

Improving Housing, Homeownership and Living Conditions through Informal Settlement Upgrading in South Africa: Beneficiaries' Perceptions Over Nearly Thirty Years in Welkom, Free State

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Abstract

From a housing policy perspective, South African government adopted several programs including informal settlement upgrading as a mechanism to provide adequate housing and improve homeownership amongst poor households in informal settlements. The history of informal settlement upgrading in South Africa is well documented both in research and academic literature. However, this body of scientific research is mostly in a form of a one-off case studies while long-term (longitudinal) research studies are very few, unusual and at times, exceptional. This historic scarcity of both quantitative and qualitative long-term evaluation and profiling of poor communities in upgraded informal settlements created an opportunity for our nearly 30 years longstanding empirical research studies in the mining town of Welkom (Free State) to fill this “*missing research link*” and *knowledge gap*. Against this background, we use empirical data to critically analyse the changing lived experiences and developmental needs and/or priorities of project beneficiaries in an upgraded informal settlement area over a period of nearly thirty (30) years. This paper uses empirical data that was gathered longitudinally through four (4) household surveys (1998, 2008, 2014 and 2021) and in-depth interviews in a former poor black township area (Thabong) near a mining town called Welkom in the Free State. Through a systematic random sampling, a sample of two hundred (200) households was selected and interviewed in each of the years. The surveys and questionnaires were completed with heads of households. In-depth interviews were conducted with thirty (30) study participants. In each of the years (with exception of 1998), two (2) were key informant interviews with senior municipal officials and one (1) estate agent. Twenty-seven (27) were with ordinary residents who are project beneficiaries in the area (Thabong near Welkom).

Keywords

Informal settlement upgrading, housing, living conditions, longitudinal research studies.