

# Article

## The Alexandra Development Forum (ADF): the tyranny of invited participatory spaces?

Luke Sinwell

lsinwell@yahoo.com

### Abstract

The majority of the South African literature on participatory development has suggested that the ANC government's approach to participation actually restricts citizens' ability to influence development. While scholars have exposed some of the dominant trends which are associated with the government's approach to participation, this article argues that they have not sufficiently considered what can be called the more 'hidden' terms within which reformed participation in development may occur. It suggests that reforms in the government's approach to participation, which enable certain residents to affect important decision-making processes, can co-exist with broader neoliberal politics. While neoliberalism has many implications for development, this article focuses on the way in which neoliberal policies limit development possibilities through fiscal austerity. It draws from Cornwall's (2002, 2004) concept of 'invited' participatory spaces and Cooke and Kothari's (2001) notion of participation as 'the new tyranny' to provide insight into the politics behind the Alexandra Development Forum (ADF) and its relationship to the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP), a R1.3 billion flagship project undertaken by the South African government. The article illustrates that the key policy change which resulted from the partnership between the ADF and the ARP led to the reprioritisation of resources from one poor group to another and thereby does not contribute significantly towards the improvement of people's lives. Far from enabling residents to transform development, participatory spaces like the ADF largely remain a managerial tool in the hands of the ANC, with fundamental similarities to those spaces adopted by the World Bank.

### Introduction

The majority of the South African literature on participation in development has suggested that the ANC government's technocentric and managerial

approach to participation limits citizens' ability to influence development. For example, Oldfield (2008) argues that while ward committee members are intended to work independently from political parties and be non-partisan, the fact that local government councillors may select their own ward committee members undermines their potential to be so. In practice, she argues, there is no clear way of deterring ward councillors from controlling and monitoring who influences decisions and who cannot. Similarly, Benit-Gbaffou illustrates that institutional channels for participation are 'not working in the South African city, and the city of Johannesburg in general' (2008:1). She concludes that this is a result of local government fragmentation as well as the 'limited power of ward councillors in council and the lack of incentive for fostering their accountability to voters' which 'lead[s] to the development of patterns of clientelism at the local level' (2008:1). The suggestion implicit in the literature is that a change in institutional structures of the local government could serve to enhance citizen participation (see also Buccus and Hicks 2008, Heller 2008, Piper and Deacon 2008, Staniland 2008).

These studies are very useful since they expose the dominant trend and some of the nuances which are associated with the government's approach to participation in South Africa. This paper contributes to this literature by further unravelling the ways in which invited spaces of participation work, what is at stake in these spaces, and how aspects of civil society relate to them. Invited spaces of participation are social spaces created by the government to induce participation by communities. Paying close attention to the wider social and political processes in which participation occurs, this article problematises what happens when these structures are merely reformed so that they become more inclusive to citizens' demands.

I suggest that scholars have not offered sufficient consideration of what can be called the more 'hidden' terms within which reformed participation in development may occur. I suggest further that reforms in the government's approach to participation in the South African context can co-exist with broader neoliberal politics. Though authors have criticised and explained the devastating effects of the ANC's adoption of neoliberal development policies (see for example, Bond 2001, Desai 2002) very little scholarly attention has been given to understanding the relationship between the neoliberal trajectory and the government's implementation of participatory approaches to development.

While neoliberalism has many implications for development, this article

focuses on the way in which neoliberal policies limit development possibilities through fiscal austerity. It draws from Cornwall's (2002, 2004) concept of 'invited' participatory spaces and Cooke and Kothari's (2001) notion of participation as 'the new tyranny' to provide insight into the politics behind the Alexandra Development Forum (ADF), one of the ANC's invited participatory spaces. It illustrates the local specific process through which this space is reformed and argues that this reform will not change the living conditions in Alexandra.

Perhaps because of their focus, the above scholars tend to refer to invited participatory spaces as institutional channels or structures of participation. In the South African context, the politics and logic behind the adoption of invited participatory spaces has only recently been given attention in the academic literature. For example, Miraftab advises readers to beware of invited spaces since institutions of power tend to designate them as the only "proper" space for civil participation' (2006: 195). Referring to the ways in which invited spaces of participation may monitor and control the kinds of voices that are able to be addressed in them, she suggests that:

just as liberal views assigned the citizenship-granting agency to the state, the neoliberal view assigns the state the agency to grant status as civil society as well, and to define the spaces where citizenship can be practiced. (2006: 211)

While her analysis of invited spaces is useful since it relates them to broader systems of power (ie the adoption of neoliberal policies in the South African context), it only touches the surface since the primary focus of her article is on invented spaces of participation, those that have been created autonomously at the grassroots level, in this case the Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC).

In a recent theoretical article, Ballard proposes that 'perhaps the most important problem with invited spaces of participation is that they can paradoxically serve to demobilise rather than mobilise' (2008: 180). He then provides insight into the South African case by suggesting that invited participatory spaces may be part of a means by which the ANC can suppress dissent and mobilisation against its policy choices (2008: 182). He cites Greenstein who has argued that:

Popular participation is always seen... as a way of bolstering the role of the state under ANC leadership, rather than as potentially contradicting, challenging, or forcing it to rethink its policies and practices. From this perspective, the focus on participation does not

reflect recognition that civil society forces may play a role independently of, let alone in opposition to, the ruling party. (Ballard 2008:182)

I elaborate on this theme by drawing from an in-depth case study of an invited participatory space called the Alexandra Development Forum (ADF). In order to understand the politics of the ADF, I draw from interviews with key leaders involved with the ADF, the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP), and the Umpakathi Development Forum which emerged to contest policies adopted by the ARP.

