

VOLUNTARY HOUSING DELIVERY: THE CONTRIBUTION OF PARTNERSHIPS TO THE SUCCESS OF A COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATION (WASSUP) IN DIEPSLOOT LOW-INCOME COMMUNITY, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA ..... 284

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**KEYWORDS:** housing, partnerships, public-private partnerships, voluntary housing, WASSUP

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South Africa continues to face a persistent housing challenge. This article examines the success of a housing partnership initiated by WASSUP, a housing-based voluntary organisation operating in Diepsloot, a low-income community north of Johannesburg. Findings showed that from its inception the organisation had gained grassroots support, because it targeted the felt housing maintenance needs of the community. Local leadership and other non-profit organisations (NPOs) in the community developed a sense of ownership, as they were involved in defining the relevant needs and the establishment of WASSUP. The authors recommend purposeful support for housing partnerships through financial and advisory support, among other aspects.



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### **INTRODUCTION**

Housing is one of the fundamental human rights that is important for people's wellbeing. The failure of the African National Congress (ANC) government to fulfil its 1994 pre-election promise to deliver affordable quality housing to all its citizens impacts negatively on the ability of the urban poor to realise their essential housing-related socio-economic rights (Hohmann, 2013; Mosselson, 2017; Noyoo & Sobantu, 2018). Rolling out low-income housing remains a perpetual challenge in South Africa, with the housing gap estimated at 2.1 million (Sobantu, Zulu & Maphosa, 2019; Tomlinson, 2015). Over seven million South Africans live in informal settlements, others in backyard shacks, some with no running water, sanitation and electricity (Noyoo & Sobantu, 2018; Sobantu *et al.*, 2019; Tomlinson, 2015). To mitigate the persistent housing challenge, the post-1994 government initiated a massive subsidy-based housing programme through the 1994 White Paper for Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), while the 1994 White Paper for Housing was aimed at giving effect to the RDP. Through these policies the government aimed at delivering "viable, integrated settlements where households could access opportunities, infrastructure and services" (Republic of South Africa, 1994: 6). While the RDP delivered houses at scale, it has faced numerous criticisms. Criticisms arose largely from the top-down way in which the programme was managed (Huchzermeyer, 2001; Khan & Thring, 2003; Noyoo & Sobantu, 2018; Sobantu *et al.*, 2019). Sobantu *et al.* (2019) argue that the RDP missed an opportunity to galvanise the citizenship, especially in terms of what relates to the black urban poor, the majority of whom continue to live in dehumanising environments. Patel (2015: 75) also pointed out that the broader RDP programme continues to "miss a twin opportunity: to address the challenge of the country's apartheid past and meet the demands of an emerging economy and democracy".

At the top of the list of criticisms was that the process lacked pro-poor planning and implementation (Charlton & Kihato, 2006; Huchzermeyer, 2001; Khan & Thring, 2003; Noyoo & Sobantu, 2018; Pithouse, 2009). The programme lacked two major requirements, namely deliberate collaboration between various housing delivery stakeholders, and a bottom-up approach to planning and implementation (Charlton & Kihato, 2006; Huchzermeyer, 2001; Khan & Thring, 2003). Consequently, the heterogeneous needs of the diverse urban poor population were undermined because of this top-down implementation. Furthermore, many RDP beneficiaries complained that the houses are very small and of poor quality (Charlton & Kihato, 2006; Huchzermeyer, 2001; Manomano & Tanga, 2018; Zack & Charlton, 2003; Zungumane, Smallwood & Emuze, 2012). Hence, there are calls for people-centred delivery pathways that are informed by an in-depth understanding of the urban poor's housing

challenges and the heterogeneous needs of contemporary urban communities (Khan & Thring, 2003; Noyoo & Sobantu, 2018; Pithouse, 2009: 11; Turner, 1972). The authors are aware that the 2004 Breaking New Ground (BNG) policy was promulgated to address the challenges associated with the RDP housing delivery programme. However, Noyoo and Sobantu (2019), Pithouse (2009), Sobantu *et al.* (2019, p. 9) and Tomlinson (2015) argue that the challenges are systemic, requiring political will from the government to address them. Greyling (2015: 1100) notes that “waiting for the state-provided homes is normal … and [an] intergenerational condition.”

Lack of grassroots participation in housing delivery has been cited as a huge challenge. Pahad (2009) emphasised that community participation is an essential barometer for democratisation. Patel (2005) and Pithouse (2009) supported voluntary organisations because of the likelihood their engendering social justice and democracy through their collaborative efforts, which incorporated community voices. About voluntary organisations, Patel (2005: 107-108) posited that:

They are made up of non-profit voluntary welfare and development organisations … raise funds independently … and operate as autonomous entities … have expertise, infrastructure and other resources that could complement public resources.

