Planning for Informality

Exploring the Potential of Collaborative Planning Forums

A Propositional Framework
by Isandla Institute
Acknowledgements

In 2012 Isandla Institute embarked on a project titled 'Building capacity for the development and use of meaningful collaborative planning tools in South Africa'. The project originated from a critical assessment that current development approaches and methodologies in South Africa are flawed as they lack meaningful and real public participation. This work built on Isandla Institute’s previous work on ‘networked spaces’, which has resulted in a number of papers and publications. Essentially, the concept of ‘networked spaces’ echoes the notion of ‘communities of practice’ as a critical feature of inclusive, participatory local governance.

This propositional framework Planning for Informality: Exploring the Potential of Collaborative Planning Forums has been drafted, presented, refined and finalised after a variety of activities and interactions with various stakeholders in the local government sector in South Africa and in Brazil.

Our appreciation goes out to Instituto Polis, a well-established Non-Governmental Organisation based in Sao Paulo (Brazil), for hosting a valuable learning exchange for staff members in May 2012. Polis was also instrumental in securing two experts who participated in a return visit to South Africa in November 2012. Isandla Institute hereby thanks Professor Eduardo Tadeu Pereira, Mayor of Várzea Paulista municipality in Sao Paulo and President of the Brazilian Association of Mayors (ABM), and Dr Nelson Saule Júnior, Executive Director of Instituto Polis, for sharing their wisdom, experience and insights.

Isandla Institute also acknowledges the invaluable contribution made by members of the Technical Steering Committee, an advisory structure that guided the development and contextualisation of this propositional framework. The committee consisted of Anton Arendse (Department of Human Settlements), Ronald Eglin (Afesis-corplan), Walter Fieuw (Community Organisation Research Centre), Mayur Maganlal (City of Tshwane), Modjadji Malahlela (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs), Seth Maqethuka (City of Cape Town), Marx Mupariwa (South African Local Government Association), Subethri Naidoo (World Bank), Samantha Naidu (National Treasury), Herman Pienaar (City of Johannesburg) and David Savage (public finance specialist).

Tristan Görgens is the main author of this document, with significant input and contributions from Pamela Masiko-Kambala and Mirjam van Donk. Inga Norenius edited the text to simplify the language and overcome our tendency to resort to shorthand terms and jargon.

The project was supported by a grant from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) Canada under its Capacity Building Technical Assistance Fund. Isandla Institute is sincerely grateful to DFATD for providing this rare opportunity - for enabling the full staff complement of the organisation to jointly work on a project that seeks to inspire innovative thinking and practice on local participatory planning and decision-making in South Africa.
Planning for Informality
Exploring the Potential of Collaborative Planning Forums
A Propositional Framework

PUBLISHED 2013
Planning for Informality: Exploring the Potential of Collaborative Planning Forums

A Propositional Framework

The spatial and economic exclusion of the majority of the urban poor from formal or legitimised spaces in South African cities has seen the growth and entrenchment of informality as a pervasive feature. Informal settlements are simultaneously expressions of the agency, resilience and ingenuity of the urban poor and the exclusionary nature of our cities and society.

Addressing informality in a coherent and effective manner, therefore, requires a strategic and judicious mixing of short-term and long-term interventions. Interventions must both improve liveability for the urban poor and support their agency in meeting their immediate needs, while addressing those exclusionary patterns of governance and development that perpetuate and deepen inequality and informality.

The ability of local government to intervene in informal systems in a manner that preserves their functional character whilst simultaneously improving the outcomes for the most vulnerable, therefore, remains the ultimate test of developmental and responsive governance as envisaged in the Constitution. The re-invigoration of the informal settlement upgrading agenda since 2009 – through the setting of national delivery targets (e.g. Outcome 8 signed by the National Minister for Human Settlements), the creation of specific institutions (e.g. the National Upgrading Support Programme) and new funding mechanisms (e.g. Urban Settlements Development Grant) – represents a concrete set of opportunities to improve the way in which the state works with citizens. The danger remains, however, that such measures will result in narrow compliance; leaving unchanged the patterns of state-driven planning and decision-making that have resulted in inefficient and inappropriate responses to these settlements.

In line with existing legislation there are at least three ways in which citizens can be enabled to form new, more empowered types of relationship with the state:

1. Through more effective citizen oversight of the implementation of political decisions and thus greater social accountability of bureaucrats and political decision-makers;
2. By establishing processes of participatory decision-making so that communities have a direct and clear role in negotiating the outcomes of projects, and
3. Through the co-production of communal assets and spaces.

The creation of such opportunities demands the formation of new types of relationship between the state, civil society, communities and other social partners. Unfortunately, these remain underexplored in South Africa and, as we will explain below, the existing spaces at a local government level, and emerging initiatives to strengthen them, hold out little promise for establishing the kind of responses needed to effectively respond to informality in South African cities.

The rationale for this propositional framework is based on a more substantive body of work by Isandla Institute. The first three sections of this document, including the introduction, are a summary of a more detailed critique of the proposed changes to the ward committee system and a fuller description of the features that characterise the proposed collaborative forums. The full text for these sections can be found in the appendix.
This propositional framework is an attempt to describe the institutional edifices that would be required to link processes of community-level deliberation and learning to city-level processes of planning and decision-making. It shows that it is only through the assemblage of sustained cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder ‘communities of practice’ (see Box 1) that this kind of action can become a reality.

1. What is the problem with state-created democratic spaces?

Despite the aspirations articulated in legislation and policy, local government remains disconnected from the majority of South Africans. There are three key areas of weakness:

1. The system of public participation in South Africa, particularly the ward committee system, has largely proved to be ineffective in enabling poor citizens to voice their priorities and concerns, particularly in ways that influence the outcome of planning and decision-making processes.

2. Local government has become increasingly dominated by a culture of compliance and risk aversion which limits its ability to learn effectively and pursue dynamic, contextually-relevant solutions.

3. The systems of planning and decision-making at the city level continue to struggle to effectively reflect the needs of poor residents or transform patterns of development in South African cities to make them more equitable, just and sustainable.

While various bodies within the state acknowledge this pattern is a cause for concern, the recent focus of the suggestions from the African National Congress (ANC), the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), and the Presidency on how to address these weaknesses in local democracy has largely focused on systematising, professionalising and expanding the role of ward committees. However, we anticipate that these suggestions are likely to have limited success because of their inability to address a number of key challenges:

1. They largely leave unaddressed the limitations represented by their scale – wards often cover too large an area and too diverse a mixture of communities

Box 1:

The value offered by communities of practice

Communities of practice provide a new model for connecting people in the spirit of learning, knowledge sharing and collaboration, as well as individual, group, and organisational development. Communities of practice are important because they:

• Connect people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to interact, either infrequently or at all.

• Provide a shared context for people to communicate and share information, stories, and personal experiences in a way that builds understanding and insight.

• Enable dialogue between people who come together to explore new possibilities, solve challenging problems, and create new, mutually beneficial opportunities.

• Stimulate learning by serving as a vehicle for authentic communication, mentoring, coaching, and self-reflection.

• Capture and diffuse existing knowledge to help people improve their practice by providing a forum to identify solutions to common problems and a process to collect and evaluate best practices.

• Introduce collaborative processes to groups and organisations as well as between organisations to encourage the free flow of ideas and exchange of information.

• Help people organise around purposeful actions that deliver tangible results.

• Generate new knowledge to help people transform their practice to accommodate changes in needs and technologies.

Source: Cambridge, Kaplan and Suter (2005)
for individual residents to know how to participate in such a way as to influence the outcomes of particular projects, let alone influence planning and decision-making occurring at a city scale.

2. The effort to isolate ward committees from the dynamics of local politics might be a worthy ideal, but remains unlikely in most communities where all of the incentives encourage rather than dissuade the use of these structures in local factional or political contests (particularly if additional resources are directed to participants or placed under the control of such structures).

