secure, stable environments for

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<sup>92</sup> This finding was confirmed by a number of project beneficiaries during in-depth interviews. It also seems that from comparative data presented in the NBI study (1995), electricity, which is very closely associated with lighting up the community and security, was valued more highly in Oukasie than in other communities.



their investments, where high returns are likely. The stories told by the community leaders of Oukasie's bitter struggle against the state, and of the community's cohesive and peaceful response to the development challenges it now faced, captivated outside actors and gave them exactly the kind of assurance that they needed.

### **Some Closing Thoughts on Oukasie's Self Fulfilling Prophecy**

Because of Oukasie's early successes (the speed with which it put together an organized community structure to be the developer, as well as the relatively short time that it took to get its contractors moving on the ground), it received much more attention than most of the IDT's other projects, not least of all from the IDT itself.<sup>93</sup> This resulted in three positive consequences, which, planners should note, are not necessarily difficult to emulate.

1. Because of Oukasie's early successes, which served the self-interested motives of stakeholders like the IDT and the Urban Foundation, these well-connected NGOs chose not to dwell on the problems that Oukasie faced later in its life-cycle. These actors sung the praises of the noticeably good aspects of the upgrade project. The attention that the Oukasie leaders got, as a result, motivated them to work harder to achieve their goals. Their persistence in pestering the state for better facilities and their continual funding applications did bring in additional resources to the community, including funds for a

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<sup>93</sup> The contractors were able to move more quickly than many other projects because (i) the community structure was in place and participation with the community did not hold up the project like in less organized communities, (ii) the contractor started the development on a greenfields (undeveloped) portion of the project. He could move quickly in this area because no people resided there yet. There was also a built in incentive, in the way the subsidy program was structured, for developers to move efficiently as they could only draw down the subsidies once transfer of the serviced sites to beneficiaries had taken place. The longer this process took, the higher were their bridging finance charges.

cooperative brick-making initiative. This further fueled both the perception and reality of Oukasie's success, even though there were already some technical and political problems in the township. Here we learn that demonstrating early success can bring benefits to project beneficiaries and their leaders. We know, too, that almost any project can show early success by beginning on an easier portion of the project.

2. Being in the lime light had another effect: the Oukasie leaders knew that they were being watched and therefore felt compelled to perform better. Trustees and sub-committee members devoted a large portion of their spare time to the work of the Trust, both sorting out difficulties as they arose (*e.g.*, when land invasions occurred on unserviced pieces of land that were being reserved for public facilities) and negotiating with the various state and local government departments for additional resources for the community. This also produced positive outcomes. For example, after a two year negotiation between the Oukasie health committee and the Brits Town Council, the latter agreed to take over the management of the maternity clinic.
3. Because stakeholders "advertised" Oukasie as a cohesive, stable and peaceful community, other potential donors (*e.g.*, USAID, Kagiso Trust, the Brits Business Community, and others) were more willing to invest in the township. This, in turn, added to Oukasie's ability to capture more resources and be more successful.

It is clear from the above that Oukasie's story of success is, to an extent, a self-fulfilling prophecy. The community leadership was organized and managed to make some early visible gains which other stakeholders latched onto as evidence of the township's success. This had a series of consequences which motivated the leadership to do even better and become even more successful. For example, they acquired a much wider range of community facilities than comparable townships. Planners should note this relationship of early success (or perceived success) to actual project success down the line. It need not be costly for communities to show successful aspects of their upgrade projects to the press or to other strategically selected actors who may have a self-interest in publicizing the information or in bringing resources into the township. Both the media and storytelling are very much under-utilized resources which communities and their advisors could use to their advantage in much the same way as Oukasie's leaders did.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Given that in-situ upgrading is an important component of housing policies in most developing countries, not least of all in South Africa, policy makers and planners need to be concerned about what works and what does not. There is no quick way or one way that can assure a community of a successful upgrade project in the eyes of both project beneficiaries and housing professionals. Yet, it is instructive to learn from communities that have succeeded because, through them, we learn what is achievable and what is not. The success of the Oukasie upgrade project with respect to all three of the ODT's prime objectives (*i.e.*, ensuring beneficiary control of the project, upgrading the physical infrastructure and community facilities in the township, and integrating the community into the broader economic fabric) is, in many ways, a unique achievement. But my findings show that many of the factors underlying Oukasie's success could be adopted or modified by other communities which are pursuing similar goals. For this reason alone, it is worthwhile sharing the experiences that facilitated Oukasie's relative successes.

