

The South African area-based urban renewal programme: experiences from Cape Town

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Abstract In his 2001 State of the Nation address former President Mbeki announced the launch of the Urban Renewal Programme (URP) as an area-based approach which would form part of a 10 years initiative to address poverty and underdevelopment in targeted areas. It had a specific emphasis on improving joint government planning and implementation. Townships were spatially engineered by the architects of apartheid and excluded by design. They are today typified by high levels of poverty and crime. It is in the undoing of these two social malaises that the URP has anchored itself on the policy agenda. The URP focused on eight urban townships in the country as pilots that would pave the way for an urban development strategy on urban renewal to be developed and implemented nationally once the 10 years pilot period elapsed. The paper is a review of lessons learnt and best practices in two anchor URP projects in Cape Town, South Africa.

Keywords Area-based approach · Spatial targeting · Khayelitsha · Mitchell's Plain · South African townships · Urban renewal programme

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1 Introduction

The spatial geography of urban apartheid and its injustices are internationally known. The most neglected urban spaces during apartheid are still largely the most neglected spaces today. Since democracy, the South African government has introduced a number of spatial-economic strategies. While some were targeted at areas seen as having the greatest potential for new growth (the so-called spatial development initiatives (Rogerson 1999)) others were aimed at areas of most neglect, such as the townships. Nationally, however, the current policy on “townships” remains at programmatic level. The three most prominent of these plans of action, since the advent of democracy are the Special Integrated Presidential Projects initiated in 1994. This was followed in 2001 by the National Urban Renewal Programme (URP), and the Neighbourhood Development Programme since the mid-2000s.

Townships were spatially engineered by the architects of apartheid and excluded from broader society by design and are today still typified by high levels of poverty and crime. It is in the undoing of these two social malaises that the URP has anchored itself in the policy agenda. The excluded by design areas have now also become excluded by decline areas. In his 2001 State of the Nation address, former President Thabo Mbeki announced the launch of the Urban Renewal Programme, an area-based approach (ABA). It was a 10-year initiative to renew eight urban nodes of deprivation in six South African cities and aimed at addressing poverty and underdevelopment in targeted areas. It had a specific emphasis on improving joint government planning and implementation. These eight urban townships were pilots to pave the way for an urban development strategy on urban renewal to be developed and implemented nationally once the 10-year pilot period elapsed. The URP was tasked with a dual mission. First was to test and demonstrate how best the notion of joined-up government can be operationalised to achieve better results (co-ordination). Second, and leading from the first, was to produce lasting and tangible impacts into creating cohesive communities in these deprived nodes and transforming them in more liveable environments. In all URP nodes investment was made in hard infrastructure and soft social interventions. Examples of hard infrastructure are: Khayelitsha business district and Mitchells Plain town centre; transport—rail extension, roads, bridges, pedestrian routes, public transport interchanges, etc.; district hospital and other clinics; housing projects—private and public; and various infrastructural and facility upgrades. Soft infrastructure is high-quality urban design and public spaces necessary to create distinctive, attractive places which facilitate social integration and attract investment (Turok and Watson 2002). Examples of URP soft infrastructure are: bush clearing and beautification programmes; community safety and environmental education programmes; skills development courses; and youth and family centre operations (Urban-Econ 2011).

This paper is divided into two main sections. In the first part the experience of area-based approaches to the urban renewal of deprived areas is briefly reviewed. The second part reflects on lessons learnt from and best practices in the URP as experienced in the two Cape Town nodes by concisely reviewing two anchor projects. This paper focuses on the Kuyasa Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) CDM project in Khayelitsha and the Watergate Estate housing development in Mitchells Plain (for a map see Newton and Schuermans 2013). These case studies were chosen for the research because of the valuable lessons learnt from their individual processes. The study is mainly qualitative in nature, being a reflection on the views and perspectives of a segment of programme stakeholders, supported by insights from a wide range of secondary sources such as key reports on the URP (both nationally and locally) and specific project documentation. In total 43 in-depth interviews were conducted and most of the interviewees are line managers and others who

have been actively involved in one way or another in a specific project. From the case studies in this paper one can argue that the positive outcomes of an ABA lie in the creation of an intermediary organisation similar to the URP nodal unit, one with a flexible platform of resources.