3. The ability of these spaces to have a substantive impact on wider municipal decision-making processes remains severely curtailed. Compelling municipalities to consider these inputs, as is currently being proposed, is unlikely to change the more powerful party-political dynamics that render these spaces largely powerless.

4. Their expanded role as a ‘clearing house’ for all of the different types of issue-specific participation (such as community policing forums, housing processes, and so on) leaves unaddressed questions about how effective a ward committee will be at addressing and synthesising the work of a multitude of issue-specific bodies.

5. They do not propose a coherent approach to addressing the capacity shortages that limit the effectiveness of such bodies. Where these are acknowledged, they are most often conceptualised as a lack of technical skills. As we have explored in our recent work on citizenship/civic academies, informed community activism requires a range of technical, organisational and leadership skills that, in combination, enable communities to self-organise and effectively advocate for self-identified objectives. In the current conception of ward committees, community members will be given an opportunity to display such skills, but these spaces are unlikely to offer communities the opportunity to develop these skills.

2. What kinds of spaces need to be created to address these challenges?

Placing an emphasis on the substantive participation of communities in processes of planning and decision-making requires us to address two key underpinning assumptions:

1. It presupposes the ability of the state to create opportunities for citizen participation that can have a substantive impact on outcomes. This requires a new level of sophistication in the design of planning and decision-making processes – it is not simply a matter of inviting community members into existing processes. This requires officials who are able to understand the value that community members can add to such processes, and will structure engagements to maximise the contribution that participants can make in such processes.

2. It presupposes a level of capacity in community members to be full and equal participants. To be successful in advocating for particular courses of action or options, community members require leadership skills, political savvy, technical skills and capabilities, and tacit knowledge about the bureaucratic processes in which they are involved.

The view advanced by this propositional framework, however, dismisses the easy answer that we first need to ‘equip’ people before they are capable of exerting citizenship. Instead it is premised on the notion of ‘citizenship as becoming’: it is in the actual process of engagement, debate and community activism that citizenship is expressed, cultivated and deepened. In turn, this acts as an important counterbalance to seemingly entrenched patterns of unaccountability and impunity in South Africa’s local governance system.

In order to adequately create the conditions in which these assumptions can become realities, therefore, a new type of space needs to be created. We have described ‘networked spaces’ (see Box 2) in our previous work. Briefly, they are conceptualised as having the following characteristics:
1. They are shared spaces in which capacity can be created, both within the state and within communities.

2. They provide space for the growth of skills and capabilities that can be honed only through the actual rough-and-tumble of deliberation, negotiation and collaboration between politicians, officials, civil society groups, professionals, private-sector interests and citizens.

3. They give these varying stakeholder groups opportunities to work together on concrete problems in the search for mutually satisfying solutions.

4. They need to explicitly balance the need for action grounded in the immediate priorities and needs of communities (thereby embedding their relevance for all stakeholders to participate) with their ability to contribute to longer-term processes of spatial transformation.

5. They should be designed to grow and deepen incrementally because acquiring a range of tacit skills and amalgamated modes of organising and acting requires stakeholders to form working relationships over a period of time, gradually expanding the focus of the working relationship and the range of included stakeholders.

6. They should support different scales of planning and decision-making, and ensure that the outcomes emerging from these various scales interact with and ‘feed’ one another.

In sum, this propositional framework is designed to create a system of opportunities in which differently positioned stakeholders can build communities of practice through negotiating the desired outcomes of planning and state action, and collaborating in the search for and implementation of solutions, while in the process deepening their understanding of the motivations and positionings of other stakeholders.

3. Collaborative forums in the context of informality

Despite being mandated by a number of different policy documents, few municipalities have a comprehensive list of informal settlements detailing their size and composition, priority needs and potential for incremental upgrade. Furthermore, these need to be part of a wider integrated human settlements strategy within the municipality, that addresses the different

Box 2: The key elements in establishing networked spaces

In our previous work on networked spaces we have argued that such spaces can be assessed against a set of criteria that can be summarised by the acronym ‘SQUIRREL’:

- Is there a clear plan of how to Sustain dialogue and interaction over a period of time?
- What is the Quality of engagement between the different parties?
- Is there a plan to ensure the Upkeep of community resources or initiatives by participants once the initial funding has ended or the original leaders have moved on?
- Do these spaces represent the Integration of different documents and processes relating to community involvement in local governance?
- Are adequate Resources being provided to ensure full and meaningful community involvement?
- Are there clear, commonly held Rules of Engagement that are agreed upon by all participants, that facilitate negotiation and account for the impact of power differentials?
- Is there proactive Leadership, representivity and accountability amongst all stakeholders?

Source: Adapted from Masiko-Kambala, Görgens and van Donk (2012)
aspects of housing delivery in a comprehensive way (from rental stock, to greenfields ‘turnkey’ housing delivery, to interim servicing and incremental upgrading).

In this propositional framework we focus on informality within the context of these wider sets of negotiations and debates about the continuum of housing options being pursued by provincial and local government. We do so in recognition of the fact that the residents of informal settlements are disproportionately unable to access, and make their voices heard in, existing formal spaces and processes (such as ward committees) in ways that influence planning and decision-making. The framework is also driven by recognition that the priorities, options and incentives that these residents have for satisfying their need for housing, livelihoods and communities are dramatically different from other groups of residents in cities. The dynamics and options that ‘make sense’ in these communities need to be understood on their own terms before they are translated into bureaucratic systems or technical processes. This, therefore, requires deliberative spaces with the characteristics that are described in the previous section. They need to support processes of negotiation and contestation as concrete options are developed for the improvement of informal communities; they need to capacitate the varying stakeholder groups to better understand and collaborate with one another, and in so doing build the communities of practice that can enrich other opportunities for local democracy in these communities.

The framework proposed here has international precedent – our thinking is particularly influenced by the Brazilian model (although there are a number of other international examples). Since the beginning of the first of the Lula terms, the federal state has created a range of councils to advise federal and state governments about the formulation of policy (ranging from health care to social assistance to sustainable livelihoods). For example, in 2005, the federal government of Brazil created the National System for Housing in the Social Interest (SNHIS). This system mandated that by the end of 2009 municipalities receiving federal funds had to have a municipal council that included members from civil society, the private sector, academic institutions and different spheres of the government, to allocate resources. In an extensive comparative review of the impact of this policy on municipalities across Brazil, Donaghy found that the number of new housing units being built by municipalities had increased substantially, and that the presence of councils to allocate federal funds substantially increased the diversity of programmes and the adoption of approaches favoured by civil society organisations (CSOs).

Isandla Institute’s propositional framework suggests that the first step in assembling such a comprehensive set of plans for action is the linking together of three collaborative forums which connect with and strengthen one another across different scales within the overall city scale. Figure 1 is intended to give a brief overview of the three propositional sets of collaborative forums, indicating the spatial scale at which they will operate and the formal planning instrument that they are intended to influence.

These spaces are conceptualised as being established in an incremental manner from the bottom up. This makes sense for practical reasons: neighbourhood-level project committees are most closely linked to existing processes through informal settlement upgrading projects; they are most closely linked to processes of planning and decision-making (and therefore can have an immediate impact on improving outcomes); and the strengthening of capacity and the general involvement of communities in processes of governance at this level are most likely to have a significant effect on improving the quality of engagement and deliberation at the ward and city spatial scales. However, it is worth emphasising that all of these structures do not need to be initiated at the same time or in place for individual structures to make a substantive difference.

