Nov-2003

Housing Delivery in Nthutukoville, South Africa: Successes and Problems for Women

Catherine Ndinda

Recommended Citation

Housing Delivery in Nthutukoville, South Africa: Successes and Problems for Women

By Catherine Ndinda

Abstract

This paper examines the notion of empowerment and what it entails in housing development. Through a critical analysis if the different phases in one particular housing project analyzed by the author, the paper highlights the areas of empowerment and emphasizes that it is a process, which in the case of Nthutukoville in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa began with securing land tenure. Access to resources and acquisition of skills are important. Both external and internal factors may be responsible for women's inability to take charge of their lives. External factors include political violence, unsupportive local authorities, and a hostile environment as well as lack of resources and skills. There is, however, often an internalized problem of the failure to challenge the prevailing gender ideology that reinforces women's subordination and male dominance in power. Although state policies may be favourable, women, through mobilizing resources, negotiating with authorities, and strategizing must be responsible for their own empowerment.

Key Words: Women's empowerment, housing policy, South Africa

Introduction

In 1994 South Africa crossed into a new era that saw the end of the nefarious apartheid regime and the beginning of a new democratic era. The end of apartheid marked an end to the state policies that supported racial discrimination and segregation. In line with the new dispensation the democratic government formulated a White Paper on housing, entitled, "A new Housing policy and Strategy for Housing". This policy is based on the principle of capital subsidy. A strong targeting mechanism is used, in which subsidy allocations are based on household income, with the lowest earners accessing the full grant and those earning close to R3500 accessing a lesser grant (Adler and Oelofse 1996:116).

Current policy suggests that communities will be supported to mobilise and participate in meeting their housing needs *"in a way that maximises the involvement of the community and the private sector and leads to the transfer of skills to and economic empowerment of members of the community"* (emphasis added). Given the low proportion (6%) of women relative to men in the construction sector it is likely that at present women comprise a lower proportion of the actors in the material supplies sector (CSS, 1998:20). The Housing White paper is vague concerning matters of gender and provides no coherent strategy for dealing with this area. It is difficult to assess the extent of empowerment unless this notion is unpacked in terms of what it would imply in housing delivery.

'Empowerment' has many meanings and is used in a wide range of contexts. It is a term that has been embraced by conflicting schools of thought; it has been used by neo-liberals, neo-Marxists, and Third World grassroots groups to denote whatever the user

wanted it to mean (Rowlands, 1997). Due to lack of clarity on what constitutes empowerment, it "becomes possible to sustain the notion of empowerment as something that can be done 'to' people" (Rowlands, 1997:8). Janet Gabriel Townsend aptly points out that "the participation of local people in a project can mean involvement in all design and implementation, or merely a show of consultation which is never intended to be allowed to change anything…Similarly *empowerment* can be used to describe poor people finding the power to help themselves, or a government privatising health or pensions so that it can cut taxes in order to 'empower' citizens to decide whether to spend their income on health or pensions or conspicuous consumption".

In development theory the notion of empowerment has often been used with regard to women and gender issues. Terms such as participation, consultation and partnership are used to denote the importance of adopting an approach that respects people's abilities to identify and express their own needs and priorities. The favourable approach reflects efforts to change practices and attitudes that perpetuate asymmetrical gender relations. It is within this context that the term 'empowerment' seems to be widely used.

For the populations and development agencies of the global north, empowerment is conceived of in terms of instruments such as education, and employment that are assumed to contribute to the improvement of women's condition. On the other hand, Third World women, specifically Latin American feminists, conceive the term to imply greater equality for women in the performance of their productive activities and Indian women take the notion of empowerment to imply the changing power relations through individual challenge to patriarchal relations or group resistance to oppressive practices (Visvanathan, 1997). Townsend, (1999) notes that,

> "Poor people need fundamental changes in power relations, at all levels from the global to the local. Poor women also need a transformation of structures which hold them down; they need radical changes in law, property, rights and other institutions that perpetuate men's control over them…Power remains central both to keeping poor people poor, and to poor people changing their condition, but power keeps slipping back out of the debates, for men as well as for women." (Townsend, 1999:21-22).

