

## Case Study

### **The Difference that Place Makes: Some Brief Notes on the Economic Implications of moving from an Informal Settlement to a Transit Camp**

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This document is a very brief case study exploring the economic implications of a small informal settlement's relocation from King's Rest, a place close to a railway station, dock, a relatively wealthy suburb at Durban's Bluff, to a large transit camp near Orient Hills in Isipingo.

On the face of it the move should not have adversely affected the community: Isipingo is an industrial area of Durban and not a rural peripheral location—the site of many new RDP housing settlements. Moreover, on paper, the transit camp offers a healthier environment: communal toilets and water are provided and the housing structures are formally built.

However, with striking unanimity community members tell how their economic livelihoods have been undermined by this move; how their sense of autonomy has been disrupted; and how housing, sanitation, and water provisions--despite being “formal”--are, on the whole, worse.

This note does not consider in detail the reason for the move (Spoornet said that the King's Rest land was required to host a large fuel pipeline--although a subsequent visit shows not all of the land is, in fact, being redeveloped). Neither is a full review of housing policy given here, though some brief context to the relocation is given in Appendix A.

In May and June 2009, 25 shack dwellers were interviewed at a Bluff shack settlement located next to King's Rest railway station.<sup>1</sup> This was principally for a study on the politics of schooling although basic data on household survival and structure was also collected. Residents had moved to this area after 2001 from a diverse group of places: rural areas, hostels, other shack settlements that had been destroyed by the government, and townships (where the monthly rent for an *umjondolo* adjacent to a family home could be R400). The informal name of King's Rest settlement was *Emantombazaneni* (Place of Women) which commemorated its first settlers, five women.

In late 2009, the settlement was relocated to Isipingo. This small group of around 60 households was now part of a sprawling transit camp of over 700 households, and they were given no clear indication of when they will be moved to RDP houses, and where these might be located. Indeed, since they were moved no one from the department of housing had spoken to them. In June and July 2010, the community members were re-interviewed. All were directly interviewed except for 4 people, about whom other community members gave details.

The interviews therefore give a brief portrait of how life has changed for a small community after relocation. It is neither a detailed study nor a large sample. Being based on interviews, the

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews were conducted in *isiZulu*, though at times this was mixed with English. A draft version of this document was translated into *isiZulu* and commented on by community members.

study could not validate the accuracy of many statements through direct observation. Some economic activities, for instance, might have been downplayed (for instance informally some people mentioned that selling of dagga was a way that one or two members gained some income though in interviews this was less likely to be mentioned). Also, the case study does not include details about the domestic situation of each household, although in general people appeared to maintain similar living situations to those they had in the past (transit camp however offer less room for households' expansion compared to shack settlements). Nevertheless, even allowing for these qualifications, the comments are so consistent as to merit attention.

In general, King's Rest offered two main forms of survival, ones deeply embedded in the local geography. The first was collecting and selling scrap metal. Most King's Rest residents, at some time, had walked from house to house asking for scrap as well as collected it from informal dumping areas at the Bluff. They then transported the scrap by train from King's Rest station to Jacob's station (which costs R3.50), and pushed it on a shopping cart to a scrap metal dealer. This raised from R50-80 for a days grueling work. Yet, at Isipingo, this livelihood had all but disappeared, though a few people still made the journey at times: the cost of transport to travel from Isipingo to the Bluff (R10 return by train, R20 return by taxi) was simply too high. One person mentioned collecting cardboard at Isipingo for only R10 a day.

At the Bluff, especially for women, casual domestic work was a very important source of income and daily wages ranged from R50-100. However, domestic work was much harder to find at Isipingo, and wages ranged from R20-35 a day.

Other means of livelihood were destroyed. While a few men working in local Bluff factories continued with this employment, those relying on more casual work found this harder to find. Moreover, while a few residents tended small gardens and one person raised chickens, this was not possible in the transit camp.

Some comments on work followed by a summary of individual's changing position is given below.