It is worth stressing that these spaces are designed to build upon and strengthen the current system for participation in local government. The success of these forums,
Figure 1: Network of collaborative informal settlement upgrading planning spaces
at each scale, offers substantial benefits to those participating in the existing spaces for participation. For example, neighbourhood-level project committees can act as concrete spaces to resolve day-to-day, operational issues emerging from upgrading projects, thereby reducing the volume of issues and diffusing some of the points of conflict before they reach ward committees. In effect, these spaces could act as technical supports to the existing governance structures and enable them to act as more strategic spaces in which processes and priorities of governance are discussed. Furthermore, the creation of multiple spaces for citizens to strengthen their capacity for planning, deliberation and decision-making should raise the level of debate and capacity for engagement within these more formal spaces. Finally, the rollout of these spaces can be relatively cost-effective – participation is often funded in an ad hoc and fractured manner across municipalities and in projects. This structure enables a far more deliberate approach to participation that will maximise the benefits for participants and the institutions themselves.

3.1. Neighbourhood-level project committees

The backbone of this network of collaborative forums, therefore, is made up of neighbourhood-level project committees, which are project-level ‘networked spaces’ that are established at the neighbourhood scale or, to use a more specific measurement of scale, sustainable community units. These spaces should be established during the project initiation phase of informal settlement upgrading processes. They are intended to provide a forum through which community members, representatives from the ward committee or councillor, project staff and officials can:

1. Make concrete decisions about priorities and trade-offs during the planning phase;
2. Give input about sequencing and selection between alternatives, and
3. Indicate the preferred modes for delivery of services during the implementation phases.

These neighbourhood-level project committees act as spaces for deliberation, decision-making and oversight so that representatives from the local community can be active participants in shaping project processes and outcomes. Furthermore, the structure should serve as a mechanism to ensure community oversight of project processes and outcomes.

While the Housing Code designates the ward committee as the expected avenue through which community participation in informal settlement upgrading should occur, it is our contention that expanding the democratic control (and therefore acceptance) of project outcomes requires that the community representatives on these committees are elected by the community itself (and held accountable by the community through, for example, frequent feedback sessions), although it may also be appropriate to ensure the representation of specific groups within the community. It is worth acknowledging that such spaces are often created on an ad hoc basis in housing projects to increase the representivity of input (beyond ward committees). Our suggestion here is that this is systematised in policy, and that their operation is adequately financed.

Therefore, rather than being considered parallel structures replicating the functions of the ward committees, neighbourhood-level project committees are conceptualised as having the far narrower purpose of improving the planning and decision-making related to particular informal settlement processes. It is therefore (1) more narrowly linked to a particular stream of funding and accountability than all of the ward committee processes, and (2) is often linked to a project area that is smaller than the entire ward (and therefore only residents of that area are eligible to be involved in the forum).

This process of facilitating the election of representatives from the community, and of establishing a formal relationship with the local government structures (including the councillor, ward committee and sector specific community-based forums such as community policing forums), will be the
responsibility of social facilitators employed by the project manager.\textsuperscript{16} It is worth pointing out that, in this conception, these social facilitators will need to be well trained and experienced, since they will be mandated to manage the demands from and power imbalances between different role players, to ensure democratic decision-making, to manage conflict and facilitate processes of learning. Their role is crucial because these collaborative processes are intended to foster a ‘community of practice’ between the different stakeholder groups, making it possible to produce novel, locally relevant solutions for problems that are identified. We have outlined the detail of how to establish and manage these spaces to maximise the opportunities for these kinds of outcomes elsewhere.\textsuperscript{19} In order to facilitate this, officials responsible for the delivery of particular services, plans or decisions should be invited to participate and share information in these forums but decision-making authority should remain invested with the community representatives (in conversation with the project manager).

\textbf{Box 3: Neighbourhood-level project committees}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Sustainable community units (i.e. neighbourhood level)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scope and function</td>
<td>Project-level deliberative forums to determine:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The sequencing of different parts of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Selection of the modes of service delivery, and between options during project implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Project monitoring and oversight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powers and authority</td>
<td>• Input into and sign-off on project planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Input into decision-making during project implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Conflict mediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation and accountability</td>
<td>• Elected community representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Project management team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Responsible officials (by invitation: non-voting members)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convening power and financing</td>
<td>• Convened by social facilitators employed by project management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Funded by project budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional alignment</td>
<td>• Parallel with, but with formal ties to, the ward committee and councillor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2. Learning forums

The learning forums will act as intermediate spaces where representatives from a number of different projects from the same geographic area within the city are given the opportunity to share emerging lessons from individual projects.\textsuperscript{20} These forums thus seek to give community representatives and state officials the opportunity to learn from one another, collaborate across projects, and build capacity where necessary. While the focus will be on increasing collaboration between community representatives, these forums are also intended to stimulate ‘higher level’ discussion and deliberation that can impact on policy and decision-making both at the project level (for example, community representatives who understand the ‘big picture’ issues that emerge and can suggest innovation) and at the city scale (for example, officials who build a more nuanced picture about appropriate policy or priorities that cut across projects). As suggested in Figure 1, these forums could also form the basis for improving input into area-based planning processes (such as district-level Spatial Development Frameworks in the City of Cape Town).\textsuperscript{21} The learning forums are intended to act as an intermediate forum for oversight – giving community representatives, project managers and officials an opportunity to understand in more nuanced ways why
particular projects are experiencing problems. While these forums have the least ‘teeth’ in terms of decision-making power, if skilfully facilitated they present an important mechanism for accountability and learning amongst peers. Horizontal learning platforms are a well-established mechanism for peer-to-peer learning, and are often very effective in persuading people to shift practice and in stimulating innovation. Our suggestion for striking the right balance between state support and community control of these spaces would be that they are financed by the local government but convened and facilitated by local NGOs or academic institutions.

3.3. Planning for informality forum

At the city scale, a planning for informality forum is established to synthesise the learning emerging from the different learning forums and ensure that this influences planning, decision-making and systems of monitoring and evaluation at the lower levels. This forum is intended to ensure that thinking and learning occurring at the project level is ‘mainstreamed’ and has a tangible impact on the wider planning processes within the municipality.

The structure will focus on aggregating the lessons emerging from the learning forums and using this as the basis for updating the municipality’s approach to upgrading; for example, in terms of its design of local policy, institutional design and modes of practice. It will also be instrumental in ensuring that the relevant and appropriate responses to the needs of different informal settlements are embedded in planning documents such as the Built Environment Performance Plan (BEPP) and Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and therefore influence the delivery of infrastructure and the direction of specific flows of funding. Finally, the forum has a key role in ensuring that the monitoring and evaluation system for projects is appropriate and effective and thus has an oversight function to monitor the implementation of projects. It should be emphasised, however, that this forum is not conceptualised as being strictly tied to the annual planning and budgeting processes that

**Box 4: Learning forums**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Geographical grouping of projects within a region of the city</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope and function</strong></td>
<td>Neighbourhood-level or regional forums tasked with:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cross-project learning and collaboration (in partnership with officials)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ongoing revision of project-level policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mid-level monitoring and oversight of projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Powers and authority</strong></td>
<td>• Recommendations about revision of policy to both project and city-level forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Election of representatives on the city-level forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Monitoring and oversight across projects in the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representation and accountability</strong></td>
<td>• Community representatives elected or nominated from neighbourhood-level project committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Project managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Responsible officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Technical professionals engaged in projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Intermediary organisations such as NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Convening power and financing</strong></td>
<td>• Convened by a civil society partner such as a local NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Financed by the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional alignment</strong></td>
<td>• Relationship established with parallel area-based structures/processes (for example, a district SDF where these exist)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
often dominate municipalities. Rather, this forum is intended to initiate cycles of dialogue and deliberation that reveal and interrogate the implicit priorities being expressed by the ‘balance of forces’ and trade-offs in those plans and budgets.

International experience\textsuperscript{25} warns that there is a difficult balance to be struck when seeking to empower these spaces: they need ‘teeth’ to have a meaningful impact on outcomes, yet transferring the control of resources or delegating decision-making power to them often politicises such spaces. This is about striking the balance that ensures the efficacy of these forums in meeting their overall strategic objectives while being pragmatic enough to ensure that they are sufficiently politically\textsuperscript{26} palatable to be established. For more information about the complexity of achieving this balance, see the appendix.

