A Case Study of Participation
in the Thinasonke Extension 4 FEDUP Pledge Project

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1. Introduction

This case study focuses on community participation in the development of the Thinasonke Extension 4 Pledge Project, a greenfield project in the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan municipality, aimed at developing low-cost subsidized housing through the support of the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor (FEDUP) in terms of an agreement with government. The study forms part of Planact’s research on participation and development from the perspective of the poor and explores the trade-offs involved in promoting community participation in development projects. Planact selected this project since it displayed elements of strong community involvement, further supported through a community support organization – FEDUP.

Participation itself is a very complex process. Policy makers, implementers, participants and development practitioners have their own ways of understanding and practicing participation as well as their own expectations from participation. The question is, when can you say people have effectively participated? This paper will analyse how community members affected by this project used various avenues of participation, from the ‘invited’ to the ‘invented spaces’, for their benefit and how their participation was affected by various factors such as government policy, the support organisation’s approach, and time frames.

The methodology used in the case study is the qualitative social research method which included exploratory meetings with residents in the case study area and with the leading organization, FEDUP; site visits; in-depth interviews with community leaders of Thinasonke’s Development Committee; and interviews with residents, political leaders (ward councillor), urban planners and the Federation’s leadership. Attempts to interview some government officials to share their insights about the project were unsuccessful and documentation on the project was very limited. The information obtained however, provided some interesting lessons to learn from regarding participation and development from a range of viewpoints.

1.1 Background to Thinasonke Ext. 4

Thinasonke Ext. 4 is a 21-hectare township, formally established in 2009, which is situated next to Tokoza Township in the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, approximately 20 kilometres from the Johannesburg central business district and 12 kilometres south of the city of Alberton. It is a peripheral area situated on the south west border of Ekurhuleni municipality. The area forms part of the former Palmietfontein farm south of Alrode South Extension 17, and directly west of Vereeniging Road (P46/1) (Gauteng Province, 24 September 2008). The industrial area of Alrode in nearby Alberton is the closest economic hub to the township and is a source of job opportunities. Thinasonke is close to several highways and major roads, various shopping malls, and ten educational facilities, including Albert College and many primary schools (Urban

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1 The Federation’s leadership interviewed refers to regional representatives and will be referred to as FEDUP / Federation representatives throughout the document.
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Dynamics Gauteng Inc, September 2008). See Figures 1 and 2 below for a map of Thinasonke Ext. 4 and its surrounding areas.

Figure 1: Thinasonke Ext. 4 located in the periphery of the Ekurhuleni Metro. Source: South African Municipal Demarcation Board

Figure 2: Aerial map of Thinasonke Ext. 4 and land use surroundings. Source: Google Earth
Thinasonke is located within ward 53 of Ekurhuleni Municipality; politically, it is a Democratic Alliance (DA)-led ward in the African National Congress (ANC)-led Metropolitan municipality. Such a political set-up increases the chances of political competition, where political parties use community development to vie for political attention or win the majority support in the area.

Thinasonke Ext. 4 is located on a 21-hectare piece of land that was previously a privately owned farm. The land has been purchased from the private owner by uTshani Fund2 - the financial arm of FEDUP - for eventual transfer to the future beneficiaries of the project (uTshani Fund, February 2010). At the time of this research, the Thinasonke Ext. 4 organisers (community members and FEDUP representatives) had completed a negotiation process with the municipality to prepare for the establishment of a new township, and were working towards its development.

The zoning process has been completed but infrastructure installation and housing development processes were still experiencing delays. At the time of our research, community members in the area were still living in shacks in an informal arrangement with no existing infrastructure. No basic services were being rendered by the local municipality, since the municipality is apparently not allowed to render public services to privately owned land (as indicated by FEDUP representatives).

Thinasonke Ext. 4 Township emerged from the savings schemes formed by the backyard dwellers from Tokoza Township. These savings clubs include the Zenzeleni and Magebhula savings clubs, which operate like stokvels3. The first savings scheme in the area was created in 1992 (Scheepers 2007). The main purpose of the savings clubs was for backyard dwellers to start saving; generally, savings scheme members do not own houses, although some members do have houses in other parts of the country. Members of the schemes contribute whatever amount they have to the savings accounts of the schemes. Once a certain amount of money is saved, members are able to borrow from the account and repay it on a monthly basis. According to an interview with the Federation’s representatives, there were more than 1000 members of these savings clubs from the Tokoza backyard dwellers when FEDUP first approached them in 1997. Savings scheme members agreed to join FEDUP to benefit from low-cost houses through government subsidies organised by the Federation.

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2 uTshani Fund is a section 21 company established for the specific purpose of managing FEDUP’s development finance. Its sole purpose is to grow and protect the assets of the Federation, which include land, housing, and infrastructure. Further details on uTshani are provided in the stakeholder section below.

3 Stokvels are generally defined as informal savings clubs where a group of people make regular contributions to a common pool and then rotate the common pool amongst the members.
1.2 Background to FEDUP’s approach

In March, 1991, the first ‘dialogue’ in South Africa to mobilize communities around the principles of Slum Dwellers International⁴ (specifically the savings schemes approach to access land and housing) took place at Broederstroom, North West Province (Shack/Slum Dwellers International, 2010). As a result, the South African Homeless People’s Federation was formed shortly before 1994 which later developed as the organization, FEDUP, (as a member of SDI), officially launched in 2006 to further promote this approach among poor South African communities⁵. The subsequent involvement of FEDUP in the Thinasonke Ext.4 development stemmed from this mobilization. In January 1996, uTshani Fund started slowly dispersing bridging finance loans to qualified household members of well-organised and mobilised collective savings schemes in South Africa.

FEDUP further negotiated with the national government for more direct access to subsidised housing based on their approach. This negotiation eventually led to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between SDI, FEDUP and the National Department of Housing (NDoH) in May 2006, (Memorandum of Understanding, May 2006) with the following objectives geared towards the eradication of informal settlements by 2015:

- The development of strategies, including joint proposals to the National Treasury of the Government of the Republic of South Africa, the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), the World Bank, Cities Alliance and bi-literal agencies, to enable South Africa to move rapidly to becoming a “Country Without Slums” over the next decade;
- The development, by means of appropriate institutional arrangements, of a reconstituted community-managed housing process in South Africa as a means of achieving the goal of “Cities without Slums” in South Africa;
- The development and implementation of a strategy on a pilot basis in the major cities and towns in South Africa, prioritizing urgent development intervention to address social fragmentation, lack of tenure security and the need for access to services and houses; and
- The establishment of people’s organisations in slums in all major cities and towns in South Africa by FEDUP and SDI so that they have the will and capacity to drive housing development, and to work in partnership with the Government of the Republic of South Africa.

In addition to the MoU, FEDUP indicated that the provincial governments pledged to support these kinds of projects through an allocation of 1000 subsidies per province, while Gauteng province pledged to give R50 million (Interview with FEDUP representative). The Thinasonke Ext. 4 project is a beneficiary project under this MoU in terms of the R50 million pledge made by Gauteng province.

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⁴ Slum Dwellers International (SDI) is an international loose network of people’s organisations from an increasing number of countries in the South. The network is made up of Federations of community organisations and other grassroots initiatives that are in the process of developing Federations. Linked to this network is a group of professionals who are committed to supporting these Federations.