*At King's rest, before, we would raise chickens, I had my garden, here I am hungry, I used to take and sell.*

*[here], there is no casual work, there is nothing*

*Now there's nothing you can work for the whole day for R25 then they say come tomorrow but the boss is not there to pay you.*

**Table 1: Principal Economic Activity of King's Rest Community**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender, Age</b>	<b>Livelihood 2009</b>	<b>Livelihood 2010</b>
A	F, 60s	Casual domestic work	Not working
B	F, 40s	Sick grant and sells scrap, maybe R50 a day	Sometimes sells cardboard for around R10 a day
C	F, 30s	Casual domestic work	Not working, boyfriend works
D	M, 40s	Sometimes working in garden or factory	Not working
E	F, 40s	Not working (though some informal selling of household goods)	Not working (though some informal selling of household goods)
F	M, 30s	Casual work in local firms	Sometimes travels back to Bluff for casual work
G	F, 40s	Sell scrap metal and cardboard, casual domestic	Occasionally casual domestic but less money (25 or 40 a day compared to 80 – 100).
H	F, 50s	Casual domestic work and scrap metal	Not working
I	F, 10s	Sells beer, scrap metal	Not working
J	F, 40s	3 days regular domestic work at Brighton Beach	Continued with job but now travels
K	M, 30s	Casual work painting, and scrap	Not working
L	F, 30s	Sells loose cigarettes, scrap metal	Still sells scrap but earns 15-25 rand now
M	F, 20s	Casual domestic work, sells scrap metal	Not working, some money from mother who also stays here (J)
N	F, 40s	Boyfriend provides	Moved to other shack area in Bluff
O	F, 50s	Casual domestic work, scrap metal	Occasionally casual washing for R20 a day
P	F, 50s	Scrap metal	Not working
Q	M, 60s	Grows vegetables, raises chickens, and collects scrap metal	Spends more time with family members in Ntuzuma
R	M, 20s	Worked at local yacht club and then other local tourist business.	Hit by car and not working
S	M, 40s	Casual factory work, and cleans gardens	Spends more time with other relatives in Durban
T	F, 30s	Scrap metal and loose cigarretes	Casual domestic work for less pay then in Bluff
U	M, 30s	Permanent factory job	Still working
V	M, 50s	Works casual contracts in local firm connected to port	Still working but harder because of move
W	M, 50s	Casual work	Still working
X	F, 10s	Casual domestic work	Moved to Isipingo Beach with boyfriend
Y	M, 30s	Works in Bluff in bathroom industry	Still works in Bluff, but now rents there

## **The benefits of formality?**

The poor quality of social facilities at Isipingo is another key theme to emerge from interviews. At King's Rest, each household built its own pit latrines; in contrast the communal toilets (ablution blocks and single portaloos) at Isipingo were extremely dirty. Moreover, at King's Rest, an agreement with Spoornet allowed the community to access water at night; in contrast, the water facilities at Isipingo were often broken, and queues long. Worse still, the area of Isipingo is situated next to a river and strong rains result in floods to residents' rooms. From the perspective of the community, a move to a more "formal" settlement was not associated with what most planners assume are the benefits of "formality." Commenting on the nature of housing, only one informant, in fact, mentioned that the formally built houses were better than the shacks from where they had moved. One clear advantage, however, was the proximity of the clinic at Isipingo.

Finally, the community had a sense of togetherness and autonomy at King's Rest, one that the name *Emantombazaneni* (Place of Women) suggests was clearly feminized in important ways. In contrast, crime is said to be higher at Isipingo and the (male) councilor clearly is responsible for a much larger community. A church leader who had held regular services at King's Rest complained that she was made to feel unwelcome at the transit camp by community leaders from elsewhere. Finally, the small prefabricated buildings, made of thin material, encouraged house-breaking; indeed, at night, thieves could literally unscrew the bolts that held the buildings together to enter them.