**Box 5: Planning for informality forum**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>City-level planning structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope and function</strong></td>
<td>City-level forum responsible for:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Synthesising ongoing learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Revising city-level policy, planning, funding flows and project implementation based on cross-cutting trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Monitoring and evaluation of project outcomes based on clearly identified variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Powers and authority</strong></td>
<td>• Delineating areas of focus and priority in city-scale planning processes (such as the IDP and USDG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Oversight of projects through monitoring and evaluation mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representation and accountability</strong></td>
<td>• Chair: Deputy Mayor/MAYCO member (or senior, politically respected leader)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Elected community representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Civil society groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Representatives from private sector and professions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Senior officials from responsible department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Convening power and financing</strong></td>
<td>• Convened under the authority of the MAYCO with a mini secretariat located in the Mayor’s office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Financed by the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional alignment</strong></td>
<td>• Parallel but subservient to the council, producing issue-specific recommendations to inform council decision-making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: USDG = Urban Settlements Development Grant; MAYCO = Mayoral Committee

The power of this forum, as it is advanced in this propositional framework, remains limited to making inputs into existing policy, planning and other institutional processes. However, the importance and impact of this forum will emerge incrementally. It will take time for this forum to consolidate political buy-in (through demonstrations of effectiveness and defusing reservations about ‘handing over power’) and to build capacity and system sensing that community groups and CSOs organise and advocate in a coherent, effective manner. The creation of such a forum, therefore, is an acknowledgement that informal settlement residents and other groups living in vulnerable conditions are least likely to be able to access and influence existing formal processes (such as IDP forums) but that these residents have an important contribution to make to the production of more just and sustainable cities. They are an expression of interest in facilitating a new type of relationship between marginalised communities and the state, beyond token ‘consultation’ in the planning of particular projects.
The details about the composition and mechanisms for accountability of representatives in this forum, including the proportions reserved for different representatives and the ways in which they are elected or nominated and held accountable, will most likely be determined by the particular needs and characteristics of each city (see Box 6, for an example from Brazil). However, it is perhaps useful to make some general proposals about how this forum might be composed. In order to increase political buy-in (and probably a condition if such a forum is funded by the council), we would anticipate that the chair of the forum would be the Deputy Mayor or a MAYCO member (or a senior, politically respected leader). In terms of representatives from the state, civil society, professional organisations and community groups, we would anticipate a ‘mixed model’ that combines proportional representation of some stakeholder groups (who are elected through processes managed by these sectors) with seats that are allocated to key organisations, experts and stakeholders. For example, representatives from particular communities, civil society or private sector groups may need to be elected by their peers, with the election and accountability processes formulated and conducted by these stakeholders. On the other hand, a set number of seats may be reserved for representatives from particular departments within the municipality (appointed based on the departmental responsibilities they hold) or for experts with needed key skills (with the consent of all parties).

As we have described elsewhere, a key aspect of asserting the legitimacy, functionality and effectiveness of such a forum is the establishment of principles and clear procedures that are adhered to by all and can form the basis for mediating future contestation. Establishing clear rules for how sectors and organisations elect or nominate representatives, norms for how accountability is asserted (both horizontally within the spaces and vertically to the stakeholder groups) and transparent procedures for deliberation, decision-making and the management of conflict are absolutely vital. Equally so, it is important that these rules and procedures are not seen as absolutely immutable (although, arguably, the establishing principles may be) because these forums are expected to evolve. The entry of new stakeholders and the emergence of new focuses and priorities may require an accompanying shift in process or structures, and there must be a clear procedure for this.

---

**Box 6:**

**Brazilian Housing Forums – an example from São Paulo**

Donaghy found that, in 2008, 89% of municipal housing councils had CSO–state parity of representation. For example, in São Paulo, the municipal housing council is made up of 48 members – 24 from civil society, including the private sector, and 24 from the state. Within the civil society segment, 12 seats are reserved for social movements, 8 are reserved for the private sector and the rest are made up of NGOs, university representatives and architecture associations. The state has a similar array of representatives: the housing municipal secretary, urban development municipal secretary, social housing public company, social housing state company, housing state secretary and other public institutions from the municipal and state governments have to indicate a member of their technical team to be part of the municipal council. There is a member from the federal bank which controls the public finances used to provide social housing (Caixa Econômica Federal). The representatives from the social movements are selected by an open election (as are the NGO representatives if there are more organisations nominated than available seats).

Source: Donaghy, 2009.
### Table 1: Planning for informality forum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Neighbourhood-level project committees</th>
<th>Learning forums</th>
<th>Planning for informality forum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>Sustainable community units (i.e. neighbourhood level)</td>
<td>Geographical grouping of projects within a region of the city</td>
<td>City-level planning structure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Scope and function** | Project-level deliberative forums to determine:  
• Priorities and trade-offs during the planning phase  
• The sequencing of different parts of the project  
• Selection of the modes of delivery of services and between alternative options during project implementation  
• Project monitoring and oversight | Neighbourhood-level or regional forums tasked with:  
• Cross-project learning and collaboration (in partnership with officials)  
• Ongoing revision of project-level policy  
• Mid-level monitoring and oversight of projects | City-level forum responsible for:  
• Synthesising ongoing learning  
• Revising city-level policy, planning, funding flows and project implementation based on cross-cutting trends  
• Monitoring and evaluation of project outcomes based on clearly identified variables |
| Powers and authority | • Input into and sign-off on project planning  
• Input into decision-making during project implementation  
• Conflict mediation | • Recommendations about revision of policy to both project and city-level forums  
• Election of representatives on the city-level forum  
• Monitoring and oversight across projects in the area | • Chair: Deputy Mayor/MAYCO member (or senior, politically respected leader)  
• Elected community representatives  
• Civil society groups  
• Representatives from private sector and professions  
• Senior officials from responsible departments |
| Representation and accountability | • Elected community representatives  
• Project management team  
• Responsible officials (by invitation: non-voting members) | • Community representatives elected or nominated from neighbourhood-level project committees  
• Project managers  
• Responsible officials  
• Technical professionals engaged in projects  
• Intermediary organisations such as NGOs | | |
| Convening power and financing | • Convened by social facilitators employed by project management  
• Funded by project budget | • Convened by a civil society partner such as a local NGO  
• Financed by the city | • Convened under the authority of the MAYCO with a mini secretariat located in the Mayor’s office  
• Financed by the city |
| Institutional alignment | Parallel with, but with formal ties to, the ward committee and councillor | Relationship established with parallel area-based structures/processes (for example, a district SDF where these exist) | Parallel but subservient to the council, producing issue-specific recommendations to inform council decision-making |
As outlined previously, the planning for informality forum is intended to be created with the political and financial backing of the council and include a senior representative from the MAYCO. The location of a mini supporting secretariat in the office of the Mayor is intended to help translate the outputs of deliberation in this forum into municipal planning, policies and systems that can institutionalise their impact. Ultimately, however, this forum is intended to act as an influential advisory body to the council and senior officials in key departments (and therefore the executive authority remains within these more formal systems). While this may fall short of the decision-making powers that Donaghy describes in Brazil, it would still represent a substantive increase in citizen participation when compared with the current anaemic state of community participation in planning and decision-making processes. The intention is to build, over time, a body of practice that will dispel ongoing scepticism amongst politicians and officials of non-state, non-party-aligned citizen input into formal processes, and an evidence base from which to change those aspects of legislation that limit the opportunity for such spaces to exert more muscular influence over state decision-making and resource distribution.29

Table 1 provides a complete overview of each of these spaces, their features and functions.

4. Conclusion

Despite the aspirations expressed across innumerable pieces of legislation, policies and guidelines, local government processes of planning and decision-making remain inaccessible and alien to the majority of South African citizens. This disconnect is most pronounced for residents and communities living in informal settlements and vulnerable conditions. Furthermore, while a wide-ranging consensus exists about this analysis, the current plans, focused on strengthening ward committees, leave many of the core reasons for the disconnect unaddressed.