The case study of the ADF speaks to one of Cornwall's (2002, 2004) key arguments, which will be elaborated on in the theoretical section. She argues that these invited spaces may simply be pseudo-democratic, but that they can also be sites in transformation and that the outcome and content of these spaces can never fully be predetermined. The underlying meaning of the reform, which has led to key policy changes, may provide critical insight into the politics of participation in the South African context and internationally. On the one hand these spaces may be repressive, closed off to particular kinds of voices, and serve the interests of those in power; and, on the other, they may offer alternative possibilities. The following explains the logic behind the tyranny critique of participatory approaches to development, shows how Cornwall's concept of invited participatory spaces advances this critique, and then uses these theoretical tools to understand the changing relationship between the ARP and the ADF. The key policy change which resulted from the partnership between the ADF and the ARP resulted in the reprioritisation of resources from one poor group to another and thereby does not contribute significantly towards the improvement of people's lives in Alexandra.

### **Framing participation: inviting them to participate**

By the 1980s and 1990s, it became widely accepted among critical academics and development practitioners that local people should no longer be viewed as passive recipients of development aid from above, but needed to play an integral role in determining their own development (Chambers 1997). This mainstreaming of participation was perceived by many as a major advance in development, which apparently overturned the dominant 'top down' approach that characterised development for decades (see Cornwall 2000). However, even as participation established itself as an apparently indispensable tool in the hands of development practitioners, serious questions were raised about it. From the mid-1990s, an increasing number of

development analysts began to pose critical questions which exposed important shortcomings in mainstream participatory processes.

Perhaps the most central issue is that the ‘slippery’ nature of the term participation enables participation to be used to achieve virtually any outcome (Crewe and Harrison 1998:73). For example, mainstream approaches to participation use the concept to achieve efficiency and sustainability in development projects. In other words, participation is used as a means to achieve an end. As in the cases of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, participation is seen as something that is *practical* because it increases the effectiveness and efficiency of the development project. They adopt participatory approaches with the assumption that by involving the people’s local expertise in the project, it is more likely to be sustainable because the beneficiaries will have had some stake in the decision-making and outcomes on the project, thus making it more likely that they will maintain the project after the developers have left (Francis 2001).

Because mainstream approaches are used as a means to an end, critics have doubted its transformative potential. In 2000, Cornwall made the strong assertion that:

there is less cause for celebration. Their [mainstream] concerns centre on the use of participation as a legitimating device that draws on the moral authority of claims to involve the poor to place the pursuit of other agendas beyond reproach. According to this perspective, most of what is hailed as ‘participation’ is a mere technical fix that leaves inequitable global and local relations of power, and with it the root causes of poverty, unchallenged. (2000: 1)

Mainstream participation is viewed as a ‘technical fix’ because people can participate in projects, perhaps even influence which ones to undertake and their outcome, but they have to do this within the parameters of global (and national) institutions. These parameters have been defined by the IMF, World Bank and other global forces which inhibit the potential for people to alter broader scale power relations that are necessary to bring about meaningful transformation for marginalised groups. Cooke explains that the World Bank has ‘appropriated participatory discourse and methods’ (2004:43) and points out that ‘the World Bank is an organisation that sees more neoliberalism as the remedy for the problems it has visited on the world’s poor’ (2004: 43-44). He has even gone so far as to suggest that ‘it uses participatory methodologies and practitioners to enforce that agenda’ (2004: 44).

The World Bank's practice and understanding of participation represents the epitome of mainstream approaches to participation. In this way, participation is depoliticised and a technical fix. Referring to Rahnama, who wrote at the beginning of the 'PRA [Participatory Rural Appraisal] boom', Williams says that participation's rapid growth was 'an indication that it had already been politically "tamed", and was serving important economic, institutional and legitimating functions for a mainstream vision of development' (Williams 2004:92). Because participation is compatible with a neoliberal agenda such as that of the World Bank, Williams questions whether 'the recent explosion of "participatory" practices and discourse represent a radical paradigm shift, or the active *de*-politicization, of international development' (2004: 92)?

Kanji and Greenwood elaborated on this perspective by arguing that, 'Emerging paradoxes towards the end of the 1990s with standardized approaches contradicting original aims for flexible and context-specific approaches, a more technical rather than empowerment-oriented use of methods with superficial knowledge of empowerment principles emerged' (Kanji and Greenwood 2001). Today, it is suggested, rather than actually empowering people to take over their own development, participation has lost the critical edge it had in the 1970s (see Freire 1972). Mechanisms such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tend to cover up what otherwise would have been called top-down development. As Mosse asserts, 'participation no longer has the radical connotations it once had' (2001: 17).

Cooke and Kothari captured these critiques most dramatically and influentially in their book entitled, *Participation: the new tyranny* (2001). This book went beyond the routine questioning of the failure of participation to empower the poor and what steps might be taken so that participation could function to enable more meaningful participation. As the title of the book suggests, it adopted a highly contentious position that participation, in its mainstreamed version, serves to legitimate the interests of those in power. These authors were among the first advocates of participation to acknowledge the need to seriously question whether the drive for participation in development should not be abandoned completely.

A key component of their argument related to the emphasis that participatory approaches to development placed on project-level interventions. According to Cooke and Kothari, reviews and critiques of the mainstream approach to participation take two main forms:

Those that focus on the technical limitations of the approach and stress

the need for a re-examination of the methodological tools used, for example in PRA, and those that pay more attention to the theoretical, political and conceptual limitations of participation. (2001: 5)

In criticising the first approach, they caution that ‘an emphasis on the micro level of intervention can obscure, and indeed sustain, broader macro level inequalities and injustice’ (2001: 14). Even if a participatory project is as efficient and effective as possible, it still may not be satisfactory since the development project has not changed the overarching economic and political structures that shape these people’s lives in various ways. Cooke and Kothari (2001) contend that it is insufficient (and perhaps counterproductive) to say that the problem of participation is with its methods or techniques. The question they then pose is: ‘Has the constant methodological revisionism to which some of us have contributed (eg Cooke: 1998), obscured the more fundamental problems within the discourse, and whether internal critiques have served to legitimize the participatory project rather than present it with a real challenge’ (Cooke and Kothari 2001: 7)?

