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The interdependency between residents' liveihoods and informal settlements improvement: a case study of Sejwetla informal settlement in Alexandra township, Johannesburg

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ABSTRACT

The failure of South African municipalities to upgrade informal settlements has forced residents to adopt diverse livelihood strategies to improve the physical conditions of their settlements. Consequently, a number of community-driven improvements are taking place in Gauteng Province's informal settlements, such as the Sejwetla informal settlement situated in Johannesburg. Scholars observe that proceeds from livelihoods in informal settlements are very low (Huchzemeyer, 2011). This suggests that when focus is put on improvements to individual dwellings, expenditure is increased, hence an increased economic burden to the residents. Using the case study of the Sejwetla informal settlement in Alexandra Township, this study investigates the interdependency between residents' livelihoods and informal settlement improvements. The study aims to establish the livelihood strategies employed by the informal settlement residents, and how these contribute to different aspects of the upgrading process, in particular, re-blocking and housing consolidation. The linkages between the improvements of informal settlements and livelihoods creation have not been adequately explored (Chalton, 2006; Napier, 2007; SERI, 2012). Although various studies on informal settlements have been conducted, an in-depth investigation of the interdependence between livelihoods and informal settlement improvements in one settlement is scarce. The study uses a sustainable livelihoods framework and rests on the proposition that residents of informal settlements are an asset on their own (human capital,) and they are willing to improve their living conditions (Moser and Dani, 2008). It uses a qualitative methodology to examine the interdependency between livelihoods and informal settlement improvements.

The study expects to establish the livelihood strategies employed by residents, and how these have contributed to re-blocking and housing consolidation. It also anticipates understanding the effects of informal settlements improvement to the livelihoods of the residents. This study concludes that the role of residents' livelihoods in informal settlements improvement is important.