

Governing Informal Settlements in South Africa – Experiences Made in the National Pilot “N2 Gateway” for Sustainable Urban Development and Low-income Housing Provision

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The N2 Gateway project in Cape Town is the national pilot project for the implementation of the South African government's new informal settlement strategy. The strategy, named “Breaking New Ground in Housing Delivery: Moving towards sustainable settlements” - short: BNG, aims at using low-income housing and upgrading of informal settlements as instruments to restructure the inefficient urban fabric of Post-Apartheid South African cities and thereby ensuring social cohesion as well as equal access to urban opportunities. In order to reach these targets, an urban governance approach was chosen that is in line with international best practice guidelines of UN-HABITAT and the Cities Alliance, focusing on comprehensive community participation as well as private sector engagement mainly in the field of financing and project management.

The BNG strategy was in general welcomed by South African scientist and professionals since it also built on lessons learnt from governance approaches of previous slum housing projects in South Africa. However, since research results of the N2 Gateway project revealed that in many ways the new housing strategy failed to reach central development targets set, it is discussed in which way this is connected to the chosen governance approach of the new housing strategy. In this regard the paper examines both, general structural shortcomings of the chosen “best practice” urban governance approach and its challenges connected to the local governing environment in the South African city. In the end, the N2 Gateway project, that is to help gaining knowledge and experiences for the implementation of further housing development projects in South African informal settlements, brings to light the question of how governance structures can be organized to ensure that the state, affected communities of informal settlements, and the private sector can work together efficiently to create a workable solution. By emphasizing this aspect, a transfer of experiences to other development projects in informal settlements in and outside South Africa is made possible.