Profiling Community Assets in Monwabisi Park, Cape Town

ABSRACT

Planning for informal settlement upgrading often neglects important social and economic networks established by community members. Asset-based community development is a community-driven approach to planning that builds upon the strengths and capacities of local residents in order to improve living conditions. By compiling an inventory of community assets in Monwabisi Park, we hope to inform the City of Cape Town's Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme (ISUP) for Monwabisi Park and other informal settlements in the area.

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VIOLENCE PROTECTION THROUGH URBAN UPGRADING

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Post-apartheid town planning and urban management has failed to restructure cities into more "equitable habitats" for South Africa's citizens (Huchzermeye, 2009). The end of the apartheid era brought job seeking migrants from the rural areas of the Eastern Cape to Cape Town. Unable to find affordable housing in the central city, many built shacks in squatter settlements on the outskirts of the city. One such settlement is Monwabisi Park in Khayelitsha.

While some progress has been made over the last twenty years towards improving the lives of those living in informal settlements in South Africa, development is difficult, slow, and uneven. The more commonly used approach is for outsider experts to identify the most pressing needs in a community, and then try to allocate resources to address the problems. This approach to redevelopment planning typically fails to build on the capacities, resources, and social and economic networks of community members.

BACKGROUND

As a response to global poverty issues, government and non-government institutions have embraced innovative social development processes to uplift poor communities all around the world. In 2000, the United Nations established the "Millennium Development Goals" (MDG), which requires significant improvement of the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020 (United Nations, 2010). In response to these demands, South

Africa's Department of Housing established the Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme (ISUP) in 2004, which is referred to as the National Housing Programme: Upgrading of Informal Settlements. This programme is founded on the partnership between three "spheres" of government (Municipality, Provincial, and National), each sharing the responsibility of monitoring implementation and progress of *in situ* upgrading projects. The main objective of this programme is "to facilitate the structured in-situ upgrading of informal settlements as opposed to relocation" (Department of Housing, 2009).

Key principles in the *in situ* upgrading include:

- Involving the community in all of the aspects of the upgrading process, as well as developing a strong connection between the community and all levels of the government.
- Preserving fragile community "survival networks" by enhancing their capacity to actively participate in development processes as well as

participation in training and education programmes. Targeting these networks will ensure the future sustainability of the informal settlement.

- Township layout and design should be undertaken on the basis of the specific needs of the community and on the principal that relocation should be avoided as far as possible.)

Municipalities are responsible to administer applications to register settlements under the *in situ* programme as well as managing, operating, and maintaining projects that have been approved by the Provincial and National government. Therefore, the City of Cape Town is obligated to preserve and improve the livelihood of persons who suffer

from poverty in their district. In response, the City of Cape Town, in partnership with the German Development Bank (KFW), initiated the Violence Protection through Urban Upgrading Programme in 2006, which focuses on developing community life in the township of Khayelitsha (VPUU, 2010). The current goal of this partnership is to implement a new approach to informal settlement upgrading through *in situ* upgrading in five pilot communities in Khayelitsha leading with Monwabisi Park.

The ISUP's interest in working with local communities and building on social networks in informal settlements can be put in practice through an asset-based approach. An asset is defined as a resource that constructs livelihoods and allows one to cope with life's setbacks by providing a sense of identity and

meaningful engagement with the world (Majija, 2009). The main principles of asset-based development include:

- Releasing the unique capacities and assets that are already a part of the community instead of targeting weaknesses.
- Identifying and utilizing human capital such as the skills, talents, gifts, and the capacities of the community members.
- Networking between different social groups to enhance the structure and stability of the community by providing the opportunity to share ideas and skills.
- Education and training programmes are a necessity for developing skills and advancing the investment of the community members.
- Strengthen the confidence of individuals from the community in their own capacities to inspire them to take action and recognize social capital.
- Empower emerging entrepreneurs to ensure local economic development.