Dunn (2000: 59-61) and Purkis (2010: 6) referred to voluntary housing as low-cost housing initiatives provided by independent, not-for-profit social businesses in a complementary role to the government’s efforts. Borrowing from the wider concepts of volunteering and voluntarism, this sector is known for utilising the pluralistic approach to housing delivery by teaming up with government and other non-profit stakeholders (Ibem, 2010; Ikekpeazu, 2004; Krishna, 2003)

WASSUP, an acronym for Water, Amenities and Sanitation Services Upgrade Programme, is a housing-based voluntary organisation operating in sections that are largely informal settlements in Diepsloot, north of Johannesburg. It is involved in housing and neighbourhood maintenance in Diepsloot. In housing delivery, maintenance is a key management function, which is as important as the ‘brick and mortar’ physical structure (El-Haram & Horner, 2002; Turner, 1972; Wong & Yeh, 1985), as buildings naturally succumb to wear and tear as they get older. The neglect of the physical structure and the surrounding environment can attract and sustain criminal activities, affects property values and can lead to rental boycotts by tenants (Cozens & Tarca, 2016; Malpass, 2000; Van Wyk & Jimoh, 2015). Tenants derive a sense of ownership and pride from their well-maintained housing environment. As a housing manager, Octavia Hill paid close attention to issues of building and human settlement maintenance, arguing that deferred maintenance poses safety, security and health risks to the tenants and their children (Clapham, 1997). The death of three children in Davis Street in Doornfontein, Johannesburg on 9 April 2018 (Shange, 2018) and two others in Kennedy Street in Durban on 21 May 2018 (Wicks, 2018) are both related to non-maintenance of the perimeter brick walls that collapsed on these children. Another six-year-old child died after drowning in an open manhole in Limpopo on 14 January 2019 (Matlala, 2019), further highlighting the importance of the maintenance of human settlement infrastructure.

With very little support from local government (LG), WASSUP managed to obtain funding and advisory services from other NPOs and provincial government agencies to maintain water taps, drainage systems and toilets. There is, however, a need for effective and efficient partnerships in the delivery of these maintenance services. This study explored the contribution that partnerships have made to the success of WASSUP in terms of the maintenance of housing-related services.

## HOUSING PARTNERSHIPS

Numerous housing challenges, especially in the developing world, exceed the capacity of local public resources, making public-private partnerships (PPPs) essential. Housing partnerships are an established initiative across the globe. Davis (1986) traced the origins of housing PPPs in the United States of America, with David Rockefeller convincing the business sector to collaborate with other stakeholders to avert the 1960s urban crisis. Resolving the bankruptcy of New York City, addressing the Chicago

urban riots and rehabilitating the waterfront in Baltimore, in the 1960s are attributed to collaborative efforts by PPPs (Davis, 1986; Holman, 1968). Mitchell-Weaver and Manning (1991) indicated that PPPs then spread to the developing world, mainly through the influence of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as a panacea for the region's developmental challenges. Elliot (1987) and Marais (2011) argued that North-South relationships were hinged on PPPs, with states collaborating with each other and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Ibem (2010: 206) posited that collaborations in the provision of low-income housing have been successful in Turkey, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, to mention a few countries. Since social development was adopted as a developmental approach to social welfare in South Africa in 1997, partnerships have become central in harnessing resources, skills, expertise and knowledge for social welfare provision. For example, social housing is a collaborative effort between the state at its different tiers and the social housing institutions (including housing associations and cooperatives) registered with the Social Housing Regulatory Authority. The state is also able to reach out to needy children, older persons, people with disabilities (PWDs), HIV-infected and affected persons and families through its collaborative efforts with non-profit organisations (NPOs).

In South Africa PPPs are regulated through the 1999 Public Finance Management Act and the 2003 Municipal Finance Management Act. These pieces of legislation provide guidelines on how government must establish partnerships with other stakeholders (Republic of South Africa, 2007). Since then, the government has been at the forefront of creating an enabling environment by targeting supply and demand constraints, while inviting private and non-profit partners to participate in the delivery of affordable housing. Social housing is an example of such a partnership, which provides innovative tenure options to the tenants (Kung'u, 2009; Noyoo & Sobantu, 2018). The growing acceptance and popularity of housing PPPs is driven by the government's lack of political will to address the housing issue in South Africa (Khan & Thring, 2003; Rust, Zack & Napier, 2009) and the general incapacity of state institutions (Aziz & Hanif, 2006; Ibem, 2010; Ikekpeazu, 2004; Krishna, 2003). South Africa has had a persistent housing shortage: 1.5 million in 1994 (Huchzermeyer, 2001; Republic of South Africa, 1994) and over 2 million in 2015 (Mirika & Mainza, 2016; Sobantu *et al.*, 2019; Tomlinson, 2015). In terms of maintenance, RDP houses have been crumbling as a result of poor workmanship and lack of regular attention (Charlton & Kihato, 2006; Huchzermeyer, 2001; Manonmano & Tanga, 2018; Sobantu *et al.*, 2019; Zack & Charlton, 2003; Zungumane *et al.*, 2012) largely as a result of the state's lack of capacity (Sobantu *et al.*, 2019; Pithouse, 2009). Aziz and Hanif (2006), Ibem (2010) and Ikekpeazu (2004) shared that in Nigeria and the rest of the developing world the fact that housing delivery and public housing maintenance do not receive meaningful attention from the state drives PPPs to direct their own resources towards low-cost housing.

