

The intelligence of change



Enabling active citizenship through planning, design and development

Townhouse Hotel
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Isandla Institute

Isandla Institute acts as a **public interest think tank** with a primary focus on just, equitable, sustainable and democratic urban habitats. At the core of our work is the goal of advancing **the right to the city**, only attainable when urban residents are able to exercise full citizenship and participate in planning and governance.

Our mission is to advocate the eradication of poverty and the realisation of human rights through **innovative** and **effective** strategies at the **interface** of the state and civil society, through promoting dialogue and exchange, policy research, advocacy, public education, institutional support, network coordination and information dissemination.

The need for active citizenship

According to the National Development Plan 2030...

‘**Active citizenry** and social activism is necessary for democracy and development to flourish. The state cannot merely act on behalf of the people – it **has to act with the people**, working together with other institutions to provide opportunities for the advancement of all communities.’

‘The message needs to be sent out that **people’s own efforts are important**, and the state must assist with the resources needed for poor communities and civil society to participate in spatial governance.’

(National Planning Commission, 2012, page 37 and 291)

Shift the starting point

- Recognising that communities are **active agents** of change
- Interrogating **responsible vs. active** citizen language
- Giving credence to both **individual and collective agency**
- Understanding **participation as a process of negotiation**
- Ensuring that **participatory processes are linked to outcomes**

Explore enabling institutional arrangements

- Formal spaces do **not allow** for the urban poor to have **real voice**
- The **needs** of the urban poor are **not adequately reflected** in planning processes
- **Compliance mentality** stifles learning and the pursuit of dynamic solutions
- Spaces for multiple stakeholders to plan collaboratively exist, but need to be **institutionalised and supported**

Explore enabling institutional arrangements

Collaborative planning forums

Scale	Neighbourhood-level project committees (sustainable community units)	Learning forums (geographical grouping of projects within a region of the city)	Collaborative planning forum (city-level planning structure)
Scope and function	Project-level deliberative forums to determine priorities, trade-offs; sequencing; modes of delivery; monitoring	Regional forum tasked with cross-project learning and collaboration; revision of policy; monitoring	City-level forum responsible for synthesising learning; revision of policy, planning and funding; monitoring

(Isandla Institute, 2013)

Taking active citizenship seriously

- **Invest** (politically and financially) in harnessing and enabling agency
- Explore enabling **institutional models**
- **Build capacity** at local level to ensure willingness and readiness to collaborate with communities and to link participatory processes to outcomes
- Put in place **partnership strategies** that allow other stakeholders to inform and be part of development processes