This participatory approach encourages the community to consider their own strengths, play a central role in the community development process, and increases communication between community mem-

bers and those who are leading redevelopment efforts in a community. According to Majija (2009), forming relationships between assets, such as WPI's work in creating a membership association among small shop keepers in Monwabisi Park (Chebelyon-Dalizu, et al., 2010), can be used to provide means of placing value on skills, talents, and capacities that otherwise might go unrecognized. While asset-based development was pioneered in the USA, the approach is now being used in South Africa. For example, in Gugulethu, a long-established township on the outskirts of Cape Town, an economic development project conducted a skills audit of local residents in order to identify the social and economic resources on which to build community development programs. The audit was also used to determine the barriers of entry to the local economy

for Gugulethu residents (Uthango 2010).

In 2009, the VPUU collaborated with a Monwabisi Park leadership organization, the Safe Node Area Committee (SNAC), to develop a Community Action Plan (CAP) for Monwabisi Park. The CAP identifies five types of interventions: Social/Cultural programmes, Economic Development, Institutional Interventions, Safety and Security, and Infrastructure. Our work to identify assets in Monwabisi Park is structured along these lines.

MISSION STATEMENT & OBJECTIVES
The goal of this project was to create through extensive community collaboration a document that describes the economic, social and cultural resources of Monwabisi Park. It is a snapshot taken in 2010 and thus serves as a baseline. It is our hope that community members and others will add new material to this book so that the changing conditions of Monwabisi Park can be more easily identified and assessed. In order to achieve this goal, we accomplished the following key objectives:

- · Conducted key informant interviews with our

project's co-researchers (see Chapter 1 for more information about co-researchers) in Monwabisi Park to identify physical and social assets.

- · Conducted interviews with the leaders of the following key assets: churches, youth groups, spaza shops, barber shops, hair salons, a community hall, the weekend patrol, and crèches.
- · Created an electronic database to record interview data and create a baseline inventory.
- · Designed a layout and templates for a Profile of Assets book.
- · Trained VPUU Community Facilitators in computer skills to help them update the Profile of Assets.
- · Created pages on the Cape Town Project Centre website dedicated to our Profile of Assets book, with a downloadable version of the book, and separate pages for each of the six chapters that include extra pictures and videos from some of the assets profiled. Also created a page dedicated to training, including the training manual given to VPUU Community Facilitators

as well as locked blank templates of profile pages to add to the book.

METHODOLOGY
Working with Co-Researchers

We worked with six co-researchers who were selected by the VPUU from a pool of local residents who volunteer for the Monwabisi Park safety patrol. They are trained in security and are proficient speakers of English and Xhosa. Their translating skills and knowledge of the community gained through leadership experience in Monwabisi Park were crucial to the success of our project. During our first week in Monwabisi Park, the co-researchers gave us walking tours of the community to help us learn about the area. During these tours, each co-researcher was given a camera, and asked to take pictures of things that they believed were good or important for the community (i.e. assets). At the end of the first day each co-researcher selected a few of their photos that they wished to present to the entire group to discuss why they took those pictures and what made them important. During the first week we had informal discussions with the co-researchers to learn more about their lives and community dynamics in Monwabisi Park. Through these conversations we began to develop a list of potential assets to profile in the community. These included crèches, the community hall, the weekend patrol, and youth groups.

Community Perceptions of Assets in Monwabisi Park

To understand community views of local resources, we developed an interview worksheet that included the following sections: general description, background, history, impact on the community, current initiatives, and personal goals of the community member who was being interviewed. We also set up our database with fields identical to those on the interview worksheet to make data entry as straightforward as possible.

Our sponsor asked us to profile as many churches in the community as possible. We were asked to focus on churches because most churches focus on some type of outreach for the community, whether that is youth groups, care for the sick, or a number of other initiatives. The capacity of churches to provide support for community members presents a unique opportunity for asset-based community development in Monwabisi Park. As we progressed through interviews of nine churches we constantly were discovering more churches, and realized that it would not be possible in our time in Cape Town to cover every single church.

