8. The Complexity of Involving Informal Settlement Communities in City-level Policy-Making processes

The aim of this study was to explore the intricate nature of involving communities living in informal settlements in city-level policy-making processes. The main objective of this thesis was to extend our understanding of the practice of public participation by focusing on the involvement of one of the most disadvantaged sectors of society living in contemporary cities. The central research question that the study grappled with was: how do informal settlement communities participate in city-level policy-making processes, and what are the key factors that influence their involvement in those processes?

In Part One of this thesis, I engaged academic literature on the subject of participation and established a conceptual understanding for the study. In Part Two, I critically analysed the policy and practice of participation in the City of Johannesburg, focusing on the involvement of informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making processes. In the following four sections, I summarise my discussions and outline the answer to the main research question.

8.1 Theoretical perspectives on participation of the poor sectors of society in policy-making processes

In Part One of the thesis, I showed that the notion of participation has been a contentious concept, which generally means different things to different people at different times and places. In defining this concept, policy-makers and scholars in the developed world emphasise the involvement of individual citizens in decision-making, while their counterparts in developing countries underscore community involvement in decision-making and/or implementation of development interventions. Also, some intellectuals and practitioners limit participation to contributions of individual citizens or groupings at project level (i.e. project design,
implementation and management) while others elevate participation to the involvement of citizens and/or their organisations in making policy decisions. The common feature in the various understandings of the notion of participation is their emphasis on ensuring the involvement of the poorer sectors of society.

In this thesis, I used the term ‘participation’ to refer to a meaningful involvement of residents of informal settlements and their community organisations, in making policies that address not only their immediate local needs, but also the direction of future development of their cities. A key dimension in this understanding is the emphasis on involving citizens in policy-making at city level by taking part in defining purposive courses of public action to address developmental issues that concern them and, more broadly, the entire city. I argued that the participation of informal settlement communities in formulating these types of policies is strategically more significant than merely taking part in the implementation of interventions that have already been defined without their involvement. However, these communities are often faced with enormous challenges that emanate from the ‘illegal’ and/or informal nature of their settlements, which leave them with little or no protection against the infringement of their citizenship rights (Huchzermeyer, 2004b). The ‘illegality’ of their settlements sometimes limits their political representation and negatively affects their influence on political processes in the city (Balbo, 1993). Furthermore, informality allows exploitation (Huchzermeyer, 2004b), which makes these communities vulnerable, voiceless and powerless.

Theoretically, the idea of participation is strongly linked to the notion of citizenship, which has also been subject to various interpretations. There are two powerful contemporary schools of thought that influence our understanding of the notion of citizenship: neo-liberalism and rights-based perspectives. The neo-liberal interpretation of citizenship celebrates individualism by emphasising the integration of individual citizens into the market (Gaventa, 2007). From a neo-liberal view being a citizen means being integrated as an individual consumer into the market. Neo-
liberalism inspires city management based on market ideas that sideline strategic planning and policy-making, while emphasising the role of the market in resource allocation. The application of these market approaches to urban management led to not only sidelining the role of the citizenry, but also the role of elected politicians, while it increased the number of individuals formally appointed for their personal skills and qualities (Ferlie et al., 1996). In this context, the poor and disadvantaged groups in society are often not seen as citizens entitled to full rights, but as ‘needy’ people to be assisted by public or private charity. This understanding also resulted in the displacement of poverty and inequality from the political arena, to the technical and philanthropic arenas. This interpretation of citizenship limits participation of the poor sectors of society to their involvement in the implementation of projects that have been designed within pre-defined policies.

In contrast to the neo-liberal understanding, the rights-based interpretation of citizenship emphasises the universality of socio-economic and political rights and collective solidarity of citizens. This perspective presents the critical issues that face the poor sectors of society, as issues of citizenship and justice and emphasises the right of communities and individual citizens to participate in making decisions that deal with these issues (Kabeer, 2005; Dagnino, 2003). This understanding of citizenship inspired international campaigns that sought to realise its ideals. An example of these is the campaign for the Right to the City, which seeks to enable a meaningful involvement of all sectors of a city population in city-level policy-making processes. It offers a useful framework for the assertion of informal settlement communities’ rights, not only as recipients of government services as in the context of neo-liberalism, but also as equals to the residents of the formal sections in shaping the future of the city. Habermas’ theory of Communicative Action (Habermas, 1979; 1984; 1987) concurs with the rights-based perspective on citizenship, in that involving citizens directly in processes of governance makes for ‘better citizens, better decisions, and better government’ (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007:4). However, the Communicative Action Theory pays a great deal of attention to the quality of
participation by establishing a framework for an ‘ideal speech’ that seeks to neutralise all forms of power other than the power of the better argument (Habermas, 1979). This implies that informal settlement communities should be treated equally with their counterparts from the ‘formal’ parts of the city at participatory fora. It also means that informal settlement communities should find ways, or be assisted by the state or civil society to find ways that enable them to effectively present and defend their claims in these participatory fora.