This framework proposes a network of collaborative planning forums directed at improving the participation of residents living in informal settlements and other vulnerable conditions in state-driven processes of development. The design of these forums is premised on the idea that the participatory development of these communities requires structured spaces for negotiation and deliberation, the development of improved and new capacities in the state, communities and civil society groups, and the emergence of new forms of working relationship between the state, communities and other key partners. It is vital to note that these benefits are explicitly designed to strengthen existing, formal spaces of participation.

The intention for this network of collaborative forums is that they will be cultivated in an incremental fashion from the bottom up. The idea is to move from strengthening opportunities for participation in community-level processes of development through the establishment of neighbourhood-level project committees, and then aggregating the emerging lessons and modes of organising and collaborating through learning forums, into a space that is able to influence city-level processes of planning, decision-making and public resource investment – the planning for informality forum. Through these evolving networks of relationships and expanding pools of capacitated and engaged organisers and practitioners, South African cities will be able to foster the new forms of collaboration and innovation required to address the immediate needs of their citizens while taking concrete action towards the creation of more equitable, just and sustainable cities.
Endnotes: A Propositional Framework

1. The injunction in Section 152 of the Constitution ‘to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities’ and ‘to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in matters of local government’ has been systematised into a range of instructions in legislation to involve local communities in planning and decision-making. These pieces of legislation include the Municipal Structures Act (1998), the Municipal Systems Act (2001) and the Municipal Finance Management Act (2003) as well as a range of injunctions and opportunities in other legislation.

2. Van Donk, 2012
3. Carrim, 2011
5. For example, in line with the Housing Code of 2009 or the guidelines for what should be included in the Housing chapter of the Integrated Development Plan.
6. NUSP, 2011
7. Oldfield, 2008; Huchzermeyer, 2009
8. Pieterse, 2008; Watson, 2009
9. Donaghy, 2009
10. From 48% in 2005 to 60% in 2008
11. For example, the percentage of municipalities pursuing the regularisation of favelas increased from 9% in 2005 to 20% in 2008.
12. The Development Action Group (DAG) has completed important work on the potential contribution that urban forums and human settlements forums can make to development in South Africa. The characteristics of these forums share many of the design elements identified above. The body of their work has focused on the importance of establishing such forums at national and provincial levels but they are also clear about the need for similar forums at a municipal level. However, they note that there are particular issues that need to be thought through when establishing forums at this scale: ‘the range of stakeholders at a municipal / metropolitan level, are much broader, and there is a greater need to ensure that citizens (not just civil society organisations) have some direct voice in city-level platforms’ (DAG, 2011: 17). The network of forums proposed in this framework, therefore, seeks to provide a systematic way to address this issue, and is also differentiated by the intention to address a narrower set of issues (informing planning with regards to informality rather than the full spectrum of human settlements or urban issues).
13. In some contexts, where the scale or make-up of the role players might indicate, it may well make sense for only neighbourhood-level project committees and a planning for informality forum (PIF) to be created. Where this is the case, it is important that the learning aspects of the learning forums are explicitly incorporated into the design and functioning of the PIFs.
14. This concept has been usefully detailed in a Sustainable Community Planning Guide produced by Nelson Mandela Bay Metro and Swedish International Cooperative Development Agency. They are defined as ‘planning areas of a size defined by accessibility of services within a maximum walking distance of 2 km or 30 min’ (NMBM, 2007: 9).
15. For example, the community may give input about the type and positioning of toilets within the settlement as well as indicating the best way to install and maintain the toilets.
16. There is an extensive literature on participatory methodologies that describes different options to ensure that these elected representatives and forums remain democratic and accountable to the wider community. In practice, however, it remains extremely difficult to ensure that these spaces do not become points of elite capture or gate keeping.
17. This might mean expanding the existing 3% limit of the total project budget that can be spent on social facilitation (DHS, 2009). Alternatively, it may simply be a case of compelling projects to spend this percentage of their budget on social facilitation.
18. This should form one of the contractual stipulations when appointing project managers. This is an approach that is currently being actively promoted by the National Upgrading Support Programme.
19. Görgens and van Donk, 2012; and see Box 2 in this document.
20. These learning forums represent a somewhat less resource intensive version of the work that Isandla Institute has been doing on the notion of civic/citizenship academies (see Görgens, Masko-Kambala and van Donk, 2013).
21. It should be acknowledged that this is not a scale of planning that is required by legislation and few cities in South Africa therefore do this scale of planning. It is a resource-heavy undertaking to produce mid-level detailed plans, and also requires relatively well capacitated community/civil society representatives who are able to engage substantively with the issues and trade-offs being debated at this scale. A forum at this scale would also be unable to exert control over budgetary flows and would be in danger of producing ‘paper plans’ that have little impact on practice. Nonetheless, as detailed in the Sustainable Community Planning Guide produced by Nelson Mandela Bay Metro, this is potentially a very useful scale at which to plan and make decisions – bridging the gap between city-scale planning instruments such as IDPs and SDFs and more detailed project-level plans (NMBM, 2007: 29).
22. For example, see Swilling, 2008.
23. Ideally this would occur through the creation of a specific grant, administered by COGTA, that is made available to municipalities. However, the Municipal Systems Act provides a persuasive rationale that such spaces should be created irrespective of the
provision of resources from national government. Flexible grants such as the Urban Settlements Development Grant provide additional opportunities to resource such spaces.

24. This idea of resourcing independent organisations to create and facilitate such spaces was originally proposed in the draft of the National Development Plan (NDP) but dropped in the subsequent version of the NDP. For more detail on Isandla Institute’s conception of this, see Görgens, Masiko-Kambala and van Donk, 2013.

25. See, for example, Donaghy, 2009.

26. ‘Political’ is used here in its broadest sense – both in terms of whether these forums would be palatable to political parties (considering they signal the degree of diffusion of authority to non-aligned community groups) as well as palatable to officials and other stakeholder groups capable of reinforcing or undermining the value of such forums.

27. Görgens and van Donk, 2012


29. The primary hurdle, in terms of legislation, seems to be the strict controls in the Public Finance Management Act and Municipal Finance Management Act.
Appendix

Planning for Informality

Exploring the Potential of Collaborative Planning Forums

A Propositional Framework
On the one hand, informal settlements represent the ultimate self-help response to the poor’s desire to be active participants in and beneficiaries of the development of South African cities. In contrast with the lumbering programmes of the state, informal settlements have grown rapidly in all of the major cities in South Africa – from about 300 settlements in 1994 to 2,628 in 20101 – providing access to urban space and opportunities for a great number of people. They represent the agency and adaptive capacity of the urban poor to build lives and neighbourhoods for themselves, often in impossible environments. On the other hand, informal settlements are also simultaneously symbols of the exclusionary nature of our cities and our society – these settlements are produced by a system that is unable to provide genuine opportunities for the majority of South Africans.

The 2010/11 UN-Habitat State of World Cities report argues that successful responses to informality require a strategic and judicious mixing of short-term and long-term interventions which seek to improve the liveability and support the agency of the urban poor while addressing those exclusionary patterns of governance and development that perpetuate and deepen inequality and informality. According to the report:

The successful municipalities took the responsibility for slum reduction squarely on their shoulders, backing commitments with bold policy reforms, and preventing future slum growth with equitable planning and economic policies. Recognition of the existence of slums must combine with long-term political commitment backed by adequate budget resources, policy reforms and institutional strengthening, strong monitoring and scaling up of successful local projects, if slums are to be tackled effectively. In all developing regions, improving the lives of slum dwellers calls for macro-level programmes that include housing infrastructure and finance, improved water and sanitation, and adequate living spaces. However, these macro-level programmes must be associated with micro-level schemes, including micro-credit, self-help, education and employment.2

The complexity and rapidly evolving functionality of informal settlements, therefore, compels the state to partner with the urban poor in planning for the improvement of their settlements as well as assembling sustained
cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral and multi-
stakeholder ‘communities of practice’ to
cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral and multi-
stakeholder ‘communities of practice’ to
cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral and multi-
stakeholder ‘communities of practice’ to
cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral and multi-
stakeholder ‘communities of practice’ to
conceptualise and begin to implement the
kind of equitable planning and economic
reforms that are required to address patterns
of exclusion and inequality.

