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On the ground/from the ground : The construction of neighbourhood visions by two local leaders : a comparative study of Yeoville and Dobsonville

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Abstract

The systems put into place to make local government developmental and which foster participation have been seen as failing communities. The elected local councillors who are the face of local government have been targeted as being disconnected from their constituencies. The notion that having local councillors to offer proximity to local communities and to better engage the government on behalf of communities has also been criticised, as often processes are undemocratic, and the powers and functions of local activists are limited. More and more communities are seeking representatives with whom they are able to identify with, and who have vested interests in community wellbeing. There has been an increase lately in the number of candidates running independently for positions as councillors, in response to community action. The research aims to understand the dynamics and challenges of leaders who work closely with communities.

The role of leaders working on the ground becomes more and more pertinent as communities seek out leaders who can relate to their needs and translate them into action. The thesis looks essentially at what is means for activists to work closely with communities, and how this positioning on the ground allows them to influence spatial change. It looks at the role of two grounded activists Maurice Smithers and Japhta Lekgetho who reside in Yeoville and Dobsonville respectively and the strategies they employ in order to be able to impact their communities. The study looks at how these two activists construct neighbourhood visions and translate them into action.

Key Terms: On the ground, vision, community activism, local leadership, Maurice Smithers, Japhta Lekgetho