The South African constitution grants equality to all regardless of gender. Institutions such as the Commission for Gender Equality were formed to monitor the rate of transformation in terms of gender. In terms of existing laws, gender equality has been achieved; in practice, equity remains a challenge and African women remain the most oppressed in socio-economic terms. This paper examines how women perceive empowerment in the context of housing development and contrasts their perceptions with the existing power relations. To determine whether the women in this community were empowered, there is need to understand the background to the Nthutukoville project.

South Africa has nine provinces and KwaZulu-Natal is the province on the eastern seaboard. The province is divided into district councils and Pietermaritzburg, the provincial headquarters, is in district council 22. Nthutukoville is a settlement, situated to the North-East of the Pietermartizburg metropolitan region. The study on Nthutukoville was part of a larger study that focused on five housing projects in KwaZulu-Natal and

gathered data by administering household questionnaires comprising of closed-ended questions to 10% of the households sampled in each project in 2000. Focus group discussions were also conducted among men and women who had participated in the housing delivery process in each of the projects. The data from the household interviews was analysed using the statistical package for social sciences and the qualitative responses were analysed using Nvivo6. In Nthutukoville there were 166 households and the statistics in this paper are drawn from the 10% (17) households sampled in Nthutukoville.

The ideas in this paper are drawn from discussions with women who participated in the housing project from the time they invaded the land, through the upgrading process after receiving the subsidy to the post-implementation phase when the community maintenance project was initiated. The paper examines the women's involvement in each phase of the housing delivery process and interrogates why the women were or were not empowered in each phase. The paper points out how empowerment should be understood and points to the factors that may contribute to the empowerment or the lack of it in housing delivery.

The Invasion

Nuthutukoville is situated between a railway line and the Coloured suburb of Woodlands, a residential area consisting of bungalows and walk-up flats. The residents of Nthutukoville invaded and squatted on the land in 1990, after their homes were burnt down in political violence. Most of the residents were single mothers. The local authority perceived the settlement of the women in Nthutukoville as another illegal occupation of land by shack dwellers and decided to evict them. The Coloured[1] population living in the adjacent suburb of Woodlands saw the community as a threat and complaints were lodged with the local authority to evict the 'invaders' from the area in 1991. The battle to remove the invaders had a class rather than race dimension and was driven by the NIMBY ('not in my backyard') syndrome, common in South Africa (Government Gazette, 1994:5). While Coloured property owners in the bungalows were opposed to the settlement in their backyard, the Coloured population living in the flats supported the land invasion; they (Coloureds in the flats) did not see a problem with people setting up their shacks. Instead, the presence of Africans provided support in campaigns against the apartheid laws. The local authority listened to the case of the property owners and decided to evict the squatters from what was then a gum tree forest next to the railway line.

In 1991 the community organised itself to fight eviction through the formation of a committee comprised of both men and women. This loose organisation was central to the fight for land tenure in Nthutukoville. The objectives of the committee were to fight eviction and secure land tenure, and demonstrations were organized to protest against the eviction. When the council sent the police to evict the residents of Nthutukoville, they organised themselves to cut down the gum tree poles, and blocked the road to render it impassable. Women, their children and a few men, joined by the Coloureds in the nearby flats were engaged in a protracted battle to secure tenure. The demonstrations against eviction were politicised to appear like another case of forced removals, carried out in the context of the Group Areas Act, in which people were removed from residential area not

marked for their race and moved to areas designated for their race group. The squatter residents asked for emergency services, such as water, and toilets: the local authority refused to concede to their demands and demanded that they move from the area.

As a result of mass action and demonstrations against removal, the local authority agreed to meet with the residents and negotiate a solution. The intervention by Built Environment Support Group (BESG) in 1991 brought the situation under control. The local authority allowed the 'invaders' to remain in Nthutukoville on the condition that the number of people moving into the area was limited to thirty families. However, due to the influx of more refugees fleeing from violence in the Northern areas of KwaZulu-Natal, the number of households that eventually settled in Nthutukoville was 166 and each household occupied a site. About 58% of these households were headed by women (Table 1). Historically, a large number of rural households in South Africa have been de facto female-headed due to male migration to urban areas in search of work in the mines (Ndinda, 2002:50). Whereas the proportion of female-headed households in Nthutukoville can be said to be exceptionally high, it is noted that South Africa generally has a high proportion of female-headed households.