⁵ It is explained that the South African Homeless People’s Federation dissolved as a result of institutional issues and a split from its NGO partners (People’s Dialogue) forming a new alliance under the name of FEDUP launched in 2006 (see Swilling. M. (n.d.) “Beyond Cooptation and Protest: Reflections on the FEDUP alternative”)
2. FEDUP’s involvement in Thinasonke

The formation of the savings schemes in Tokoza led to the idea of buying land and the establishment of a new township in Thinasonke Ext 4; as a new area, development of infrastructure and houses were needed. Led by the Federation, the savings schemes aimed for a bigger initiative to develop infrastructure and houses in an empty space of land for the benefit of these savings schemes’ members and other members of the Federation outside of the Tokoza area. The Federation then assisted the savings schemes to look for available empty land to purchase for the purpose of the low-cost housing development. Members were mostly backyard dwellers from Tokoza. In Thinasonke Ext 4, there were no people officially living on the land except for labourer tenants who had initially lived with the former landowner. The Federation’s senior representative, who was the landless mobiliser of the Federation, helped the savings scheme members to identify the 21-hectare piece of land at a cost of R1.5 million.

2.1 The process of buying land

Once the land was found, the challenge was to negotiate with the owner of the land, who was then located in Cape Town. It was said that the savings schemes working with the Federation nominated some people within the schemes, who were then delegated to negotiate for the land with the owner; they were accompanied by some senior representatives from the Federation.

The Federation asked uTshani to go with them to meet the owner. At [the] time of this process there was an NGO called People’s Dialogue and the delegates went with them to meet with the land owner. People’s Dialogue came back with the recommendation that the land was too expensive at a cost of R1.5 million. It became so difficult for the group to have that money to purchase land. (FEDUP representative).

The Federation, working with the savings schemes, took a decision as a region (Gauteng region) that they would buy the land. The professional advice from the People’s Dialogue was that the land was too expensive and not viable to buy at a cost of R1.5 million; the delegates negotiated a reduced price of R1.2 million. Realizing that the cost of land was too high and that they could not afford to buy it from the savings money which they had, the savings schemes held a meeting to discuss how much each member should contribute to raise funds to purchase that land. By that time the number of members had dwindled to approximately 600. Members of the savings groups agreed that they should contribute R600.00 each. Yet that amount, multiplied by the number of members, could not match the cost of the land; they therefore needed to negotiate with the landowner to accept a deposit for at least a quarter of the required amount. The group never managed to raise the R1.2 million needed; instead, they raised R260 000.00. This amount was then paid as a deposit for the land in 1997. The owner of the land gave them one year to come up with the R1 million balance of payment. They then requested the assistance of uTshani

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6 The People’s Dialogue was an NGO which supported the Federation by providing capacity building support to Federation members.

7 Members of the Federation said the collected money was R260 000.00, while residents and development committee members said it was R245 000.00
to help them with the balance. The agreement reached was that uTshani would be the legal owner of the property as it had purchased it on behalf of the Federation. uTshani then paid the balance of R1 million and also paid the rates and the holding costs.

In the interviews with the Federation, it was explained that uTshani will sell the land to the municipality (for a profit) to ensure that infrastructure services are provided in the area. It is understood that once the land is transferred to the municipality, the beneficiaries will be allocated sites with title deeds. At the time of writing, the deed of sale between uTshani and the municipality was in process in terms of the legal work around the land (Interview with FEDUP representative).

After purchasing the land, negotiations with the provincial and municipal governments started, and the group requested the municipality to install the infrastructure, but first, the zoning of the area had to be done. The idea was that once the municipality has done this, FEDUP would facilitate the housing development (through the People’s Housing Process (PHP)\(^8\)) for FEDUP members, utilising government subsidies as per agreement. The company called Urban Dynamics was employed to do the zoning of the area.

The total number of community members and beneficiaries in the project (938 people) was more than the available sites when the zoning was done - the number of those who will be able to get houses in Thinasonke Ext. 4 stands at approximately 597\(^9\). This is due to the required size per plot and the available land allowable for residential development. The number of savings scheme members who had already moved to the area (prior to infrastructure being installed) is 335. According to interviews with members of the Federation, once they had paid a deposit, they were advised by the former landowner to move onto the land to avoid possible invasions.

\(^8\) The PHP was being promoted by FEDUP since it allowed for a more participatory approach by community members to local housing development.

\(^9\) The Development Committee members and the Federation representatives also gave conflicting figures – 524 and 597.

Figure 3. The northeastern border of the Thinasonke property.
FEDUP representatives admitted that, in hindsight, the idea to move onto the land was unwise, as it not only caused conflict with law enforcement agencies, but also created community divisions. The group who had initially moved onto the land allegedly began to sell sites illegally and eventually separated from the original savings groups aligned to FEDUP. After several years of tension, other loyal FEDUP members moved onto the land to protect it from further invasions.

3. Stakeholders involved in the project
There are a number of different stakeholders involved in the project as follows:

3.1 Residents in the area
Thinasonke Ext. 4 is an area made up different residents who form part of different community-based groups. All these residents are meant to be the beneficiaries of this project and include the following groups:
- The savings groups Zenzeleni and Magebhula, who are loyal supporters of the Federation;
- A group which defected from the Federation (‘splinter group’) which was also part of the savings schemes;
- Former farm labourers who remained on the land after it was sold to uTshani;
- A fourth group - a group of people who bought sites illegally from the ‘splinter group’.10

These are the main stakeholders and beneficiaries of the project. However, the Federation has indicated that its loyal members of the savings schemes are the main beneficiaries. The other groups in this area are in objection to this, particularly the ‘splinter group’. There is still an unresolved argument between these groups about the list of residents who are the main beneficiaries. Some residents, after realizing that the ‘splinter group’ was not helping them, also subsequently joined FEDUP so that they could benefit from the project:

Those who were sold sites by the ‘splinter group’ realized that they were robbed by the ‘splinter group’ and can no longer get their money back; now they have decided to join the Federation so that they become part of the Federation, and have joined the savings schemes so that they can be beneficiaries. (Federation representative)

The unconfirmed number of members of the savings schemes to benefit in this project was at about 600 by the time of our research and the number from the ‘splinter group’ is estimated between 80-90, while the number of other groups who are not members of the savings schemes and the Federation (former farm labourers and those who bought sites illegally) is a smaller number but was not indicated. In addition, it has been indicated that approximately 288 members of FEDUP from outside of the Tokoza and Thinasonke area will also benefit from housing sites

10 It was claimed that the ‘splinter group’ was selling sites illegally to those who were not members of the Federation. The splinter group was put on the land by the Federation to guard the property against possible land invasion.
in Thinasonke. Sites for housing in this area are clearly less than the numbers of potential beneficiaries in this project (524 single residential erven and 650 beneficiaries from Tokoza and 288 from outside the area). It was indicated by the Federation that those residents who would not be able to get houses from this project would get houses from the Federation’s projects that will take place in other areas located in close proximity, or would benefit from the proposed backyard rooms in the project (discussed further below).

### 3.2 Community Development Committee

A Development Committee\(^\text{11}\), which works as an advisory body to all of the residents, is made up of savings group members who are also loyal members of the Federation, and at the same time they are beneficiaries of the project. Its functions are to call residents’ meetings and explain any new developments within the project.

> There are people who do not have knowledge about this new development and also the progress in the project, so it is the duty of the committee to explain this to the people. (Development Committee member)

The committee members receive training and attend workshops related to capacity development and community building, organised by the Federation (more accurately, by Udondolo – FEDUP’s partner for capacity-building, as explained below). Some members of the committee have also been taken abroad to attend workshops to boost their capacity in the committee.