However, public participation in South Africa
has largely proved to be ineffective in enabling
poor citizens to voice their priorities and
concerns, particularly in ways that influence
the outcome of planning and decision-making
processes. While the progressive intent
behind local government policy and legislation
is not in question, there is a whole host of
factors that militates against the realisation
of these norms and ideals in municipal
governance. This includes, amongst others:

1. The pressure to respond to high levels
of poverty and informality by rolling out
services and achieving set, quantifiable
targets in this respect;

2. The multiple reporting requirements
imposed on local government, which has
instilled a compliance culture that numbs
initiative, innovation and process-oriented
development;

3. The dominant political culture, which
is characterised by a narrow ‘vanguard
politics’, patronage, self-seeking
behaviour, impunity and corruption, and

4. An organisational culture that in some
respects mimics political culture,
devalues the importance of deep
citizenship and is intolerant of extra-state
modes of engagement.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that
levels of trust in local government consistently
rate amongst the lowest when compared with
other spheres of government, and indeed
other institutions (such as the church, political
parties and the media). Between 2004 and
2010, levels of satisfaction with and trust in
local government declined rapidly, from just
below 80% in 2004, to around 55% by 2010,
even dropping below 40% in the intervening
years. This is most disconcerting for the
sphere of government that is seen as closest
to the people.

These realities are recognised in South Africa’s
first National Development Plan, which firmly
posits active citizenship as one of three pillars
driving inclusive development (the other
two being strong leadership and effective
government). This denotes a significant
departure from the current paradigm in South
Africa, which tends to view citizens primarily
as (passive) beneficiaries or consumers of
public goods and services, rather than active
agents of social change. The emphasis on civic
activism has been welcomed by many seeking
to strengthen participatory local democracy
in South Africa, although some reservations
have been expressed about citizens’ state of
readiness to be ‘active’ in the manner envisaged
in the National Development Plan. This has led
many of the conversations to revolve around
building capacity in communities to ensure that
they can ‘exercise’ active citizenship.

Isandla Institute’s view is different: rather than
saying that we first need to ‘equip’ people
before they are capable of exerting citizenship,
we believe in the notion of ‘citizenship as
becoming’ – it is in the actual process of
engagement, debate and community activism
that citizenship is expressed, cultivated and
deepened. In turn, this acts as an important
counterbalance to seemingly entrenched
patterns of unaccountability and impunity in
South Africa’s local governance system.

The framework outlined in this document,
therefore, proposes the establishment of a
network of collaborative planning forums,
drawing on a range of insights from Isandla
Institute’s work on citizenship/civic academies
as well as international experiences with
the formation of such spaces. They are
designed to enable cities to respond to
growing informality and lack of substantive
opportunities for poor residents to be involved
in governance processes. These forums are
intended to enable poor residents to become
directly involved in processes of planning
and decision-making about the development
of their neighbourhoods and the wider city
form. Beyond this, they are intended to
connect different initiatives, structures and
forums from the community level into city-
wide processes; they are also intended as laboratories for developing and testing new ideas and approaches; and as the training ground for sustained and effective civic activism and citizen-centred practice amongst officials. Such a set of mechanisms will undoubtedly strengthen the transparency and quality of local democracy.

1. Understanding the strengths and limitations of the existing system

A comprehensive review of existing weaknesses in the local government system, especially as they relate to the ability of citizens to participate in and influence decision-making within the state, is beyond the means of this document and has been thoroughly explored elsewhere. However, a cross-cutting consensus amongst politicians, technocrats, civil society organisations and researchers has linked the rapid rise in community-based protests over the past few years to deep dissatisfaction with the opportunities for substantive participation in processes of decision-making created by the state and other formal institutions. In the propositional framework we argue that this dissatisfaction can be linked to three key areas of weakness in the local government system:

1. The system of public participation, particularly the ward committee system, in South Africa has largely proved to be ineffective in enabling poor citizens to voice their priorities and concerns, particularly in ways that influence the outcome of planning and decision-making processes.

2. Local government have become increasingly dominated by a culture of compliance and risk aversion which limits its ability to learn effectively and pursue dynamic, contextually-relevant solutions.

3. The systems of planning and decision-making at the city level continue to struggle to effectively reflect the needs of poor residents or transform patterns of development in South African cities to make them more equitable, just and sustainable.

The recent focus of the suggestions from the African National Congress (ANC), the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), and the Presidency on how to address these weaknesses in local democracy has been on systematising, professionalising and expanding the role of ward committees. These suggestions include expanding their composition to better represent community groups; expanding their role to include planning and even the pursuit of small projects; obliging municipalities to consider the decisions of ward committees; ensuring that meetings are held regularly and that ward committees are held accountable to communities; the implementation of a code of conduct and annual reports; the inclusion of municipal administrators and the provision of technical support, where possible; the clarification of the role of community development workers; an increase in funding for ward committees and active oversight from the municipality.

However, as Pieterse outlines very succinctly, the largely technocratic focus on efforts to protect these structures from local political dynamics and to increase their integration into existing governance processes misunderstands the core elements of their weakness. The overwhelming focus on delivery and meeting targets already means that participation is understood in very narrow, instrumental terms – participation is about ‘ticking boxes’ or getting signoff on plans that have already been completed. This often leads communities feeling dissatisfied and disempowered. Furthermore, wards often cover too large an area and too diverse a mixture of communities for individual residents to know how to effectively lobby their ward councillor or effect change. Perhaps more problematically, the politics of local governance, especially in the large cities, renders ward councillors and their committees largely toothless in pressing for local priorities. As Pieterse puts it:

Executive mayors and mayoral committee members dominate most urban governments. Given the size of most municipal councils, and the day-to-day pressures that obsess mayoral committee
members, ward councillors have very little hope of gaining any insight into the ‘big’ strategic decisions of the municipality … So, politically ambitious ward councillors quickly figure out that the most important challenge is to survive tenure relatively intact within the party in order to improve their chances to move across to the proportional representatives list or possibly even ascend to the mayoral committee.\textsuperscript{11}

There is also a sense that communities do not have the skills required to engage in substantive ways with ‘higher order’ planning or decision-making processes. For example, in a speech on the proposed changes to the ward committee system, the Deputy Minister of COGTA, Yunus Carrim, quotes a Department of Planning and Local Government (DPLG) review of Independent Development Plan (IDP) processes that was conducted in 2007, and argued that ‘[c]ommunities often prioritise visible delivery needs, and do not understand the importance of invisible service delivery needs, such as bulk infrastructure’.\textsuperscript{12} Many of these assumptions are reflected in the National Development Plan. This key issue of capacity, even if it is read in its most narrow sense as lacking the technical skills to participate in long-term strategic planning, remains relatively under-addressed in the new plans. Some combination of the following proposed changes to the ward committee process is expected, it would seem, to result in the necessary capacity either being available or created: attendance of meetings by municipal administrators, where possible; attaching community development workers to ward committees; the provision of technical support to ward committees by the municipality, and creating oversight and learning systems through the establishment of a Public Participation Unit in the Speaker’s Office of each municipality.\textsuperscript{13}

This reformulation of the design and role of ward committees is, however, unlikely to address some of the key challenges. First, it largely leaves unaddressed the issue of scale, which is a key component of ensuring that genuine, widespread and engaged participation and deliberation is possible for community members.

Second, the effort remains to try and isolate ward committees from the dynamics of local politics which, while perhaps an ideal scenario, remains unlikely in most communities where all of the incentives encourage rather than dissuade the use of these structures in local factional or political contests (particularly if additional resources are directed to participants or placed under the control of such structures).