Table 1: Household Head by Gender

Gender	Percentage	Total
Male	41.2% (7)	41.2%
Female	58.8% (10)	58.8%
Total	100% (17)	100%

Emergency services of water and latrines were provided in late 1991, although the residents had invaded the area in 1990. The process of securing land tenure was also clearly described by the women:

> Through negotiations the council finally agreed to let us stay. Built Environment Support Group also moved in. It gave us training on how to lay [water] pipes, and sewer pipes. We bought the land for R2000 from the council using the subsidy. We negotiated with the municipality. After 1994 the subsidy was approved[2].

The residential mobility of the community and their struggle to secure tenure was described in the following terms:

> Before, we used to live in a squatter camp. We had shacks, made of plastic, old tins, wattle and daub. We would build the shacks and get in the same day. We would come in start excavating, put your pots there and children there and get in the same day. Most people in this shack area were from Table Mountain. We were forced to flee our homes due to political violence between the ANC and IFP. About 30 families came and invaded the land here. Initially this was a big gum tree forest. The old council would break our shacks down to remove us from here. Our neighbors in the flats joined us in the struggle to remain here. Some of the

Coloureds in the houses did not want us here because they said that we would make their houses cheap[3].

During apartheid various pieces of legislation had been passed, restricting the movement of African women into urban areas, the type of work available to them, where they lived and with whom they interacted (Morris, 1981:74; Walker, 1990:186). The impact of the new constitution was, theoretically at least, to uplift the status of women who, particularly if they were unmarried, had been discriminated against (Maylam & Edwards, 1996:121). By the end of apartheid in 1994, the women were clear that all that the apartheid regime had done was to stifle their development and empowerment. They argued, "*Apartheid did nothing for us. The new government is thinking about people. During apartheid if you were a woman you would not get a house but now we are single parents with sites and houses[4]*". This statement, drawn from women who had lived in urban areas during apartheid and had lived to see the dawn of a new post-apartheid housing policy that included rather than excluded them, is a profound expression of the impact of state policies in improving the status of women and facilitating their empowerment.

Although women accessed housing, interviews conducted in 2000, when households were still consolidating their housing, showed that there was a high level of discontentment and about 76% of the households expressed their dissatisfaction with the choice of infrastructural services. Of the dissatisfied with the level of services, about 58% were female-headed (Table 1). More than half of all the households interviewed indicated that the subsidy was insufficient for the starter unit (70%); of these, 67% were female-headed. Although the men's focus group pointed to the inadequacy of the subsidy and was discontented with the way it was spent, they did not question why their subsidy did not achieve as much as men would have wanted:

> We don't see what it's doing because we can only get a one-room house. After water, roads, and toilets were put in we got a residue of +- R3000 for materials. This is not enough to build a house. The government put the toilet and standpipe and electricity. You have to build with R3000. The government should amend the policy by increasing the subsidy[5].

The notion of incremental housing [that is improving the core structure in stages as funds become available and in line with household needs,] was not fully understood at the grassroots level. The government policy clearly states that the housing subsidy aims at assisting households through a grant in the form of the housing subsidy. The subsidy level depends on the household income of the applicants. About 70% of the households received the full subsidy of R15000 and the rest received R12500. Out of the proportion that received the full subsidy, 60% were female-headed households. Those who did not receive the full subsidy had to meet the deficit in building their starter units.

Studies on incremental housing, which is characteristic of site and service schemes, suggest that the initial core varies with the level of funding and community participation in the project (van der Linden, 1986; Harms, 1990:35; Mathey, 1990:200). While the notion of incrementalism may not be understood at the grassroots level, the question of spending a substantial proportion of the individual subsidy raises a lot of

questions. The initial government policy in 1994 indicates that the local authorities and the department of public works will be responsible for providing bulk infrastructure services. The position of government regarding the provision of infrastructure is highlighted by the policy guidelines which stipulate that no more than R 7 500 should be used in the provision of infrastructure per household (Department of Housing [DOH], 2000:9). By the time this policy was effected Nthutukoville had already been developed. The policy was applicable to the housing projects that were developed from the year 2000.