2 Area-based (ABA) approach to renewing deprived areas

Spatial policies can take various forms including spatially blind (i.e. reactive to market forces, trends and events) policies, those that include deliberate spatial targeting (conscious direction), and those that are integrated place-based policies (Turok 2011). Internationally, an area based approach (ABA) to urban renewal and regeneration became a very popular policy option during the 1990s, although its origin in the UK dates back to the 1970s. ABA to spatial planning has become the face of so-called 'new urban governance' with collaborative partnerships featuring intergovernmental and/or public-private sector becoming a main principle in public administration. It is argued that greater coordination in the development of "policy responses to complex social problems, or restructuring service delivery in order to meet demanding targets" is needed for successful urban renewal (Mason 2007, p. 2366). In addition, urban planners are of late "given more freedom in formulating area-specific environmental ambitions that are based more on existing functions and characteristics of urban areas" (Runhaar et al. 2009, p. 417). More significantly, what has become qualitatively different about the regeneration in the twenty-first century is the role afforded to the community and their involvement in the process (Russell 2001). Areas within cities suffering from multiple deprivations (so-called distressed urban areas) do not only refer to a problem of low income levels or areas of physical deterioration. Features of distressed urban areas are widespread and include among other "high levels of poverty, low educational achievement, low rates of labour force participation, high numbers of single-parent families and a greater incidence of health problems than experienced in other parts of the urban areas". Moreover, these areas often have inadequate access to shops and other services and households often lack adequate means of transport. Participation in democratic processes and community involvement tends to be low, resulting in increasing isolation from the broader society. The incidence of crime and vandalism is often high, leading to feelings of insecurity and enhancing the sense of isolation" (Conway and Konvitz 2000, p. 750).

Typically an ABA intends to change the nature of a geographical area by involving residents and other interest groups who have a stake in its future. Depending on the character of local problems and opportunities available, it typically embraces a range of social, economic and physical development objectives cutting across the functional responsibilities of government in fields such as education, housing, transport, sport, recreation, and economic development (Smith 1999). ABA can take different institutional forms, "ranging from large partnership structures, involving diverse stakeholders to special-purpose agencies with narrow responsibilities and short time frames" (Turok 2004, p. 6). ABA is said to be only "really appropriate when deprivation and disadvantage can be addressed, in part, within the boundaries of a target area" (Smith 1999: 36).

An ABA however has to balance social and physical renewal. Research in Europe has shown that though urban renewal policies have been distinctly successful regarding improving and modernising the physical structure and environment, social and economic problems (unemployment, difficult living circumstances, changing social standards) persisted. The European study bemoaned the fact that the "experiences of 20 years of urban

renewal show the need of connecting the physical-technical aspects to juridical, management and social aspects” (Hulsbergen and Stouten 2001, p. 325). Three main themes from the international literature on ABA are identified and these pertain to the role of the community in the process, partnership and interagency cooperation, and the question of complexity—i.e. a more diverse approach and comprehensive approach dealing with a “commensurately complex interplay of social, economic, and environmental problems” (Lawless 2004, p. 384). Creating a new sense of place is a key to successful ABA renewal.

As a laboratory for innovative ideas and flexibility, ABA is seen as an experimental policy, trying out new things and providing alternative policy ideas. Being seen as pilots provides ABAs the flexibility of being risky and if successful being rolled out more widely, but according to international experiences this is rare. The lack of “formal mechanisms for generalising local successes or incorporating the lessons into the main functional departments of local and national government” (Turok 2004, p. 5) is mainly to be blamed for inaction. International evidence of main-streaming ABA from pilot status to rolling out in wider areas is however mixed.

3 URP pilots in Cape Town

Why was it decided to implement the URP in South Africa along an ABA? According to Forster et al. (2006) there were typically four rationales for implementing URP in an ABA. First, to ‘crowd in’, prioritise and integrate investment and effort in the area to solve a priority problem or capitalise on a special opportunity. Second, to mobilise partnerships with locally orientated partners. Third, to strengthen public participation. Lastly, to develop new approaches in a ‘hot house’ for subsequent broad-scale application.