Third, the ability of ward committees to have a substantive impact on wider municipal decision-making processes remains severely curtailed. Compelling municipalities to consider their inputs, as is currently being proposed, is unlikely to change the more powerful party-political dynamics that render these spaces largely powerless.

Fourth, their expanded role as a ‘clearinghouse’ for all of the different types of issue-specific participation (such as community policing forums, housing processes and so on) also seems to leave this problem largely unaddressed. It reduces participation in these spaces to ‘participation for the sake of being consultative’. It also leaves unaddressed questions about how effective a ward committee can be at addressing and synthesising the work of a multitude of issue-specific bodies (each with their own dynamics and potentially contradictory outputs) without focused support.

Fifth, it does not propose a coherent approach to addressing the capacity shortages that limit the effectiveness of such bodies. Furthermore, where these are acknowledged, they are most often conceptualised as a lack of technical skills. In our recent work on citizenship/civic academies, we demonstrated that informed community activism requires a range of technical, organisational and leadership skills that, in combination, enable communities to self-organise and effectively advocate for self-identified objectives. In the current conception of ward committees, community members will be given an opportunity to display such skills, but these spaces are unlikely to offer communities the opportunity to acquire these skills. As we argue above, our contention is
that these skills are best developed in spaces of deliberation and contestation which are linked to specific projects or outcomes. That is to say, it is inappropriate to expect that these skills can be honed exclusively outside of state-created spaces. Deliberation about particular projects or outcomes presents an excellent opportunity to strengthen the type and distribution of skills within communities so that they are able to participate meaningfully in state-created democratic spaces.

Isandla Institute is therefore sceptical about the ability of the ward committee system to play the substantial role in expanding local democracy that is intended by its framers. Current efforts at reform do not adequately account for some of the key reasons they have struggled to be effective in the past. Pragmatically, however, we recognise that the ward committee system enjoys substantial political and institutional support and that existing initiatives, as outlined above, probably mean that the system will be in place for the foreseeable future.

Our proposal therefore focuses on the actions the state can make to strengthen and enrich local democratic spaces, and which will strengthen the governance aspects of ward committees, but it is premised on an understanding of the limitations of this system. In the conception of this propositional framework, therefore, ward committees are understood as political spaces that are intended to facilitate processes of accountable, representative democracy in communities. They become spaces for reporting back and holding councillors responsible; spaces that make contention and contestation transparent to the local community. They are made up of committees that represent different segments of the local community, who are elected to expose the ward councillor to a wide variety of voices and perspectives (as is currently the intent but rarely the practice). However, as outlined above, local democracy requires more than the right container or forum in which contestation can occur:

Those doing the inviting often take their own ways of seeing and doing for granted. Those who enter invited spaces may consciously or unconsciously mimic the kinds of behaviour they have witnessed in these and other spaces, in order to gain voice and influence. Simply creating a space does not mean that the space will not be filled with old ways of working, entrenched hierarchies, disabling assumptions and relations of power that reproduce the generally undemocratic institutions of the family, community and polity. Breaking with these patterns takes intensive investment in processes that restore to people a sense of their own agency as well as enable those in positions of power to recognise the limiting effects of their own beliefs and conduct.15

Local democracy requires spaces in which individuals and groups can ‘find their voice’ so they can maximise the opportunities offered by these ‘invited spaces’. It is towards a better description of these types of spaces that we now turn.

2. Identifying the key features of collaborative planning forums

In line with existing legislation,16 there are three primary sets of opportunities for the state to embed a culture of participation:

1. More effective citizen oversight of bureaucratic and political decision-making;
2. Establishing processes of participatory decision-making in which communities have a direct and clear role in negotiating the outcomes of projects, and
3. The co-production of communal assets and spaces.

This spectrum of opportunities recognises that citizens have varying degrees of interest and capacity to engage with processes of deliberation and decision-making within the state. However, there are two key assumptions that need to be addressed in order for these
opportunities to become significant and impactful:

1. They presuppose the ability of the state to create opportunities for citizen participation that can have a substantive impact on outcomes. This requires a new level of sophistication in the design of planning and decision-making processes – it is not simply a matter of inviting community members into existing processes. This requires officials who understand the value that community members can add to such processes, and will structure engagements to maximise the contribution that participants can make in such processes.

2. They presuppose a level of capacity in community members to be full and equal participants. To be successful in advocating for particular courses of action or options, community members require leadership skills, political savvy, technical skills and capabilities and tacit knowledge about the bureaucratic processes in which they are involved.

We have explored these in more detail elsewhere. The core assertion derived from this analysis is that efforts to strengthen the current system of local democracy in South Africa require the construction of shared spaces in which capacity, within both the state and communities, can be created. Furthermore, we contend that this is not just a matter of more extensive or more elaborate training processes.

These skills and capabilities can only be honed through the rough-and-tumble of deliberation, negotiation and collaboration between politicians, officials, civil society groups, professionals, private sector interests and citizens. We are under no illusions about the complexity of advocating for the productiveness of contestation. The power dynamics within communities are often highly uneven and in flux, and the introduction of additional stakeholders (with the promise of resources) can aggravate and deepen these patterns of contestation. Nevertheless, it is only through making explicit the different value claims, conflicts in priorities and differences in perspective that more equitable decisions can be made. As Bäcklund and Mäntysalo explain, pursuing this form of ‘agonistic planning’ requires the

\[\ldots\text{active search for such vehicles of expressing opinions that would allow one to present passionate views without being construed as an enemy\ldots} \]

This view of democracy paves the way to a culture of planning more tolerant to the coexistence of and conflicts between different meaning systems. In agonistic planning the stakeholders may agree on certain issues, and respectfully agree to disagree on others. Even if the conflicts were to be found as irresolvable, the actors may still come to mutual agreement on the procedure – how the differences in opinion are to be dealt with.\textsuperscript{18}

Drawing on extensive experience in South Africa, Adlard reaches a similar conclusion: ‘[e]very major project is likely to involve and attract [an array of] characters. A lesson worth learning is to anticipate them, obtain broad support for a simple set of project values and principles before anything else and then defend them to the hilt’.\textsuperscript{19}

This requirement for ‘networked spaces’ – shared spaces in which negotiation and contestation between varying stakeholder groups can occur – necessitates that they have opportunities to work together on concrete problems in the search for mutually satisfying solutions. We have explored the characteristics of these ‘networked spaces’ in some detail elsewhere\textsuperscript{20} but it is important to emphasise that their credibility is closely tied to their ability to:

1. Influence the outcomes of a specific project;
2. Facilitate democratic decision-making;
3. Expand the interest and capacity of communities to participate in the production of outcomes, and
4. Effectively leverage the technical skills needed to achieve more socially relevant solutions to problems.
It is equally important to emphasise that these spaces should be designed to grow and deepen incrementally (beginning with a focus group of participants working on a limited number of outcomes and then systematically expanding). Local and international experience strongly suggests that successful and sustainable change, especially as it applies to acquiring a range of tacit skills and amalgamated modes of organising and acting, requires stakeholders to form working relationships over a period of time, incrementally expanding the focus of the working relationship and the range of included stakeholders. Ultimately, one of the most distinguishing characteristics of these spaces should be their intention to develop working relationships that are able to sustain engagement between key stakeholders beyond specific products or governance processes.