Community Organising

The members of the committee that had organized the demonstrations against eviction became the members of the development committee when the Trust [within the South African context this is a section 21 legal entity which can receive or disburse funds in line with the set objectives] was formed. After achieving the objectives of warding off eviction and securing land tenure the objectives of the development committee became to develop the area using the subsidy funds and by finding donors to finance their project. The subsidy funds were deposited with the Trust that was responsible for developing the area by putting in infrastructure, water, roads, drainage and sewerage. In addition to the subsidy funds the Trust secured more project funding from Oxfam-Canada to pilot mutual self-help housing in Nthutukoville. That there was a high level of community participation from the residents is evidenced by the fact that the site plans had to change nine times before the residents could understand the plans and agree with the surveyor. Some residents wanted to know why some of the plots were bigger than others, and the surveyor had to explain about the topography of the area, that some of the plots appeared bigger on the site plans, because of the slope where they were located. The surveyor had to convince all the residents that some were not getting a raw deal through the site subdivision. Families whose houses were on the road plan also had to be moved to the new sites.

In the upgrading process the residents had the option of choosing between ventilated improved pit-latrines toilets (VIP) and water-borne toilets. The engineers explained that it would be cheaper to provide VIP latrines in the settlement because of the high running costs of flush toilets. The community argued that they had better 'bury' their subsidy and get the flush toilets because they had used VIP toilets in the rural areas and they did not like them because they were smelly. They also argued that since their settlement was next to a formal residential area, it would be easy to connect their drainage and sewerage system to that of the formal residential area.

Implementation Process

Households contributed to the provision of their housing through 'sweat equity' [household labour contribution to the construction of their own housing] by providing labour in the installation of infrastructure as well as the construction of the top-structure (dwelling) (47%). About 60% of the residents employed local builders and community groups to build their starter units (Survey, 2000). Both men and women were involved in putting in the infrastructure. Women were trained in plumbing and fitting pipes. Men were trained in road construction because it involved the use of heavy machinery. There were five groups, comprised of eight members with two women in each group. In total

forty residents were trained in putting in the infrastructure, and out of these 25% were women and the rest (75%) were men. Those involved were single women with dependants. They were trained in sewer plumbing, toilet systems, digging trenches, and house construction from the foundation to the roof level. Although women headed most of the households, more men were trained. When the factors constraining women's participation are considered, most cited the lack of training as a major obstacle to their participation. Whether there was a deliberate bias against women in the selection of trainees, or whether the women themselves were diffident is not clear from the group discussions, but the uniform pattern of a disproportionate number of men compared to women points to the existence of gender bias in favour of men.

Women participated in building their houses from the start to completion, particularly those who were involved in the mutual self-help project. Those who were not trained in construction provided labor in the construction of their own houses. The survey conducted in 2000 showed that 57% of the male-headed households indicated that their members had built their houses while 60% of the female-headed households indicated that local builders or community group had built their houses. Those who hired contractors from outside the community explained that they were in a hurry to get houses: *"We were all busy trying to build our own houses[6]"*. Specifically women were involved in laying and connecting the water and sewer pipes, bricklaying, plastering, and roofing. If there had been painting work they would have done it, but since the subsidy did not allow for that level of detail, only a few were involved in painting the crèche, which was also used as a community centre. The materials used in the construction of houses were iron-sheets or tiles for roofing, blocks or wattle and daub for the walls, and concrete, cement and river sand for the floor. Some of the households made improvements, such as painting the walls and carpeting spaces like the corridor and living room.

Female-headed households, which comprised 58% of all the households in Nthutukoville in 2000, were particularly constrained as most were the only bread-winners in their households and their incomes were so low that they were barely enough "*to give the crying kids bread*". Yet the assumption in the housing policy is that through combining the government subsidy with the household income, residents can access housing either through providing sweat equity or engaging paid contractors. In a settlement where many women earned irregular incomes through casual work, their subsidy houses often remained incomplete, with shacks interspersed with formal housing. This situation appears to confirm the assumption that even if women accessed the housing subsidy, it is difficult for them to find the means to contribute incrementally to their own housing. Female heads of households (80%) pointed to low income as the main constraint to improving their housing conditions. This finding is consistent with the literature in which low income was cited as chief among other factors constraining women's access to housing (Vance, 1985:3). The most common source of housing finance among the sampled households was their own savings, stockvels[7] or payments from their own children (75%). Only 25% of the female-headed households cited bank loans as the chief source of housing finance (money other than the government subsidy).