Consonant with the social development approach to social welfare, articulated in the 1997 White Paper for Social Welfare, PPPs are known to provide space for community participation. Midgley (2001: 272) added that the White Paper resonated with RDP policy in its emphasis on grassroots participation in community development programmes. Because of the involvement of the people for whom development initiatives are undertaken, PPPs are therefore highly likely to target poverty and address the housing needs of the poor (Krishna, 2003). It is not surprising, therefore, that PPPs are known for the efficient allocation of resources and institutional accountability, because of this participatory culture. In the same vein, Mirafat (2004) argued that strong urban partnerships are the basis for efficient service delivery, translating to a stable, safe and economically productive urban environment. The strength of PPPs also lies in the expertise, knowledge and skills that each participant brings into the housing delivery partnership, with each partner concentrating on the specific aspects of housing in which its strengths lie (Ibem, 2010). More importantly, in PPPs participants share risks and benefits as they each concentrate on their areas of expertise (Davis, 1986; Ibem, 2010; Marais, 2011).

Partnerships come in different configurations. Ibem (2010) presented four common forms of PPPs, namely public and non-profit sectors, the public commercial private sector, non-profit and commercial private sectors, and public commercial private and non-profit private sectors. Marais (2011: 51)

presented two other forms of partnerships, one of which emphasised economic development involving small-to-medium enterprises and another which is oriented towards cross-pollination of ideas between large and small-to-medium enterprises. As a non-profit organisation, WASSUP is in the first category, collaborating mainly with other non-profit organisations in Diepsloot and the public sector comprising government agencies in the City of Johannesburg (COJ). Davis (1986) argued that this kind of collaboration helps in reconfiguring the role of government, giving it new evolutionary insights into its functions in ensuring the realisation of socio-economic rights of the urban poor. Beyond being just tax-generators and tax collectors, both businesses and government respectively start collaborating on how they can create jobs, provide housing and sanitation, provide health care services, and overall how to revitalise the city and make it inclusive for all racial and income groups (Davis, 1986).

## **VOLUNTARY HOUSING**

As already defined, voluntary housing refers to low-cost housing initiatives provided by independent, not-for-profit social businesses in a role complementary to government efforts (Dunn, 2000; Purkis, 2010). The broader voluntary sector is known to possess social and technical skills to meet the heterogeneous housing needs of the urban poor. In South Africa the most common organisations driving voluntary housing delivery are some of the social housing institutions (SHIs) in the form of cooperatives and HAs, also registered as non-profit organisations. A. Diephout (personal communication, February 10, 2017) shared the view that because of the highly technical and complex steps involved in social housing planning and implementation, it is sometimes impossible to involve the beneficiaries. However, once construction is completed and tenants have moved into their units, there are mechanisms to ensure bottom-up participation in governance and other activities. Beneficiary participation is key to generating social capital, which is an important ingredient in maintaining social sustainability in human settlements. For example, in housing that caters for older persons, it is highly likely that “social capital and successful aging” and a climate that fosters solidarity and connectedness of families will be promoted (Cannuscio, Block & Kawachi, 2003: 395; Cohen & Phillips, 1997; Cohen & Pyle, 2000). Such human settlements are characterised by high ownership of neighbourhoods, enhancing collective care to vulnerable groups (Hertzel & Szymanski, 1981; Purkis, 2010). This is because voluntary housing strengthens families and communities by embodying participatory practices (Hertzel & Szymanski, 1981), which in turn open “new social arrangements that accelerate the pace of development [and] guarantee the satisfaction of people’s needs” (Cohen *et al.*, 2004; Noyoo, 2015: 169).

Of critical importance, voluntary housing and voluntarism have competitive advantages over other housing delivery pathways and engender a developmental approach to housing delivery. The strategies resonate with the goals of social development, which are to build viable inclusive communities through integrating the voices of the poor. According to Cepel (2012, Clark (1993) and Krishna (2003), the sector utilises the advantage of proximity to its beneficiaries. Proximity reduces unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape associated with traditional normative housing delivery avenues Khan & Thring, 2003; Mosselson, 2015, 2017). Secondly, most of these institutions are smaller, making administration and communication (both internal and external) fairly efficient (Cepel, 2012). Decision-making in smaller organisations is quicker and this translates into shorter turnover periods in addressing beneficiaries’ problems. Thirdly, most of these entities enjoy a local support base as the team members are mostly from the community. This has a huge effect in targeting the core housing delivery and other related challenges that the team members face daily (Krishna, 2003).

As already pointed out, very little is known about the value of voluntary housing delivery (especially in small community-based initiatives) and hence it has not been vigorously pursued in the country (Mosselson, 2015; Noyoo & Sobantu, 2018). It is not common to have community-based voluntary organisations in South Africa that focus on providing “*housing plus services*” in human settlements. Coined by the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), “*housing plus services*” “incorporate services provided by people for whom service delivery [is intended], not property management”

(Granuth & Smith in (Cohen, Mulroy, Tull, White & Crowley, 2004). This study's focus is on the services associated with housing, such as drainage, water supply and toilets.

