

Perceptions of Hostel Dwellers The Conversion of Hostels into Family Units

Zwelibanzi Mpehle

UNISA, University of South Africa

Doi:10.5901/mjss.2012.v3n12p214

Abstract

The establishment of hostels during the apartheid era was seen as immediate and long term solution to accommodate black male migrant workers who were primarily from the Southern Africa region, who were contracted to work in the mines and industries. These hostels were built next to townships that were designated as black residential areas located, far from the cities and towns that were inhabited by whites. These camps offered cheap and affordable accommodation for the poor migrant workers who lived in forlorn poverty. The initiative of the National Department of Housing in launching the Public Sector Hostels Re-Development Programme with the initial funding of R325-million to change the deploring, congested and filthy hostels into a clean habitation suited for occupation by families was embraced by hostel inmates as a critical government's muscle to integrate them into local communities and making them more homely. This article argues that, although the government's effort in converting hostels into family units was seen as the right step in restoring human dignity and social fibre in muddled families, there are obstacles that make dreams of thousand hostel dwellers not realised in good time.

Keywords: Hostels in South Africa, Human Settlements, City of Tshwane

1. Introduction

Hostels as transit camps created by the South African apartheid regime centuries ago were utilised to accommodate mainly male migrant workers who left their families and homes behind in rural areas and neighbouring countries in search of employment in the cities. The institutionalisation of hostels as residential places for single men in South Africa during the apartheid era came as a result of the mineral revolution that took place in the late 19th century. The revolution gave rise to a migrant labour system that saw the rise of cheap labour from within the borders of South Africa and neighbouring countries. The cheap labour that was provided by migrant workers, men that were recruited from over twenty regions, who left their families in poverty stricken rural areas in search of work in the developed urban areas was seen as a solution for the demanding work in the mines, farms and factories that were owned by whites. The main areas that supplied such

labour were Lesotho, Mozambique, and the former Transkei¹ that contributed to over sixty percent of the entire labour force (Harington, McGlashan & Chelkowska 2004: 65).

The entrenched migrant system that became a permanent feature in South Africa ensured that "racial segregation of land" was the feature of the time, and those male migrants that were under the employment of whites who owned businesses were not allowed to permanently reside areas designated for whites, especially in small town and big cities. This gave rise to hundreds of thousands of African men living in crowded single-sex dormitories or hostels (O'Malley 2010: Online). The arrangement had a very negative social impact on families that were directly and indirectly affected by such migration, as women and children of hostel dwellers were not allowed to visit hostel premises. Figures provided by Umzamo, a non-governmental organisation that works on the redevelopment of hostels, estimated that in the year 1997 the South African migrant labour hostels were accommodating a little more than a million people (Thurman 1997: 43). For the purpose of this study the Mamelodi hostels in the Tshwane Metropolitan will be discussed.

2. Brief Background of Mamelodi

According to Ntuli (2003: Online), the township was established in 1953 and is situated about 20km in the eastern part of Pretoria (Tshwane). It was built for black residents that were forcefully removed from other areas of the city because of the Group Areas Act that was introduced in 1950, that ensured Blacks reside far from the city. It is one of the Tshwane townships that is poverty stricken but with a high population; about 45% of residents are unemployed, and therefore are economically inactive. Its population is estimated at about one million in a radius of 25 km². The Mamelodi hostels were built in 1954 to accommodate male migrant workers, mostly from Limpopo Province. These hostels have been the property of the City of Tshwane, and had a capacity of 8 000 residents, but accommodated residents in the excess of 10 000 - 12 000. Quite a number of units have been demolished and residents relocated to other hostels around the area. The conversion of these hostels into family units started in 2000 but was not very successful due to poor implementation of the National Housing Policy and lack of consultation with relevant stakeholders by the municipality. Although the City has made progress in building 98 new family units at a cost of approximately R40million, a unit costing more than R400'000, there are about 9 500 residents that still need to be taken care of at a cost of more than R600 million. Currently there are 98 hostel units that have been converted into family units, and it is planned by the municipality to have 3 000 units converted in by 2014. It was envisaged that by the end of 2010 there will 148 units completed, and approximately 300 temporary residential units completed to accommodate residents currently occupying blocks to be demolished. Van Garderen and

¹ Transkei was one of the areas designated to Xhosa speaking South Africans, this being their homeland during the era of apartheid in the south-eastern region of South Africa. The area was established to promote the policy of separate development instituted by the apartheid regime.

