

## **SHIFTING FROM CONTESTATIONS TO TRANSFORMATION: A CASE OF FIRE RISK REDUCTION IN CLARE ESTATE INFORMAL SETTLEMENT**

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### **TRANSFORMATION IN A NUTSHELL**

Informal settlement dwellers in eThekweni lose their lives, loved ones, irreplaceable family memorabilia, identity documents and other personal belongings as well as their homes through fires on a regular basis. While the upgrading of informal settlements may be underway, untapped opportunities exist for transformation of relationships between municipal employees, social movement organisations and informal settlement dwellers with respect to fire disaster risk reduction (DRR).

### **KEY COMPONENTS OF THE EVIDENCE BASED RESEARCH**

It is contested as to whether the DMECU managers engage the Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) Movement South Africa and Clare Estate residents in fire DRR.

It is contested as to whether the Fire Department engages the Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) Movement South Africa and Clare Estate residents as a whole in development and implementation fire prevention initiatives and programmes in the informal settlement.

DMECU managers conduct awareness campaigns and train Clare Estate residents on fire DRR but the trained residents soon move away.

AbM and Clare Estate informal settlement community members claim that the municipality excludes them from design and implementation of fire DRR programmes but the community wants to be involved.

All stakeholders have an interest in the use of indigenous knowledge to plan and implement strategies for fire risk reduction but the municipal and civil society sectors are disconnected regarding awareness of respective perceptions on the use of indigenous knowledge by each sector.

Non-human actors in the network such as fires, lack of access to water and electricity, lack of sanitation and inaccessible shacks contribute to destruction and loss of lives and which could be avoided by inclusive cross-sector engagement.

## **BENEFITS TO ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY**

While there does not appear to be written policies and strategies pertaining to fires for informal settlements in eThekweni Municipality, the data adduced from the study show the types of policies and strategies that could be jointly designed by all network actors.

Creation and maintenance of network governance of fire DRR planning and implementation for informal settlements so as to transform informal settlements into safe and liveable space while upgrading initiatives are underway.

Conflict resolution between the municipal and civil society sectors regarding fire DRR strategies in informal settlements to promote habitable living conditions and safety.

## **SUMMARY**

According to Statistics South Africa's (2016) in-depth analysis of the General Household Survey data from 2002 to 2014, the density of eThekweni municipality increased by 11,4% between 2001 to 2011 ranking the municipality as the fourth most dense metropolis in the country. The percentage of households living in informal dwellings in the backyard increased by 0.5% between 2001 and 2011. However, the percentage of households living in informal dwellings in informal settlements in eThekweni decreased by approximately 4% during the same time period. While the latter shows an improvement, the issue of raging fires in informal settlements persists.

Controversy abounds as to whether informal settlements can be transformed into safe and liveable places. There is scant empirical evidence on DRR governance for fires in informal settlements. Hence, the aim of this research study was to examine fire risk reduction planning and strategies of eThekweni municipality and self-help initiatives of Clare Estate residents, including use of indigenous knowledge. In this qualitative study executed by narrative strategy, competing perspectives on DRR frameworks pertaining to fires in informal settlements surfaced. Stakeholder perspectives are revealed from eThekweni disaster management officials, fire unit managers, fire fighters; executives of AbM social movement organisation and Clare Estate residents. The study was driven by actor network theory which encompasses human and non-human entities and often includes the element of conflict as part of a network geared toward common interests of the entities. A combination of content, matrix and thematic data analysis show not only power imbalances in contested common space but also divergent views on municipal planning and implementation of strategies to address DRR for fires in Clare Estate. Findings and recommendations contribute to the development discourse critical insights and an action plan for a human centred approach to DRR for fires in informal settlements, with Clare Estates informal settlement in eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality as a case in point. Findings reveal how the municipality and community could work together to promote the role of DRR strategies and to avoid contestations. Transformed relationships between the municipality and civil society can help shape informal settlements into safe and liveable places in a metropolis like eThekweni.