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Lived experiences of large scale housing developments on urban peripheries: the case study of Lufhereng at the Western Edge of Soweto

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ABSTRACT

Gauteng Provincial Government through its launch of mega projects of clusters and new cities in April 2015 intends to pursue developing mega sustainable human settlement projects on greenfields at the urban peripheries. The projects are envisioned to bring 'radical and decisive spatial transformation' to Gauteng City Region, characterised by settlements that are socially and economically integrated, with ample amenities for communities in these settlements. The mega projects are seen as a solution to the challenge of housing backlog and each project will have no less than 15 000 integrated housing units, with majority being for the poor. The conception of these projects continues to be criticised heavily in literature as they are perceived to reinforce urban fragmentation, inefficiency and exclusion. Lufhereng Mixed Development is a large scale peripheral greenfield development designed to be a sustainable human settlement and has many mutual characteristics with the proposed mega projects. Even though Lufhereng is not yet a consolidated development, it was first occupied in 2010. At the time of this study, Lufhereng has about 2 100 housing units, with a population estimated at 7 560. This study seeks to find out from the views and perceptions of Lufhereng residents what it is like to actually live in these projects. The study employs a mixed method research. Data is gathered using questionnaires with both structured and semi-structured interviews. Residents of Lufhereng and Lufhereng Project Manager from City of Johannesburg Department of Housing are the key informants in the study. Some of the findings are that there is a general sense of dissatisfaction among the residents which stems from lack of facilities, retail and services within the project, and lack of employment opportunities. Most of the economically active residents of Lufhereng are unemployed, and feel that living in Lufhereng makes it worse off mainly because of its location in relation to places of employment. Moreover, most of the residents assert that since they got relocated to Lufhereng, their household incomes have significantly dropped as they have lost their livelihoods strategies. The residents' perceptions, based on their lived experiences of the project therefore confirm some of the criticisms of Mega Projects, considering at the time of the study, it has been six years since people moved to Lufhereng. The living experiences of residents of Lufhereng about Lufhereng are therefore, not of a sustainable human settlement.