A common feature in the theoretical perspectives on participation discussed in this thesis (neo-liberalism, rights-based and Communicative Action) is their faith in the role of civil society organisations in promoting the participation of the poor in policy-making. Civil society organisations, according to these perspectives, play the role both of intermediary agents between the state and the poor, and of incubators for promoting democratic practices within society. Nevertheless, not all civil society organisations are capable of representing the voice of the poor. The realm of civil society is populated by a variety of organisations ranging from area-based civic structures and membership-based interest groups, to non-governmental organisations and social movements. Evidence from Latin America suggests that area-based associations that either have direct membership bases from the poor or work on behalf of territorially-defined poor communities appear to be more effective in representing the voices of the poor. Other forms of associations, such as advocacy NGOs are also useful in representing the voices of the poor at provincial and national levels.

Area-based associations sometimes establish links with, or form part of social movements in pursuit of change for a better life in cities. Contrary to a widely held view that emphasises the autonomy of civil society organisations from governments and political parties, as argued by Carothers (1999) for example, emerging trends in developing countries, particularly in Latin America, show that organisations with strong ties to governments and political parties could be more capable of representing
the poor and achieving their goals (Wampler, 2004; Lavalle et al., 2005). However, it remains critically important that these organisations represent the true voice of the poor.

The theoretical discussions in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis assisted in identifying five key factors that influence the participation of the poor sectors of society in policy-making processes. First, the attitude of government towards the poor sectors of society is a critical factor in facilitating their involvement in policy-making. Where governments are open to, and supportive of the poor, the poor are likely to enjoy higher levels of involvement in policy-making processes. Second, mechanisms of participation need to empower the poor. For participation to achieve a real redistribution of power, a deliberate inclusion of the hitherto politically and economically excluded sectors of society, not only in the processes of decision-making, but also in designing the mechanisms for their inclusion, is required. Third, the relevance of the issues discussed at the participatory fora. For the poor sectors of society to effectively participate in policy-making processes, participatory fora need to focus on policy issues that address the priority needs of these communities, such as access to basic services, housing and urban land, and infrastructure. This emanates from the understanding that poor people participate in policy fora because apart from political empowerment, they also seek access to services. Fourth, the nature of decisions made at participatory fora is another critical factor, as more complex decisions, such as those involving many variables and/or many stakeholders, tend to limit the involvement of the poor. Finally, the visibility of tangible results of their participation in terms of specific policy decisions, but also in terms of concrete development outcomes on the ground, influences their participation.
8.2 The involvement of informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making processes

Creating policies at city level is an integral part of urban management, which I discussed in Chapter Three. The phrase ‘urban management’ encompasses a holistic concept that denotes managing a multitude of activities which take place within a city or a town. It involves taking comprehensive and sustained responsibility for public actions, with the aim of improving human life in urban settlements. Besides policy-making, key areas of urban management responsibilities involve policy implementation, fostering relationships with other government levels/spheres as well as other sectors of society, and managing the city’s assets and services.

The processes of making policies in contemporary cities are very complex, not only because of the multitude of the problems that these policies have to address, but also because of the large number of actors and interests involved. Urban development literature (see, for example, Rakodi, 2003; Vigoda, 2002; Cheema and Shabbir, 1993; Devas et al., 1993) identifies six key categories of actors who are involved in urban management and planning processes. These actors include local elected politicians such as councillors and mayors, provincial/state/regional and national authorities, public sector agencies, residents and their associations, civil society organisations, and business communities. This multitude of actors adds to the complexity of decision-making and could result in a lack of support for the equal involvement of the poor sectors of society in policy-making. Invariably, the poor in the city, with their interests often conflicting with those of the other sectors, become the weak actors in these processes.

However, the possibility of involving the poor in city-level policy-making processes in any city is defined, to a large extent, by the approach to managing that city. In Chapter Three, I discussed various theoretical approaches to urban management, which have been developed in response to different circumstances in different urban
The four most influential of these approaches to city management during the last two decades include the market-based, traditional, Third Way, and participatory theories. There are striking differences among these approaches to city management, particularly with regard to the relationship between citizens and their authorities and the nature of policy-making processes, which have direct bearing on the practice of participation.