Though Cooke and Kothari’s (2001) analysis had not yet framed their critique of participation in this way, they were essentially directing their critique at what Cornwall (2002, 2004) has coined the government or development project’s ‘invited’ spaces of participation. Cornwall was among the first influential theorists to argue that the purpose of these spaces may be to locate poor people into the prevailing order and to maintain neoliberal hegemony (Cornwall 2002) However, Cornwall’s (2004) adoption of the concept of space to understand the dynamics of participatory processes provides further insights into the above debate because it enables scholars to understand the positive effects of power as well as its negative effects. Participatory spaces are social arenas in which the community has the potential to impact policies, discourses and practices of development. Rather than describe a geographical space that is considered to be an empty area, this concept refers to ‘a dynamic, humanely constructed means of control and hence of domination, of power’ (Lefebvre 1974:24). Cornwall (2004) suggests that analysing spaces is a useful way to understand how these spaces might be used by people to enhance citizen participation for some, or used to undermine citizen participation of others. According to Cornwall:

Talking in terms of spaces for participation conveys the situated nature of participation, the bounded yet permeable arenas in which participation is invited, and the domains from within which new intermediary

institutions and new opportunities for citizen involvement have been fashioned. It also allows us to think about the ways in which particular sites come to be populated, appropriated or designated by particular actors for particular kinds of purposes. (2004: 75)

While these spaces can take many forms and overlap with each other, Cornwall differentiates between what she calls ‘popular spaces’ and ‘invited spaces’. Popular spaces are ‘those arenas in which people join together, often with others like them, in collective actions, self-help initiatives, or everyday sociality’ (Cornwall 2004:76). Invited spaces, on the other hand, have been induced by governments or development organisation. In the South African context, the main examples of invited spaces are ward committees or development forums, while popular spaces may take part in protests, resistance or letters to those in government.

Referring to Narayan et al (2000), Cornwall insists that ‘the primary emphasis of institutions like the World Bank seems to be on relocating the poor within the prevailing order: bringing them in, finding them a place, lending them opportunities, inviting them to participate’ (in Cornwall 2004: 78). Opportunities to participate outside of the prescribed boundaries of the spaces that have been induced by international organisations or governments may be limited. Those participating in invited spaces may have to do so within the parameters of those who have done the inviting.

Central to Cornwall’s (2004) understanding of these spaces, is the operation of power that accompanies it:

making available, claiming and taking up spaces need to be seen, then, as acts of power... Viewing participation as a spatial practice helps draw attention to the productive possibilities of power as well as its negative effects. (Cornwall 2004: 85)

Space is ‘not only something that can be taken up, assumed or filled, but something that can be created, opened, reshaped’ (Webster and Engberg-Pederson 2002, in Cornwall 2004:77). Spaces must be thought of ‘less as concrete locales than as sites that are constituted as well as expressive of power relations’ (Cornwall 2004:83).

### **Inviting the ADF**

Alexandra is a poor and densely populated black township north-east of Johannesburg which is well known internationally for its contribution to the anti-apartheid struggle (Mayekiso 1996). The ARP has been in operation since 2001 and yet Alexandra still has the face of a congested ghetto. Although the ARP has witnessed a decline in crime rates and some minor

improvements in access to water and electricity, the majority of the population remains without access to adequate housing opportunities. Julian Baskin, the director of the ARP, has suggested that the development of Alexandra will ‘take a lifetime’ (in Dlamini 2006), but the inception of the ARP gave residents high hopes and the expectation that they would not need to wait that long for delivery. While the ARP aimed to deliver 22,250 houses in seven years, by August 2007, the ARP website noted that there were only 2,727 completed housing units (including 2,000 in Bramfischerville), and more than 7,000 under construction (ARP website, [www.alexandra.co.za](http://www.alexandra.co.za)). Even if people were able to immediately occupy the other 7,000 houses that were under construction, the number of households receiving houses would be 9,727. While this seems substantial at first glance, it is less so if one accounts for a housing backlog of approximately 40,000 in Alexandra (CASE 2005:123). Fiscal constraints mean that the ARP does not have the resources to improve the lives of most residents in Alexandra.

In this context, a wide array of civic organisations in Alexandra have vied for housing opportunities. For example, The Alexandra Land and Property Owners Association seeks to de-densify Alexandra so that their property values go up. However, these plans would undermine the interests of shack dwellers who want to remain in Alexandra. In fact, those living in shacks along the Iphuteng school cluster were part of the victory in 2005 that now enables them to be provided with houses in extension 7, just along the borders of Alexandra, instead of being removed to periphery areas such as Diepsloot and Bramfischerville. The Wynberg Concerned Residents are yet another civic organisation which, out of desperation, occupied abandoned factories in Alexandra in the mid 1980s, and now seek the same housing opportunities as those in the Iphuteng School Cluster. There are also the residents who lived in S’swetla, an informal settlement in Alexandra until they were moved to a transit camp (a temporary government-designed shack settlement) so that a bridge could be built that would connect old and new Alexandra. These residents are now placing pressure on the government to move into the houses that the ARP promised them. The Marlboro Concerned Residents, and the Alexandra Concerned Residents are the names of other civic organisations which have emerged to demand access to housing over the past several years (Sinwell 2009).

The politics of the ADF is critical for at least two reasons. First, the ADF is part of the ARP, a flagship, nationally funded R1.3 billion government-driven project which has financial and managerial support from the ANC at

the national, provincial, and local level. As part of a key attempt to enable the people of Alexandra to participate and drive the renewal of their township, the ARP created the ADF. Furthermore, the ARP and the ANC claim that the ADF is the 'official mouthpiece for the community' (ARP website, [www.alexandra.co.za](http://www.alexandra.co.za)). Second, the relationship between the ARP and the ADF has changed over time.