## **WASSUP IN CONTEXT**

Launched in 2007, WASSUP first emerged as an initiative to combat solid and liquid pollution into the Jukskei River, which runs across central Diepsloot. Diepsloot, which is located 40 kilometres north of Johannesburg (Himlin, Engel & Mathoho, 2005), is 12 square kilometres in size, comprised of over 60 000 households with an estimated population of 350 000 people. In terms of housing typology, Diepsloot has a mixture of housing types – it has bonded houses (Extension 3), RDP houses (Extensions 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11) and informal settlements (Extension 1, 12 and 13). The extensions with shacks lack the essential adequate public amenities such as toilets, water, sanitation, refuse and sewage reticulation services and, on average, approximately 25 families share one toilet. The residents in these areas have had to contend with intermittently bursting sewer pipes, a feature not exclusive only to Extensions 1, 12 and 13 but to the entire Diepsloot. Water shortages and unconventional solid waste disposal often lead to pollution in the area. Furthermore, roads are not properly maintained, and challenges with public transport and street lighting are also common in Diepsloot. It is a paradox that the urban poor who lived in inhuman environments in the apartheid era still occupy inadequate housing, even in the democratic dispensation. In the midst of growing poverty (Statistics South Africa, 2017) that technically hinders the urban poor from upgrading their settlements, it is crucial to encourage pluralistic strategies where the beneficiaries would assume ownership and team up with other grassroots stakeholders in improving their human settlement environment (Turner, 1972). WASSUP is a locally-founded organisation, whose interest is maintenance in housing delivery. Turner (1972) emphasised that housing delivery transcends brick and mortar structures to include housing and human settlements maintenance. With government acknowledging that it is battling to roll out low-cost housing, institutions such as WASSUP occupy a central role in maintaining the urban poor settlements. As a registered co-operative, all the members reside in Diepsloot and, since its founding in 2007, the organisation has inspired both local and government agencies to take responsibility for the maintenance of services with regard to housing, such as water and sanitation services. The aim of the study was to explore how partnerships had contributed to the success of WASSUP's voluntary housing delivery activities.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

An explorative qualitative research design was used in the study to explore the contribution of partnerships for the success of WASSUP as a voluntary housing organisation. Creswell (2009) argued that it was not possible to get this insight through a quantitative approach (Babbie & Mouton, 2012). Purposive sampling was used to select the participants, based on the aim of the study (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2011; Rubin & Babbie, 2011). The sample of 11 participants consisted of employees from WASSUP and institutions that work closely with the organisation. As shown in Table 1, five participants were selected from WASSUP, two from local government (LG) and one from each of the four following organisations: Joburg Water (JW), Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA), Sticky Situations and Diepsloot, Arts and Culture Network (DACN). LG, JW, JDA, Sticky Situations and DACN have collaborated with WASSUP since it was founded. The criteria when selecting participants was that they should be from organisations that are in partnership with WASSUP and that they were available and willing to share information about their collaboration. The participating organisations have also been with WASSUP in Diepsloot and have been instrumental in supporting the organisation from the outset. Participation was voluntary, and participants signed consent forms after having been taken through the information sheet, which was written in simple language. Furthermore, it was explained to the participants that they could withdraw their participation from the study at any time with no consequences and that there were no material benefits for taking part. Ethics approval was also gained from the Department of Architecture and Planning's Ethics Committee at the University of the Witwatersrand.

**TABLE 1**  
**DETAILS OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

Affiliation	Number of participants by gender: Male (M) Female (F)		Total number of participants	Number of years known/with WASSUP
	Male	Female		
Local government (LG)	1	1	2	7
WASSUP	3	2	5	7
Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA)	0	1	1	5
Joburg Water (JW)	0	1	1	5
Diepsloot, Arts and Culture Network (DACN)	1	0	1	7
Sticky Situations	0	1	1	7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>

(N=11)

All the organisations render important contributions to the Diepsloot community, especially in Extensions 1, 12 and 13. According to Johannesburg City Network (2018), DACN is a registered NPO operating in Diepsloot whose main aim is to conduct awareness campaigns on topical issues through using the arts. Use of entertainment as a medium of education, referred to as *edutainment* (Torrebruno & Garzotto, 2008), has been applied in teaching as blended learning (Yusof, Daniel, Low & Aziz, 2015). JDA is an agency of the City of Johannesburg tasked with implementing the development projects of the city. It is a key institution of the Johannesburg's Growth and Development Strategy (Johannesburg Development Agency, 2018). JW is also another entity of the City of Johannesburg, formed in 2000 and tasked with providing water and sanitation services in Johannesburg (Joburg Water, 2018). Sticky Situations plays a pivotal role by providing continuous training and advisory support on operational and administrative issues (Sticky Situations, 2018). Lastly, Local Government (LG) plays a major role in the development of the country's democratic dispensation (Purnell, Pieterse, Swilling & Woolridge, 2002). It is mandated to provide space for grassroots participation in governance and development (Purnell *et al*, 2002). This is aimed at ensuring effective service delivery.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted, guided by a thematised interview schedule (Creswell, 2009). The following questions, among others, were posed to the participants:

- What circumstances led to the formation of WASSUP?
- What are the key focus areas of WASSUP?
- Would you kindly explain why you focus on Diepsloot's Extension A.
- Who are the stakeholders that you work with?
- Kindly shed light on your role in the partnership?
- What is the outcome of such a partnership?
- Describe the relationship that you share with your stakeholders?
- How has the community received the organisation and the services that you render?

