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The Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP): A case study of development and participation in Alexandra

Sinwell, Luke

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Abstract

This paper analyses what has arguably become a salient feature of development on an international level, namely community participation. Specifically, it focuses on a case study of the removals of people from the Jukskei River as part of the Alexandra Renewal Project in order to obtain an understanding of the processes of participation on the ARP as a whole. The research makes use of interview and observation methods in order to uncover the perspectives of various stakeholders including the leadership of the ARP, community members of Alexandra and people actually displaced from the Jukskei River as part of the ARP. The central research question that the research addresses is: To what extent do participatory processes of the ARP either contribute to the further disempowerment of the already poor or hold the possibility of empowering them?

I have concluded that a weak form of participation, in this case consultation, has led to the legitimization of the interests of those in power, of the state. I have suggested that since the kind of participation on the ARP is simply a technical one meant to ensure project success, it therefore does not and will not lead to achieving greater social justice (particularly for those who are poor). I recommend that structures be put in place that would enable people, particularly the poor, to become critically aware of their political and social situation. It is in this way that participation and indeed social justice may occur in South Africa in a substantial way.