Unemployment, low wages, and lack of access to credit constrain women's access to and participation in incremental housing. Irregular income among the majority in Nthutukoville indicates that despite what the policy states, the residents are unable to add on to the government subsidy. Women's lack of income and the government expectation

that subsidy beneficiaries contribute financially towards their own housing presents a problem which can cause departures from policy in actual practice.

Maintenance Project

After the completion of the project, a Community Based Maintenance[8] (CBM) project was started. The project was funded by the national government and was a partnership between the local government (Msunduzi Transitional Local Council), the community and the Built Environment Support Group (BESG), a non-governmental organization. The national government provided the funding for the project through the local government to the Nthutukoville Development Trust to run the project. Community maintenance involved cleaning the storm water drains, door-to-door-waste removal, planting trees and grass in the open spaces, construction of retaining walls, and cutting the overgrown grass. Research findings suggest that the rate of illness among children in the settlement, associated with their previously dirty environment, dropped because of the maintenance project.

The blockage of drains ceased due to the on-going maintenance and the project provided income to the residents employed in the project. The community based maintenance (CBM) project employed seven women and one man who was the supervisor. This presents a departure from the gender division of labour in urban South Africa where the norm has been to employ men in gardening and women in domestic work, but it is notable that authority remained in the hands of a man. That a man was put in charge of women workers is, in my view, explained by examining the development committee and the roles of the various members. Members of the development committee were volunteers and all but one member was employed full-time. Having had experience in designating tasks during the development the housing project, it was assumed that this member would be able to allocate the tasks and supervise the work of the CBM. The work of the supervisor was not completely voluntary as he was remunerated for working two hours a day, while the women were fully remunerated for their work. The question that this scenario presents is whether women who were supervised by a man in this project can be said to have been empowered? Given the above scenario, how should we understand empowerment in housing programs?

Perceptions of Empowerment

The Nthutukoville case study shows that the role of women in housing development does not end with mortar and bricks but is a continuous process that started with the struggle for security of land tenure and continued with improvements to the community environment as well as the indoor environment. This reinforces the notion that the multiplier effects of shelter delivery transcend the top-structure (dwelling) and include benefits to the community and households. Participation in garbage collection and urban greening resulted in a clean and aesthetically pleasing environment. Individual efforts through kitchen gardening as well as keeping potted plants contributed to the health and well being of members and improved the indoor air quality.

The notion of empowerment among women in the housing delivery process is well illustrated by the words of the women from Nthutukoville; *Time [has] changed, my dear. Women have power now[9]*. The words of the women embody a notion of empowerment that is discussed by Townsend (1999) who suggests that empowerment is

the realization that one is not helpless and that one can do something about one's situation. The idea that 'I can' described by the Mexican women is presented by the women of Nthutukoville who show that while the men say that there are no jobs, women do not just sit and complain about joblessness.

> *Women build houses, Men drink the whole day... No jobs for men and women. Even people working in factories work for a short time now. I'm asking myself what is happening now? No jobs. Men become scabengu[10], rape and therefore crime increases. Women don't sit down. They go to the neighbors and do washing and get R10. It's easy to get jobs like washing. Men can't wash because if children are crying hungry, they say," Ask mother", that's why we have to work for the R10 per day and give the crying kids bread[11].*

Women take the initiative and do odd jobs even if they are poorly remunerated, and illustrate that they "can" do something about their situation. The women's words and actions encapsulate the notion that empowerment is the realization that say that they were in charge of their lives as suggested by the Beijing Women's conference, (1995), and illustrated in the women's own words:

