

The environmental and participation experience of Lamontville Township¹ community

Field work was conducted and report compiled by Ntokozo Mthembu

Introduction

Although the communities of South Africa remains divided in understanding the realities and the true meaning of the political settlement in the country. But what is common to all is that is that in the post apartheid South Africa, community participation has become identical to legitimate governance. This section will help in trying to understand whether communities participate in the development of their neighbourhood or not.

In trying to understand this type of development by capturing the experiences of various communities understudy in their differing neighbourhoods. The experiences of the respondents who participated are captured through in-depth interviews. These interviews were scheduled as part of our research concerning the pollution and the role played by the corporate world that is seen to part of the problem that haunts the community under study. Initially, 11 respondents confirmed their participation but later only 6 arrived and the interviews were to begin as it was Saturday of which is the day that “regarded” as the day of attending to family or community matters such as feasts and funeral.

Then the respondents were briefed with the purpose of the research and told to feel free in case they feel that they don’t want to answer any question. The questions were open ended to enable the interviewees to say whatever they feel was necessary in order to get the true picture of their understanding of the situation. In addition, all participants were female estimated to be age between 22 years and 37 years of age and all are resident of Lamontville Township.

In closure, the section summarises the findings from the study and highlights the voices from the communities and as well as suggestion.

Role played by the community when it comes to developing their neighbourhood

The interviewees said the development is about getting jobs, so that even the next generation will benefit. They also highlighted that the community does not take part in decision making for development because they are just told what to do (Williams, 2006:12). For example, the present development of houses such as Wilbedash is not supposed to be what it is as this area does not have transport and schools and that cause the children to walk long distance everyday. When we were allocated houses they just told us that we are moving from the informal houses – ‘*imijondolo*’ without any consultation. In addition, the local community members did not get jobs there because those who are in charge brought their friends from other areas such as Kwa Mashu to work here. That cause most people who were given houses at Wilbedash to move back to Lamontville as they see that they cannot stay in the place where their children have to walk long distance to school everyday and that expose their children to unsafe

environment. Nompumelelo said, “ *this type of development is not sustainable because people go back where they were moved earlier and that is why you see more informal settlement are rebuilt and you can think that there is no development at Lamontville when you see a lot of informal settlements*”. The interviewees noted that the development in order to be sustainable it need to include community, so that they can highlight what is important when their life is improved, so that can say that development is theirs. If the development doesn’t include community, the community will feel that there is nothing to be sustained in anyway as they did not partake in decision-making and the lack of proper development affects not only them but their children as well.

The interviewees highlighted that small municipal/RDP houses at Wilbedash are not conducive enough for the family because they are too small to cater for a family of more than two members. There is no privacy, as they have to stay in there with their children and do everything in the same small house. We fear that in case fire broke everything will burn up because the houses are too small.

The members’ of the community committees that were chosen to deal with the community problems don’t consider the input from the community members because they end up taking sides with a political party and those that are not members of that party end up not benefiting from the committee. The interviewees feel that the community meeting is used by the committee for campaigning for a political party instead of addressing the issues that the community is facing. They tell the community members that they will benefit if they join the party. The interviewees also noted that the other factor is that the party members within the community they first communicate with the counselor and take decisions without the community being involved. Councilors also differ when it comes to servicing communities as each councilor support political agenda of its political party. The interviewees feel that the community is used as steps to get them where they are in higher position but they are not interested in their opinions. Because of these problems most community members decided not participate in community meetings as they view those meetings as the waste of time.

We believe that committee members or developers should be asking us as the community on where we would like to move to and why, not to just come and tell us what to do and where to go. The committee decided that the community should move to Wilbedash and the people don’t want to move there for the reasons that Wilbedash does not have facilities that cater for them. But if the committee had consulted with them about issues of development perhaps the development would have been more sustainable because the people would feel part of it and will not vandalize it as they do.

The interviewees feel that another thing is that the committee do not seem to care about the effects that such movements have on their children, for instance our children then start living in a place that’s too far from their schools, and in most cases what happens is that the children will end up not going to school and will as a result end up being criminals. We cannot take our children to Wilbedash schools so easily because the schools there use English as a medium of communication and this side our children are taught in Zulu.

People keep on saying that there is no development but the issue is not that there is no development but rather that there is no communication between decision makers and the community itself.

What simply needs to happen for people to see and feel the development is that the government should just build proper and descent houses instead of these small houses they have built for us. Then people will be satisfied not to move them up and down.