The ADF was created by the ANC provincial government (and funded by them) to become part of the ARP and is therefore an institutional or, what Cornwall calls, an 'invited space' for participation (2004: 76). After the announcement by the president that the ARP would be undertaken, officials from the department of housing came to Alexandra and suggested to leaders in Alexandra that they create a community development forum (2004: 76). Over 250 people, including community representatives from the ANC, SACP, IFP, SANCO and other civics and members of the ARP attended the first meeting where an executive was elected and a constitution adopted. The weakness of political parties (with the exception of the ANC) and civics in Alexandra in the post-apartheid period, meant that the ADF could, without great contestation, be at the forefront of development in relation to the ARP. Since 2002, the ADF has been funded by the ARP. At least in terms of the number of community organisations that are members of the ADF, the ADF is the most representative structure to enable community participation in Alexandra. There are claims that it represents anywhere between 25 and 200 community organisations. In reality, it probably represents about 70 today and attendance sheets suggest that less than 20 attend meetings regularly.

Since the inception of the ADF in 2002 until the present, the ADF has met monthly to discuss issues pertaining to the ARP and the executive committee normally meets weekly. Any organisation within greater Alexandra can become a member of the ADF by submitting a letter to the ADF which declares their desire to become involved. In making decisions regarding its position on development in Alexandra, it states that the ADF 'should strive to arrive at decisions through consensus' (ADF 2004: 3). When this is not possible, the ADF votes on decisions, with each organisation entitled to two representatives.

The ARP expects that this participation will occur within the confines of the ADF. Paul Mashatile, the former Provincial Member of the Executive Committee (MEC) for housing, explains that the logic behind involving the ADF is that the 'community is represented in the ADF so that we don't do what we think is right for the community, but do what the community thinks

is right for them' (Mashatile 2004: ARP video). However, in reality participation in the ADF is an add-on with little official control over the ARP's development trajectory. The ARP website substantiates this point:

The Alexandra Renewal Project will not be bound by the decisions of the Alexandra Development Forum, but will take such decisions seriously and will make all efforts to meet such decisions. (ARP website)

Yet at the same time, an ADF document thereby expresses the ADF's commitment to:

*the implementation of the Alexandra Renewal Project.* In addition they further commit themselves to providing advice and assistance, in a spirit of co-operation and support, so as to ensure that the implementation of the Project is undertaken in a manner that meets the needs of the residents of Alexandra. (ADF 2002: 6, my emphasis)

Here, participation is conceived as a means to an end – that is, to implement the ARP. This is because the ADF is intended, and to a significant extent commits, to operate on the ARP's terms and, therefore, to assist in the implementation of the ARP. In the section to follow I illustrate how the ADF has altered its relationship with the development process in Alexandra.

### **The ADF: reforming the participatory process**

The relationship between the ARP and the ADF has changed since the inception of the project. Two distinct phases can be distinguished. The first phase, from 2001-2004, may be characterised by struggles over participation, whereas the second phase may be understood in terms of the building of a partnership. Between 2001 and 2004, the ADF leadership tended to be disenchanted with its influence over the ARP and was not closely linked to its decision-making structures. After 2004, the ADF became more satisfied with how it related to the ARP and viewed their relationship more as a partnership (Sinwell 2009).

Between 2001 and 2004, the project was implemented by a project manager appointed by provincial government on a contract basis. The complex structure of the ARP was inefficient and the involvement of a large number of consultants led to a top-down development process. According to the chairperson of the ADF, Benito Lekalakala, the ADF had no direct relationship with programme directors (interview, Lekalakla 2007). Zack, an urban analyst endorses the claim that the ARP took an exclusionary approach and suggests that 'certain high level municipal officials tried to "run their own show"' (Zack 2006: 131).

During Carien Engelbrecht's tenure as director of the ARP between April and March 2003, for example, the ARP focused on the project's design and planning. Zack, comments that although Engelbrecht's approach was efficient, it was:

...not always sufficiently collaborative and at times disempowered individuals to participate in debates around alternative ways of achieving the project aims. One local authority official remarked that project managers need to listen as well as instruct and that the more authoritarian approach of Engelbrecht did not accommodate listening. (2006:132)

Engelbrecht's style emanated from the ARP's early approach to development which relied heavily on consultants and left virtually no space for the community's involvement in decision-making.

With a frankly pessimistic view of community participation in Alexandra, a technical consultant at the beginning of the ARP, Themba Maluleke, suggests that if development is to take place it is impracticable to embrace the knowledge and action of locals themselves.

Some will say, 'get the community to make those decisions', but maybe you guys are still studying... In the real world, it doesn't work. It only worked... When was it? 14AD in the Greek City states because we were only having less than 200 people making a decision on behalf of the city. In today's world, you never get community involvement and it works and it makes decisions and things move... Those are the practical realities. (interview, Maluleke 2004)

This viewpoint is an example of how leaders of the ARP, during the period between 2001-2004 perceived participation. Managers and consultants of the ARP are hired by the government to implement government programmes. They are acting on behalf of the government, as Themba Maluleke points out. As a result, at least in the minds of previous managers, this leaves little room for the people of Alexandra to actually determine development. Since the government has its own projects that it wishes to have the ARP implement, participation is intended only to amount to those affected giving their consent to or being informed about pre-determined interventions. In this perspective, participation may be used to speed up consultant- or state-driven development projects, but never to encourage active agency outside of the preconceived government parameters. At this stage the ADF, despite its position as the 'official mouthpiece of the community' for the ARP, was concerned that it was only acting as a 'rubberstamp' for ARP decisions that had already been made (interview, Lekalakala 2004).