Du Plessis (2010: Online) state that the demolition of one part of the Mamelodi hostel commenced on the 15th and the 16th November 2009 in which residents witnessed the hostel roof being forcefully removed, in the process exposing them and their belongings to the to the very cold wind accompanied by rain, and the residents' property was damaged in the process. The residents took the City of Tshwane to the Northern Gauteng High Court to prevent the City from demolishing the hostels. Although the City of Tshwane argued that it was not eviction but relocation, an interim order by the court to stop the eviction was issued on the 18th November 2009, citing that the removal of residents was illegal and not procedural. The argument was also based on the Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act ("PIE"), which states that any eviction has to be sanctioned by a court. In their case the residents also alluded to the fact that they were not properly consulted on their relocation, and therefore felt left out of the process. The City of Tshwane had to pay the legal costs and restore the removed roof

3. Literature Review

Statistics released by United Nations in 2002 estimated the number of migrant workers, both men and women, in Africa in the 21st century was at 20 million, and the South African mines were the biggest employer, followed by factories and farms. The number of migrant workers from South Africa and its neighbouring countries like Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, and Mozambique in 1902 was 174,402 and increased to 230,687 and 267,894 in 2002 and 2006 respectively. In 2012 the number of migrant workers in South Africa were estimated to be 3 255 406, mainly from the South African Development Community (SADC) region.² Approximately 63% of the number were unskilled or semi-skilled South African contract workers who moved from rural areas in search of better job opportunities (Kanyenze 2004:5). To ensure that the migrant labour provides a flexible cheap work force, at the same time the mining industry making huge profits, the government made certain that African migrant workers were working under highly controlled labour system, and had to sign a contract before assuming duty. The migrant workers had to survive on meagre salaries to keep their rural homesteads running (Lehulere 2008: Online).

Migrant workers who were often young and uneducated were separated from their families, friends and homes because of the restrictive laws such as the Urban Areas Act and the reference book that strictly controlled movement, and ensured that these workers are not accompanied by wives and children to cities, thus adversely affecting the social fibre of communities. Initially migrant workers were men, but the growth of industry in urban areas and the removal of restrictive laws saw families united. The temporary movement of South Africans for the purposes of work changed and was "... replaced by the more permanent movement and settlement of people at or nearer to their places of

² SADC region is formed by Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

employment" (Richmond 2010: 1). It meant that women also had to leave their homes in search of greener pastures, and served mainly as domestic workers and farm labourers for the affluent white families (Michigan State University 2005: Online). The 2002 migration pattern showed that of the 12 136 migrant cases, 67% were driven by work and 6% were looking for work. The mostly affected ages were between 15 and 55 (Statistics South Africa 2006).

The two studies conducted by Kok and Collinson in 2005 revealed that the permanent migration of individuals happens when: (a) their expectations in their current become lower than those in respect of an alternative place of residence; (b) they are influenced by the information received about the alternative place of abode from relatives and friends living there; (c) they become sufficiently dissatisfied with their lives in the current area of residence; and (d) high poverty levels in the (local government) area where people reside are an inhibiting factor in the decision to move away permanently. The study further revealed that the younger unmarried adults between the years 18–29 migrate as compared to their older, married counterparts, and that those who have migrated before are likely to migrate again. Although there are those who migrate because of higher education attainment, there are few of them who would use hostels as their dwelling place (Statistics South Africa 2006).

According to Hartleb (2005: Online) this rapid urbanisation caused a fast growing housing demand and therefore caused pressure on the government to deliver more than it could afford. By 2004 the urban growth rate was 4%, two times higher than that of Latin America and Asia. There were already 2,4 million informal households, and 800 000 were on government's waiting list. The three identified areas greatly affected by rapid urbanisation and house shortages were Johannesburg, Tshwane and Ekurhuleni.