The market-based approach to city management is informed by neo-liberal ideas, which favour managing urban growth (mostly economic growth but also population growth). This approach relies on market processes rather than policy interventions to effect change in cities. The relationship between urban residents and urban authorities within the market approach is driven by a quest for responsive management of urban areas, in which the urban authorities (seen as managers) seek to satisfy the needs of the residents (seen as customers or clients). Citizen participation in policy-making is, therefore, not directly sought in contexts where this approach is followed.

The traditional approach to city management is aimed at maintaining public order in the city and providing basic services to its residents. This approach uses policy interventions to effect development, but promotes technical processes in making those policies that do not sponsor citizen involvement. The nature of the relationship between urban authorities (seen as rulers) and urban residents (seen as subjects) in the earlier versions of the traditional approach to governance, is based on coercion. Recent versions of this approach to urban management have changed the nature of this relationship to that of delegation, where voters (urban residents) delegate trustees (urban authorities) to manage their affairs. Again, public participation is not sought in contexts that adopt this approach to urban city management.

A recently emerging approach to urban management is associated with the ‘Third Way’ ideas pertaining to governance. This approach marries elements from both the market-based and participatory approaches to urban management, in addition to the
notion of integration in the sense of policy and institutional coherence. Theoretically, this approach appears to be providing space for public participation in general, and the participation of the poor in particular, but the actual practice of participation in this context seems to be very complex. There are serious contradictions between the notion of participation, the culture of performance management, and integration, which are embedded in Third Way approaches to governance (Harrison, 2006). The institutions of the City of Johannesburg, which is the case study of this thesis, are modelled on these ideas, as discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

Participatory approaches to urban management aim to fight social inequalities and expand citizenship rights of urban residents. Policies within this approach are generally made through political and technical processes. The relationship between city authorities and residents is based on collaboration, where both the authorities and citizens are seen as partners in the processes of development. This approach to city management, which is rooted in theories of social justice, is supportive of the participation of citizens, particularly the poor sectors of society, in policy-making. The Municipality of São Paulo in Brazil is an example of a city that attempted participatory approaches to urban management, particularly during 2001-2004. In Chapter Four, I examined the involvement of that city’s informal settlement (favela) communities in three participatory city-level policy-making processes: the formulation of a housing policy for the city (2001), participatory budgeting (2001-2003, and the public debate on that city’s master plan (2002/03).

The three examples of participatory policy-making from São Paulo demonstrated that meaningful involvement of informal settlement communities in this level of policy-making is possible. This is particularly so when the city has the appropriate constitutional mandate to address the issues that concern these communities. The city’s approach to development planning is another key factor in enabling the participation of informal settlement communities in policy-making processes. The two cases - São Paulo’s housing policy formulation and participatory budgeting -
suggest that informal settlement communities were more inclined to participate in fora that focused on their immediate and direct needs. Strategic interventions, such as the master plan, although perhaps more critical in addressing the needs of the informal settlement communities in the long run, seemed to be less attractive to them. In addition, the city’s approach to public participation is another important factor in enabling the informal settlement communities to participate more effectively. The aim of São Paulo’s approach to public participation was to empower the disadvantaged communities in the city, and to involve them in designing the public participation mechanisms themselves. Finally, intensity of participation and visibility of results appear to be crucial in encouraging informal settlement communities to participate. Certainly, the involvement of São Paulo’s *favela* communities alongside other sectors, in identifying intervention priorities, developing policies, designing programmes, allocating resources and monitoring the implementation of these programmes, strengthened their confidence in the system. Also, the visible implementation of decisions made through these participatory mechanisms increased the system’s credibility.