A major theme underlying the achievements of the Oukasie community was the ability of its leadership to network government, NGO and market actors in a way that drew on the different institutional strengths and resources of each. Sanyal (1996) points out that the triple alliance of government, NGOs and market institutions is rare, but it does happen

occasionally.<sup>94</sup> One such occasion was the formation and working of the Oukasie Development Trust (ODT); each institutional actor in the Trust played a distinct role and at the same time contributed to strengthening the community organization.

In the Oukasie community where I conducted my fieldwork, my research showed that a combination of public exposure, networking and collective action experiences (including community organizing, leadership accountability and trust formation) contributed to the project's success. Although some of the success of this project was based on circumstances unique to Oukasie, most of the successful features could be adapted to other in-situ upgrades in South Africa, as well as to similar projects in other developing countries.

In this paper, I discussed each of my major findings at length and suggested ways that housing actors could generalize the lessons that emerge from the Oukasie case. In this final section, I try to turn the essential elements of my main findings into a brief list of policy-pointers and advice which can assist planners and policy-makers involved in in-situ upgrade projects in the future.

1. My study showed that well designed in-situ upgrade projects and programs can reduce “project negatives” such as conflict between actors over site allocation processes and maintenance problems caused by poorly designed infrastructure. Well designed

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<sup>94</sup> See the Myth of development from below (Sanyal 1996 p.25).

projects can also greatly increase “project positives.” Projects can be structured in a way that stimulates positive interaction between different stakeholders. Even if this interaction is based on the self-interest of the stakeholders, it can still translate into benefits for the target population. Even the reluctant, politically conservative Brits Town Council saw it in its interests to cooperate with the IDT-subsidized project (Oukasie) because the project offered them a benefit: a black township that they would have been responsible for financing and providing with services in the future was getting services for free from somewhere else. Even though the IDT was not aware of it at the time, the structure of its program had this built-in incentive to entice racist local authorities to participate. There is no reason why similar techniques cannot be used deliberately for other reluctant actors in the future.

2. Even where projects are not designed to facilitate interaction between different groups of individuals, such as government officials and community leaders, development processes open many unpredictable opportunities for such interactions to take place. My fieldwork showed that a former enemy like the Provincial Administration was willing to behave like a “friend” towards the community; and, no matter what the Provincial Administration’s motives, the community benefited. The temptation to avoid one’s enemies is a powerful one, both inside one’s community and outside of it. Yet, the Oukasie project shows us that strengthening ties with one’s enemies is often a useful tactic: for example, giving the Mayor of Brits (the conservative neighboring white town) the credit for bringing electricity to Oukasie, even though he dragged his

feet all the way, helped establish a better working relationship between the black and white areas.

The Oukasie case also demonstrates how important it is for NGO advisors (and others) to assist in building bridges between different stakeholders, rather than setting up an “us” and “them” dynamic. Communities which had good relationships with their developers, whether they were from the for-profit sector or not, generally had better project outcomes in the eyes of beneficiaries. For example, beneficiaries were more satisfied overall with the projects and were not thinking of leaving the newly-developed areas. This paper demonstrates a variety of ways in which NGOs can assist in building these bridges, including by drawing-in more enlightened individuals from the traditional or conservative groupings; if these more progressive individuals can be gently persuaded of the benefits of a particular initiative, they can work to change attitudes among their kin.