> I have travelled to Taiwan in China and Cape Town to attend workshops related to shack dwellers and in all these workshops I learned a lot from other people. (Development Committee member)

This committee also goes to the local municipality to negotiate with various departments about issues related to the new development in the area. This committee also chairs all residents’ meetings. Interestingly, when residents’ meetings are called, all residents, including the savings groups, the ‘splinter

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\(^{11}\) The Development Committee is composed of representatives of the FEDUP-aligned savings groups, therefore is not strictly a representative body of all stakeholders in the community.
group’, former farm labourers, and those who bought sites illegally attend. Although this committee is only made up of members loyal to the Federation, they claim to represent all people in this area since the meetings deal with project issues that will affect everyone in the area. It is only when the savings groups have their own savings meetings that other groups do not attend.

3.3 FEDUP

The Federation of the Urban Poor (FEDUP) is the major role player in the Thinasonke Ext 4 project, providing management support for community members’ involvement in the project and in leading the negotiations with other key stakeholders such as government. FEDUP, the South African affiliate of Shack Dwellers International (SDI), is a people-based housing movement with over 700 affiliate groups; most of its membership are drawn from informal settlements, backyard shacks, hostels, or rented accommodation in township areas. The building blocks of FEDUP are women’s savings collectives:

By means of savings, exchanges, enumerations, negotiations and dialogue, the Federation develops its members’ capacity to conceive, control and implement their own poverty alleviation strategies via the development of their own communities. (uTshani Fund, February 2010)

It was officially launched in early 2006 but, as indicated earlier, its roots go back to 1991 when a social movement was born as a result of an African People’s Dialogue on Land and Shelter. FEDUP has been able to secure tenure for more than 25 000 families and has facilitated the creation of grassroots housing associations that have constructed over 15 000 formal houses (Community Organization Resource Centre, February 2010).

The Federation has a national structure as the top structure with a final decision-making body of twelve members (the President, National Savings Coordinator, representatives from all nine provinces and a board member). There is also a regional structure in each province made up of representatives from the local savings groups. The third level of the Federation is composed of the local savings groups. In Tokoza, the Federation has Zenzeleni and Magebhula savings schemes as local membership organisations. At a local level there are also Community Construction Management Teams (CCMTs) - their presence depends on the availability of the projects in the respective local areas.

FEDUP has different entities that facilitate the various formal activities of the Federation; including uTshani Fund and Udondolo Trust.

- **uTshani Fund** is a section 21 company established for the specific purpose of managing development finance. Its sole purpose is to grow and protect the assets of the Federation, which includes land, housing, and infrastructure. They manage subsidies, grants, revolving finance, and donor funding for capital ventures for the Federation. uTshani Fund was established in January 1995 to partner and support development initiatives of organised slum communities. uTshani’s
community partners are grassroots organisations practicing the principles of Shack Dwellers International (SDI) (uTshani Fund, February 2010). In this specific case, uTshani’s role was to help acquire land by meeting the savings groups half-way for the purchase of the land, maintaining the portion of the land in terms of rent and taxes, securing the agreement with the government to sell the land back to the government at a profit, and ensuring that the Federation is in the winning position in this regard.

For example, if the Federation bought the land for R1 million, and uTshani sells it for R1.4 million, they would take off the holding costs, which would be the rates and taxes over the period, and the balance, but the whole R1.4 million would go back into the Federation/uTshani revolving fund and they would use that to kick start the project if need be, that is if they don’t get subsidies up front. In Thinasonke, for example, the infrastructure is financed but the top structures need bridge financing. uTshani would bridge that financing and sign the deal [or] proper contract with the government and provide technical assistance to the Federation in order to reach the required housing standards of the government, which is not what the Federation thinks [it] is supposed to be doing, but the Federation is doing [this] so as to get the money flowing and build a better quality and standard houses. (FEDUP representative)

- **Udondolo Trust** is the treasury for the Slum Dwellers International (SDI) programs of the Federation, which are the savings, women’s savings, participation, and enumeration programs; it raises the funding for these programs. Udondolo also manages the social money\(^{12}\) in terms of building social capital.

These two different structures have also different roles to play in the Thinasonke Ext. 4 project. As indicated, uTshani bought the land and holds the title deed while Udondolo has to facilitate participation and savings with the savings schemes.

As per the MoU with the South African government (Memorandum of Understanding, May 2006), the roles and responsibilities of the Federation are to:

- Collaborate with the Government of the Republic of South Africa in driving the first significant pilot projects of housing delivery, involving both upgrading and relocation, and to work with the Government of the Republic of South Africa to facilitate their replication to other slums; and,
- Mobilise all slum dwellers into coherent organisations with a capacity to contribute knowledge, skills and other resources towards the transformation of their settlements into decent, affordable and sustainable built environments.

### 3.4 Provincial and local governments

The Gauteng Department of Housing and Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality are also major stakeholders in the project - if government structures don’t play their part, the project cannot progress. The provincial government has pledged to finance this project as far as housing and

\(^{12}\) Social money refers to the small running costs of the Federation which is used for activities such as organising meetings, workshops and other programmes of the Federation
infrastructure are concerned,\textsuperscript{13} while the municipality has to deal with: 1) approving the zoning of the area, 2) registering the title deeds of the allocated sites and approving the housing plans, 3) putting in the infrastructure once the zoning plan is approved, and 4) delivering municipal services to this community. At the time of our research the municipality had already approved the zoning plan.

Since we managed to get land, the Ekurhuleni Municipality has promised to put infrastructure into the area and then the Federation will come up with the construction of PHP through subsidies provided by the Gauteng Provincial Housing Department. (Development Committee member)

Initially, according to FEDUP representatives, it was a challenge for the municipality to install the infrastructure as the title deed of the land was in uTshani’s name. According to the regulations, the municipality is prohibited from installing infrastructure on privately owned land. Subsequently (late 2009), a deed of sale between the municipality and uTshani was signed, which included uTshani’s conditions that the land be developed for their intended beneficiaries (Interview with Urban Dynamics representative).

As per the MoU (Memorandum of Understanding, May 2006), the general role and responsibilities of government are to:

- Provide information and assistance in respect of land ownership and acquisition where required;
- Provide guidance on modification of planning and building standards where these are required for equitable land allocation;
- Provide support to FEDUP in negotiations with local and provincial authorities on land and development priorities; and
- Actively support exposure training for officials and political representatives in order to ensure their familiarity with, and support for, community-based development processes.

3.5 Urban Dynamics Gauteng

Urban Dynamics Gauteng (UDG) is an urban planning consultancy appointed to deal with the urban planning process for the Thinasonke project. It forms part of a group of companies operating in Southern Africa. The infrastructure of this group consists of a network of 11 companies spread throughout the region, with more than 150 qualified and skilled personnel and supported by state-of-the-art, technologically advanced equipment. UDG is an independent consultant which was recommended by the Federation to do the zoning of the area. It is working under the Project Manager, LTE Engineers, which is employed by the Gauteng Department of Housing. It was indicated during the interviews that UDG was recommended by the Federation to do town planning in Thinasonke Ext. 4 as it has a long history of working with the Federation

\textsuperscript{13} The information gathered on this point was somewhat contradictory: interviews with Federation members indicate that the municipality wanted to install the infrastructure and later some information from Urban Dynamics and other members of the Federation show that the provincial Department of Housing stopped the municipality from carrying out that duty and promised to install infrastructure on its own as a province.
in other projects. UDG showed that it is paid by the provincial government to do the technical work for this project.

The following stakeholder map indicates the linkages / relationships between the various stakeholders in the Thinasonke Ext. 4 project:

![Project Stakeholder Diagram](image)

Figure 5. Project Stakeholder Diagram

4. Findings and analysis

4.1 Participation process

As participation in the development project involves many parties, every stakeholder in this project makes different claims about participation. This is a community-initiated project as it emerged from the mobilization of savings schemes with assistance from the support organisation, FEDUP. The provincial and local governments are also critical to the project’s success. However it is not quite clear who takes full control of the project as both FEDUP and community members claim to have leading roles in it; if one stakeholder stops along the process the whole project comes to a halt.
Although the project was kick-started through efforts of the savings schemes and the Federation, there are many contested issues between the stakeholders, with different implications for the participation process. Some of these contested issues are good for the project while others are negative, in some instances causing delays in the project. The information gathered shows that the different stakeholders have different levels of satisfaction about their participation in the project.