Maxwell (1998: 85) pointed out that thematising an interview schedule functions as "a form of pre-analysis that simplifies the analytic work required." Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility and control by the researcher during the interview process (Babbie & Mouton, 2012). It was also possible to clarify unclear responses and observe non-verbal behaviour in semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, Creswell (2009) posited that semi-structured interviews are rooted in grounded theory as

they allow for reformulating and categorising the interview structure according to the participants' responses. It took six weeks to collect data and all the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. In the thematic content analysis the steps set out by Braun and Clarke (2006) were used to analyse data.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study only had participants from the WASSUP organisation itself and partners who worked closely with the organisation. Because of the time limitation, the community members did not take part in the study. The voices of the community members would have contributed to more nuanced views on the partnerships. The findings were limited to the WASSUP organisation in relation to its partnerships and cannot therefore be generalised to other voluntary housing organisations. However, this provides an opportunity for further research studies that will investigate the perceptions of the grassroots community members.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

To shed more light on this organisation and the relationships it has forged with its partners, this section discusses the findings of the study based on three key themes that best capture these elements. These themes are the emergence of WASSUP, the roles of WASSUP, and the partnerships the organisation has formed in its housing delivery roles. Verbatim responses are used to illustrate important aspects arising from the interviews and integrated with the literature.

### The emergence of WASSUP

The study found that WASSUP is a voluntary non-profit entity, duly registered as a cooperative with the Department of Trade and Industry (Dti). As an idea, the organisation was conceptualised in 2007, launched in 2009 and finally registered in 2011. Findings showed that WASSUP is driven by partnerships, receiving support from other community-based organisations (CBOs) in the area, the LG, government agencies and more importantly, the community members of Diepsloot (WASSUP, 2012).

As a co-operative, WASSUP focuses on the maintenance of infrastructure such as repairing toilets, water taps and drains. The literature indicates that most housing delivery partnerships and other community-based initiatives are founded mainly to respond to the service delivery gaps (Cepel, 2012; Davis, 1986; Ibem, 2010; Krishna, 2003). Housing-related delivery gaps in South Africa are amplified by service delivery protests that have become a common feature in the country (Alexander, Runciman & Maruping, 2017; Mukhuthu, 2015; Msindo, 2017). It is because of WASSUP's response to housing maintenance gaps in Diepsloot that the organisation continues to receive support from its partners.

The findings also showed that the emergence of WASSUP is closely linked to the arrival of the Global Studio (GS) team in Diepsloot in 2007. GS is an activist group of international research students, mainly in the field of architecture, planning and community participation (WASSUP, 2012). While in Diepsloot, the students experienced the lack of sanitation, burst water drains and vandalism of housing infrastructure. The GS team initiated an in-depth participatory study, supported by the community leadership, to discuss these challenges confronting the residents of Diepsloot and explore ways to mitigate them. Topping the list of concerns were the vandalism of toilets, water taps and drainage. Exacerbating this was the lack of maintenance of the remaining infrastructure by the local municipality. In an area with a population of over 15 900 people and a density of 1 076 people per square kilometre (Himlin *et al.*, 2005), one toilet was being shared by an average of 20-25 families, with water taps breaking down frequently. The challenges are illustrated by the following responses:

*"It was becoming very clear that we had to do something, the government up until now has forgotten about us. At this time, it is disheartening to find people queuing to use a toilet and carrying buckets of water from other places because of vandalism."* (Interviewee B)

*"We thank Global Studio for coming and encouraging us to form WASSUP. The idea of the organisation was appealing from the beginning because it was addressing the challenges that*

*we have as we also stay here. At the end of the day, we can't say WASSUP was formed by Global Studio, we were involved in its formation and it belongs to the community and it's the pride of Diepsloot." (Interviewee A)*

The above excerpts show that the community welcomed the process of collective engagement to initiate a local solution to the challenge of maintaining the housing environment in Diepsloot. It is evident that when community members are involved in needs identification, projects are more likely to be legitimised, and hence become sustainable because of grassroots support (Ife & Tesoriero, 2002; Mathekga & Buccus, 2006; Pahad, 2009). As explained by Cepel (2012) and Krishna (2003), voluntary organisations are more inclined to engage with the community to develop the support base for their sustainability. Integrating the grassroots voices into development planning and implementation is central to social development and a barometer for democratisation (Pahad, 2009: 21; Patel, 2015). Atibil (2012), Cepel (2012) and Thomas, Muradian, Groot and Ruijter (2010) pointed out that most voluntary organisations are known to target poverty and community challenges effectively. This study found that WASSUP's emergence and success were linked to its focus on addressing the "felt" needs of the residents in Diepsloot. This is illustrated by the following response from a participant from JW:

*"We were all inspired by WASSUP, an organisation made up of people that wanted to change their own situation where they stay. This is a welcome initiative because it is positively impacting the residents on an area that has been neglected for long. This is what people here need; dignity, water and sanitation for their children and a clean environment. Even us as a government agency, we saw a credible institution to channel our support to the people of Diepsloot because they are addressing issues that affect most communities, especially here in Diepsloot." (Interviewee I)*

From the above verbatim response, it is evident that the decision by WASSUP to focus on housing maintenance attracted support partners. The importance of housing cannot be over-emphasised – it is a basic human right close to people's hearts as it undergirds all social, economic and political relationships (Charlton & Kihato, 2006; Cohen *et al.*, 2004; Hohmann, 2013; Huchzermeyer, 2001; Noyoo & Sobantu, 2018; Turner, 1972). Realising the performance of the organisation, JDA, Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) and other local NPO partners such as DACN extended their support. The following response explains the reasons for this kind of support.