In mid-2004, half way through the ARP's lifespan of seven years, the ADF convened the Alexandra Review Summit. This summit was a response to growing frustrations within the ADF, particularly amongst those in leadership positions, regarding its ability to influence the ARP. The exclusive character of the ARP provided the basis upon which agents acting on behalf of the ADF resisted. The potential for the ADF to be a site of transformation therefore presented itself. The ADF therefore sought to restructure the ARP so that it could have more influence. At an ADF Strategic Planning Workshop, the members complained that:

Currently there are problems of communication between the ADF and the ARP. This is caused mainly by the fact that the ADF feels that the ARP plans and implements projects without proper and adequate meaningful consultation with the ADF and the community at large. The ADF feels that it is important for them to be part of the planning and implementation of these projects from conception and not to be seen to act as rubberstamps to ARP decisions. (ADF 2004a: 7-8)

On December 2 and 3, the ARP Review Summit was held where ADF formally expressed its dissatisfaction with the degree to which the community was involved in the ARP and proposed that the ARP should undertake a more people-driven approach to development in Alexandra. The ADF invoked the RDP to support its argument:

Development is not about the delivery of goods to a passive citizenry...  
It is about active involvement and growing empowerment. (ADF 2004b: 5)

The ADF argued that development in Alexandra could only take place if there was active involvement by the community affected.

The ADF's demands led to changes in the structure of the ARP so that the government would embed the ARP into the local government. This meant that the ARP was controlled by fewer consultants and that decisions could potentially be more easily negotiated by the ADF at the local level. One consequence of the restructuring was that the ARP would appoint a new director, Julian Baskin. Baskin had extensive local and international experience. He worked in Alexandra for several years in the early 1990s, was involved in the local government negotiations with Planact (an NGO in Johannesburg) and helped design the Alexandra Accord. Furthermore, he worked in urban planning for over 25 years (interview, Baskin 2006). Julian Baskin explains the role that the ADF played in influencing the decision to restructure the ARP:

I think the fundamental issue here is the community summit meeting they had in 2004, where I think all this came to the fore. And I think that 2004 summit had a very clear message that you can't run a programme like this using consultants and doing things that are against the wishes of the ADF and things. And I think that's where I came in, that's when I got recruited to come in 2005... That's where the decision came from... to bring in a whole new system, to try and get it back into the control of government and... My understanding of that summit meeting, they announced that more money had been spent on consultants than on delivery. Whereas now we hardly have any consultants at all. (interview Baskin 2007)

The ARP's structural changes that resulted from the ARP Review Summit were based significantly on the demands made by the ADF to be more involved in the ARP's decision-making process. The new approach taken by the ARP meant that the ADF could have a stronger role to play and be more closely connected to the ARP. Representatives of the ADF now also rooms in the ARP's offices and a direct relationship with the ARP director exists. This means that the ADF does not need to pressure the director in order to arrange meetings, but instead are expected to meet with the director in his office and to arrange appointments to discuss issues of development in Alexandra as they arise. The ADF and the ARP came to view each other as 'partners' in determining the development agenda of the ARP.

Julian Baskin was made aware early on that Alexandra is highly complex politically and that if delivery was to be achieved, he would need to involve the community. According to Julian Baskin:

We don't do anything without engaging with the ADF. Their job then is to feed back in and bring information into the project.... We work very closely with the ADF, very very closely... They give us information as well. I mean they will tell us you know, this is a pressing community need. Then we will sit down and package a project and take the necessary administrates [sic] and mobilise resources for that to happen. (interview, Baskin 2007)

The ADF and the ARP work closely together. The Chairperson of the ADF, Benito Lekalakala, reflects that, 'the relationship with the ADF was not that cozy at the beginning... now we have a direct relationship with the ARP through the director of the programme' (interview, Lekalakala 2007).

Explaining the logic behind the ARP's adoption of the ADF, Neels Letter, a consultant of the ARP, says the following:

...ARP created the ADF. And it has been funded by us, by government.

Because the government said we cannot go and talk to 198 organisations all the time. We need to have a representative body that you can speak to. That's why the ADF was created. (interview, Letter 2007)

While the ADF's lobbying to be more intimately involved in decisions made by the ARP clearly had an influence over their involvement, the ADF was also included because Alexandra is such a complex and politicised community. To Julian Baskin, this meant that he could not successfully deliver services to the Alexandra community without involving and taking the local expertise from a community organisation, in this case the ADF. The ARP is not in a position to implement projects on its own. It needs 'locals' to help them understand whether or not the projects they want to implement will be conducive to those affected. The ARP incorporates the ADF when necessary so that it is more likely to implement projects that are locally relevant and will not be resisted by the community.

Previous secretary of the ADF, Linda Memela, explains that the ADF has different approaches to development:

We are engaging each other from time to time as the two structures. Because there are always differences that arrive along the way because ARP will base their opinions on theory, we will base our opinions on experiences on the ground. So there won't be similar approaches in development. (interview, Memela 2007)

Because the ADF's approach is based on 'opinions on experiences on the ground', the ARP benefits if it checks with the ADF to determine the local relevance of their projects. According to Julian Baskin, the ADF enables the ARP to share the responsibility of conflicts:

...I don't take the conflict on myself. I must tell you that. I will bring the ADF in, I will [bring] local ANC in. They must engage and do those types of negotiations because I really, I don't see myself being an official making decisions on behalf of other people. (interview, Baskin 2007)

Without these negotiators, the extent to which the ARP could deliver is questionable. The ADF helps deliver and reduces the possibility of conflict between stakeholders in Alexandra when specific projects are undertaken. The ADF is part of a managerial strategy to enhance effective and efficient delivery of services to the people of Alexandra. Officials in the ARP, including Baskin, benefit significantly from their close relationship with the ADF. The ARP is able to legitimise projects to the public and to the government by using the ADF to get community buy-in, and it takes advantage of policy and project recommendations that account for the

complex political issues in Alexandra. The ARP reaps the benefits of participation without sacrificing or heeding any of the costs. The emphasis on the personal reform of directors assumes that because development professionals become more open to the input of communities, that participation itself is enhanced. But great responsiveness does not fundamentally challenge the managerial strategy to ensure the implementation of service delivery on the ARP's terms. This is highlighted below by reference to a case study of a key policy change.