> [12]*Kakuulu! I feel well. Happy. I was having a big sore here (pointing to her heart) as the place where we came from, our houses were burnt down. I was not dreaming. But now, I'm dreaming about this house. I was not dreaming because of the violence. Now I dream as if my house is still there. Our former houses were destroyed in the political violence between the ANC[13] and IFP[14]. IFP people occupied our land. KZN is signing a peace agreement. We want to go back to our land. We're no more fighting. We believe in negotiation and promoting peace. If I die, I don't want to be buried here in Mountain rise. They throw you in the water and make people cry even more. I want to be buried where I can have a corner of my own in peace[15].*

As the above passage suggests, empowerment is personal as well as collective. It involves the ability to deal with one's past and to take action to address present challenges. The passage is illustrative of empowerment as 'power from within[16]' and the 'power to' (Mercado, 1999:110). As the participant indicates, she felt bitter because of the destruction of her rural home. However, she is now able to dream. The idea of being able to dream is consistent with Mercado's view of empowerment as the 'power to' (Mercado, 1999:108-127). In the case of the women in Nthutukoville, housing has provided them with the space to reflect on their experiences, and the development process imparted new skills (community organising, mobilising resources and new skills in plumbing). The impact of dislocation, the mental and emotional trauma of violence was evident in the stories of the women. Through access to land and housing, women in Nthutukoville found shelter from violence, healing from the trauma of dislocation and stability in their lives.

The notion of dislocation was discussed by Emmot (1996) in the study among dislocated Afghani women living in refugee camps. Whereas the Afghanistan women had lost their husbands in the conflict, most of the women in Nthutukoville were single.

Although the dislocation among the Nthutukoville women and the Afghanis may have occurred in different countries and for different reasons, the impact was the same. The Afghani women, like those in Nthutukoville, experienced the mental and physical trauma of dislocation and were heartbroken to have lost their homes. The Afghanis lived in tents in the desert, while those in Nthutukoville lived in shacks in the urban periphery, but both groups felt an overwhelming sense of loss. Although the women in Nthutukoville had found shelter in a new environment, they still spoke of going back to their homes.

The analysis of women and shelter in Nthutukoville suggests that external factors may be responsible for one's empowerment or disempowerment. The loss of their homes as a result of political violence led to their sense of powerlessness, dislocation, mental anguish and trauma. Empowerment was achieved through the ownership of, and the participation in the construction of their own houses, which transformed their lives and contributed to the 'power from within' or confidence. That women could now 'dream' is a profound statement of the extent of their empowerment; it signifies the importance of housing not only as shelter; housing is a source of security and freedom from violence and domination. The idea of being able to dream again raises the notion of empowerment as providing the space to be imaginative; it echoes the notion of housing as a sanctuary and a place where creativity is nurtured. It is how individuals deal with those factors that contribute to their powerlessness that determines the extent of their empowerment or the lack of it. Participation in housing delivery empowers women through imparting skills, access to resources, building their individual and collective confidence and through mobilising to challenge the constraints to their empowerment.

By the success of their mobilisation and collective protests the women were collectively empowered because they achieved their goal of being recognised as legal occupants of the land. Had these women been in a rural area, they would not have secured land tenure. In rural areas, land is held in Trust for the community by the Chiefs and *Indunas*[17], who allocate it in according to Zulu custom. Despite the change in the constitution that grants equal rights to both men and women, the literature surveyed in this study showed that women's access to land in rural areas was constrained by practices of the Chiefs and Indunas who insisted on allocating it according to Zulu custom and that meant that only men could access land. Thus the chance move to an urban area, administered by the local authority and not by the Chiefs worked to the advantage of single women who had children. Furthermore, it gave them confidence as individuals and as a community. This is illustrated by the phrase that *"women have power now"*. Through mobilisation and negotiation women attained the 'power to' (skills, capacity, creativity and organization). The capacity to negotiate is illustrated, not by the fact that women won the right to remain on the land but by the trade-offs made in the process. The women demanded that the community agree not to allow any more settlers into the area. The reason for regulating the population density in the area was to prevent people settling too close to the railway line, thereby making them vulnerable to train accidents.