However, the examples from São Paulo are also useful in understanding the limitations of participatory policy-making in large cities with informal settlements. Public participation, by its very nature, may lead to a focus on localised, short-term interventions. Yet, big cities also require long-term and city-wide projects, especially in the fields of transport infrastructure, local economic development and environment. These interventions cannot easily be agreed on by the different sectors in a deeply unequal city. The tendency of the informal settlement communities to participate in the fora that debate their immediate interventions, such as the cases of the housing policy and the participatory budget, rather than long-term strategic interventions is, indeed, a setback. This latter limitation certainly represents a big challenge in the context of current urban development thinking that recognises the strong linkages between the various sectors of urban development, and therefore favours integrated policies.
8.3 The City of Johannesburg and informal settlement communities: from discrimination to tentative inclusion

Informal settlements have been in and around Johannesburg for most of the last seven decades. The first significant wave of ‘squatter settlements’ in and around Johannesburg was in the 1940s. These settlements were eradicated during the 1950-60s by the apartheid regime. The phenomenon re-emerged and grew more rapidly after the end of apartheid and resulted in 30% of the city’s population living in some form of inadequate housing (primarily informal settlements, backyard shacks and shacks on serviced sites). The marginalisation of informally and inadequately housed residents raises significant questions about their representation and voice in the governance of the city in the post-apartheid era.

Historically, the City of Johannesburg’s relationship with its informal settlement communities was characterised by state control, discrimination, forced removals and, at times, relocation to segregated, low cost housing developments as pointed out. For almost a century, Johannesburg’s informal settlement/squatter communities (and, to a large extent, its non-white residents) were excluded from and denied their citizen rights, as part of the apartheid project in the country. The residents of the city’s ‘squatter camps’ radically responded to the measures taken by the city authorities against them with resistance and, at times, attempts at self-government, especially during the 1940s. This situation continued until the end of the apartheid rule in the early 1990s. This ushered in a new era of local governance in South Africa and a new relationship between Johannesburg’s city authorities and its non-white residents in general, and residents of informal settlement, in particular. The basis for the new local governance in South Africa was established through intensive negotiations, enshrined in the country’s Constitution of 1996 and elaborated on in a multitude of national policies and legislation.
During the early years of South Africa’s transition from apartheid to democracy (1991-1993), there were intensive negotiations on the future of Johannesburg. These involved the Transvaal Provincial Authority, the 13 local authorities which existed in the area of Johannesburg, civic and ratepayer associations, as well as political parties including the then newly un-banned ANC. The focus of the negotiators, particularly from the influential parties involved, was on uniting the city and realising the slogan ‘One city, One tax base’. While the local negotiation process was, itself, highly participative compared to the days of apartheid, quite surprisingly, it did not place public participation at the heart of the new system of governance being designed for the city. Rather, the focus of the negotiators was on achieving spatial and institutional integration to accelerate delivery of basic services to the communities denied by apartheid. Considering the long experience of Johannesburg’s civic organisations from black townships, such as Soweto and Alexandra, in popular mobilisation against the rule of apartheid, it was indeed a lost opportunity not to place participation at the heart of the new governance system of the city.

There was also no significant involvement of Johannesburg’s informal settlement communities in the city’s local negotiation. The harsh measures taken by the apartheid authorities against the ‘squatters’ of Johannesburg, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, had left only a few informal settlements in the southern areas of the city. However, state ambiguity around informal settlements in the 1980s (see Huchzermeier, 2004b) led to the establishment of some informal settlements in the southern areas of Johannesburg. At the time of local negotiations, these settlements did not have recognised community organisations other than SANCO to represent them at the Johannesburg Local Government Negotiating Forum of the early 1990s. The majority of the informal settlements that existed in Johannesburg during the period covered by this study (2003-2006), particularly in the northern parts of the city, were formed between 1990 and 2001.
The foundation of Johannesburg’s approach to governance under the democratic dispensation, which was laid down during the local negotiations of the early 1990s, was consolidated by the country’s 1996 Constitution. In addition to the key ideas of integration and efficiency that came out of the local negotiations, the constitution mandates the sphere of local government to encourage the involvement of local communities and local community organisations in local government processes (Republic of South Africa, 1996). This constitutional mandate was further elaborated on by subsequent policies and legislation, which while emphasising the placement of participation at the heart of local government, also requires that participation should not interfere with the right of elected councils to rule.

Johannesburg’s governance model, which has been examined in this study, represents a combination of the notions of integration, efficiency and participation. The city successfully brought together 13 racially-based local authorities inherited from the apartheid rule to form a ‘unicity’ with strong ideas around ‘new public management’. The separation of policy formulation from policy management and implementation; the creation of a strong managerial core; the corporatisation of service delivery units; and the adoption of a performance management system are some of the key characteristics of the city’s emerging model of urban management. The City of Johannesburg developed a policy framework for public participation. Although this was developed in a deterministic, top-down fashion without public involvement, it claims to promote a notion of ‘structured participation’. This notion tends to limit public participation in policy-making process to involvement through statutory mechanisms: the ward committee system, public open meetings at ward and regional levels, as well as citywide and regional fora that involve ward committees and or community groups. However, as the case study demonstrates, the provided mechanisms for participation appear to be flexible and are evolving to become more inclusive of local communities.
8.4 The involvement in city-level policy-making processes of communities living in informal settlements in the study area