Another problem is that they want us to move in the middle of the year and this poses a problem in that our children will not be able to move to other schools in the middle of the year but will have to wait for the next year to continue. If they could consult with us first then we would ask them to ask for our children to start in the new schools in the middle of the year, because us as Blacks it is very difficult to approach an Indian principal.

It is hard to accept the change, we need support from the committees they should not just take us put us there and leave us there. Since they have decided on their own to move us out of Lamontville they should then provide necessary incentives for us to move because it is costly, especially the transport issue.

Another thing is that in Wilbedash there is no public transport, no shops because most of the community members there work in town and have their own cars so they do their shopping in town, but we find it difficult to adopt in such conditions because we do not have our own cars.

Life is too difficult there because if you take a taxi from town that passes though Wilbedash but going to another place the taxi will drop you too far from where you are going. Maybe it would be better is they provide buses especially for those who are working as well as the school children. We cannot afford to go on our own feet because jobs schools and shops are too far; we think they also need to be tuck shops.

Key values and guidelines that influence decision makers

The interviewees said they don't know of any guideline that is followed when decisions are taken. There is also a lack of co-operation among the different departments and we are not given a choice on who should take decisions. We are not consulted about the houses being build and these houses are too expensive (R28000.00) and we can't afford them.

No one knows how the committees are selected, in a community at times there could even be two committees and you will find that the two committees do not work together, everything is confusing because when the community is called to come and select a committee, when we get there instead of selecting a committee we are introduced to an already selected committee. They chose each other as friends without skills, qualification, nor is there any training that is given to them after being chosen. People are tired they

have learnt to keep quiet and watch because even if they say anything nothing will happen instead they put their lives in danger.

Another problem is that some of the committee members are not from Lamontville and they know nothing about our problems. So there is a need for principles and rules to be put in place about the selection process as well as the decision making process.

Role played by the corporate towards community development

Interviewees said companies are doing something on children because they sponsor the schools with equipment and they have also built a laboratory. This benefits our children as they are getting a better education.

Teachers have also been able to get the committees and the community to come and sit together and come up with ideas on how to develop the children, a children's committee has also been formed so that the children are represented when decisions are being taken. But when it comes to sitting down as a community everything just falls apart.

Sapref built the laboratory and Engen and the schools share it among themselves. These firms have also promised to build a centre of will help the children to get their drivers licenses in order to get jobs.

Corporate activities concerning health issues

The interviewees said they, *"We don't know of anything that been done by the companies to help us pertaining pollution or health issues but there are a lot of children who are asthmatic and some even have arthritis"*. Sindle said, *"Although we don't know what firms can do about stopping the pollution but they can stop it because at some point when I was schooling next to one of these firms, on other days it use to produce unbearable fume and the Principal of the school use to go to the firm and request it to do something and within few minutes fumes stopped. So, we don't know whether is costly to stop it or what but they are able to stop the fumes when they want to do so"*. In addition, Nompendulo said, *"In my family only two people who are not suffering from asthma from my father, mother and two brothers and sisters are the victims"*

Then the interviewees believe that the communities need to get up and get financial support in order to run programs for awareness of these diseases that are caused by pollution and also consult governments departments to get help. However, the problem is that the community is not aware of the channels that need to be followed for them to get help.

Help or assistance expected from relevant government departments

The interviewees said they want jobs.

It is good to see institutions such as the UKZN as it come and conducts medical tests in the schools and gives us advises on how to handle the diseases, and at times they even go door to door offering help.

The Department of Health is already doing something, they once asked the committee to tell the community that if they want free home based treatment they can come and inform them but the committee never passed the message to the community.

The Department of Transport is also trying in that it has made speed humps on the roads and now the roads are safer to both drive and work on especially for the children. The effects of that the road accidents have been reduced.

There is a need for awareness because people are only focused on HIV/Aids as a killer disease and do not consider other diseases such as asthma.

Suggested government interventions on the health issues in the community

Interviewees feel that Government should educate leaders about the diseases so that they can help the community and the selection process of leaders should require them to have knowledge and skills to deal with such diseases and leadership skills.

There should also be a criteria of choosing people if there is a job because people just call their friends and family to take the jobs they even call people who are not even part of the community whilst we have a lot of people who want jobs. So when there are developments for Lamontville people then people from the area should be employed to do the work.

Suggested strategies that government should use to monitor the implementation of policies/ projects

Interviewees highlighted that government need to apply more monitoring means, as the present ones are not working that is proven by the fact the projects are done to the required standards. Interviewees made an example about way of hiring people to work in community projects, *“the rule was that when development such as road rebuilding or house construction in the township will only use community members from the area who are not working but the committee members opted to exclude people from the area and took their friends or family members who don’t stay in those areas to work in these projects”*.