4. Data and Methods

This article is based on a qualitative and quantitative study that was conducted between 2010 and 2011 in the formerly black township of Mamelodi situated in the eastern parts of the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. The available literature on hostels and housing obtained from journals, books, thesis, and electronic media served as valuable sources of secondary data. The primary data was obtained through questionnaires. To ensure reliability of the research and its findings it was imperative for the researcher to use questionnaires that were directed to 25 occupants of the new family units and 25 prospective occupants of the new family units who were still occupying old hostels that were randomly selected. Of the 50 distributed questionnaires 40 were returned, providing a response of 80%. The questionnaires were divided into two sections: Section A was on biographical details of the respondents such as gender, occupation, income, number of dependants, age, language, and education level. It was imperative to have this information as it informed the researcher of the socio-economic background of the respondents. Section B had both closed and open-ended questions. The latter was designed to allow respondents to elaborate on information provided that was not

captured in the closed-ended questions. The researcher administered 20 questionnaires, and the 30 remaining questionnaires were administered by two research assistants (each administering 15 questionnaires) who were trained on how to ask questions on the questionnaires.

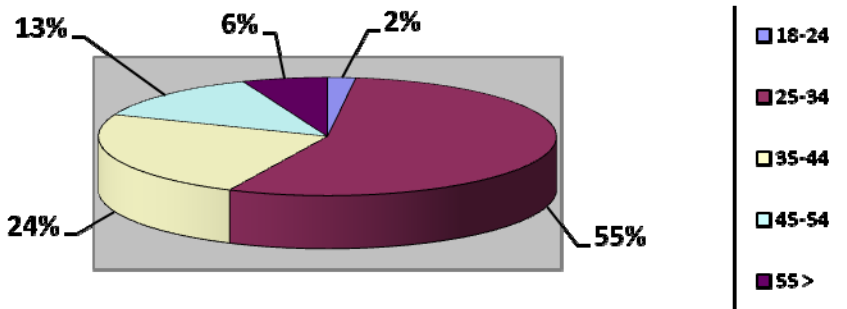
5. Analysis and Interpretation of Results

For purposes of this article only specific questions pertinent to the topic were analysed and interpreted.

5.1 Respondents by Age

As shown in Figure 1, about 55% of the respondents were between ages 25 and 34, and of the ages 35-44 were 24%. The majority indicated that they came to the urban area in search of job opportunities, and would prefer to stay permanently. This concurs with the survey conducted in 2006 by Statistics South Africa (mentioned earlier on), which suggests that urbanisation is common among young people of the ages 18-29 who not only seek jobs but also permanent residence in urban areas. Only 6% were 55 years old and over, and these indicated that they intend going back to their rural homes when they reach the age 60 (retirement age).

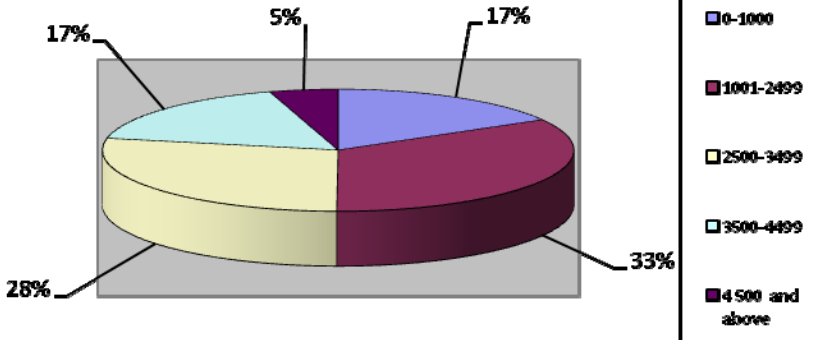
Figure 1: Respondents by Age



5.2 Respondents by Monthly (Rands) Income

About 33% of residents earn between R1 001 and R2 499 (approximately \$113 and \$282) per month, with 28% earning between R2 500 (\$282) and R3 499 (\$396), and 17% earning between R0 and R1 000 (\$113) per month. For the reason that the majority do not earn much, it becomes a challenge for them to afford the repayment of the new family units; as a result the culture of non-payment is prevalent.