### **The limitations of a managerial policy change**

The partnership between the ARP and the ADF has resulted in a consensus about the process through which to allocate housing in the ARP. From the beginning of the project in 2001 until April 2006, the ARP used the national waiting list method of allocating houses. This began in 1996 when the government asked people in Alexandra to sign up for housing so that they could wait to be prioritised. By April 2006, the waiting list was scrapped and the ARP, in partnership with the ADF, decided that it would undertake the block by block approach exclusively. This change in policy resulted from pressure by the ADF as well as the perceived failure of the waiting list approach to show any sign of de-densification or improvement in Alexandra as a whole.

The ARP had a serious problem when it removed people from shacks or housing based on the 1996 housing waiting list. It could not monitor the area in which people were moved and therefore there was no de-densification in Alexandra. Darlene Louw, the Deputy Director and spokesperson of the ARP, called the waiting list the 'pop-corn approach' (interview, Louw 2007) because as soon as people were moved out of densely populated areas in yards, it was impossible to regulate and ensure that other people did not occupy, or 'pop-up' in the abandoned area. She said that if policy works solely based on the waiting list, the problem of de-densification is perpetuated rather than solved (2007). Linda Memela confirms the problems with the waiting list approach and discusses the ARP's logic behind the new approach:

...there was the feeling that the approach that the ARP is doing is not working because it does not make a difference. For instance, up 'til now, the new houses that have been built in Alex, people who were allocated, there are more than 6,000. But you can't see that vacuum in Alex. So, people cannot see that visibility, that there have been about 6,000 families that have moved out of Alex ...

So the new approach that has been adopted is that we must have a block by block approach in terms of development... So in that way, we would be able to see exactly that something is happening around development. (interview, Memela 2007)

This approach identifies blocks that are in need of development, collects the data around that block and determines how many people need RDP houses, rental rooms or a housing subsidy and moves those people into the appropriate housing on that basis. Once these people are moved, the ARP can 'demolish [the] old block and start a new development in there' (2007).

The block by block approach has serious implications for local politics in Alexandra. Although there are many other civic organisations fighting for the very same resources in Alexandra (Sinwell 2009), the case of the Umpakathi Development Forum (UDF) most clearly illustrates the way in which the block by block approach reprioritised limited resources from one poor group to another. The housing waiting list approach meant that it would be primarily old residents who were on the waiting list who would benefit, but the block by block approach changed this completely by benefiting primarily shack dwellers and excluding and frustrating those who had been on the waiting list. As a result, the UDF formed in mid-2007 around a general concern about issues of development broadly. Their main aims and objectives, according to one of the founders, Glen Marvinbela, were 'to address the issues of the c-forms and the waiting list that the first people to benefit or to be prioritised houses are the people who had been on the queue' (interview, Marvinbela 2008).

Blessing Mashigo, another founder, explains that 'after the sixth year, we could notice there were extensions but now Alexandra hasn't been touched and its Alexandra Renewal Project' (interview, Mashigo 2008) Glen Marvinbela later commented that:

What makes the people more angry is that the system the government introduces to the people, and the people have got hope from that system, and at the end of the day those systems are not being implemented accordingly. (interview, Marvinbela 2008)

The UDF provided another forum where people can address development issues. Residents of Alexandra have begun to come in numbers and, up until at least the end of 2008, approximately 500 people came to the meetings which are held every week on Wednesdays at Alex Sancopano. Meetings to address development issues and to consider ways of engaging the government are the UDF's primary activities. The UDF does not have a list

of members, but the number of people who attend their meetings each week suggests that they have a constituency in Alexandra that is in the thousands.

As noted earlier, the ADF and ARP have come to a consensus development regarding the prioritisation of housing, and this consensus conflicts with the alternative offered by the UDF who seek the return of the waiting list approach to housing allocations in the ARP. It is therefore not surprising that Blessing Mashigo and others complain that the concerns of the UDF were not met when they engaged the ADF:

Even us as UDF, we were expected to affiliate with them, which we cannot. We cannot affiliate with ADF because now whatever we raise is not part of their agenda because we have burning issues. They are burning issues which we need to deal with which they are not including on their agenda. (interview, Mashigo 2008)

When alternative options for development enter the ADF's participatory space, they work within the discursive confines of that space and, in this case, cannot be addressed.

Referring to the ADF, Glen Marvinbela commented that 'They purport to be representing the inspirations and aspirations of the people of Alexandra and yet they are not' (interview, Marvinbela 2008). Marvinbela claims that because the UDF represents the interests of the community, 'we are seen as opposition to the ADF' (interview, Mashigo 2008). However, they are not seen as an opposition to the ADF because they deal with issues of the community, but because their specific development agenda falls outside of the ARP's consensus – the block by block approach to housing allocations.