According to the ward councillor, there is a report that came to him showing that in this community there is a group of residents who are not satisfied with the participation process, complaining that it has not been fully consulted about this development project. Some residents have also indicated similar views:

> The process has not been entirely participatory in that the Federation and Zenzeleni savings group do not always give sufficient information on the process to us. The Federation collected money from us a few years back, with us under the impression that the money would be generated towards building proper houses. However the houses have still not arrived. (Former farm labourer)

In contrast, a UDG representative who did the zoning and facilitated participation in the zoning process feels that residents in this area definitely participated in terms of raising their concerns and directing the progress of the project, at one point halting the process as a result of their dissatisfaction with certain government regulations.

> There was a point I think in this process where things fell flat for a bit. We were appointed by uTshani initially. We went through this process with the community and drew the layout. At the time there was a standard from the provincial government that you had to have a 250 square metre stand which is now reduced to 180 square metres or you would not qualify for the subsidy. We told uTshani Fund and they told us they don’t accept the plan as they wanted their principles on size and density to be applied to this project (the original 250 square metre). I agreed with their principles but it was unacceptable to the provincial government. So we couldn’t submit it as a subsidy project. [uTshani, as mandated by residents] told us to stop so we stopped with the layout plan. (Urban Dynamics Gauteng representative)

Many residents also indicated that they were satisfied with the participation process in the project in general:

> So far I have seen the full participation by the members in the whole development process in the project. Although the development is not yet complete - they are still in a process of planning - but I am satisfied by the way I see people participating in the whole process. If there was no participation, I don’t think we would have been at this stage. All these are because of good participation and cooperation by the savings groups’ members. (Development Committee member)

> Participation by all stakeholders has drastically shaped the project. Participation is very good because there is nothing that can proceed without people taking part in it. People feel ownership of the development. In general, people resist some developments because they have never been part of that. (Resident)
It is often noted in various projects that participation consumes a lot of time. In Thinasonke this is also the case, particularly in situations in which government uses its own way of implementing policies and active community members then contest such actions; everything in the project has to stop and the project gets delayed. This is evident in Thinasonke, for instance, when the municipality changed rules regarding the implementation plan:

We went through the same process in the second round of layout planning. The rules changed in the meantime and Ekurhuleni would not accept the project to use their internal funding to put in the infrastructure unless the stands were smaller than 180 square metres. So we started again. Residents brought me a drawing with alternatives and I took their alternatives and drew them up on the computer. I explained to the community and showed them the alternatives and laid out the good and the bad points. The community I’m talking about is all of the heads of the savings clubs. They must go out and explain to the rest of the community. They came back and decided on the layout and that was the layout that was circulated. (Urban Dynamics Gauteng representative)

Apart from the contestations within the community, various issues raised tensions between the community members loyal to FEDUP, the municipality, and other residents referred to as the ‘splinter group’. Factors such as the lack of communication between the municipality and residents, slow progress and less interest by the municipality in the project, and some legal technicalities were indicated as factors hampering participation in the project.

These participation dynamics raised above unfolded in different ways during the process of development, as discussed in the following sections.

4.1.1 Participation in the purchase of land
The buying process shows that stakeholders in the project went through different processes to purchase the land, e.g. searching for the available land for sale, negotiating with land owners, holding savings schemes meetings to discuss the buying process, as well as negotiating with the municipality to buy the land from them. Not all stakeholders and beneficiaries participated in all of these processes. From the interviews, it became clear that only the delegated members of the team (Federation representatives and selected savings scheme members) were deeply involved and participated in the purchase of land. The delegated team claimed they reported back to the other members about all progress made in the land negotiations. Once the available land was found and the price was known, the savings scheme members held meetings to determine how each member would contribute to the purchase price. The savings scheme members agreed to the contribution of R600.00 per member in order to raise the deposit amount needed. Collecting enough money to purchase land proved too difficult for the savings schemes, until uTshani came in to assist by providing the balance of payment (R1 million).

Many people interviewed, amongst them members of the savings schemes and those from the Federation, commented that people in this area feel proud of their participation in the process of
The whole plan is from the community itself. The community has played the bigger role in the project because they become part of the development. They are the ones who have planned; they are the ones who were coming up with the ideas about everything. They are the ones who have shown the priorities of the community. And they have also raised that when the development comes to their area, they should be prioritized in the construction work as labourers. (Savings scheme member)

However it should be noted that community members do not yet have ownership status since the land is still owned by uTshani (on their behalf) and beneficiaries have not yet received title to the proposed sites. The feelings of ownership should therefore be seen in light of the community members’ role in securing the deposit and their role in negotiating with uTshani to provide the balance. Community members certainly played a major role in this process but not having sufficient finances does relegate their role to a secondary status since uTshani / FEDUP owns the land at this stage and not the residents.

4.1.2 Participation in the urban design

This project is a greenfield project, as development is starting on an empty space of land, which is to provide 524 subsidy housing units along with municipal services, parks, a taxi rank/business facility and 65 rental housing units (Urban Dynamics Gauteng, Inc. September 2008). The beneficiaries assisted by FEDUP are to benefit from houses developed through the PHP. After completing the process of buying land, town planners were needed to do the zoning of the area. Urban Dynamics Gauteng (UDG) is the company involved in the zoning of the Thinasonke Ext 4 area. UDG has a long history of working with the Federation. As many activities in this community are organised by the Federation, community members were advised to use UDG as their town planner in the project.

There is conflicting information on who appointed UDG to do the zoning of Thinasonke Ext 4. While some state that the residents “appointed the company”, others indicated it was appointed by the Gauteng Department of Housing (GDH). Savings scheme members involved in the Development Committee said that they have appointed UDG, while the Federation said that they only recommended the UDG to Thinasonke Ext. 4 residents, as the Federation has a long history of working relationships with the UDG in many projects.

The community appointed UDG years ago to be the technical advisors to the project. To date, I think Urban Dynamics has been working on this project for 12 years. When the Federation asks them to come for support they will come. uTshani has not paid one cent to them...I think it is their social contribution. (FEDUP representative)

Urban Dynamics is working under LTE, the project managers employed by the GDH. The work that UDG is doing in this project is paid by the GDH. GDH is providing the subsidies to the project. They are paying for our fees; they give you money for professional fees, project management support, the money for the
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infrastructure, the money for the top structure, money for the land. (Urban Dynamics Gauteng representative)

The confusion about how UDG was appointed is interesting in the sense that community members and FEDUP representatives interviewed show that they were clearly not directly involved in the overall appointment process of UDG; instead, their role was to recommend UDG. But the main point is noted that their recommendation was taken seriously.

With regard to participation in the urban design, stakeholders interviewed showed their satisfaction with the participation process but also indicated the difficulties for communities in engaging with technical processes as well as disagreements between community groups on the main features of the plan, which took considerable time to resolve. The Development Committee, Federation and the UDG representatives indicated that the planning process was done through a bottom-up approach, which gave an opportunity to beneficiaries to develop a site plan in the way community members involved in this process wanted it. The UDG took the initial draft and modified it to come up with the standard plan. However, the first step involved discussions with FEDUP, followed by interaction with the Development Committee and the councillor. These structures then liaised and reported back to the residents and beneficiaries about every meeting that took place with UDG, the Development Committee and the Federation.