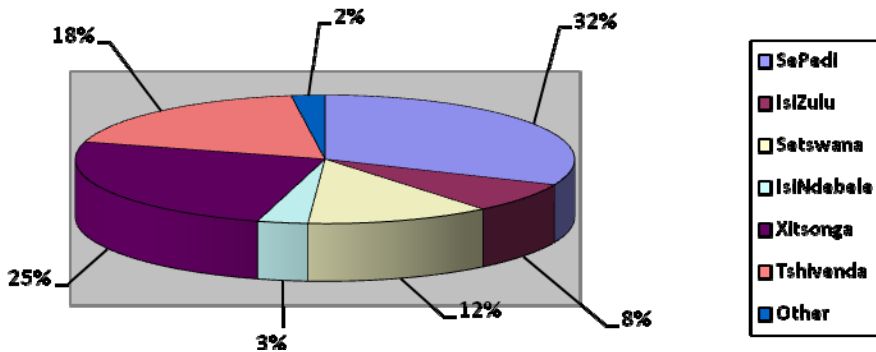
Figure 2: Respondents by Income



5.3 Respondent by African Language

The majority of hostel residents are migrant workers who come from Limpopo, and therefore the three languages mostly spoken by hostel residents is SePedi (32%), XiTsonga (25%) and Tshivenda (18%). There are Mozambicans that have been here for long acquired South African citizenship, and therefore add to the number of the Xitsonga speaking residents.

Figure 3: Respondents by home language

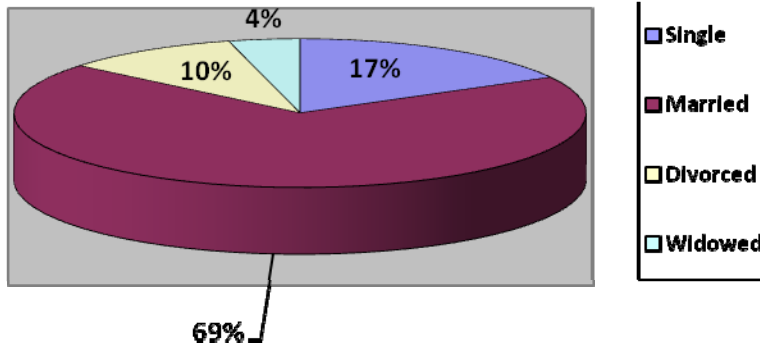


5.4 Respondents by Marital Status

According to Figure 4 below, 75% of residents are married, although the majority of them do not live with their families. One of the reasons mentioned is that the family units that have been built so far are limited in number. However, it became apparent that because of the challenge of unemployment, and 61% earning less than R5 000 (\$565), some that

occupy family units cannot afford paying for these units, and therefore end up letting them out to raise money.

Figure 4: Respondents by Marital Status



6. The Need to Convert Hostels into Family Units

On the question whether there was a need to convert hostels into family units, the majority of respondents, about 94%, expressed the fact that the conversion of hostels into family units was long overdue. They felt that hostels were destructive to families and social fibre of societies. The appalling conditions of hostels were not conducive for human habitation and outdated. The rubble of dirt, the unattended and often blocked toilets, the filthy kitchens, the long uncut grass that breeds rats and often used as toilets by other hostel dwellers, and the leak of sewage pipes that cause sewage waste "dams" are a health hazard not only to the residents but also to the surrounding communities. The lack of electricity makes life difficult for hostel dwellers that have to look for wood in order to make cooking fire. The absence of electricity also is a problem as it makes hostels a den of robbers at night. On the other hand the remaining 6% were of the opinion that the hostel redevelopment project was not necessary because they have houses in areas where they come from, and therefore could not afford to maintain two houses.

7. Community Participation

About 72% of the respondents, who were mainly hostel dwellers that have not received units as yet, complained about their participation in the process of conversion of hostels into family units. Although they knew that hostels were going to be converted to family units, they were not properly consulted on the issue of when the hostels were going to be demolished. The hostels are in an inhabitable state; the toilets have no running water,

resulting in blockages and an unbearable stench, the leaks in the showers render them unusable, the refuse in and around the hostels piles up, which may be seedbed of diseases, a number of broken windows, and a roof that is leaking. The challenges in the area include the refusal of residents to move out of the hostels. Although the municipality established the Local Negotiating Group that is chaired by ward councillors to enhance communication between the municipality and prospective occupants of the units, communities affected by the move still feel they are not thoroughly consulted.