In Chapter Six, I turned my focus to the study area (Midrand and Ivory Park, City of Johannesburg) and closely looked at its socio-economic and political dynamics to establish the area’s relevance to the purpose of the study. I demonstrated that the study area is similar to the whole city, not only because of parallels in terms of social, economic and political indicators, but also due to similarities of the institutional history of the study area with the other parts of the city. Most importantly, Chapter Six established that the study area cannot be seen as one homogenous part of Johannesburg. Rather, it is socio-economically very diverse, and politically and spatially segregated, as reflected in the patterns of civil society and community organisations active in the area. This internal diversity, which is also comparable to other parts of the city, is recognisable in the way public participation activities are undertaken, as discussed in Chapter Seven. However, considering the difference in the history of informal settlements between the study area and the southern parts of the city where informal settlements have been in existence since 1980s (subsection 5.5.1), the Midrand and Ivory Park area is not intended to be a representative sample of Johannesburg in this study. As explained earlier (subsection 1.4.2), the thesis’ aim is to make analytic (but not statistical) generalisations.

In Chapter Seven, I explored the extent of informal settlement communities’ actual involvement in policy-making processes through the City of Johannesburg’s statutory mechanisms and non-statutory initiatives by ward councillors. Overall, there are clear indications of varying degrees and levels of involvement by these communities in policy-making processes through these mechanisms and initiatives. According to the City of Johannesburg’s notion of ‘structured participation’, ward committees generally play a considerable role in city-level policy-making processes, especially in the preparation and annual reviews of the City’s IDP and budget. During the period
covered by this study (2003-2006), there was limited involvement of the study area’s informal settlement communities in the formation, composition and functioning of ward committees. The main reason appears to be the city’s sector-based approach to representation in ward committees that did not take into consideration how to get disadvantaged communities, such as informal settlement communities, involved in the system. Other statutory mechanisms (public open meetings at ward and regional levels), although seemingly less effective in influencing the final outcome of participatory processes, appear to have been more successful in involving the informal settlement communities of the study area, particularly when these meetings were held at accessible venues and suitable times.

Despite a deterministic, top-down policy framework for public participation designed by the city, most ward councillors in the study area sought to enhance the practice of public participation in their constituencies by adopting non-statutory mechanisms. These non-statutory mechanisms included measures to improve the inclusivity of participatory processes (the involvement of sectional committees in Wards 77, 79 and 80, and the use of IT in Ward 94), and/or to deepen participatory practices (establishing sectional fora and sub-committees and organising primary consultations prior to ward public meetings in Wards 77, 79 and 80). All these measures, except the use of IT in Ward 94, had a positive impact on the involvement of informal settlement communities in policy-making processes.

Furthermore, the field investigation, which I carried out in the study area, revealed that ward councillors played significant roles in promoting (or hindering) the involvement of informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making processes. These roles emanate from the leadership responsibility towards public participation in local governance assigned to councillors by policy and legislative frameworks, which allow them to impose their own understanding of policy and legislative imperatives (see section 7.5). Ward councillors’ attitudes towards informal settlement communities are critical in enabling or disabling the involvement of these
communities (see subsection 7.5.1 and section 7.6). Another key factor that influences the degree of informal settlement communities’ participation across the various mechanisms was the extent of engaging issues that concern them. For example, these communities were found to be more inclined to take active part in fora that discussed issues such as housing, drinking water, electricity, sanitation, access roads and schools. While most of these issues are municipal and form part of the city’s policy agenda, issues such as housing and education are provincial and national competences, and therefore officials cannot engage the public on these issues beyond information sharing.

8.5 Conclusion

In conclusion then, what new insights does this study add to our understanding of the complexities associated with the involvement of informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making?