*"We were deeply touched by the wonderful work that this organisation was doing in this area. They did very well in repairs and in refuse and waste disposal. Even though it wasn't not registered, there was no reason we couldn't support them informally in terms of advice and training. Our relationship continued well after it was registered when we gave them funding as part of our corporate social responsibility." (Interviewee I)*

As already alluded to, WASSUP was only formally registered as a primary cooperative with the Department of Trade and Industry (Dti) in 2011 under the Cooperatives Act of 2005 after it had been operating from 2009. In explaining this disparity, the participants from WASSUP noted that they lacked the requisite knowledge about the registration processes and procedures, as shown below:

*"We did not know anything about registering this thing, all we had passion for was to make our housing environment clean and reduce cases of vandalism. That's all we wanted. But we had challenges when we needed support from other players – they said they only assist registered organisations, but they didn't tell which government department we had to register with." (Interviewee A)*

Noyoo and Sobantu (2019) posit that the housing challenge in the country requires new theorisations, insights and practical steps in favour of partnerships. The government needs to acknowledge efforts by different actors and extend the necessary advisory and financial support (Magadla, 2013; Noyoo & Sobantu, 2019). The challenges expressed in the above excerpt reflect the common experiences of many other non-profit organisations and partnerships. Magadla (2013: 3) echoed that most voluntary

CBOs “neither understand the professional jargon nor do they know how to begin.” From the findings, WASSUP’s successful registration in 2011 did not result in any meaningful assistance to the organisation and the partnership from DtI, despite the positive impact of the organisation in housing maintenance. In his analysis of voluntary organisations, Atibil (2012) found that many of them lack pre- and post-registration support. This lack of support contradicts the government’s rhetoric that it will assist cooperatives as they are central to facilitating wealth redistribution through targeting poverty and creating employment (Republic of South Africa, 2005). Furthermore, struggling CBOs and partnerships undermine the promotion of a pluralist culture of service delivery, which is articulated in the RDP and the White Paper for Social Welfare (Noyoo, 2018; Patel, 2015; Sobantu *et al.*, 2019).

### **The role of WASSUP**

The emergence of WASSUP and its subsequent focus and roles seem to have been based on a unanimous community decision. Inclusive of the WASSUP members, all 11 participants from partnering institutions concurred that WASSUP was formed primarily to address the perpetual service delivery gap – repairing water taps, clearing blocked toilets and drainage. These activities are integral components of housing delivery. By the time this study was conducted, WASSUP’s operations were confined to Diepsloot’s Extension 1, servicing 140 toilets. The housing typology in these extensions is informal settlements and the residents use community points to draw water and access toilets. The infrastructure often breaks down as a result of non-maintenance or vandalism by residents. On average, WASSUP repairs eight toilets per day. The organisation does not erect new toilets and taps, but maintains the existing infrastructure. This involves mainly replacing water cisterns and clearing drain blockages. The latter is the agreement that WASSUP has with its partner, JW. The study found out that blockages that are further away from the toilets are reported to Joburg Water, because they can be complex, requiring more skills and expertise. The following responses capture WASSUP’s primary goal.

*“Basically, we repair water and sewer drains, water taps and toilets. These can be maintenance or replacing broken components. We have an agreement with Joburg Water not to carry out major works that are far away from the toilets. We’re still in Extension 1 but we’re planning to go to other areas in Diepsloot.” (Interviewee B)*

*“We’re very happy to team up with WASSUP as an agency. We have an agreement with them not attempt any blockages that are a far from the toilets as these are often complicated. There is now better communication between WASSUP and the agency’ technicians who come anytime to unblock complicated blockages. To say the least, blockages are attended to quicker and this saves a lot of water.” (Interviewee I)*

As exactly described by Davis (1986), Ibem (2010) and Marais (2011), WASSUP makes use of its proximity to quickly repair minor faults, while JW brings in advanced technical skills to attend to complicated cases. Krishna (2003) postulated that most voluntary organisations are successful because of their proximity to the communities that they serve. Findings further showed that WASSUP also collaborates with DACN in organising and conducting environmental awareness campaigns using edutainment techniques. Through these forums, DACN and WASSUP educate the community on the need to steer collective responsibility in taking care of public infrastructure, fighting crime and putting into practice responsible refuse disposal means. Because of these symbiotic relationships, community leadership and agencies such as JDA and JW also participate and are now more visible in the community, generating social capital. Participants from WASSUP and local government indicated that crime rates as well as vandalism have been on the decrease because of these campaigns. Invariably, such success stories enhance the dignity of the community and foster neighbourhood collegiality (Anderson & Hoff, 2001; Cepel, 2012), as reflected in the Interviewee K’s response below:

*“As an agency, we’re happy to be supporting WASSUP as part of our corporate social responsibility. It was a very easy decision to extend support because of its impact in improving housing conditions here, thefts and vandalism has decreased, the environment is*

*visibly clean, community members are more involved because of what WASSUP is doing. I also like their involvement in community educational awareness programmes.”* (Interviewee K).