In the town planning process, specifically at the beginning with the layout, first I discussed the principles and how we are going to do it with FEDUP and uTshani. Our arrangement is that they give us the ideas and principles and I gave them the technical output. Unfortunately, allowing them to do technical doesn’t really work and technical doesn’t always have nice answers. It doesn’t matter if you draw something this big, it’s not 250 square meters. What happened in this specific project is that we discussed the project and how we were going to handle it and you know there are the savings groups and then there was a long fight within the groups which I don’t want to get into that debate. So what happened was that I got both groups’ input on the layout. I needed to have buy-in from both groups on my layout. So we also included the ward councillor in our discussions with them. Initially, a long time ago, the community gave me a drawing of how they see it. I first had a meeting with them explaining the contours; we can’t have access here and there, where the pipes are, etc. They gave me a drawing back. The problem was that they got someone who worked for a land surveyor somewhere and the drawing showed that there were about 2,000 stands on it and he wrote in 250 square meters. But I can’t stretch the land! So I then took their drawing and tried to follow the layout and brought it back to them and we discussed it.[VAC3] (Urban Dynamics Gauteng representative)

Residents have played the bigger role because the whole plan is from the community itself. Urban Dynamics has only helped in formalising the whole plan. (Development Committee member)

Contrary to the last comment above, it is clear that the role of the urban planners went beyond just formalising the plan – the previous quotation indicates that careful facilitation of the participation process in the urban design was required by the urban planners to ensure that all of the different community groups’ views were taken into consideration and to reach common ground. Furthermore the urban planners also had to work through the support organisation.
(FEDUP) to inform them about the urban design process so that they could inform community members. The community was then represented through the Development Committee and the ward councillor to finally approve the plan on behalf of the community members:

From then on with my community participation, although we [Urban Dynamics] are not the project manager, say from a town planning perspective, we try to keep the Federation up to date about why there is a hold up or about small things so that they can give feedback to the people. When we decided on the final layout, we had members of the Development Committee and the ward councillor who were eyewitness, and they all signed the final plan. (Urban Dynamics Gauteng representative).

Throughout the urban design process, community members were clearly eager to participate, taking the initiative to get a land surveyor to draw up an initial plan and engaging with UDG, showing much interest in the technical details of the design. FEDUP was also encouraging a high level of participation in this regard so that it would lead to capacity building. However, UDG raised concern about engaging community members at this level of detail, implying that it could cause delays. This reflects that design professionals may have less understanding of the value of capacity building in improving participation:

I know that uTshani/FEDUP want capacity building as one of their conditions. It’s a difficult thing to define… because why? It’s important for the community to understand the process and to be kept up to date. I get the feeling that some of the members of the committee wanted to know all of the details of how the storm water goes. I don’t know if there is a benefit to that. To give information is not a problem. An example, is the [problem created by the] guy who drew the plan. He could say, “why don’t we have 2,000 stands?” One just needs to be careful of the level of participation on the technical side. (Urban Dynamics Gauteng representative)

The final plan approved through all these community input processes is indicated below: (see figure 6).
Although the majority got involved and participated in the planning process, it does not necessarily mean that there were no challenges. As in many other communities where community development projects are marred by community conflicts, some members within Thinasonke Ext. 4 challenged some of the planning aspects, which is positive in terms of participation since the project gave residents the opportunity to raise important concerns. But some of these concerns could only be addressed by explaining the reasons to community members and hence not resulting in the desired changes that the community members had in mind. The UDG indicated that it came across some disgruntled residents who were unhappy with aspects of the plan, but for UDG this was not seen as a major challenge since the matter mainly required clarity about the technicalities in the town planning regulations. The UDG was able to address community members’ demands in a way which allowed them to gain a full understanding of the issue. For example, an issue at stake by this contesting section of the community was the size of stands in the site; the group demanded stands of 250 square metres. Unfortunately, the municipality had changed the rules along the way, only allowing for 180 square metre stands, or the plan would not be approved. The UDG said that as a result of such contestations the project was a bit delayed, since they had to go through various processes to reach an agreement or make the group understand that their preferences and needs could not be accommodated. Thus, there were clearly limits to community participation with regards to government decisions, as certain government decisions could not be challenged effectively by community members.
4.1.3 Participation in the negotiations with the municipality
From the standpoint of the municipality, it was their responsibility to see to it that everything in this project met the required standards, following certain rules and regulations. From the buying of land to the urban design of this project, the municipality kept an eye on every step. The Development Committee, backed by the support organisation FEDUP, went through many meetings with the municipality to deal with the development of the area. For FEDUP, it was important that the community take the lead in these negotiations and that FEDUP merely provides support, so that in the process community members take responsibility for the project and their capacity is also developed at the same time:

The community must do the negotiations; they will call the municipality to set up a meeting. Once the first series of meetings are set up, it is just a continuation in terms of progress and then the follow-up. I try to do an action matrix in the meeting. They must do the minutes and take notes. All I do, or the professional will do, is to make a matrix to consolidate at the end of the meeting - this is what we agreed to do, this is who is responsible for what and by when. My job after that is to ensure that I’m doing what I’m supposed to do and the Federation is doing what they are supposed to do and the development team or committee will do the follow-up for the meeting and ask for the minutes. There you build the capacity also. If they don’t do it, I don’t push. I always tell them that the development will go as far as they want it to go and that they must remember they are not a priority in uTshani’s book. There are hundreds of other projects waiting…they must make it happen. (FEDUP representative)

The simultaneous process of taking responsibility for key processes and, in so doing, building capacity, contrasts to other development projects where many believe that capacity first has to be developed and then community members can incrementally take responsibility for various aspects of the project. In the case of Thinasonke the simultaneous process has proved effective in that members of the Development Committee felt more empowered and confident at earlier stages in the project.

Yet, as indicated above, there were many aspects that community members could not change through their participation in negotiations with the municipality e.g., the stand sizes. This again highlights that in this case participation can only go so far – that it is restricted by government controls.

4.2 Contested issues in the project

4.2.1 Beneficiaries and selection criterion
Selection of beneficiaries in this project is one aspect that is posing serious challenges to project unity, reflecting divisions among the different stakeholders, notably between some residents and the leaders of the Federation. At the beginning, it was shown that the project was initiated by backyard dwellers from Tokoza Township, who were organised into savings schemes. FEDUP leaders indicated that the savings schemes had approximately 1000 members when they first met with the Federation, but the number dwindled as some people withdrew as a result of differences
with FEDUP, while others moved to some other parts of the country. A representative from the Federation indicated that there are 650 beneficiaries from Tokoza and 288 from other areas outside Tokoza; in total, the number of beneficiaries in this project is 938 while the available stands for housing are 524. This will leave 414 beneficiaries out of the list of beneficiaries in the area.

This is a very complex situation to deal with, which could end up splitting residents in the area into more camps and could lead to apathy on the part of others involved in the project. While we talked to some people who are meant to be project beneficiaries, it seems as if the issue of who will benefit and who will not is not clear to beneficiaries; every resident has hopes that he/she will benefit from this project in the same way. The Federation representatives provided a puzzling answer about the way of resolving this issue. On the one hand, Federation representatives indicated that this was an aspect for community participation in that the community members had to resolve the issue; that is, they should take responsibility for working out who should benefit and in which way. Yet the response also indicates that FEDUP had already decided that those who have houses elsewhere will only be able to rent, and that vulnerable women will benefit from a government grant but that this would mean smaller houses for them:

This is a process which they must work out themselves as a community. This community also has a grant from government for about R300 000.00 to give to vulnerable women. So in that 650 there are women with children who are divorced and with no houses. They won’t get a big house but they have that grant money so the community can make provisions for them. There are also people who are members of the savings group in the area who will not qualify for housing because they have houses somewhere. To resolve this issue, the project has come up with houses for rental. The ones that don’t qualify because they have houses elsewhere… will have to rent. Where beneficiaries have benefited before and have no reason to have a site, other than the vulnerable women, they will have to rent [these are people who are still members of the Federation and savings groups and have houses somewhere e.g. having houses in their homelands or elsewhere]. (FEDUP representative)

The question is: if members who had an experience of backyard life in Tokoza and contributed so much in the buying of land, with the intention to avoid a similar unpleasant backyard situation, find themselves again renting the backyard rooms, what would be their reaction? Yet it seems that their feelings will not be taken into consideration by FEDUP, who seems to have the decision-making power in this regard, even though they claim that community members need to participate in these decisions.