In this thesis, I argued that informal settlement communities should participate, not only in the implementation and/or management of development interventions aimed at addressing their needs, but most importantly, in making policies that shape the future of their cities. This level of participation is quite significant in order for them to break away from the vulnerability and marginalisation imposed on them by the informal and ‘illegal’ nature of their settlements. However, participation in policy-making at city level is very complex due to the complicated nature of the issues addressed and the multitude of actors involved. Furthermore, the approach to city management may promote or hinder the involvement of these communities in city-level policy processes. Participatory approaches to urban management, which seek to achieve social justice and combat inequalities in the city, provide an environment conducive to that involvement. Market oriented approaches do not promote policy interventions to achieve development and therefore do not seek participation.
Meaningful involvement of informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making processes occurs when a city has the appropriate legal mandate to tackle relevant issues that relate to the priority needs of these communities. This emanates from an argument that poor people participate in decision-making fora in pursuit of their access to basic needs, as well as in pursuit of empowerment and participation (see section 8.1). People living in informal settlements normally prioritise access to urban land and housing, social development programmes such as health, education, and government grants, and basic services such as water, sanitation, electricity, and waste removal over other municipal services. If a city has competencies that cover these functions, then that city would be better positioned to engage its informal settlement residents in policy-making processes.

The city government’s openness to and support of informal settlement communities is fundamental to involving the communities living in these settlements in policy processes. Support of informal settlements involves recognising them as inseparable parts of the city, but also acknowledging the extremely difficult conditions that their residents face on a daily basis and the socio-economic and spatial gap that separates them from the rest of the city residents. Openness of government also entails assisting these communities by creating and nurturing suitable participatory structures that enable the informal settlement communities to take part in decision-making processes. This aspect relates to logistical considerations including the timing and venues of public meetings, the nature of discussion at those meetings, and the sensitivity of language.

Civil society organisations play an intermediary role between informal settlement communities and city government, and act also as incubators of participatory practices within these communities. Whilst advocacy organisations might play significant lobbying roles in favour of the residents of informal settlements, particularly at national and provincial levels, sector-based or area-based organisations, which are deeply rooted in informal settlements, are far more important
in representing the voices of these communities in policy-making fora. While some grassroots movements might be very radical in their struggle for the rights of the informal settlement communities, a balanced and constructive relationship with government and other political actors in the city, such as political parties, could be an important factor in ensuring direct influence of these communities on policy outcomes.

Considering the limiting effect that complex and multi-stakeholder policy-making processes at city-level have on the participation of informal settlement communities, appropriate institutional mechanisms are critically important for achieving meaningful participation of these communities. These mechanisms can emerge from consultations with the communities, as the case of the housing policy process in São Paulo demonstrated, or from the ongoing interaction between policy imperatives and the elements of micro-contexts, as in Ivory Park. Notwithstanding the imperative of having integrated plans for cities that involve a large number of urban actors, cities could still provide simple and focused mechanisms to facilitate meaningful involvement of informal settlement communities in making policy decisions.

The City of Johannesburg has made significant progress in involving the public and its informal settlement communities, in particular, in policy-making processes when compared to its apartheid era past. Although during the transitional period (1995-2000), public participation in the city’s policy-making processes was weakened, this thesis found that informal settlement communities in Midrand and Ivory Park during the period covered by the study (2003-2006) had been involved to varying degrees of intensity in the processes of city-level policy-making. They were seemingly better involved in public meetings at ward and regional levels than in the participatory activities of the ward committees. The choices made by the ward councillors based on their understanding of policy imperatives and their attitude towards informal settlement communities were critical in enabling or disabling that participation.
However, the involvement of the informal settlement communities in Johannesburg’s city-level policy-making processes remains uneven when compared to the involvement of other sectors of the city’s population. One of the limiting factors for Johannesburg to achieve the same or even a higher degree of involvement from its informal settlement communities lies in the scope of local government responsibilities as defined by the South African Constitution. The city has limited or no competency to deal with policy issues relating to the top priority needs of informal settlement communities, namely housing, social welfare and education. This is a structural limitation which the city does not have the power to change. As long as the national and provincial governments remain in control of functions that deal with issues of poverty and inequality, the city will always find it difficult to engage these communities in a meaningful way. However, the City of Johannesburg could still achieve a better level of involvement for its informal settlement communities in policy-making processes if it develops a positive attitude towards these communities. The city needs to strengthen its recognition of informal settlements as part and parcel of Johannesburg, but also as a sector that faces huge challenges in its daily existence; a fact that must be considered.

While these are pragmatic recommendations, the broader conclusion is that in a democratic and open system, the actual involvement of informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making processes is shaped by the interplay between policies and elements of micro contexts. City governments in democratic systems tend to be open and supportive to public participation, especially the poor sectors. Policies of such governments provide mechanisms for public engagement, which are either designed in collaboration with the target communities or allowed to evolve during practice. The interplay between policies and contexts is facilitated by local officials and organizations that represent the voices of the informal settlement communities.