### **The partnership**

WASSUP’s emergence and success are attributed to the partnership between WASSUP and institutions in Diepsloot and with some government agencies. Amongst these organisations are some that assist with funding, expertise and advisory services, while WASSUP collaborates with others in community-related campaigns, on-going events and other activities. As each partner concentrates on its area of expertise in voluntary housing, risks are minimised and hence are cost-effective and efficient (Davis, 1986; Ibem, 2010, Ntema & Marais, 2010; Patel, 2015; Smit, 2006). The following are some of the key institutions with whom WASSUP partners.

***Diepsloot Arts and Culture Network:*** As a CBO in Diepsloot, DACN focuses on conducting awareness and educational campaigns on a range of issues such as crime, vandalism and refuse dumping. Findings from the study indicated that the partnership between WASSUP and DACN is of a special mutual nature that dates back to the inception of the former. As an organisation that had long been established in Diepsloot, DACN extended advisory support to WASSUP and helped link it with possible funders. When WASSUP received funding from the Development Bank of South Africa in 2009, DACN’s bank account was used to receive this cash injection. At that time WASSUP had not yet been registered as a formal entity and hence was not able to open an account with any formal bank. The following excerpt illustrates this relationship:

*“We work very well with other organisations in Diepsloot. Our relationship, especially with DACN, has been very fruitful, cordial and mutual. We got our funding through DACN’s bank account when we were still not registered. It’s easier to attract people through entertainment and that is where we educate them. DACN helps us with edutainment and when we are doing our campaigns and we thank the artists involved with a few cents for helping us.”*

(Interviewee C)

It emerged that DACN and WASSUP operate in a rather complementary fashion. As explained by Interviewee C above, DACN employs *edutainment*, a strategy that combines education and entertainment using street performances, workshops and graphical paintings emphasising issues that affect the community, such as vandalism, crime and the need to dispose of waste appropriately. The findings also discovered that, depending on the availability of funds, WASSUP usually pays stipends to DACN artist members who participate in such campaigns, a move that Interviewee C said *“incentivises our youth, helping them to buy their costumes.”* To be effective in the events, the two organisations collaborate in planning and share skills, expertise and costs. The two attend each other’s meetings as equal partners, as shown below:

*“Our relationship with WASSUP is good. We attend their weekly meetings and we also work hand-in-hand in most of the community events. We all work for our community and it’s encouraging to collaborate and share skills with WASSUP. Our roles are the same, we educate through arts because we all need a better Diepsloot. In the process, people know what WASSUP does through our edutainment. Most of the community members don’t even know who belongs to WASSUP and who is for DACN and this is due to us being together in most events and we work towards the same goal.”* (Interviewee F)

The two verbatim responses above show collective effort by WASSUP and DACN in their endeavours to improve not only housing maintenance but also the other social aspects in Diepsloot. Purcell (2009) postulated that there is a labyrinth of social, political and economic relations that need to be negotiated and maintained in human settlements, the success of which depends on stakeholders working collaboratively.

**Local government:** To shed light on WASSUP's relationship with LG, this section uses interview responses from the two participants from LG and those from WASSUP. Mathekga and Buccus (2006) emphasised the need for local authority support in community projects. The two participants from LG stated that they both knew WASSUP from its inception. Furthermore, they indicated that the decision by WASSUP to focus on housing maintenance made the organisation very appealing to LG from the outset and this is chiefly because poor sanitation had been a serious concern in the area for long. As illustrated by Cohen and Philips (1997) and Hartman (1998), poor housing delivery, or the lack of it, results in loss of dignity and sense of community, family life and neighbourhoods. Hence the LG's support for WASSUP as shown in the response below:

*As local government, we've been behind WASSUP since it was started because it assists a lot here in this community. We support it because we've acknowledged that we're facing huge challenges with providing proper housing, sanitation and even water here in Diepsloot. I'm actually happy to see that WASSUP still exists and it's still sticking to what it was formed for." (Interviewee G)*

Continued support is also shown by officials from the ward councillor's office by attending WASSUP meetings. As an LG leader, one of the participants shared that he had been personally attending major WASSUP meetings or sent a representative when he had other commitments. Furthermore, he pointed out that WASSUP members form an integral component of the community and hence he even invites them to other ad hoc stakeholder planning sessions for major events. Further insights on their relationship are expressed below:

*"I'm always there in their campaigns with DACN and in their weekly meetings if I'm not committed. They come to me for advice and when they don't have funds I always give them emotional support. WASSUP is an important organisation and as government we think about it every time we have major event because of its influence in the area." (Interviewee G)*

*"We get along very well with local government. They attend to our meetings and it is very important for us for the ward councillor to come to our events. This shows that what we're doing is appreciated and people support us too because of that." (Interviewee A)*

When asked about the kind of support that the local government extends to WASSUP, one LG participant indicated that they assist in linking with resources such as funding and advisory services. It also emerged from the findings that one of the participants from LG had hand-picked some members, whom he seconded to WASSUP. The participant acknowledged that WASSUP members had been selected from strategic civil and political organisations such as the ANC Women's League and South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO). Probed to provide reasons for this decision, a participant from LG and the other from WASSUP argued as follows:

*"As an upcoming organisation, WASSUP needed individuals that new the community and its challenges, people that had experience in organising community members around concerning issues." (Interviewee H)*

*"It was important to have mature, experienced and well-respected people in the organisation. Like myself I've been with SANCO so I have links with so many individuals in the community and at government. These links are important for WASSUP and that is why the organisation is strong as it is." (Interviewee A)*

While hand-picking individuals by the councillor may not have had any adverse effects on WASSUP, Cepel (2012) and Ibem (2010) warned that the involvement of political figures in partnerships may open up opportunities for corruption and patronage.