3. A different but related point on dealing with one’s enemies was relayed to me by a community organizer who worked among shack-dwellers in Phola Park and Thokoza. He told me that “you should want not only to organize yourself. You should want your enemy to be well organized too. If your enemy is not organized and is not accountable to a constituency, who can you talk to when you have a problem that involves his or her supporters?”<sup>95</sup> Although his comment strikes one as being

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with Duma Nkosi

counterintuitive (why on earth would we want to organize our enemies?), housing actors working in divided communities should pay attention; it is often necessary to assist in building “our enemies” (or at least not furthering their state of disorganization) in order to ensure that they are able to bind their supporters. We need to be certain that supporters of opposition leaders do not disrupt or destroy project initiatives when deals with their “bosses” are struck. Only an organized opposition can ensure this. The organizer’s point was validated in Oukasie, where the unorganized opposition grouping was more of a threat when it was organizing underground to try overthrow the democratically elected Civic and the Oukasie Development Trust than when it came into the open. The ODT and Civic engaged in a strategy to get the group to “come out” and declare its interests; once it began organizing above-board as a recognized official political party (the PPP), it was an entity with a small but identifiable following with which the Civic and Trust could constructively interact.

4. Demand-driven infrastructure projects, even relatively simple ones like the IDT initiative, are complicated for communities to manage because they are highly technical. Communities that wish to be involved in a meaningful way need to have access to technical support. While this may seem obvious, less obvious is the impact that the shape and form of this technical support can have. It has an impact both on the project success in the eyes of beneficiaries and on the extent to which beneficiaries are able to participate and meaningfully influence the kind of technical choices and



trade-offs that upgrade projects involve. My findings show that communities can benefit from hiring their own help (*e.g.*, a sympathetic and experienced technical consultant). Such a person can assist them in monitoring other contractors and suggest alternative technical options which may better meet their needs. A direct consulting relationship has potential to work well for communities because a consultant is only accountable to his/her client (the community). This is different from NGO representatives, who are often torn between many communities and constrained by accountability to their own organizations. In addition, hiring one's own consultant need not pose an extra financial burden on the community. In the case of Oukasié, their review consultant actually saved them money, thus making his contract financially beneficial to the community as well.

My research also shows that engaging particular NGOs and consultants in long-term relationships can have positive spin-offs as trust develops between the parties as they get to better understand each other's concerns. In Oukasié, the NGO advisors probably learned as much on the job as the community leaders did. Their improved understanding of community dynamics, which developed over time, enabled them to give more grounded advice. It is for this reason that skilled and sympathetic local government officials should be targeted for support; they are likely to be around for longer than NGOs or others who are in it for as long as their funders support that particular type of project.

My findings also showed the importance of community-based developers having access to individuals who can give them the project management and hard-core technical skills that they lack. Many NGO advisors are very good on either the process side (community organization assistance) or the technical side, but seldom both. Community-based developers probably already have a fair degree of process skills. Priority should therefore be given to making sure that their advisors can adequately support them in technical skills. The old saying that *knowledge is strength* cannot be over-emphasized in in-situ upgrade projects.

5. Access to knowledge is just as important to ordinary beneficiaries as it is to their leaders in in-situ upgrades. My findings show how important it is for both community leaders and ordinary beneficiaries to be well informed about technical aspects of their projects--not just for the sake of participation, but, rather, because well-informed beneficiaries can play a critical role in assisting project managers with some of the more difficult aspects of the projects. In Oukasie, the community leaders would probably never have been able to retain beneficiary support in the way that they did if they had not listened to beneficiaries. For example, only beneficiaries could have suggested that a committee including very old residents of Oukasie should be responsible for identifying the gravesites of people who might be buried in areas where pipes were being laid. By listening to the community's advice, the project management team headed off a potentially explosive situation. Similarly, only a resident of Oukasie would have thought that the best person to handle the big

celebration of the reprieve of the township and the launching of the ODT--a really happy occasion--would be the man who handled deaths, funerals and family arrangements for relatives of the deceased. His managerial and organizational experience was well known to beneficiaries but hidden to outsiders.