As noted earlier, we used the categories in the Community Action Plan to profile additional assets. For assets that were largely abundant in the community, such as the approximately 100 spaza shops, we entered into our database each shop's name and location. This information is valuable for monitoring and evaluation to show just how widespread spaza shops are in Monwabisi Park. We also conducted in-depth interviews with two shops, to better understand how they are operated, what

issues the owners are working on currently, and what kind of formal business training the owners do or do not have. We followed a similar path for the eight formal crèches in Monwabisi Park by listing general information about six of the crèches, and conducting in-depth interviews with two others. Our in-depth interviews helped us to better understand the capacity of each crèche for serving the community, and the current initiatives the owners were working on. For both the spaza shops and crèches our team relied heavily on information gathered by two other WPI project groups working with training for spaza shops owners (Chebelyon-Dalizu, et al., 2010), and interventions for early childhood development in the community (Barbour, et al., 2010).

Training Community Facilitators

We held a workshop for VPUU Community Facilitators where we gave a training presentation on how to create asset profile pages.

Topics covered included uploading, saving, and organizing pictures, basic computer operation skills, database management in Microsoft Access, creating profile pages using Adobe Reader, and how to use a GPS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our project deliverables include the Monwabisi Park 2010 Profile of Assets book, a Microsoft Access database of assets in Monwabisi Park, and a training manual and materials for others to use our tool for asset-based monitoring and evaluation in the future. Additionally, we have made these materials, as well as extra photographs and videos of different assets, available on the Cape Town Project Centre website.

Monwabisi Park 2010 Profile of Assets

Our Monwabisi Park 2010 Profile of Assets book represents the information collected by our team through structured interviews with community leaders of different assets, and serves as an example of how

Community Action Plan Categories:	Assets Profiled:
Cultural/Social	Faith-based Organizations, Youth Groups
Infrastructure	B Section Community Hall
Institutional	Formal Crèches
Economic	Spaza Shops, Barber Shops, Hair Salons
Safety & Security	Weekend Patrol

St. John's Apostle Church of South Africa

Sick Shelter

"We are a branch of a largertree"

Personal Profile

"Grandmother"

Technical Information

Skills Checklist

such an asset-based tool for community development as well as monitoring and evaluation can be created. The first step to creating our Profile of Assets book was creating a standard design for each page of the book. We used information gathered from one church to develop and edit the mock-up of our layout. Main considerations with designing the layout were that the layout would be repeatable for every asset profile, what the text to picture ratio should be, how to represent information with pictures and quotes instead of heavy text, the inclusion of a box for technical information and a skills checklist, and an overall visually pleasing design. The layout went through multiple stages of revision, and ended up including a large picture of the asset, with four smaller pictures and brief text describing what was represented by each picture. For the two-page spreads we also included a map of Monwabisi Park with a star indicating the location of each asset. Since some people were more forthcoming in interviews, or some assets just had less that we could write about, we created both a one-page and two-page template for the profiles. We maximized the value of information included on each profile by using pictures and quotes instead of paragraphs of text where appropriate.

The book includes an introduction chapter, and profiles of assets organized into chapters of cultural/social, institutional, infrastructure, economy, safety and security, and personal profiles. Our goal was to provide a current snapshot of each asset including the concrete initiatives people are working on to improve conditions in Monwabisi Park. In this way, the profiles can help development agencies identify possible interventions to support local efforts.

One aspect of asset-based development that our sponsor was particularly interested in was a skills inventory. For our book we developed a skills checklist with the following nine categories of skills: communication, leadership, entrepreneurial, cultural knowledge, caring, building, crafting, musical, and engineering/automotive skills. Each asset profile in the book includes this checklist and indicates which skills are used or taught through asset activities.