While some of the women received training in housing construction trades very few continue to utilize their skills (30%). The reason may be attributed to the fact that participation in housing delivery in Nthutukoville was perceived as a means to an end, which was housing itself. After the completion of their houses, the women stopped participating. On the other hand skills acquisition among men appears to have a more lasting impact, as they began securing contracts for housing consolidation from the

community. The contractors were constrained in competing for contracts outside their community due to their low literacy level; as they explained everything had to be written down when tendering for work. It was noted that, the lack of marketing skills is an obstacle to the male contractors getting work. Participation in the construction in Nthutukoville showed that both men and women were involved but it was the men who got training in construction. Women acted in the capacity of unskilled laborers and got on-the-job training in digging the trenches, joining the sewer pipes, water pipes.

By participating in the project as construction workers, women were able to meet their practical needs for income and housing though their strategic needs for gender equality in training and employment were not addressed. The gender ideology of men's dominance and women's subordination may explain why it was a man that was put in charge of women workers. Questions of gender power remained unaddressed in the project planning and implementation, despite women having played a leading role in securing tenure in Nthutukoville. The project cycle was not accompanied by consciousness raising for women to agitate for equality, both in representation in leadership structures in the community and in the division of labor both inside and outside the home.

Conclusion

Notions of empowerment suggest that it is the power to take charge of one's own life. The process of empowerment in Nthutukoville began with the invasion of the area. The persistence of women in fighting for security of tenure was also a struggle for economic empowerment. The government's housing policy acted as a catalyst to the empowerment of women in that it provided them with the funds to develop their sites with infrastructural services. What appears to be new is that women's empowerment in this settlement was facilitated by the government's housing policy. Although the policy as shown at the beginning of this paper did not unpack the meaning of empowerment, the residents' views suggest that they took the concept and gave it meaning in their own context. They unpacked the term and concretized it in terms of their housing situation. The policy environment can also be said to have facilitated their empowerment.

From the example of Nthutukoville it may be argued that state policies are in themselves important in facilitating or obstructing the achievement of local empowerment objectives. In the hostile apartheid policy environment, the women had to fight the state the secure access to land. In the post-apartheid period, the new policy environment offered space for them to participate in shelter development. Yet a favorable policy environment without the input of the intended beneficiaries does not lead to empowerment. What led to empowerment in Nthutukoville was the proactive measures that the women took in securing tenure, organizing themselves for development, working to install the infrastructural services and organizing together in the post-delivery phase for community maintenance.

Although access to resources may allow for greater empowerment, it is important to address the underlying gender ideology that perpetuates men's dominance in leadership and women's subordination. Factors that constrain women's empowerment in shelter programs include low incomes, unemployment and lack of access to credit. I therefore conclude by arguing that state policies may facilitate women's empowerment but intervening factors may constrain it. Only women can empower themselves through

organizing, training, participating in development and challenging the oppressive gender ideology.

Bibliography

Adler, T & Oelofse, M. 1996. The Housing Subsidy Scheme. In S. Rubenstein & K. Rust (eds). *A Mandate to Build*. Cape Town: IDASA.

Edigheji, S & Maharaj, A. 1999. Women in Construction. In *Agenda,* No. 42 (pp 82-87).

Edigheji, S & Maharaj, A. 1999. Women in Construction. In *Agenda,* No. 42 (pp 82-87).

Emmot, S. 1996. 'Dislocation', Shelter, and Crisis: Afghanistan's Refugees and notions of home. In C. Sweetman (ed) *Women and Urban Settlement*. Oxford: Oxfam (Uk & Ireland).

Ginwalla, F. 1999. African National Congress (ANC) Activist and Leader; Speaker of the National Assembly; Former Convenor of Women's National Coalition. In Common Wealth Secretariat. Women in Politics. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Government of Gazette, 1994. *White Paper on Housing: A New Housing Policy and Strategy for South Africa* . Cape Town: Government Printers.

Hamdi, N. 1995. *Housing Without Houses: Participation, Flexibility, enablement*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

Ismail, S. 1998. Women Take control - building houses, people and communities in *Agenda* 38.

Machado, L.M. 1985. *Women and Low-Income Housing in Brazil: Evaluation of The Prolifurb Programme in Terms of Its Capacity to Define and Reach Female- Headed Households*. London: Development Planing Unit, University of London.

Maylam, Paul & Edwards, Ian. 1996. *The People's City: African Life in Twenthieth-Century Durban*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

Mercado, M. 1999. Power to do: and to Make Money. In J.G. Townsend, E. Zapata, J. Rowlands, O. Alberti, & M. Mercado. *Women and Power*. London: Zed.