Apart from members of the savings groups and the Federation, the issue about the benefits of the ‘splitter group’ was also disputed at a number of levels. While FEDUP felt they should not benefit, the municipality seems to have decided that this group and others should also form part of the beneficiaries. However, the municipality agreed with FEDUP on certain conditions about this decision. According to the agreement, the government would provide infrastructure if the
Federation will include in its beneficiary list the ‘splinter group’, those who were sold stands illegally by the ‘splinter group,’ and old plot dwellers in its list of beneficiaries; however, non-members of the Federation will get houses of smaller sizes as compared to those that FEDUP members will receive. According to FEDUP representatives, the issue of residents (both FEDUP members and ‘splinter group’ members) who do not qualify for subsidies is another matter that will have to be worked out, and this will take a considerable amount of time. Yet the response is not clear about how this process will be worked out and to what extent community participation on this aspect will be possible, since there are clear government restrictions in this regard that limit the various options available to community members:

The other challenge is the subsidy approvals; we already know that a lot of both the ‘splinter group’ and our beneficiaries do not qualify. They need to seek common ground as to how they are going to try and accommodate as many people as possible, notwithstanding those people who do qualify. For the Federation, it’s going to take 18-24 months to work it out. (FEDUP representative)

It is clear, though, that the criteria for beneficiaries is biased towards loyal supporters of the Federation and members of the savings schemes, and this is causing conflict among residents in the area. Even participation in this regard is dominated by members of the Federation, with some decisions predetermined by FEDUP. Rifts and protests by different groups in this project is evidence that inequality among the beneficiaries threatens the participation process and it is affecting the project negatively.

The committee is lacking to call us in meetings as old tenants, and the conflict in the committee is affecting the project. Another problem is for us who were here and the Federation demanded us to pay rent. We are not treated as other residents. (Former farm labourer)

4.2.2 Conflicts and divisions within the community

Although the savings scheme groups in the Thinasonke Ext. 4 project started as a very united group of people with common goals, somewhere along the line they got divided. In many communities, the control of resources and the struggle for power tend to be the major causes of these rifts, as is the case in Thinasonke. The divisions in the Thinasonke Ext. 4 project led to the derailing of this project, loss of confidence in government processes, and reluctance to participate. As indicated earlier, residents in this area are divided into different groups: a group which diverted from the savings groups and the Federation, termed the ‘splinter group,’ with between 80-90 people; the group still participating in the savings schemes and the Federation; a third group consisting of former farm labourers; and a fourth group for those who were sold sites by the ‘splinter group’.14 The ‘splinter group’ and the FEDUP-aligned savings groups are blaming each other for the problems in the project. These groups differ on many things. The ‘splinter group’ was not in favour of the way in which the Development Committee and

14 It was claimed by the Federation that some of these people who were sold sites have now joined the savings schemes and the Federation; they have now realised that they will never get their money back from the ‘splinter group’, so, to benefit from the project, they have to join the savings schemes and the Federation.
Federation members conducted the negotiations with the municipality - the ‘splinter group’ feels that the Federation has sold the community out to the municipality, and they will therefore lose their share of their land. On the other hand, the ‘splinter group’ was accused of negotiating with the municipality separately and leaving the Development Committee and other Federation members out of those negotiations; it was also blamed for the illegal sale of sites to people who were not members of the Federation or the savings schemes. uTshani had to intervene in the illegal sale of sites and told the group that uTshani is the legal owner of the land.

The group that the Federation put onto the land [in 1998] to look after it started to sell sites. They sold them to anyone who had money and they began creating an informal settlement in the area. That is what created the split.... Only a few were benefiting from these sales. That was more of the gripe and so they split; it became ugly. They wouldn’t allow the Federation members who were still not yet in the area to access the land. They started negotiating with the municipality on their own. They had a lawyer. Over the years, it became progressively more antagonistic until uTshani Fund had to stop it because it was spoiling the relationships in terms of furthering the development. We said here’s the title deed. No one owns the land except for uTshani. No one has rights to it except for uTshani. (FEDUP representative)

All stakeholders in the project indicated that they got frustrated by these divisions as they are hampering the project and the participation process. This example also shows that not all processes in the projects will go unchallenged and that the community should not be seen as a completely unified homogenous entity. Rather, active members of communities will not allow stages of the project to pass without participating and asking questions about them, or even creating their own processes for their own benefit. It shows that within communities there might be people with the mission to disrupt the project to better suit their interests, even if this means derailing the project so that they would benefit at the expense of others in the community. In other instances, when some community members felt that their needs were not being addressed and that they were not effectively informed (since they were not members of FEDUP), they took matters into their own hands to approach government directly, which then sparked a reaction from urban planners to address these concerns:

There was one guy who nearly derailed the whole project who came back later and say they didn’t know about the site plan; he wrote a letter to Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) to say that he wants schools and [a] hospital on the site as well. I spoke to him on the phone and he just wanted to see that there are schools and that there are medical facilities. We spoke to him before the project was delayed. He made an objection to the proposal [by planners]. He’s from the community, he’s one of the residents but he’s not with FEDUP and he doesn’t qualify for a subsidy. (Urban Dynamics Gauteng representative)

This example shows that community members in this project are not all unified, passive recipients following the leadership of FEDUP and the urban planners, but create their own channels to participate in the process when they feel excluded. Of course, this creates problems for the main participation route (created by the project managers) which could negatively affect the progress of the project. Yet it does emphasise that all residents affected by such
developments should be included in participation processes or they will create their own spaces for participation, and that this possibility should be taken seriously since it will ultimately affect the project.

4.2.3 Community relations with government (provincial and municipal levels)

In many community development projects, interactions and relationships between government and communities were found to be unhealthy, as is the case in Thinasonke to some extent. The common complaints are that the government does things without consulting the communities, taking unilateral decisions and bringing projects to communities without community participation in their planning stages. As a result, the gap between government and communities in the planning stage can lead to failures in the implementation stage.