In doing this sort of ethnographic research, we encountered three major challenges: in many cases it was difficult for interviewees to identify assets in their community; in view of the difficult living conditions in Monwabisi Park, they often focused on what was needed to improve their lives, such as improved taps, toilets, electricity, and proper buildings. For many community members, our position in the community was ambiguous and this shaped the responses to our questions. Many people we talked to were under the impression that we would provide improved infrastructure. We were often frustrated about our inability to successfully probe the views and implicit assumptions of our respondents, a situation made more difficult by language barriers.

Many of the community members we interviewed either did not speak English, or were more comfortable answering questions in Xhosa. As such, we relied heavily on translations from our co-researchers. In the beginning, there would be times when an interviewee would speak for five minutes, and then the co-researcher would give us a thirty second translation. It was clear to us that details had been left out. As we involved the co-researchers more in our work, they understood that we wanted direct quotes from the people we were interviewing, and in most cases provided excellent interpretations for our research. There could be a few reasons why the co-researchers did not seem to give us a full interpretation. Initially, the design scheme for our portfolio had not relied as heavily on direct quotations, so we had not originally insisted on word for word translations. As our design evolved it was our responsibility to keep the co-researchers updated on our progress. Another important barrier we found was that the co-researchers wanted to shelter us from some of the harsh realities of life in Monwabisi Park. While we did not personally experience many of these realities, we know that violence, for example, is a big concern in the community.

To overcome these obstacles, we re-evaluated the kinds of questions we were asking to help us gain the information we wanted to know. We had conversations with co-researchers to work out possible ways to better communicate our purpose to community members. Also, we carried with us a mock-up of a profile for our book to show people the kind of document we were producing.

Through multiple visits, we bridged the language barrier by not just visiting the site of an asset once and conducting an impersonal interview, but rather getting to know people in the community, visiting them a number of times, and forming personal relationships with them. This process helped us to learn a great deal about assets in Monwabisi Park, and was a meaningful experience on a personal level.

To do this we relied heavily on the cross-cultural skills of our co-researchers. Without them we could not have obtained the depth and breadth of information in our book. On multiple occasions we provided the co-researchers with interview worksheets and cameras, and asked them to go out into the community by themselves to conduct interviews. Through the co-researchers we were able to profile many assets that would not have been possible otherwise, since activities associated with things such as churches, youth groups, and the weekend patrol, often occurred outside of the hours when we could safely be in Monwabisi Park. A crucial part of the asset-based approach is that it is community-driven, and involving the co-researchers in our work helped to accomplish this. Outside of regular working hours the co-researchers conducted interviews, took pictures, and captured activities on video, to support our project. Seeing the community through their eyes truly guided the representation of community assets in the book.
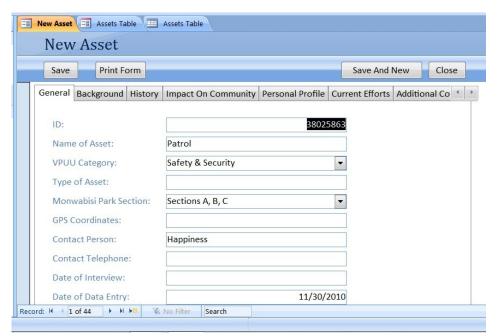
The Monwabisi Park 2010 Profile of Assets book is itself an asset to the community. It represents an initiative to recognize the community-driven efforts that exist in Monwabisi Park right now that could serve as very useful building blocks for future redevelopment projects.

Asset Database

We created a database using Microsoft Access to organize the data we collected in the field. This database was important to the VPUU for the following reasons:

- It was a way for our team to transfer the data we collected to the VPUU in an organized fashion.
- It allows the VPUU to add additional records to the database when it collects asset data in subsequent years.
- Microsoft Access allows the user to search for certain fields, so for example, if the VPUU wanted to only look for the names of the leaders of the churches in Monwabisi Park, they could use the database to pull up a list of the churches, and then from that a list of the leaders.
- For certain applications of monitoring and evaluation it would be more practical for the VPUU to quickly search within a database of information, rather than having to read through our entire book to find a certain piece of information.