Morris, Pauline. 1981. *A History of Black Housing in South Africa*. Johannesburg. South Africa Foundation.

Ndinda, C. 2002. *Women's Participation in Housing Delivery: The extent of Empowerment in Post-1994 era, with Reference to Specific Case Studies in KwaZulu-Natal.* Durban: University of Natal (Doctoral Thesis).

Nimpuno-Parente, P. The Struggle for Shelter: women in a site and service project in Nairobi, Kenya. In C. O. N Moser and L. Peake, *Women, Human Settlements & Housing.* New York: Tavistock Publishers.

Ramphele, M. 1993. *A Bed Called Home***.** Cape Town: David Philip**.**

Rowlands, J. 1997 *Questioning Empowerment***.** Oxfam: An Oxfam Publication

Steinberg, Florian. 1992. People's Participation and Self-help Housing. In Kosta Mathey (ed.). Beyond Self-Help Housing. London: Mansell.

Townsend, J.G., Zapata, E., Rowlands, J., Alberti, P., Mercado, M. 1999. *Women and Power*. London: Zed.

Valodia, Imraan. 1996. Women and Work: The Impact of the Budget. In D. Budlender, (ed), Women's Budget Report, Cape Town: IDASA.

Van der Linden, Jan. 1986. The Sites and Services Approach Reviewed. Aldershot: Gower.

Vance, I. 1985. *Women's Participation in Self-Help Housing: The San Judas Barrio Project, Managua, Nicaragua*. London: Development Planning Unit, University College of London.

Visvanathan, N., Duggan, L., Nisonoff, L., Wiegersma, N. 1997.*The Women, Gender and Development Reader*, London & New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd.

Walker, C. 1990. *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945***.** Cape Town: David Philip.

Endnotes

[1] 'Coloured' in the South Africa is a term used to refer to people of mixed race. It is an apartheid term but it is used in this paper to explicate the race dynamics during apartheid.

[2] Women's focus group discussion 6th May 2000. Pietermaritzburg : Nthutukoville. Middle-aged woman, early forties, single mother of two and member of Development Committee.

[3] Women's focus group discussion 6th May 2000. Durban: Nthutukoville. Middle-aged woman, early forties, single mother of two and member of Development Committee.

[4] Women's focus group discussion 6th May 2000. Pietermaritzburg : Nthutukoville. Middle-aged woman, early forties, single mother of two and member of Development Committee.

[5] Women's focus group discussion 6th May 2000. Pietermaritzburg : Nthutukoville.Middle-aged single mother; self-employed dress-maker.

[6] Women's focus group discussion 6th May 2000. Pietermaritzburg : Nthutukoville. Woman in mid-thirties part-time domestic worker.

[7] Stockvel is a term used for group saving schemes in South Africa. Most of these are initiated and run by women.

[8] Source 1: Key informant and pamphlet: Urban Sector Network. Habitable Environments Through Municipal-Community Partnerships: Johannesburg: Urban Sector Network

[9] Women's focus group in Nthutukoville, 6th May 2000. Pietermaritzburg:Nthutukoville. Middle-aged woman, Development Committee member (same participant as footnote 61).

[10] Local term for petty thieves

[11] Women's focus group discussion, 6th may 2000. Pietermaritzburg: Nthutukoville. Middle-aged, single mother of three, factory worker.

[12] Kakuulu is a Zulu word that means a lot. The usage in this context denotes that the participant had been empowered a lot.

[13] African National Congress: the ruling party in South Africa since the transition to democracy in 1994.

[14] Inkatha Freedom Party is mainly an ethnic party whose supporters are the indigenous Zulu people majority of whom live in KwaZulu-Natal but are also spread out in different parts of South Africa.

[15] Women's focus group in Nthutukoville, 6th May 2000. Pietermaritzburg:Nthutukoville. Middle-aged woman, Development Committee member (same participant as footnote 61).

[16] 'Power with' "is grounded in both self-esteem and in an awareness of external reality. It is knowing who you are that you have a right to exist; self-respect' (Townsend, 1999:63).

[17] Zulu term for village headmen.