8. Fairness in the Allocation of Units

There is an alleged corruption by officials who do not follow the registration list when assigning units to residents. 65% of respondents believe that councillors who are responsible to allocate residents new units give first preference to those who have money to bribe them. One respondent claimed that some officials were paid up to R1 500 by individuals to jump the queue, and also that the units were given to relatives and friends of officials to occupy, and that these relatives and friends pay less than market related rentals. When the pilot project started in 2000, according to another respondent, many hostel residents were moved out and promised to be brought back after the conversion was completed. That did not happen; instead the improved units were allocated to different people that were not even hostel residents, not even in the waiting list. The displaced residents have to stay in old hostel blocks that do not have basic services. The action of the municipality prompted residents to take the municipality to court, as they felt that the prescribed processes in the allocation of renovated units were not followed.

9. Transparency and Equity in Awarding Contracts

51% of residents alluded to the fact that the awarding of contracts to contractors has not been transparent, as some of the contractors are either friends related to municipality officials, and that local women were not fairly represented in the empowerment; out of fourteen emerging contract companies awarded the tender to revamp the hostels, there were only four contract companies owned by women.

10. Temporary accommodation Displaced Residents

97% expressed the fact that the programme turned to be disruptive to lives of the intended recipients of the new units. Residents of the hostels that were supposed to be demolished have to be moved to nearby hostels, and those that have been moved already complained of overcrowding. Again, residents of old hostels of units resist moving to the new units because of the reduction of number of occupants of the unit. In the old hostels 12 people would share a room, but each new unit houses one or two families, leaving the rest displaced with no accommodation. It is not only about space but finances also as explained by one official who explained that finding alternative

accommodation to house the displaced hostel residents proved to be an expensive exercise for municipality that is already operating in the negative.

11. Culture of Non-Payment

The culture of non-payment of rent makes it difficult for municipalities to recover the money that was used to build these units, and also to raise more revenue to build more units, and has negative impact on the maintenance and provision of services such as water and sanitation, electricity and refuse disposal. The non-payment has also caused the private sector investors not to contribute anymore to the project. Some of the reasons for non-payment cited by residents are unemployment and inability to afford maintaining more than one household. According to recent statistics the unemployment rate in the three townships is at 25, 3%, and hostel residents form a bulk of this percentage. 30% of the respondents indicated that they were either not employed or do not have a fixed job. As far as affordability is concerned, some residents mentioned the fact that they have houses in rural areas, and therefore find it difficult and expensive to run and maintain two households. They would have preferred to either rent the units at a very low cost, occupy these units free of charge or even given the units free. Even though they had agreed to pay for rental at an agreed amount, they discovered later that they could not afford because of either the loss of jobs or demands from families left in rural areas.

12. Revamping Maintenance Costs

As expressed by the municipality official, the programme turned to be costly because of the devaluing of the rand that caused the rate of inflation to soar. The revamping process was not only about subsidising beds but also included the replacement of roofs, repairing the drainage system and broken windows, replacing of unwanted grass and weed by planting lawn and using bricks in paving other portions of the hostel grounds, and the construction and replacement of storm water drains. The culture of non-payment of rent makes it difficult for maintenance. This survey revealed that 22% of those occupying new units do not want to pay rent as they own houses in rural areas

13. Conclusion

This article was aimed at evaluating the progress made in the conversion of hostels into family units programme in the Tshwane Metropolitan area, namely Mamelodi. The article gave a background on the establishment of hostels in the apartheid era, and the impact the migratory laws had on families and how the apartheid laws influenced the socio-economic conditions of individuals and communities where these hostels were built. The conversion of hostels into family units by the present government, in line with the principles of democracy as enshrined in the Constitution, was an attempt to bring back the inherent dignity that needs to be respected and protected. The National Department

of Housing in addressing the housing crisis in the country took upon its shoulders to ensure that the transformation of hostels into family units is implemented, thus the introduction of The Hostels Redevelopment Programme that serves as the Policy for the Upgrading of Public Sector Hostels. However, the implementation of the programme met with some challenges that have led to its delay as far as completion is concerned. Some of the challenges identified by the research are alleged corruption by officials in the allocation of units, the unexpected inflation and non-payment of rent by residents that led to the escalation of revamping costs and the lack of maintenance of the units that have already been built, the displacement of residents due to demolition of some of the old units, and lack of proper stakeholders' participation.