According to many people interviewed in the Thinasonke project, although the municipality wanted to take control of the project, community members stood their ground in raising their objections in terms of their needs. It is clear in this project that the dominant group, the Federation members, took control in many instances in their disputes with government about the project. It was even mentioned during the interviews that during the process of buying the land for the project, the municipality tried to compete with the savings groups to buy the same land, but the landowner preferred to give it to the poor people:

The municipality decided…[to try] to negotiate with the land owner to buy that same land as a municipality for its own purpose. The owner of the land refused the offer from the municipality and decided to sell the land to the poor people which were us. (Development Committee member)

There were a few other instances where the interaction in relation to this project between the government and communities went sour. Some members of the savings groups in Tokoza moved onto the land in early 1998 after the land was purchased, but their reasons were to watch over the land and to stop the ‘splinter group’ from further illegal sales of sites. The government objected to these people moving onto the land and took actions to remove them, even though they had done nothing when these community members called upon government to prevent occupation of the land by those not involved in the project:

I received a directive from the Department of Environmental Affairs and all the departments (because I was the uTshani representative) [that Federation members were] in contravention of all the acts to allow people to move onto the land. Suddenly everyone from government wanted to meet with us. I told them that they needed to go. This is a community, it’s their land, and the land has been invaded. They have asked you to assist in evicting people, to facilitate, and no one has helped them. They reported the illegal trade of sites. There are numerous cases at the police station and no one has spotted them. Now that the Federation members are moving onto the land in contravention of the acts, people are asking about it. Suddenly the municipality sent the notorious security company known to deal with evictions called ‘Red Ants’; they came and demolished all shacks for Federation members. We had to get the Legal Resources Centre to help us deal with the matter in a legal way and we had to get the guy who was head of Metro, whom I knew personally, to intervene and tell the ‘Red Ants’ what they are doing …. [is] illegal. The ‘Red Ants’ said it

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was illegal to occupy the land and that just because they own the land does not mean they can do whatever they want. We said that we weren’t issued a court order. I asked head of the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Police to arrest the ‘Red Ants’ and put up emergency tents. We didn’t have the capacity to get involved with legal things but we told the Federation that they could start civil proceedings. (FEDUP representative)

The shacks had to be rebuilt and the Federation took the advantage of that to mobilise people and get more support from its members. These kinds of acts by government left people with less interest in engaging government and they became reluctant to participate in the project.

Community members also complained about the slow progress in implementing the project, which they interpret as empty promises or deception, negatively affecting their interest in participating. Some placed the blame on the government while others accused the Federation. This was registered during the interviews with various community members, both non-members and members of the Federation:

The project is yet to bear fruits as there are no real developments yet to come from the project since its inception. These problems… have plagued the community as there has been a lot of promise of delivery, however there has been no… delivery to the people of Thinasonke Ext. 4. (Resident)

Another challenge is how the community members feel that they are being lied to by government officials and sometimes by the Federation as well. People have …[for] far too long felt neglected by the government and municipality. (Resident)

4.3 Benefits of participation

There is a perception by many people that any form of participation changes the shape of a particular project, creating either negative or positive change in the project. It is believed, as in Arnstein’s ladder of participation, that ‘citizen power’ is the highest level of participation that should be strived towards to yield positive results, where people are fully involved and at the end they feel ownership of the product. UDG, who spent much time in facilitating participation with the residents of Thinasonke Ext.4 in this project, believes that participation had both positive and negative effects for this project.

Participation definitely changed the project. There’s a positive and negative side of the participation. Unfortunately you’ll get that everywhere. Some members of the community use the information and technical stuff and use it as a weapon to cause a divide. They take a negative thing and go back to the community with that and say deal with that. In every project there will be fights, but it is important for me that if there are issues we listen to them. On the technical side, I had to get everyone’s buy-in. (Urban Dynamics Gauteng representative)

As a town planner, the UDG representative had to accommodate everyone’s view and had to work to get the buy-in from all residents in order to deter any delays, so that the residents would benefit from the end product.
The Federation representative, who has worked with the Federation for a very long period and got involved in the Thinasonke Ext. 4 project from its inception, indicated the benefits of community participation in this project from a different angle, emphasising the importance of personal empowerment and agency as opposed to being passive recipients:

If you don’t have participation, then there is an entitlement mentality. If you are not going to participate you might as well just be on the government’s waiting list and then you have to take what you get. With participation comes sacrifice, pride, rights. (FEDUP representative)

She further emphasised the importance of developing capacity to negotiate in these development processes, citing the general approach of FEDUP to get involved at higher levels of decision-making with a range of stakeholders and taking on leading roles in these processes. For example, she indicated that “the Free State Federation has managed community participation processes so well that they chair, coordinate, and take minutes of joint working group meetings comprised of uTshani, the National Department of Housing, the Provincial Department of Housing, etc. - this is the type of capacity the Federation has built and they know the process from the ground to the top. They’ve become experts at playing the game.” In relation to participation in the Thinasonke Ext 4 project, she indicated that they are also striving towards similar levels of capacity building so that the community will have more pride in the development as a result of their participation:

That is what we would like to see when the Thinasonke Ext. 4 development is finished. When the community is built, you find there will be less crime because there’s more pride in the community. People feel they have sacrificed so much that they will not allow illegal activities in their community, e.g. mushrooming of ‘shebeens’. There are a lot of abstract social benefits. (FEDUP representative)

Benefits of participation in development projects are therefore not only related to the material benefits for the poor, but also the development of capacity and skills that will enable the poor to gain more agency and ability to make choices that will continue to provide benefits for their lives and the life of the community. Participation in community development projects also empowers community members through transfer of skills in terms of learning through participation. One interviewee in the community who is also a Development Committee member said that through participation there is a lot that she has learned:

I have learned that coming together with other people and doing things together, there is a lot to benefit from. I have travelled to Taiwan to attend a workshop of the shack dwellers, also traveled to Cape Town for a workshop related to shack dwellers. Through participation people give more ideas and views. Sometimes if you isolate yourself from other people, you might think that what you are thinking is right, and when you take people and sit down with them, they will give you more ideas about what they want and how they see things. Another thing, through participation people feel ownership of the end product. (Development Committee member)

Participation is like a learning curve. Through participation there is a lot that can be achieved. I feel like I can go somewhere, to another community, and encourage other people on participation, as it is a good vehicle of
development to yield good results. Public participation is a good way of working with people. People also succeed in life because they got involved in the participation process, more especially in the development projects in their areas. (Development Committee member)

4.4 Project challenges in relation to community participation
Every community development project has its own challenges and in some instances challenges have positive and negative impacts on the levels of community participation. On the positive side, challenges drive participants or stakeholders in the project to be creative and find solutions to the problems facing the project, while on the negative side, project participants might lose energy and feel reluctant to continue with participation in the project.

From the Federation’s perspective, one big challenge in this project was about getting the deed of sale approved, with the condition that the Federation can implement the project as planned for their beneficiaries. The Federation indicated that for the municipality to install infrastructure, the municipality has to have title to the land, but the Federation feared that if the land is transferred to the municipality without any conditions attached, they might lose everything. The Federation feels that there is apathy in the Ekurhuleni legal department that has to drive the approval. A Federation member said, “I don’t think anyone in the legal department at Ekurhuleni is brave enough to move with it on those conditions.” These negotiations with municipality are definitely one of the more challenging aspects of the project, and FEDUP has had to play a major role in these negotiations, minimising the participation of community members in this aspect. Even though FEDUP itself has emphasised that community members should lead these negotiations, they have also indicated that this requires more capacity building for community members as well as technical support from support organizations.

The Federation views the other serious challenge as the subsidy approvals. The Federation feels that since many residents belonging to both the ‘splinter group’ and the Federation do not qualify for subsidies, there should be a common agreement as to how they are going to try and accommodate as many people as possible. The Federation is aware that the process to sort out the beneficiary list is still going to be a long process that will delay the project further.

As beneficiaries on the list exceed the available number of sites in the area, there is an option which the Federation feels can solve the problem - the backyard formal structures for rental. If the government agrees to do simultaneous backyard formal structures, that will ease the problem.

What we did in this project was to reserve an area for rental units. We’ve also discussed opportunities to provide rental units on the sites with Ekurhuleni municipality. We are trying to accommodate them. First we need to get the subsidy and get services on the site. But there’s also an opportunity to add on to that and look at high-density housing with Ekurhuleni. (Urban Dynamics Gauteng representative)

It is not clear to what extent community participation in this process has occurred or will assist in solving the problem. Although the Federation at one point indicated that the community
members must resolve this issue amongst themselves, it is also clear that the Federation is promoting the rental option; however, this also depends on government approval, so in this instance there are clear limits to the community’s ability to influence these decisions.