The national URP project was coordinated and monitored by the National Department of Provincial and Local Government (later renamed Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs). Two of the URP nodes are located in Cape Town. These are Mitchells Plain and Khayelitsha which are located adjacent to one another, essentially forming a large scale nodal focus area for the URP. In Cape Town, the URP is implemented and monitored by the URP department of the CoCT. Two main aspects pertaining to project financing have stood out over the past 10 years. First, there was no substantial dedicated funding source allocated to the URP at inception, causing initial frustration, panic and uncertainty. The funding philosophy was based on the premise of an integrated approach that allows financial and technical resources from all three spheres of government to be channelled to nodes for development. Second, is the counterpoint to the first, namely that once the programme got going a basket of finance options opened up. The total public expenditure on URP projects from various sources in 2002/3–2009/10 amounted to R1.2 billion in Khayelitsha and R610 million in Mitchells Plain (Donaldson and Du Plessis 2011).

Unlike the other cities in the national programme, Cape Town has been subjected to regime changes that have had a distinct impact on the manner and direction in which the URP has played out since its inception. Within the relatively short time span of 8 years a dedicated URP unit has galvanised into one with the capacity to play a facilitative role in urban renewal. This facilitative role has realised the securing of significant funding from a range of sources (national to local) and a key knowledge-management system that provides the necessary imputes for informed decision making on spatial, social, economic and infrastructural planning of services and facilities. The unit has been able to achieve this despite the absence of dedicated organisational support from the relevant national

department management where the support was perceived to have been overshadowed by the FIFA 2010 World Cup and of late the integrated rapid transport plan.

Two of the anchor projects will be discussed below and Table 1 summarises the main features of the two projects. The first example of a pilot URP project is the Watergate Estate 'gap housing' development.

The so-called 'gap housing market' is one of the most challenging elements of housing delivery in South Africa. It refers to those who earn in excess of the upper limit to qualify for state-provided subsidised housing, but whose financial position does not allow them to afford the high prices of private homes on the open housing market, as they do not qualify for a house bond from a financial institution (Rust 2006a). The Watergate Estate development in Mitchell's Plain is a mixed-use, integrated human settlement development billed as a pilot project for affordable gap housing in Cape Town. The project was initiated by the land owner who approached the URP office to request assistance with the rezoning process. A public-private partnership was born and the Watergate Estate was afforded URP anchor project status. During the research interviews it was established that the privately-funded R1.2 billion affordable-housing development, aimed at a specific section of the first-time homeowners' market, was launched in August 2009. Upon completion of its four phases, the development will consist of 3,368 properties on 22 hectares. The development is in line with the compact city principles propagated in policy at national level and places strong emphasis on higher building densities and pedestrianisation. Its proximity to two commuter railway stations also supports the increased utilisation of public transport and a reduction in private vehicle ownership.

A second example of a URP pilot is the Kuyasa Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) pilot project. The settlement of Kuyasa is a newly-formalised part of the Khayelitsha area. Originally an informal settlement, the area was upgraded through the provision of a number of low cost housing units and basic services. The interviews with the main implementers of the Kuyasa CDM pilot project outlined the key interventions of the development. These included the retrofitting of 2,300 low-cost homes with solar water geysers, insulating homes with ceilings and fitting energy-efficient lighting. This is South Africa's first internationally registered CDM project under the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. Carbon credits involve the assigning of a value to lessen or offset greenhouse gas emissions. A carbon credit is generally equivalent to one tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent. This credit can be used to reduce their carbon footprint through an investment in an action that reduces or sequestered greenhouse gases at another location (Winkler and Thorne 2002; Dechezleprêtre et al. 2008).

The Kuyasa project was developed by a Non-Governmental Organisation (South South North) for the City of Cape Town's Environmental Resource Management department and URP. The Department of Environment and Tourism's Social Responsibility Programme and provincial government's Department of Housing provided the funding for retrofitting the houses.

The URP is founded on the principle concept of nodal development in specified municipalities. Two principal structuring mechanisms are used to drive the programme: spatial focus, and targeting of funding and resource allocation from the three spheres of government and strategic partners in response to indicators of both poverty and economic opportunity. These rationales are evident from the two case studies (Table 1).