Having open mass meetings where beneficiaries are informed of the difficulties that their leaders and/or the project management team are facing has at least three benefits. First, leadership accountability and transparency are entrenched and beneficiary satisfaction is increased. Second, the leadership can defer difficult problems to the community; they thus create a shared problem and defer some of the responsibility for the outcome of the problem as well. Third, an informed constituency can participate in technical decisions in a manner that greatly increases project satisfaction and ultimately *reduces* project costs. Well-timed information transfer from leaders to beneficiaries and visa versa can go a long way towards reducing conflict and ensuring that negative rumors do not get out of hand. Ironically, the Oukasie case showed that having an enemy has its benefits too: it kept the leadership on their guard, motivated them to work harder to prove their worth and encouraged them to meet more often with beneficiaries to inform them of progress made and to listen to their feedback and concerns.

6. My study also pointed to a relatively underutilized strategy--flexible sequencing of deliverables-- that housing actors could use to increase beneficiary satisfaction.

Everyone knows that it is “the right thing” to listen to the priorities of beneficiaries. Yet few actors see the strategic opportunity in this. In Oukasie, it was ordinary beneficiaries who told their leaders that schools and clinics (not houses or improved roads) were their two most important priorities after drinking water. The project leadership took their recommendation seriously and went all out to get resources for both a school and a clinic. The literature usually tells us to put in basic services first and the rest will follow through a process of incremental upgrading. Because of the community’s demands and their extensive network of contacts, the ODT leadership did the two tasks simultaneously and secured health and education facilities at a very early stage in the project’s life cycle. In so doing, it elicited a high level of beneficiary satisfaction with the public facilities which, in turn, probably made residents more willing to moderate their other initial demands like “houses for all.” The policy lesson here is one of sequencing. Project managers should be sure to satisfy at least some of the community’s very pressing needs early on in the project, as this can assist in making communities more amenable down the line when difficult choices and trade-offs need to be made.

7. I discussed how the Oukasie Development Trust used political strategies and tactics to both manage conflict *and* to lay claim to a wide range of resources (like schools and clinics). I also showed that it can be far more dangerous to avoid politics than to engage in politics strategically. My finding suggest that communities that are *not* politically connected may be in greater danger of not succeeding. This casts doubt on conventional

wisdom that, to be successful, communities must separate out their political and development goals. Oukasie was a successful project precisely because its leaders were highly politicized and used political tactics to achieve their ends. They were also extremely well connected to politicians and other influential actors. Without these connections and the politically strategic maneuvers of the leadership, it is doubtful that the project would have been as successful as it was. Policy-makers and planners should, therefore, not be too hasty in writing off politics in development projects but should, instead, work within the existing systems to ensure that project beneficiaries get the best possible outcomes for resources invested.

8. Finally, my chapter on storytelling informs housing actors that there are often more hidden and less conventional factors that underpin successful upgrade projects. In this case, I showed how communities, funders and NGOs can all manipulate a success story for their own ends and still make the community better off in the process. The old adage that “nothing builds success like success” was given life in the case of Oukasie through an extraordinary process of storytelling by community leaders and other stakeholders. Through their narratives about the community’s success, they built support for the Oukasie project among influential actors, who then contributed additional resources to the project. These additional resources further helped to fulfill the prophecy of success in the township. I suggest here that it is possible for many other communities to use many of the same techniques as the Oukasie community did

(*e.g.*, extensive use of the media) to build similar resource bases in their respective communities.