Conflict amongst residents is another issue which every stakeholder feels is delaying the implementation of this project. One source of conflict in this area is caused by uncertainty amongst some residents who are not members of the Federation. Former plot dwellers and members of the ‘splinter group’ indicated that they were worried about their future in the area. During the interviews, they expressed concern about what was going to happen to them, claiming that neither the Federation nor government gives them clarity about their status in the new developments. It was also claimed that some people who know that they are not included in the list of beneficiaries even cause unnecessary delays to the planning processes so that their concerns can be addressed.

The changes in government processes and procedures along the way without informing other stakeholders effectively, and coordination problems between provincial and local government, are some of the biggest challenges, as they frustrate beneficiaries as well the Federation and as a result dampen the mood of participation in the project. The UDG representative gave an example of what happened in their town planning process:

For me, the delay was when the size of the erven was changed. That was a big delay from a technical perspective. We were right at the point of approval and we were told to stop. The rules changed in the meantime and Ekurhuleni would not accept the project to use their internal funding to put in the infrastructure unless the stands were smaller than 180 square meters. (Urban Dynamics Gauteng representative)

In some of the latest developments, the UDG learned that the delay now is as a result of the budget.

The province told us the day we had the township approval [November, 2009] that they were ready to go. Gauteng province gave money to the Ekurhuleni municipality to buy the land from uTshani to develop houses for the Thinasonke Ext 4 community. Ekurhuleni municipality was involved throughout the process; in anticipation of the project being implemented, the Ekurhuleni municipality reserved funds from Ekurhuleni’s budget for the implementation, but they were told by the provincial government not to put funds aside as the province would fund it because it was one of their priority projects. We have everybody up and ready, and then they told us that they have no budget. I was told later on in December 2009 that the Province doesn’t actually have the money, there’s no money left. (Urban Dynamics Gauteng representative)

There is a feeling that these actions by government might rip this community apart worse than before, since expectations about the project benefits were raised by promoting community participation.
I feel bad for [FEDUP representatives] and the ladies of the savings clubs because community people are blaming them because the project is taking so long. They should be commended for how far they have come. The allocation of funding was confirmed, but the fact that the budget wasn’t there from [Department of] Housing has created a lot of problems. People don’t believe the [FEDUP representative] and the women [in the savings clubs] anymore. Things like where to build a clinic and what to do with the non-qualifiers—those are just issues that we will deal with. Those are just processes but without the budget—that’s the problem. (Urban Dynamics Gauteng representative)

The ward councillor, when asked about the difference brought in by the element of participation in the project, indicated that so far the process is so slow and he cannot see how participation is really bringing some positive developments within the project. He said that the lack of communication within the project is still a challenge, especially a lack of communication with the government departments.

It seems as if the government departments that are responsible with some issues within the community are not communicating well with people. It could be the Department of Development and Planning or the Department of Housing. (Ward Councillor)

What about the role of FEDUP as facilitating this multi-layered, multi-stakeholders project? Taking on the role of leading support organisation requires a high level of skill for this project to succeed, and so while FEDUP displays this capacity through the support of its different entities, community members seem to largely depend on FEDUP. It seems that skills transfer has not yet occurred effectively enough for community members to play a leading role in decision-making. It is evident that to a large extent, in practice, FEDUP makes decisions on behalf of many of the community members in Thinasonke Ext 4, even though in theory they promote community participation at the higher levels of decision-making and problem solving. It can, of course be argued that many of the community members are not yet fully capacitated for these responsibilities and that this is what FEDUP is working towards in the long run, as is evident from their statements.

5. Conclusion
The Thinasonke Ext. 4 case study has provided some interesting lessons about participation by all stakeholders. During the research process, saving scheme members indicated that they have initiated the project, yet the Federation claims that it has approached the saving schemes in Tokozza to join the Federation to initiate the project. These two claims show that the saving schemes and the Federation had different agendas, affecting the type of participation in the project. According to members of the saving schemes, the saving schemes were formed with the purpose of saving cash money, which members could borrow and return through monthly repayments, while the sole purpose of the Federation is to mobilise urban and rural poor communities to save in order to find people-centred solutions to challenges of land tenure, infrastructure and housing through engaging state and private institutions.
While it is good for community-based organizations (CBOs) to have a leading or a support NGO to provide guidance in terms of direction for CBO activities, the relationship between the Federation and saving schemes seems to have left these saving schemes depending more on the Federation. Their dependency limits the level of community participation in terms of influencing decision-making in the project. While the Federation plays the leading and advising roles to the savings schemes, it is clear that the Federation is leading in all the processes of the project, from mobilising members of the saving schemes to join the Federation to determining who should be in and out of the beneficiary list and how different residents should benefit.

Although none of the residents seem to have contested the criterion for beneficiaries, the question of who set the criteria is crucial in this project. It is clear that the Federation has set criteria for beneficiaries which beneficiaries could not change, it’s either they ‘take it or leave it’. Therefore, beneficiaries do not have control of the process and the challenge is that participation is left in a skewed position, with the support organization (FEDUP) having much more power and community members are left in a weaker position.

The challenge of shortage of sites poses a serious threat to the project. People have joined the project apparently to move out of backyard shacks in Tokoza, yet, based on FEDUP’s proposal to provide rental accommodation to resolve this problem, they might again end up renting in Thinasonke, even further away from the city and services and jobs even though they have contributed a lot to the project. This situation points to the possibility that the Thinasonke development is more a FEDUP/SDI led-project than the residents’ project. Similarly, the ‘illegal’ sale of sites by the ‘splinter group’ indicates that perhaps a PHP house is not necessarily what all community members actually want. The ‘illegal’ or informal sale of land could therefore not be considered as ‘criminal,’ but reflective of people’s other priorities.

The Thinasonke Ext. 4 project has been in existence for more than a decade and beneficiaries are yet to receive their intended PHP houses. The time factor in the lifecycle of this project has disadvantaged many of the intended beneficiaries, particularly those who started with the project, and it is posing challenges for participation. It was said by the Federation that some people have left the area and are staying in other parts of the country; such people will no longer benefit from this project. This raises questions of how do you organize participation (that potentially makes the project take more time) and still match people’s own life cycles? And on the other hand, it points to more negative effects of participation - obviously people lose patience with participation processes when there are numerous delays. Along the way, many beneficiaries have lost trust and confidence in the whole project because of the time taken to yield results. They have been discouraged by the changes in government plans, as in the current situation where government now claims that it does not have a budget to continue with the planned developments.
In general, government is often blamed for poor communication and changing the rules of the game without consulting those affected. Our attempts in the study to get government officials from the Ekurhuleni municipality to share with us their insights about this project have failed, and so their perspective and explanation is not known at this stage. All stakeholders in the project blamed government for many of the project delays. Some residents felt discouraged to continue participating because of government’s behaviour. Leading negotiators from the side of the beneficiaries and urban planners agreed that the shifting of goal posts by government was distressing and de-motivating for both community members and developers as a result of lack of clarity and uncertainty.

Participation is also about contestation, protests and competition; competing groups use projects to show their power and to control resources to benefit in some way. This is clear in the interactions between the ‘splinter group’ and loyal FEDUP members, also drawing in government to align itself with a certain group in its evictions of people who they regarded as ‘land invaders,’ rather than legitimate owners sent to avoid invasions. This situation bears signs of competition for power, but also for benefits which were not forthcoming for some residents through the formal processes of the project. It shows that participation processes require careful consideration and facilitation to ensure that the different needs and interests within the community are taken into account and that the project is not dominated by certain interests or agendas, in support of the project’s overall benefit for the broader community.
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