**Joburg Development Agency:** The participant from JDA explained that the agency has a Corporate Service Investment (CSI) fund that it often uses to support especially public stakeholders involved in relevant projects. When JDA realised that WASSUP was doing very well and was dedicated in

repairing taps, clearing drainage and fixing toilets, it decided to inject an initial donation of R60 000 from its CSI budget. The participant further indicated:

*“...this donation is to support ... in a mutual arrangement so that they are able to look after a few toilets.” (Interviewee J)*

After successful registration with the DtI, WASSUP received the second tranche of R60 000 and, according to the participant, this was a further indication of appreciation of the positive impact that the organisation had in Diepsloot. From time to time the participant holds meetings with WASSUP and visits Diepsloot to check the progress of work done. About the partnership, Interviewee D shared:

*“We thank the agency, especially its representative here, we respect each other. It’s such donations that give us energised and successful.”*

**Joburg Water:** The study found out that the involvement of JW in the partnership is more technical in nature, with their role of:

*“making sure that we’re available to help technically when there are complicated blockages and those far away from the toilets. We’ve to make sure that there is sanitation here and that every unnecessary drop of water is prevented. WASSUP is helping us do so.” (Interviewee I)*

Both participants from WASSUP and JW emphasised stated that trust, respect and communication had been key to their successful partnership. While JW is not part of WASSUP’s weekly meetings, both have regular meetings in the community, where updates are given on progress. On their partnership, one participant shared:

*“As WASSUP, we’re thankful of the technical support we get from Joburg Water. We always learn a lot from their artisans when they come and they also thank us for always being available for routine maintenance.” (Interviewee E)*

**Sticky Situations:** Findings showed that Sticky Situations has been highly instrumental in many aspects, including advisory services, sourcing funding, providing training opportunities, and enhancing the operational and administrative capacity of the organisation. Participants from WASSUP highlighted that Sticky Situations facilitated funding from DBSA and JDA, their trip to the United States of America and the management workshops organised by the Small Enterprise Development Authority. One participant from WASSUP expressed appreciation for the facilitator from Sticky Situations:

*“She is in fact the backbone of the organisation because of her passion. We went to the US and attended conferences in Durban and also have money right now to buy our material because of her. I like the way she’s teaching us administration, she checks our records every now and then. It’s a good thing that she motivates us.” (Interviewee A)*

Participants from JDA and DACN concurred with those from WASSUP about the role played by Sticky Situations. They applauded the facilitator for setting up administrative processes in terms of filing, compiling weekly worksheets and time sheets, as well as writing six-monthly reports. In fact, a participant from JDA indicated that the agency disbursed funds to WASSUP, chiefly because of the confidence that the facilitator brought to the organisation.

When asked about her view on WASSUP and the role of Sticky Situations, especially hers as the facilitator, the participant from Sticky Situations responded:

*“It’s an opportunity for the community members to see that they can do things for themselves. I don’t see myself as different from other people in the community and I’m contributing in any way I can in this partnership as an equal with others. We’ve linked them with so many opportunities and how I wish they could pursue some of them. I must say I’m happy with how WASSUP has grown in terms of its impact and influence in Diepsloot. I just hope we’ll get some more funding for them.” (Interviewee K)*

Magadla (2013) shared the same sentiments that most grassroots organisations struggle financially, while many do not have the capacity to market themselves to prospective funders, despite the impact they have with their operations. From the above responses, it may be inferred that WASSUP must develop a strategy to source funding to ensure its future sustainability without the facilitator.

## CONCLUSION

Right from its inception WASSUP gained support from various stakeholders, including community members, other non-profit organisations, local authority and government agencies. Central to the formation of a successful partnership is this organisation's ability to focus on a housing maintenance gap that had been a long-standing challenge in the community. Partnerships add much value to WASSUP in terms of funding, administration and technical skills. The organisation contributes immensely to enhancing the dignity of the urban poor in Diepsloot, while more importantly creating a web of social capital to tackle the many social issues presenting in the community. Despite the limited resources available to WASSUP, the organisation has continued to fulfil its obligation, challenging the government and the private sector to extend support to such voluntary efforts and organisations. The competencies found to be driving the success of WASSUP may be replicated at other such entities in the sector. The competencies include organising skills and expertise as well efficient administration. These can go a long way towards promoting bottom-up developmental programmes and strategies in the country. Scaling up housing-based voluntary organisations and promoting PPPs can help, not only in delivering housing units at scale, but also in ensuring quality of the human settlements delivered.

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