

Development Action Group's Citizenship & Participation Programme May 2007

During the apartheid era, human rights and essential livelihood resources were denied to many South Africans. Throughout the past thirteen years, the democratically elected Government approved a number of laws and policies, established development programmes, and ratified international treaties to ensure the realization of basic human rights as defined in the South African Constitution. However, as time passes it is evident that the Constitutional promise of rights does not automatically translate into real change and improvement in livelihoods, particularly of the poor and marginalized. In part, this is because the attainment of rights requires that people understand their rights, participate in the development and implementation of laws and policy, and hold their elected representatives accountable.

Increasingly, it is becoming clear that the ability to access resources is closely linked to one's capacity to assert rights. In the competition for resources, the poor are often passive role-players against powerful economic, social and environmental interests. As a consequence they often do not receive an equal share and struggle to meet their basic needs. Development Action Group's "Citizenship and Participation Programme" is essentially about strengthening the voice of the poor in an effort to ensure more equitable resource distribution in society. It intends to achieve this by equipping poor citizens with the proper tools and knowledge to effectively claim and defend their rights.

The overall objective of the Citizen and Participation Programme is to better enable South Africans, particularly those from poor communities active in urban development processes supported by DAG, to participate actively in the development and implementation of pro-poor public policy. The programme hopes to make an impact through focusing on the following three areas:

- 1) Building an **active citizenry** through encouraging and educating individuals to become motivated, to take on the role of citizens, and to assume the associated rights and responsibilities.
- 2) Strengthening the **voices of the poor** in an effort to enhance their ability to articulate their resource needs, realize their socio-economic rights and be part of democratic decision-making processes.
- 3) Infusing community members with a **political consciousness** that deepens their understanding of the links between civic and political issues and local and macro issues, such as the link between water cut offs and the privatization of water services.

More specifically, DAG plans to influence the urban development context through advocating for the provision of appropriate spaces for effective citizen participation in urban development processes; as well as the adoption of pro-poor policy and practice by government (supported by a public opinion which is concerned with the interests of the poor), and championed by strong citizen-lead collective platforms.

In order to achieve the above impacts, DAG has identified a number of strategic interventions, listed below, that collectively will contribute to advancing these goals. These activities will occur between 2007 and 2010 with the intention, in most cases, that the size, scale and depth of each activity will increase year on year.

1. To facilitate *collective reflection and learning* amongst community leaders and members. DAG will hold 2-day workshops bringing together DAG project partners. A space will be created for reflection on the multitude of activities in which communities have engaged (including but not

limited to, World Habitat Day commemoration activities and public hearings on the Department of Local Government & Housing's annual report). The overall goal is to encourage community groups to share their experiences with one another and distil lessons related to the efforts and success in influencing policy and practice. With each advancing year it is hoped that the depth of reflection and learning can be enhanced and that communities begin to forge strong networks and work together to achieve common goals.

2. The *collective development and implementation of strategies to influence urban development policy and practice* in the interests of the poor through planning joint activities for mutual benefit and solidarity amongst project partners. These activities include assisting community based organizations to work collectively to influence urban development decision makers by organizing meetings, presentations and policy submissions. The groups will also be assisted to develop and implement an ongoing media campaign to publicise their viewpoints on selected urban development policy issues. The outcomes and strategies developed are intended to be directly linked to the reflective processes stemming from no. 1 above. The process to determine next steps, strategies and activities will therefore be determined through collective reflection and learning processes.
3. The collective development of *the 2007 People's Human Settlement Report*, a well-researched document which strengthens the voice of the poor and is created through reviewing policy, practice, case studies and community experience. This document will be prepared with the active involvement of community-based organizations and will reflect their analysis of the state of human settlements in the Western Cape. It will be used by citizens as a tool to advocate for the development of pro-poor public policy and practice and will be compiled annually to coincide with the release of the Western Cape Government's Report on Housing and Local Government. It will be explicitly pro-poor in its approach and is intended to review the activities of various communities in which DAG is involved linking these activities to wider policy debates.
4. The continuation of *DAG's leadership training programme*, now in its third year of existence, which provides citizens with the information and skills necessary to facilitate their active and collective participation in urban development policy formation and practice. The programmes' aim is to develop and enhance the required leadership skills and abilities of those working for community-based organizations. The programme consists of three modules, sub-divided into 15 units which are taught over a period of a year in 8 weekend residential sessions. The first module focuses on understanding the concepts of development and leadership, facilitation and communication. The second, aims to develop the hard skills required for effective community development and mobilization, including financial management and meeting procedures. Finally, the last module reviews rights-based approaches to development, advocacy, gender, diversity and conflict management.

The leadership programme is important for the multiplication of community-centred, pro-poor development projects which redress social and economic inequalities. Knowledge and skills gained through participation provide community groups and individuals with the skills necessary to strengthen citizenship and democracy specifically related to the delivery of housing policy and practice. The programme encourages multiple layers of leadership to emerge within communities and specifically teaches the skills required for leading and managing activities as determined in interventions no. 1 and no. 2. The programme assists citizens to strengthen collective platforms and organizations of the urban poor, making their participation in urban development processes more effective.

Efforts to mobilize South Africans to participate in civic life and to create an active and knowledgeable leadership for organizing the poor to better access rights and resources are needed more now than ever. Historically, liberation movements like that of the ANC represented the voice of the poor, however, the election of the ANC to government in 1994 saw a mass exodus of civic

leaders into Government and the private sector. As a consequence, many communities have been left with few leaders and little direction. Meanwhile, continued racial segregation, urban sprawl, a lack of integrated development, and weak service delivery continue to pose many challenges for the creation of more equitable and pro-poor urban development processes.

DAG has strategically designed the above interventions to achieve success in the programme. With over 20 years of experience, DAG is confident that its strategies and techniques are appropriate and will encourage social mobilization. DAG's role is that of a facilitator and partner; not leader or resource provider. Instead, DAG's programme allows space for communities to reflect and develop their own agenda and strategies, thus creating empowered and skilled community members. In addition, all four strategies run in parallel to one another, providing participants with tailored and well-rounded support and learning. In this way, DAG's intervention is unique and effective and plays an important role in efforts to encourage citizens, especially those from poor communities, to become active participants in civic life and the development of public policy and practice related to urban development in South Africa.

Clearly, DAG's Citizenship & Participation Programme is necessary and vital to help citizens realize their rights and create a more equal society.