Nevertheless, the UDF mobilises on the basis of their status since they are old residents who were born in Alexandra and believe they have a claim to resources provided by the ARP. In order to benefit from the ARP, they seek the reintroduction of the waiting list:

There were waiting list systems, which were introduced to the communities or to the townships by the previous government... And now ARP, they are coming up with different systems such as block by block systems, you see. The block by block systems which gave people concerns as to how can they introduce such systems while there are other systems that were introduced by the government that was still in place? (interview, Mashigo 2008)

The shift from the c-form to block by block distribution of houses has led to the exclusion of old residents. Hence, Glen Marvinbela has accurately pointed out that, 'you will find that they will only take the people who are

vulnerable, which are the shacks dwellers, the desperate people to get houses' (interview, Marvinbela 2008). The UDF leader's view is that the policy should not have shifted, and that those with c-forms should be prioritised for housing over new residents. Glen Marvinbela explains the problems that old residents have with new residents who are given preference for housing in Alexandra:

But now you will find that in the yard, there are people who just came in maybe 2 years, 3 years, but there are people who have been there over 30 years. So when the system which is being introduced by the ARP, it's sidelining the people which have been there for all these years. Because of now they are only looking at the easy way out because of what they will normally do, they will only take the people who are in the shacks and put them in the houses. And the people which they have been there, which they were supposed to be allocated houses, they said no they don't qualify. (interview, Marvinbela 2008)

Without close analysis, the policy shift to block by block could be seen as a significant advance towards more locally appropriate development brought about by the partnership between the ADF and the ARP. However, the reprioritisation of resources ends up benefiting one group of residents at the expense of another and accounts for no net gain in the improvement of Alexandra's residents.

### **Conclusion: mainstreaming participation**

Like the World Bank's approach to participation in development, the ADF does not seek to challenge broader national and global processes that bind people into a state of poverty in the first place, but functions within neoliberal resource confines. Even if the ADF wanted to, its relationship with the ARP hinders the possibility to challenge the amount of national resources that have been provided for the ARP. This is because the focus of participation by the ARP and ADF is about what happens at the local. It does not seek to mobilise citizens to question broader structures of power which determine what is fiscally possible in the ARP, but enables them to work within the budgetary framework (R1.3 billion) that has been given by the government and this creates conflict between various residents, as the above case study reveals.

Mosse's depiction of a participatory farming systems development project in the Bhil tribal region of western India provide understanding of participatory processes in the ARP. In these projects, he says that 'Villager "needs" were significantly shaped by perceptions of what the agency was

able to deliver' (2001:20-21). Mosse refers to the knowledge that is created through participatory processes as 'planning knowledge' rather than 'people's knowledge' (Mosse 2001).

This depiction resonates with how residents of Alexandra view development in their area. For example, Justice Ngalungulu, a key player in the ADF and now a local ANC councilor, says that 'the only challenge is the pace' of delivery:

Because people, they don't understand that there is a question of budget... They understand that if we are doing housing, we must do housing to all of them. If we are saying that we must eradicate shacks, we must eradicate shacks to all of them at the same time. So they don't understand that there is process that we have to go through. There is budgeting... That is why also today we have those particular projects. It's not [that] there is no development. There is the development. They can see that the development is happening in that particular one. But the problem is that it is not happening at the present moment at their particular area. Then it makes them to go out into the street to say why the development is happening there, it's not happening to us. (interview, Ngalungulu 2007)

The ADF and ANC local councilors are content to work within the limited budget of the ARP, and therefore believe that people must only participate to the extent that they wait their turn for the government to deliver to them. People's knowledge becomes, at best, that which can fit within the prescribed 'budget' of the ARP.

At the ARP Review Summit, the ADF also states that in order for people's lives to be changed in Alexandra, 'A lot of re-alignment and reprioritisation of the budget will be required' (ADF 2004b: 8). Recently, Benito Lekalakala confirmed this position when he explained that the ARP:

...will come with a whole long list of projects and then we will interact with them in determining which ones should be prioritised for optimal benefit for the community. (interview, Lekalakala 2007)

Reprioritisation has the effect of excluding sets of residents and thereby pitting residents against each other, in this case new versus old residents. The case study also illustrates that civic organisations in the township do not necessarily have a radical alternative for the development of Alexandra. The UDF is not the only example of this in Alexandra. Sinwell (2009a) has highlighted that even those affiliated to the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) are conservative to the extent that they seek only to reprioritise limited resources in their favour as well.

The ARP has worked hard to obtain a ‘partnership’ with the ADF and to ensure that projects can be implemented in a locally-appropriate manner. When the book, *Participation: the new tyranny* (Cooke and Kothari 2001) was being written, the authors were concerned about precisely this. They suggested that participation should be abandoned if it was part of the structural conditions that bind people into a state of poverty in the first place, thereby confining participation to the local level (and therefore to available local resources). Participation on the ARP, from the perspective of the most influential writers on participation, is tyrannical.

Nevertheless, the ADF’s relationship to the ARP has advanced beyond the shortcomings associated with participatory approaches to development in the South African context to the extent that the ADF appears satisfied with its relationship to development and many might conclude that more locally appropriate development now occurs in Alexandra. However, the case study shows that locally appropriate is not enough because it is bound to the local level. To the extent that they are a managerial tool by which to implement neoliberal development trajectories, the invited spaces of the World Bank and that of the ARP, the ADF, may be fundamentally the same. While the most recent South African scholars have tended to ignore the relationship between the government’s institutions for participation and the ANC’s neoliberal development trajectory, placing hope in the reforming of invited spaces such as the ADF has serious implications if one considers the urgency of development in townships like Alexandra where there are not enough resources. Residents will remain frustrated by terrible living conditions and lack of service delivery until the underlying political and economic processes which guide what is possible in slums like Alexandra begins to be engaged with.

## **Acknowledgement**

Luke Sinwell is currently a postdoctoral fellow for the South African Research Chair in Social Change at the University of Johannesburg. He is grateful to Noor Nieftagodien (previously his PhD advisor at the University of the Witwatersrand) and for the support provided by the programme called “The Voices of the Poor in Urban Governance: Participation, Mobilization and Politics in South African Cities”.

## **References**

ADF (2002) ‘Terms of reference for the Alexandra Development Forum’, February.  
— (2004) ‘Constitution for the Alexandra Development Forum’.