## **Comments on health, social services, and safety:**

*It is dirty here, people are ill and dying*

*They didn't tell us that we are coming to a place like this, they said we are coming to a place with flush toilets, electricity, and clean water. We were happy. We arrive here, and there are houses only, the water comes out slowly.*

*There is no life here, there is no cleanliness, these houses they are just standing. Me, I am near the road and the fence, a person he comes and just urinates, he urinates, outside my place.*

*Here, there is a lot of crime*

*In the night they undo the screws (that hold together the thin prefabricated walls)*

*There is no respect. If I want to talk and shout at your door I will. 2am or 3 am. If you talk back they will say this place is not yours go to your own place*

## **Conclusions**

RDP housing has been widely criticized for relocating informal settlement dwellers from central urban areas to the periphery. This brief case shows that even a relatively short move, to a

surrounding industrial area, resulted in devastating economic consequences. This effect was worsened because the transit camp also concentrated a large population in one place.

Neither, on the whole, did the camp provide the expected benefits of “formality”: the risk of floods, poor water supply, and dirty toilets were worse than the situation in the existing informal settlement.

As is common practice, residents of the transit camp have been given no information on when and to where, they might be relocated. Indeed, one can question the political will to end transit camps when their occupants remain concealed from conventional planning statistics: they are neither informal nor occupants of formal RDP houses/rate-paying homes. Although transit camps were used in the apartheid era, for instance prior to the establishment of a township, perhaps their defining feature in the post-apartheid period is the way they ascribe formality to a population but, in doing so, ironically make them more invisible.

## Appendix A: Some short notes on state policy toward shacks and transit camps

Very generally, government policy has manifested over the years a tension between two approaches toward informal settlements<sup>2</sup>:

- the recognition that shack settlements will be a feature of urban life for many years to come, indeed numbers have barely dropped despite the building of several million RDP houses; that location close to work opportunities is vital to shack dwellers' survival; that a successful urban policy should be measured not only by the number of new RDP houses built, or shacks destroyed, but the improvement of the lives of the poor; that higher density housing models and not simply low density housing should be considered; and that a coercive response to shack dwellers is politically unacceptable (broadly speaking this position is consistent with the government's 2004 Breaking New Ground Policy and social movements such as *abahlali baseMjondolo*).
- a position that "slums" must and can be removed at any cost; that development is always positive if it involves a move from the "informal" to the "formal"; that the correct measurement for the success of housing policy is the number of RDP houses built, or the number of shacks destroyed; and that the principal legitimate spokespeople for the poor are councilors and not social movements or other community groups (In KwaZulu-Natal this position has been symbolized by the 2007 KwaZulu-Natal Elimination & Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums Act, whose legality *abahlali baseMjondolo* successfully challenged in the constitutional court).

In reality government departments, and other related groups like the police and councilors, typically manifest different perspectives on informal settlements, and eThekweni is no exception. The municipality has been praised for its high levels of *in situ* upgrading, and for building a relatively large number of RDP houses built. Yet it has also faced criticism from groups like *abahlali* for its lack of consultation and for restricting the expansion of existing settlements. While the run up to the 2010 World Cup appeared to increase the desire among local politicians to quickly end slums, in recent months, the city's plans to providing interim services for informal communities (as opposed to minimal services in the hope that this will discourage settlements) appears to be a significant development.

In turn, transit camps are positioned in very different light depending on how informal settlements are viewed. While government officials argue that *in situ* upgrading or other development projects involves a certain amount of displacement, and therefore the necessity of such camps, in reality these camps are often more than short-term places of relocation. What's more, restrictions on the building of new shacks in urban spaces, and the high cost of rented accommodation, means that people have few options but to enter them. Whatever the intention, the reality is that those living in transit camps often do so for many years; indeed, people enter them without a specific commitment as to when and where they will take up RDP houses. While, therefore, the government is able to claim that it has reduced the number of informal dwellers through these camps, colloquial names like "concentration camps" and *amatins*, suggest that residents themselves often see these as unacceptable dwellings.

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<sup>2</sup> The literature on informal settlements in South Africa is large but for a good overview see Marie Huchzermeyer and Aly Karam (eds.) *Informal Settlements: A Perpetual Challenge*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2006; for a critical perspective on the effects of government policy on poor shack dwellers in eThekweni see, COHRE. *Business and Usual? Housing Rights and Slum Eradication in Durban, South Africa* (written by Richard Pithouse), 2008.