The research established that in Mitchell's Plain, the URP primarily played a facilitating role between city management and the developer and provided assistance with the various applications for development approvals. The URP assisted with adherence to planning protocols, final designs, environmental impact assessments, and the acquisition of land. In

Table 1 Summary of the main features of the two projects

Selection criteria for URP projects	Watergate estate development scorecard	Kuyasa housing CDM project
Partnerships	The development is the first public–private affordable housing development in the Cape Town. The URP provides municipal process assistance and can leverage funds from the national URP fund for items in the development. The developer constructs the development and hands over the public spaces and facilities to the City	The project was a collaborative partnership between the City of Cape Town, the national Department of Water and Environmental Affairs, the Provincial Department of housing and local Government, the SAEDF and the community of Kuyasa. Involving the community as a partner was a key to the success of this project. The URP offices at the City of Cape Town also provided assistance on the ground and served at the community’s direct link to the City
Community contributions	The construction of the development has created 500 jobs. Certain subcontracting operations have been awarded to companies from Mitchells Plain. However, it has been identified that, in future, a larger component of sweat equity should be from the local community. It is also envisaged that the development would create approximately 250 permanent jobs in the commercial precinct and in the maintenance of the development	The energy-efficient technology training, targeting 2,309 people. Life skills training for this same group are facilitated through full-time trainers. To date, 50 of the Kuyasa residents have been sent on specific employment-related training. The project has created 87 job opportunities for local community members in Kuyasa
Multi-sectoral impact	The Watergate Estate development addresses housing, social and economic needs. It delivers affordable gap housing, provides public facilities for residents of Mitchells Plain and creates job opportunities through the mixed-use development which includes a commercial precinct	The Kuyasa project addresses environmental, social and economic needs. It delivers energy-efficient and energy saving systems to the community and has provided skills training, awareness raising and job opportunities for the community
Representation	The development contributes to housing requirements in the gap housing market. The public facilities are not for the exclusive use of the residents but are open to all	All members of the community were represented regardless of financial or economic situations, gender or age
Sustainability	The sustainability of the development would be determined by the residents’ participation in the homeowners association (HOA). This is a challenge as HOAs are new to the gap housing segment. It is envisaged that the URP would play a facilitating role in the HOA	The sale of the carbon credits has allowed for monitoring and continued support for the project. The Gold Standard certification and CER certification require that maintenance is provided for the installations. The national and international acclaim for this project has also allowed for its sustainability. The CDM office in Kuyasa ensured continued support and communication within the project

Table 1 continued

Selection criteria for URP projects	Watergate estate development scorecard	Kuyasa housing CDM project
Innovation	The high-density development has a focus on public transport and pedestrianisation, which in itself is an innovative idea for gap housing in Cape Town. The residents will have the opportunity to become active participants in the affairs of the development through the HOA	The use of a CDM model and the registration of this project with the UNFCCC have been an innovative move on the part of the developers. This caters for sustainability and for ongoing support and acclaim. The focus on the community and continued participation has taken on an innovative approach with the use of local economic forums, community liaison officers and local community representation
Ease of implementation	The URP has assisted the developer in identifying challenges in the development process and has facilitated problem-solving of issues. There are two problems that need attention: the finalisation of the access road and the process of approval of building plans	The URP has assisted the developer in identifying challenges in the development process and has facilitated problem solving of issues. This process has had a number of setbacks, particularly in terms of financial spending and sustainability as well as the differences in approach between the partners

this regard the completion of the Spatial Development Framework and Environmental Management Plan for the Mitchell's Plain area prior to URP mandates in the area, expedited some of these cumbersome processes. The URP office facilitated the creation of a multidisciplinary municipal and provincial project management team who was responsible for evaluating and monitoring various aspects of the development. In addition to the initial problems with land use protocols experienced by the developer, which paved the way for the creation public-private partnership with the URP, the partnership in itself brought various other challenges. Some of the challenges experienced in the project are similar to those documented in URP projects elsewhere in the country (Peter 2008). The development presented a shared learning experience, from which arose a number of issues that could address future developments of a similar nature (Ragland et al. 2011). There should be definitive lines of communication between the URP and the developer as well as communication to interested and affected parties. It is imperative that sub-contracting work be facilitated by the URP, ensuring that community skills are utilised in the development. This also speaks to the further need for the URP to develop a business empowerment strategy.

The research found that, whilst the inception meeting between the developer and officials was invaluable for identifying project component 'champions', there remains the need to follow due process with approvals, procedures, timeframes and the timely submission of documents. Municipal policy changes are required to streamline the various approval processes regarding the construction of gap housing. The interviews also revealed the fact that unnecessary delays often increase development costs which are eventually passed on to the buyer. To this end, it has been proposed that a dedicated municipal official for the specific development be appointed to solely focus on any issues that may arise during the project's life span, which includes liaison with other officials and more frequent meetings with the development consulting team. A 'package-of-plans' approach has been suggested

consisting of various spatial levels; from high-level buy-in of the broad concept of the development, to the detailed designs of various precincts within the development at finer level of spatial planning—essentially, a layered approach to the development. Alignment and integration of project planning with broader municipal plans and spatial development frameworks are also required to ensure compatibility with current and future developments.