In conclusion, for the redevelopment programme to be successful there is a need for the officials to be transparent in the allocation of the new units to prevent suspicion and allegation of corruption and nepotism. It is also imperative that the monthly income of individuals who are supposed to be occupying the units be taken into consideration to avoid non-payment of rent by the occupants. Again, consultation and involvement of the intended recipients of the new units is crucial. The Local Negotiating Group has to work hand in hand and consult thoroughly with hostel residents in every matter that affects them, and that the consultation and engagement should be within the parameters of the law and all housing legislation.

References

- Harington, J. S., McGlashan, N. D., and Chelkowska, E. Z. (2004). A century of migrant labour in the goldmines of South Africa. *The Journal of The South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy*, 104 (2), 65-71.
- Hartleb, T. (2005). Rapid urbanisation 'a serious problem'. *Mail and Guardian*, 14 October 2005.
- Kanyenze, G. (2004). African Migrant Labour Situation In Southern Africa. Paper Presented at The Icfu-Afro Conference On 'Migrant Labour', Director: Labour And Economic Development Research Institute Of Zimbabwe (Ledriz), Nairobi, 15-17 March 2004
- Jenkins, H. (2009). State of the province Address by the Northern Cape Premier at the Fourth Democratic Provincial Legislature, Kimberley. [Online] Available: Available: http://www.northerncape.gov.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=95:state-of-the-province-address&catid=44:speeches&Itemid=54 (June 12, 2009)
- Kok, P. and Collinson, M. (2006). Migration and Urbanisation in South Africa. Pretoria: Printing and Distribution Statistics South Africa.
- Lehulere, O. (2008). Introduction and background to the 2008 Annual Conference of IALHI. A Concept Note at The Conference on the "The Heritage of Migrant Labour in South and Southern Africa", Director: Khanya College, Johannesburg, 09-13 September 2008.
- Michigan State University. (2005). South Africa Overcoming Apartheid and Building Democracy: Migrant Labor. East Lansing: Michigan State University Centre for Humane Arts. [Online] Available: <http://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/multimedia.php?id=4> (May 03, 2012)
- Ntuli, D. (2003). City Of Tshwane: Briefing to the Portfolio Committee on Housing. [Online] Available <http://www.pmg.org.za/docs/2003/appendices/030611tshwane.htm>. (October 19, 2010)

- O'Malley, P. (2010). The Mining Industry, Migrant Labour and Hostels. Johannesburg: Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Dialogue. [Online] Available: <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/g/03lv02167/04lv02264/05lv02303/06lv02317/07lv02318/08lv02323.htm>. (January 29, 2012).
- Republic of South Africa. (2008). South Africa. Social Housing Act 2008 (16 of 2008). Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa. (2006). Migration and Urbanisation in South Africa. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.
- Richmond, S. (2010). Temporary Labour Migration in Post-Apartheid SA. Briefing Paper 242. South African Catholics Bishop's Conference, 23 September 2010. Cape Town: Parliamentary Liaison Office.
- Thurman, S. (1997). Umzamo: improving hostel dwellers'accommodation in South Africa *Environment and Urbanization*, 9 (2), October 1997, pp 43-61
- Van Garderen, J. and Du Plessis, L. (2010). LHR to seek contempt order against Tshwane for destruction of Mamelodi hostel. Pretoria: Lawyers for Human Rights. [Online] Available: <http://www.lhr.org.za/news/2009/lhr-seek-contempt-order-against-tshwane-destruction-mamelodi-hostel> (May 05, 2011).