Finally, they have to be carefully conceptualised to ensure that they are supporting different scales of planning and decision-making, and that the outcomes emerging from these different scales interact with and ‘feed’ one another. A deep weakness in the way in which governance operates in South Africa is the disconnect between project-level activity and the processes of planning and decision-making that are occurring at the city scale: ‘[w]ith the advent of unicities in South Africa, decision-making is not devolved to the most local scale. However, participation often happens at the local level of the ward. The interaction between these two scales is key to determining the degree to which people influence policy’. Gains that can be secured at a project level, therefore, need to be linked to struggles that are (or should be) occurring at the city scale. The experience of the Brazilian housing forums has shown that the creation of spaces at the city scale in which the state, community groups and other key role players negotiate a cross-cutting policy and public investment decisions, even where civil society groups may be weakly organised at the city scale, led to substantive impacts for poor communities. Reviewing evidence from the Brazilian example, Donaghy argues that it was the formation of the institution itself that was strongly correlated to an increase in pro-poor outcomes: ‘[g]iven the overall positive impact of municipal councils on program adoption, in areas where civil society is not strong, councils may have the greatest impact’. In a South African context, where civil society is often fractured and relatively weak, this would seem to be a further strong rationale for the creation of such collaborative planning forums. Pieterse explains the potential impact of such a forum to help galvanise civil society activism beyond individual projects or neighbourhoods:

One of the really curious puzzles in South African politics is the general absence of civil society formations or coalitions that operate at the larger urban scale. This is peculiar because the metropolitan system of governance paves the way for re-articulating public claims at a metropolitan scale because that is where decisions are considered and made. This is even more acute given that fiscal redistributive decisions also get to be made at that scale and to an insignificant degree at a district or ward basis. Yet, despite this institutional construction of the urban democratic systems, civil society organisations across class and interest lines seem intent to restrict their activism to the neighbourhood level. As a result these formations seldom reflect the capacity or language to connect local problems to broader, city-wide issues of resource allocation and structural inequality.

In sum, while these spaces need to be grounded in concrete action, they need to explicitly balance the need for action grounded in the immediate priorities and needs of communities (thereby embedding their relevance for all stakeholders to participate) with their ability to contribute to longer-term processes of spatial transformation.
thereby deepening their understanding of the motivations and positionings of one another. Creating forums to facilitate learning is an imperative part of constructing a functional community of practice. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder\textsuperscript{25} suggest that the efficacy of such spaces can be improved by careful attention to some of the key pragmatic design features, outlined in Box 1.

**3. Conclusion**

Despite the aspirations expressed across innumerable pieces of legislation, policies and guidelines, local government processes of planning and decision-making remain inaccessible and alien to the majority of South African citizens. This framework proposes a network of collaborative planning forums directed at improving the participation of informal settlement residents and those living in vulnerable conditions in state-driven processes of development. The design of these forums is premised on the idea that the participatory development of these communities requires structured spaces for negotiation and deliberation, the development of improved and new capacities in the state, in communities and in civil society groups, and the emergence of new forms of working relationship between the state, communities and other key partners. Furthermore, these benefits are explicitly designed to strengthen existing formal spaces of participation. Through these evolving networks of relationships and expanding pools of capacitated and engaged organisers and practitioners, South African cities will be able to foster new forms of collaboration and innovation capable of addressing the immediate needs of their citizens, while taking concrete action for more equitable, just and sustainable cities.

### Box 1: Creating productive communities of practice

- Communities of practice tend to be dynamic with different stakeholders introducing and negotiating different interests, goals and modes of engagement, and so they must be designed to evolve naturally.
- The success of such groups is often dependent on finding a regular rhythm or pace for meetings, engagements and activities in order to sustain vibrancy and the interest of the community.
- Recognise that these communities of practice will inspire and require different levels of participation, each of which should be accommodated. These will include a core group that typically takes a leadership role and participates intensely, a group that are active participants in the community but do not take on leadership roles, and a peripheral group that remains relatively passively involved but who will learn from their involvement.
- The community of practice must not become an exclusive or inward-looking group; instead its evolving ideas should be brought into open dialogue with outside perspectives.
- The community of practice should seek to create both public and private community spaces for interaction. While many of the activities of the group should be done in public spaces for all to see and share, there may be appropriate moments for members of the community to meet separately to consolidate perspectives (planners have long recognised the need for marginalised or vulnerable groups to have independent spaces so as not to be drowned out by the wider group).\textsuperscript{26}
- There should regular opportunities for participants in the community of practice to have explicit discussions about the value and productivity of their involvement in the group.
- The activities of the community of practice need to combine familiar structures and ideas with radical or exciting opportunities to stretch the thinking of the group.
Endnotes: Appendix

1. NUSP, 2011
2. UN-Habitat, 2011: x–xi
3. Van Donk, 2012
4. For a complete overview, see Van Donk, 2012.
5. NPC, 2012
6. Isandla Institute prefers to use the term ‘civic academy’ to shift away from the exclusionary connotation embedded in the ‘citizenship’ notion. This is particularly relevant in the South African context, where xenophobic sentiments prevail and relationships between nationals and foreign nationals can be volatile.
7. For example, a collection of different contributions can be found in Isandla Institute’s 2008 book entitled Consolidating Developmental Local Government or in annual reports produced by the Good Governance Learning Network on The State of Local Governance in South Africa. For specific, detailed research on the problems with ward committees see Smith and de Visser, 2009. The state has also completed a comprehensive set of reviews including the Auditor-General’s ‘2010/2011 Local Government Audit Outcomes’ (released in 2012), the 2011 National Treasury’s ‘Local Government Budget and Expenditure Review’, the 2009 Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs’ ‘State of Local Government in South Africa’ and the Local Government Turnaround Strategy reports. Attempts have also been made to address these problems and some of the barriers to a strong local government and democracy.
8. The other notable effort to reform local government was the Local Government: Municipal Systems Amendment Act (MSA) which was passed in 2011. The Act aims to remove undue influence of political parties and political office-bearers over the administrative function of a municipality.
11. Pieterse, 2013: 20–21. For analysis grounded in specific experiences of participatory planning and budgeting in the City of Johannesburg, see Winkler, 2011.
13. Carrim, 2011: 11–12
14. Smith and de Visser, 2009
15. Cornwall, 2008: 47
16. The injunction in Section 152 of the Constitution ‘to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities’ and ‘to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in matters of local government’ has been systematised into a range of instructions in legislation to involve local communities in planning and decision-making. These pieces of legislation include the Municipal Structures Act (1998), the Municipal Systems Act (2001) and the Municipal Finance Management Act (2005) as well as a range of injunctions and opportunities in other legislation.
17. This is further elaborated on in Isandla Institute’s contribution to the 2013 The State of Local Governance publication, which is produced annually by the Good Governance Learning Network (GGLN), a national network of NGOs concerned with participatory local democracy in South Africa. See Görgens, Masiko-Kambala and van Donk, 2013.
19. Adlard, 2011: 22
20. Görgens and van Donk, 2012
21. For example, Cornwall, 2008; Mitlin, 2008; Adler, 2011
22. Ballard, 2008: 168
23. Donaghy, 2009: 25
25. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002: 51
26. Fraser, 2008
References


Isandla Institute acts as a public think tank with a primary focus on just, equitable, sustainable and democratic urban habitats. At the core of our work is the goal of advancing the right to the city, only attainable when urban residents are able to exercise full citizenship and participate in planning and governance. Isandla Institute’s mission is to advocate for the eradication of poverty and the realisation of human rights through innovative and effective strategies at the interface of state and civil society, including the following: promoting dialogue and exchange, policy research, advocacy, public education, institutional support, network coordination and information dissemination.

We envisage cities and urban space in which:

- Cities are governed through accountable, democratic and capable systems, and all citizens enjoy the right to shape the city and influence substantive outcomes;
- City resources and institutional arrangements are organised and used to promote social inclusion, equity, poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods, work opportunity, redistribution and safety;
- Citizens are enabled to exercise their rights and citizen agency is recognised, valued and supported;
- Resources are used and managed in a sustainable, responsible and just manner bearing in mind environmental constraints, opportunities for more appropriate use and the needs of future generations.

Our organising idea is The Right to the City. The concept coheres around the collective right of citizens to engage in both place making and city making. It also prioritises the social function over exchange function and collective use over individual use. The Right to the City is both an integrative concept and a practice area. Our other practice areas are governance, urban land and livelihoods.