In my paper I have shown some factors that underpin successful in-situ upgrade projects. Each in-situ upgrade project, however, will always bring with it a different set of constraints and challenges which pose new problems and different dilemmas that housing actors need to face. I have argued that policy-makers and planners must learn from successful upgrades in order to equip themselves to deal with the diverse needs of other communities. Yet, while I make recommendations about improving the chances of success of in-situ upgrade projects, I do not mean to imply that incremental upgrading is a panacea that we should expect the poor or policy-makers to embrace. Financial constraints aside, the incremental process is in no way preferable to giving a bigger set of deliverables (including houses) to needy communities “up front.” It is, however, all we have if we want to reach most of the poor within our affordability constraints. And, because governments are giving relatively little to the poor in in-situ upgrades (taps, toilets and title-deeds), they had better be absolutely certain that the products and processes through which they are delivered leverage the greatest benefit for communities. The purpose of this paper is to help ensure that this happens. In-situ upgrades may not be a perfect solution, but they are feasible and affordable. Implemented effectively, this approach could significantly improve the living conditions of most of South Africa’s informally housed population, and millions of other poor people around the world.

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## **INTERVIEWS<sup>96</sup>**

### **Key Informants in Oukasie**

Jacob Moatshe: Community Liaison Officer Oukasie

Levy Mamabolo: Chair Oukasie Development Trust, Mayor of Brits

Stan Minisi: Trustee on Oukasie Development Trust

Sam Mkhabela: Chairperson Oukasie Civic Association and Town Manager for Oukasie

Ann Mokoshi.: former member health committee, current member education committee

### **Discussions/Interviews Held With Housing Actors in South Africa**

Ulli Bleibaum and Otto Holicki: engineers and project managers of numerous in-situ upgrade and site- and-service projects around the country. Both work at Bleibaum Associates

Taffy Adler: Vice Chair Oukasie Development Trust. Currently heading up inner city housing initiative organization.

Ishmael Mkhabela: Chair National Housing Forum, Director of Interfaith Community Development Association

Matthew Nell: former chair National Housing Forum, vice-chair of the government's National Housing Board

Tanya Zac, Mike Morkel, Colin Appleton, Seetela and Martha Makheta, Ian Palmer, Neill Otten: independent development consultants for IDT.

Neo Tladinyane: former member of Bouwer Viljoen's project management team in Oukasie

Gavin Wyngaard: Independent Development Trust

Duma Nkosi: Member of Parliament, Local ANC leader Thokoza township.

Jill Shlagter: former coordinator of IDT's training program for community workers and trustees

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<sup>96</sup> I conducted interviews with around 60 residents and with 26 professionals / housing stakeholders outside Oukasie. Only the residents that I met with nearly everyday that I did my fieldwork are named.

Rosie Gordon, Sue Rubenstein: consultants working on infrastructure and social services programs on the East Rand where many informal settlement residents live.

Thomas Steward: formerly project manager of Freedom Square in-situ upgrade project

Clive Felix: formerly on project management team of Soweto-on-Sea upgrade project

Vish Supersud: Housing expert involved in various in-situ upgrade projects in Kwazulu Natal

Mary Tomlinson, Khehla Shubane: both of Center for Policy Studies, Shubane was formerly vice-chair of the National Housing Forum.

Brian Levenson: Housing Consumer Protection Trust.

Conveyancer at Van der Meer and Schoonby

Electrical Engineer from Brits Municipality

Bureaucrat in charge of Reconstruction and Development Program for Greater Brits

Various white residents in the Brits.

## **Discussions held with World Bank and other Housing/Development Experts**

### **1. World Bank**

Alain Bertaud

Steve Mayo

Steve Malpezzi

Kwusick Lee

Junaid Ahmad

Alcira Kreimer

V.J. Jaganathan

John Briscoe

Thakoor Persaud

Tova Solo

Bernant Veuthey

Larry Hannah

Kevin Villani

Richard Beardmore

Robert Buckley

Joe Leitman

Michael Bamburger

## **2. Others**

Omar Razzaz: MIT

Judith Tandler: MIT

Bish Sanyal: MIT

Paul Smoke: MIT

Lisa Peattie: MIT

Willian Doebele: Harvard