Therefore interviewees believe that government should use strategy that is similar to that is used at school. For example, the principals is not given the money to purchase whatever is required at school but government just buy the material they need in order to avoid the disappearance of the money and that should be the same even to the projects that are implemented in the township.

Interviewees noted that it would be better if different Government Departments will listen to their plea and respond early. E.g. Dept of Welfare in KZN during the times of Minister Zulu, he was responsible to respond in what ever which is the concerned for the community. The Dept of Education is doing the same and there is no need to even to make an appointment you just go there and explain your problem. Therefore, the interviewees believe if other Dept can apply an open door policy so that the community can report their problems and resolved sooner. The Interviewees believe it is better to go straight to the Department rather than going to the councilor because *“if you consult a council first he/she will ask you so many things and they just delay you in order not to get access and we believe councilors are stumbling block in to resolving community problems”*.

Interviewees would like to see Government employing inspectors or assessors that will monitor the project from the beginning till its finished and these assessors must come not come from the same area where project is conducted. Furthermore, the interviewees feel that in case the project fail to meet required standards or don't get finished because of corruption, the government through its agents such as Scorpions need to take away the property or assets of the individuals who were running the project and the individuals be dealt with in terms of the criminal law as they robbed the state and the communities.

Suggested strategy /ies that government to ensure community involvement

The Interviewees suggest that government should bring together all unemployed people so that they will able to identify and hear what their needs are. In addition, the Government should use strategy such as writing letters to all community members when inviting them to a community meeting and should not rely on area committees as they tend not share the information with communities especially if those communities differ with the councilor's views.

Pollution in your community

Interviewees feel that firms such as Sapref, Mondi and all those companies in the same category in terms of producing fumes that destroy the environment or threatensⁱⁱ human health should be invited to come to the meetings where they will experience directly the effects of pollution in the township.

There is also a need to call all community members who are sick because of the pollution to partake in the meeting in order to take decision on what need to be done. This meeting should be called in each section of the township. Interviewees said, *“It will be better to sit down with company owners because it seems like they don't care about our lives”*.

Firms should come and hear the views and complains from the community about pollution about the damage done by their companies. Interviewees says, that *“people should be educated on how pollution works and company owners should understand and be willing to spend money in order to improve the situation even to those who are already*

sick, and should find other alternatives to control the air pollution from their companies”.

We won't say the firms should go way because we will suffer at the end in terms of jobs. Interviewees suggest that *“at least the firms should do something that may not allow the air to go out at least try some other ways of controlling it”*. If we say the firms should go there would be no jobs, where else we have shortage of jobs in South Africa we won't say that.

Other problems experienced by this community

Praxadis said *“I have 3 children, at school I have no job and I have to pay over R300-00 each, how can I get help?”*. Nompumelelo suggested that sometimes she need to go to the principal and explain to him/her about your problem and you will find that even a principal understands you and will explain that they have a shortage of money so that is why they want every child to pay a schools fees. Although principals understands the rule that if a child and the parents are not working should not pay the school fees. In January you should go to school and applying for an aid it is a partial one and exemption. Community do not know about that even the principals don't want to announced it to community because people will end up not paying the school fees. Also you should go to the Social workers to get help are very helpful.

The most of the participants did not know anything about environmental issues such as pollution although it affects them. Firms who produce hazardous fumes do nothing such as awareness campaigns but they only contribute with educational resources such as laboratory for school children. Most of the interviewees they were no longer interested in partaking in community gatherings as meetings are manipulated by the leaders who always push agendas for their political parties. Corruption of community leaders and as well as project management is rife and development is not sustainable as community members go back where they used to be prior they were moved to new area. The development that is effected does not take of community needs such transport, shops and clinics and the community is expected to it as the development. Interviewees feel that the community is marginalised, as they don't take part in decision making for socio economic development. In the next sections look at the differ impacts at different communities in their respective areas of study.

Interviews Conducted:-

List of in-depth interviewees at Lamontville on the 13th November 2004 –

- S'lungile Manzini
- Benzani Nxumalo
- Praxadis Sithole
- Nompumelelo Dlodla

- Nompendulo Chiliza
- Sindle Mchunu

ⁱ It's one of the townships based in the south of Durban and was built by apartheid government as the labour reserve as it is today. This township is known for being the home of one the lawyers – Mr Mxenge who represented in defence of the activists in the 1980s and also known for the rent boycott – “ASINAMALI CAMPAIGN”.

ⁱⁱ Refer to The groundWork Report 2003- Forging the Future