We designed our database with fields that reflect the fields used on our structured interview worksheet, using the main headings reflected in both the interview worksheet and the profile pages of the book. As we collected data in the field, we added this information to the database. For the VPUU employees who focus on Monwabisi Park, they can simply add to the database. We also provided a completely empty database that only includes the fields, but no gathered information, that can be used to begin data collection in other communities as well.

Training Manual

In order to support the continued use of our tool for monitoring and evaluation, we were asked by our sponsor to train the VPUU Community Facilitators about the methods we used to interview community members, how we created profile pages, and organized the data into the database. We developed a five-part training manual that covers uploading, saving, and organizing pictures, basic computer operation skills, database management in Microsoft Access, creating profile pages using Adobe Reader, and how to use a GPS. This information makes it possible for people with varied computer skills and experience to be able to contribute to a Profile of Assets book. Along with the training manual, we provided documents to the VPUU and on our website that are locked PDF templates with picture and text fields to be filled out to create more profile pages. There are 18 templates, with an introduction page, one-page profile spread, and two-page profile spread for each of the six chapters of the book. While in Cape Town our group pilot tested our training materials with one of the co-

researchers, and gave a training presentation to Community Facilitators from the VPUU to ensure that the manual and materials to be provided were as useful as possible.

All training materials, along with the database file which is too big for the website, were distributed to all Community Facilitators at the end of our project, and posted to the Cape Town Project Centre website. We worked with the VPUU's information technology specialist to ensure that all files would be compatible with the VPUU system, and briefed him on our methods so that he could assist the Community Facilitators with any questions they might have after we leave Cape Town. By training the Community Facilitators we have taken steps to ensure the success of our book as an on-going tool for asset-based monitoring and evaluation.

Website

An important part of the sharing and continuation of our project is making as much material as possible available on the Cape Town Project Centre website. We have posted PDF versions of our final Profile of Assets, this Executive Summary, our Training Manual, Interview Worksheet, and 18 locked profile templates on the Cape Town Project Centre website. In addition, we have made available a library of photographs and videos taken by our team and co-researchers in Monwabisi Park.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our field work allowed us to get to know many people, as we spent hours interviewing community members about some of the most meaningful or important aspects of their community. In the course of these discussions our project took on a new meaning; to improve the lives of people we cared about.

We learned about collaborating with community members to understand how economic and social networks help people live in conditions of such desperate poverty. We saw that people are able to exercise considerable personal agency, whether it is a church leader caring for the sick, a spaza shop owner providing for her family, or a crèche owner organizing a graduation ceremony for children starting grade 1 in the New Year.

When people in Monwabisi Park told us about their lives or wishes, they shaped our impressions, but in telling us, they also shaped themselves. For example, the pastor's wife at the Mzokhanyo Church told us how she counsels people who are HIV positive and tries to encourage them as much as she can. We asked if she was trained for this, and she said she was not but would like to be trained to be able to give emotional and medical advice to people suffering from HIV. This conversation led to the woman expressing ideas for how she could further help the people if she were trained to give advice about taking medications and to provide emotional support and encouragement.

We strongly recommend that the VPUU Community Facilitators in Monwabisi Park continue to conduct interviews with community members to identify and profile assets of the community.

We recommend that VPUU Community Facilitators help residents of Monwabisi Park gain access to computers and support their efforts in profiling community assets.

We recommend that this book is made available to residents of Monwabisi Park to foster discussion about redevelopment planning and to help mobilize sustained community action in what will be a complex and lengthy process.

Our recommendation to continue using our Profile of Assets methodology as a tool for monitoring and evaluation is based upon the many strengths we have discovered to this method. Through background research and implementation we learned the benefits of an asset-based approach to community development. Through multiple interviews with community leaders, our group has been able to foster communication and build relationships with many leaders in the community, which is an asset in itself.

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