- (2004a) 'Alexandra Development Forum Strategic Planning Workshop', October 1-3. Workshop proceedings report prepared by Neo Tladinyane.
- (2004b) 'Alexandra Review Summit Document'. December 2-3.
- ARP Website [online]. Accessed April 23, 2007. Available at [www.alexandra.co.za](http://www.alexandra.co.za).
- Ballard, R (2008) 'Between the community hall and the city hall: five research questions on participation', *Transformation: critical perspectives on southern Africa* 66/67.
- Benit-Gbaffou, C (2008) 'Are practices of local participation sidelining the institutional channels? Reflections from Johannesburg', *Transformation: critical perspectives on southern Africa* 66/67.
- Bond, P (2001) *Elite Transition: from apartheid to neoliberalism in South Africa*. London: Pluto Press.
- Buccus, I and J Hicks (2008) 'Democratisation and inclusion: revisiting the role of ward committees', in M van Donk, M Swilling and S Parnell (eds) *Consolidating Developmental Local Government: lessons from the South African experience*. Cape Town: UCT Press.
- C.A.S.E. (2005) 'Alex Benchmark survey: Alexandra renewal project'. Unpublished Document.
- Cooke, B and U Kothari (eds) (2001) *Participation: the new tyranny?* London: Zed Books.
- Cooke, B (2004) 'Rules of thumb for participatory change agents', in S Hickey and G Mohan (eds) *Participation from Tyranny to Transformation: exploring new approaches to participation in development*. London and New York: Zed Books.
- Chambers, R (1997) *Whose Reality Counts: putting the first last*. London: ITDG Publishing.
- Cornwall, A (2000) *Beneficiary, Consumer, Citizen: perspectives on participation for poverty reduction*. Gothenburg: Sida Studies.
- (2002) *Making Spaces, Changing Places: situating participation in development*. Sussex: Institute of Development Studies.
- (2004) 'Spaces for transformation? Reflections on issues of power and difference in participation in development', in S Hickey and G Mohan (eds) *Participation from Tyranny to Transformation: exploring new approaches to participation in development*. London and New York: Zed Books.
- Crewe, E and E Harrison (2000) *Whose Development: an ethnography of aid*. London and New York: Zed Books.
- Desai, A (2002) *We are the Poors: community struggles in post-apartheid South Africa*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

- Dlamini, N (2006) 'Alex renewal needs a lifetime', *Johannesburg News Agency*, July 6. Available online at [www.alexandra.co.za/10\\_media/jonews\\_060706.htm](http://www.alexandra.co.za/10_media/jonews_060706.htm).
- Francis, P (2001) 'Participatory development at the World Bank: the primacy of process', in B Cooke and U Kothari (eds).
- Freire, P (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Heller, P (2008) 'Local democracy and development in comparative perspective', in M van Donk, M Swilling and S Parnell (eds) *Consolidating Developmental Local Government: lessons from the South African experience*. Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Kanji, N and L Greenwood (2001) *Participatory Approaches to Research and Development in IIED: learning from experience*. London: IIED.
- Lefebvre, H (1974) *The Production of Space*. London: Verso.
- Mashatile, P (2004) *Hello My Name is Alex*. Alexandra Renewal Project Official Video
- Mayekiso, M (1996) *Township Politics: civic struggles for a new South Africa*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Miraftab, F (2006) 'Feminist praxis, citizenship and informal politics: reflections on South Africa's anti-eviction campaign', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8(2).
- Mosse, D (2001) "'People's knowledge," participation and patronage: operations and representations in rural development', in B Cooke and U Kothari (eds).
- Piper, L and R Deacon (2008) 'Party politics, elite accountability and public participation: ward committee politics in the Msunduzi Municipality', *Transformation: critical perspectives on southern Africa* 66/67.
- Staniland, L (2008) "'They know me, I will not get a job": public participation, patronage, and the sedation of civil society in a Capetonian township', *Transformation: critical perspectives on southern Africa* (66/67).
- Oldfield, S (2008) 'Participatory mechanisms and community politics: building consensus and conflict', in M van Donk, M Swilling and S Parnell (eds). *Consolidating Developmental Local Government: lessons from the South African experience*. Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Sinwell, L (2009) 'Participation as popular agency: the limitations and possibilities for transforming development in the Alexandra renewal project', PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.
- (2009a) 'Participatory spaces and the Alexandra Vukuzenzele crisis committee (AVCC): reshaping government plans', *Social Dynamics* 35(2).

- Williams, G (2004) 'Towards repoliticisation of participatory development: political capabilities and spaces of empowerment', in S Hickey and G Mohan (eds). *Participation from Tyranny to Transformation: exploring new approaches to participation in development*. London and New York: Zed Books.
- Zack, T (2006) 'Alexandra: nodal assessment'. Paper Presented to the Royal Australian Planning Conference in 2001.

## **Interviews**

- Baskin, Julian (2006) Director of the ARP, Wynberg: May 4.
- Baskin, Julian. (2007) Director of the ARP, Wynberg: October 9.
- Lekalakala, Benito (2004) Chairperson of the ADF, Alexandra: August 9.
- Lekalakala, Benito (2007) Chairperson of the ADF, Centurion: August 15.
- Letter, Neels (2007) ARP technical consultant, Wynberg: September 4.
- Louwe, Darlene (2007) Deputy Director of the ARP, Wynberg: August 16.
- Maluleke, Themba (2004) ARP Technical Consultant, Johannesburg: September 27.
- Marvinbela, Glen (2008) Founder of the UDF, Alexandra: February 15.
- Mashigo, Blessing (2008) Founder of the UDF, Alexandra: February 15.
- Memela, Linda (2007) Secretary of the ADF, Alexandra: June 8.
- Msimang, Nhlanhla (2006) Executive Member of the ADF, Wynberg: September 19.
- Ngalungulu, Justice (2007) ANC Councillor, Wynberg: August 16.
- Nkosi, Sizakele (2007) ANC Councillor, Braamfontein: August 22.