



ADVOCACY THROUGH
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Reflections on land, housing, and access to
basic services

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BESG's legacy of advocacy work

- Began in 1983 defending the rights of indigent communities to settle in urban areas – direct action.
- Participated in the National Housing Forum in shaping the National Housing Subsidy Scheme (1993)
- Participated locally in the Low Income Settlement Task Team (1994-7) to manage informal settlement policies and programmes within the city of Pietermaritzburg
- Used research, demonstration projects, and public participation to advocate pro-poor development policies and programmes

Creating a platform for participatory advocacy

- BESG is not a social movement, but provides technical support to poor communities and other vulnerable groups
- BESG's mandate is through using effective means of enabling the poor to be heard at various levels of government, and influence government policies and programmes

Tiers of community engagement

- Facilitating direct engagement of communities with government structures
- Facilitating indirect engagement of communities with government structures
- Using participatory research as a tool for advocacy
- Using our branding and track record as a mandate for engagement on behalf of poor communities

Facilitating direct engagement of communities with government structures

Example 1: People's Housing Process summit 2005 – national housing policy

- National government invited select NGOs (branding) to attend a major conference to review a failed housing subsidy instrument intended to engage the poor in addressing their own housing needs.
- Through **caucusing** with other NGOs and **challenging** the invitation process and structure of the agenda, the Department of Housing agreed to a second summit where NGOs could bring their community based partners to speak for themselves about their frustrations with slow and poor housing delivery.
- Result: Opened the door for direct policy engagement in 2008-9.

Facilitating direct engagement of communities with government structures

Example 2: Local government performance – the “development” mandate
Kuyasa community leadership development and deepening democracy programme (2008-10):

Phase 1 involved developing leadership skills in targeted CBOs, and developing an active understanding of complex local government legislation.

Phase 2 involves monitoring the extent to which public participation processes are employed by targeted municipalities (which will feed into a national policy review), and the extent to which CBOs are able to engage effectively with local government structures in the formulation of development plans (IDPs) and budgets – WORK IN PROGRESS.

Facilitating indirect engagement of communities with government structures

Example: National land access campaign 2007-9

- BESG joined a national consortium of NGOs to run a series of workshops to capture experiences of poor communities in accessing well located land.
- Those experiences were written up into a formal submission and presented to targeted departments (Housing, Land Affairs, Public Works)
- Result: Unknown at this stage, but chronic problems in accessing land led to the promulgation of the Housing Development Agency Act in 1008.

Using (participatory) research as a tool for advocacy

Example 1: Towards the Right to Adequate Housing (2000) - national

- BESG perceived a number of problems in RDP housing development that were entrenching poverty.
- We used participatory research methods to produce a qualitative report on the impact of poor housing conditions on the wellbeing of poor households.
- The funder used a high profile lobby group to procure banner headlines in the media to publicise the project.
- Result: National Dept. Housing took grave exception to the banner headlines, but did adopt many of the policy recommendations; relationship healed over time.

Using (participatory) research as a tool for advocacy

Example 2: The Right of Access to Free Basic Services (CAP 2007/9)

- BESG wanted to test whether Msunduzi Municipality's policy of indigent support was reaching the intended recipients.
- We qualitative (focus group meetings) and quantitative (sampling) research methods to produce a report how Council disseminated its policy, who knew about it, and who benefited from it.
- We secured the support from the Municipal Manger for Strategic Research for the project, and she hosted a launch of the report at a municipal venue (library).
- We secured access, with the blessing of the Municipal Manager, to present the report to his senior management team.
- Result: The Director of Finance "buried" the initiative – but we monitored the press to identify what policy changes were made as a consequence, and made the DG for Provincial and Local Government aware of the abuse of the obligation to engage the public in policy formulation.

Using our branding and track record as a mandate for engagement on behalf of poor communities

Example: Tenure security campaign – CAP 2007/8

- **In partnership with Lawyers for Human Rights, we ran a series of participatory workshops for CBOs on the importance of having a will. We used the lessons learnt from participants to extend and deepen our knowledge of the hardships that occur when people do not provide for their inheritance.**
- **We then targeted Ward Committees in Msunduzi Municipality in order to impart that knowledge to Ward Councillors and committee members, who generally hold positions of regard in their communities. This involved a lengthy process of “buy-in” – first with the Speaker of the Council, then the various party caucuses, then Area Based Management Teams – and finally a series of learning workshops.**
- **Result: There is a much higher level of awareness of the importance of having a will, among targeted CBOs and people in positions of leadership in their communities.**

Thank you!

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