In Khayelitsha, some of the main lessons learnt from the case study included the need for the project to be orientated towards social and local economic development as well as infrastructure development thus allowing for delivery, community satisfaction and capacity building. Others included the necessity for a comprehensive business plan to help secure support from all levels of government that meets the needs of the community. Those interviewed during the research pointed out that clear institutional vision and mandate for projects of this nature is critical as is the use of local groups such as the Khayelitsha Development Forum in communication, design and implementation. The use of local leaders also played a significant role from the outset and assisted to sustain community capacity building over the lifespan of the project. It is important to prepare communities to engage with the opportunities and impacts of the project. In terms of project preparation and design, the location of a project office within the community and the use of a community liaison officer were crucial to the success of the project as they provided a sense of ownership and involvement. The community's needs have to be embraced in formal agreements from the preliminary visionary phase to the maintenance phase of the project. Having a dedicated URP team within the City of Cape Town (CoCT) provided for a community link to the CoCT and adequate staffing to be allocated to the project. The ownership of the project by the CoCT also assisted in the leveraging of funds through the Extended Public Works Programme which meant that the community received training and skills-based work and funding was available for the project. The use of an implementer was key as this provided for accountability and for the adequate implementation of the project. Having an internal project manager to monitor expenditure, and an external implementer to project manage daily implementation and public participation was vital. Sustainability has further been promoted through the use of CDM and the ultimate sale of Certified Emission Reductions (CERs).

4 Conclusion

From the case studies in the paper it is argued that the success of an ABA lies in the establishment of an intermediary organisation similar to the URP nodal unit with a flexible package of resources. Turok (2004 p. 5) commends ABA thus: “If this arrangement is structured carefully, with an appropriate balance of incentives and controls, it may give the local organisation (e.g. URP unit) the scope and wherewithal to be highly innovative in its approach to problem solving and energetic in the pursuit of opportunities for growth and development. It may become a valuable catalyst for change by providing the technical expertise and negotiating skills to influence wider public and private investment decisions. It can represent and advocate local interests in wider arenas, raise the area's profile and generally act as a ‘champion’ for the locality.” Turok argues that in highly economically polarised societies, such as South Africa, area effects will be significant and therefore an ABA to renewal should be supported in this context. According to him, place affects economic and social processes and by targeting an area as a whole by means of strategic environmental and infrastructural improvements and enhanced security (all these were

characteristics of the Cape Town URP) “a strong signal can be given of public sector commitment to renewal and revitalisation” (Turok 2004, p. 3).

The case studies illustrated that a range of actors were engaged in partnerships and other types of networks that are more or less autonomous with respect to the state. As noted elsewhere by Andersen and Van Kempen (2003 p. 80), the experience in Cape Town shows that the “partners are willing to get involved because they think they will thereby maximize their benefits individually as well as collectively. Normally, participation in such networks is based on mutual interests, exchange of resources, and commitment, although the relations between the participants do not have to be balanced.” Sharing a local development perspective and strategy, as well as creating legitimacy for development choices through participation and ownership, can be considered the success and core of an ABA and principle to establish sustainable human settlements (Küsel 2009) as was seen in the Kuyasa case study. An important observation that stems from the Watergate Estate development, specifically from the project preparation and planning phase, is that a flexible system of land-use management is desirable in a URP node of this nature, particularly when dealing with private investment and a range of different public investments in a single project area. The project management experience from the case studies revealed that an initiative of this magnitude requires substantial high level project management input to ensure its success. This is particularly evident in dealing with bureaucratic processes (development and funding) and engaging with a wide variety of role players. ABA needs concise project management that is informed by explicit and negotiated frameworks. It requires buy-in and common vision from community members, their local leaders, government officials (at national, provincial and local level) and contractors. Finally, whilst public–private partnerships assisted in solving problems hampering development, the partnerships itself encountered new problems that had to be conquered. However, the shared experience and learning in various projects provides an opportunity for sector-specific best practices within the URP to be consolidated.

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