

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE SOCIO-
ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, TENURE
PREFERENCE, SKILLS AVAILABLE AND
STATE OF DWELLINGS AT SYDENHAM
HEIGHTS**

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Rebuilding a better future



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ISBN No.0-9584610-2-3

First Draft

**ABOUT THE ORGANISATION OF CIVIC RIGHTS:
SOCIAL FACILITATOR OF THE SYDENHAM HEIGHTS
REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

The OCR is a community based NGO formed in April 1984 to oppose the racist evictions under the Group Areas Act. The successful protests and opposition by the OCR led to demands being made by tenants to take up their plight against unscrupulous landlords. Residents of the inner city of Durban also established anti-crime and redevelopment projects through the OCR. Over a period of 19 years the OCR has provided research, capacity building workshops on tenants' rights and sectional title schemes and lobbied all tiers of government for changes in legislation and bylaws with great measure of success.

Sayed-Iqbal Mohamed was the founding member of the OCR and serves as its chairperson. He has served on various forums and grassroots structures and is committed to contributing to meaningful changes to improve the conditions of tenants, residents and particularly the plight of the poor.

ABOUT THE SYDENHAM HEIGHTS COMMUNITY'S STRUGGLE (1980 – 2003)

The Sydenham Heights flats were built in 1980 by the Durban Municipality to provide accommodation to so-called coloured families. There are three blocks in the complex, each with 120 dwellings (flats/units). There are two blocks that are ten storeys high and one block that is fifteen storeys high, with a total of 360 flats. Each block is serviced by two lifts, a main stairwell and two fire escape staircases in each block.

Tenants of Sydenham Heights have waged a long struggle to improve their environment and dwellings against the background of difficult socio-economic conditions.

In post-apartheid, the rents continued to increase, as did the unemployment rate of the residents. The Ethekewini Municipality as the landlord inherited ownership of these buildings with major problems relating to lifts that are often out of service, maintenance and repairs, non-payment of rentals, "illegal" occupants, vandalism, the financial circumstances of tenants and the poor state of the buildings. As part of the national government's drive to provide ownership opportunities to tenants through the Extended Discount Benefit Scheme, the Ethekewini Municipality attempted to sell off its housing stock since 1994. The sales campaign however, resulted in only 70 units or flats being sold with ownership still to be transferred.

The sales campaign led to friction between the tenants. The tenants through the Concerned Citizens Forum opposed the sale and demanded the upgrading of the flats and buildings and challenged the Ethekewini Municipality to deliver on its anti-apartheid commitment to better living conditions and sensitivity to the circumstances of the poor tenants.

After many years of protests, demands and legal battles, the Ethekewini Municipality finally gave-in to the Sydenham community by committing itself to rehabilitate the dwellings and buildings and to rebuild trust between the various stakeholders. Towards the latter part of 2003, a proactive engagement process started between the tenants and flat owners (sectional title unit holders) of Sydenham Heights and the Ethekewini Municipality. This resulted in the Sydenham Heights Redevelopment Project. To this end, the Municipality appointed the Organisation of Civic Rights (OCR) as the social facilitator and Vaughn-Charles and Associates (quantity surveyor).

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Ethekewini Municipality eventually responded to the plight of the tenants and flat owners by committing itself to improving the conditions at Sydenham Heights. The project envisages attending to repairs and maintenance to the flats and buildings and ensuring the maximum use of local labour (unemployed tenants and flat owners of Sydenham Heights).

The six lifts are to be replaced with new ones in the interest of the health and safety of tenants / flat owners and to avoid further maintenance and repair costs. The replacement of the lifts is estimated to cost R2.5m.

An independent Quantity Surveyor's assessment indicated that all three blocks needed repairs and maintenance. These include: -

- ▶ complete redecoration of all exterior walls;
- ▶ repainting, re-putting and glazing of steel window frames;
- ▶ repairing spalling concrete in certain areas;
- ▶ waterproofing of the roofs;
- ▶ replacing certain waste piping; and
- ▶ redoing of the expansion joints.

To this end, the Ethekewini Municipality approved a budget of R9 million.

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

As a social facilitator, the OCR needed to establish: -

- The nature of the problems in respect of the flats and buildings
- The number of unemployed
- The socio-economic profiles of individuals and families
- Rental and ownership preferences.

A survey was designed in consultation with the newly established Sydenham Heights Working Group and officials of Ethekewini Municipality. The objectives were to ascertain maintenance and repairs required, the skills available by the unemployed occupants and members of households, the level of poverty and the number of tenants interested in owning or renting their flats.

The OCR was then required to make recommendations to the Ethekewini Municipality and Vaughn-Charles by providing a list of names of skilled and unskilled persons (refer to Appendix 1) that would constitute the local labour force. The first to be appointed after the awarding of the contract is the Community Liaison Officer (CLO) and lifts “wardens” followed by local labour force.

Together with all the stakeholders, the OCR would set up a Job Opportunities Bureau (JOB) that would assist in the interviewing and screening of local labour through the database provided by OCR’s survey results.

A Community Liaison Officer (CLO) is also to be appointed whose main function would be to act as a link between the contractors, the workforce and the Sydenham Heights community.

The Sydenham Heights project is Ethekewini Municipality’s pilot project and the rehabilitation of the flats and buildings is scheduled to commence in December 2003.

METHODOLOGY

The OCR faced the daunting task of administering questionnaires, ideally to all 360 flats / units in the three blocks. A sample study would not meet the project's goals in respect of ascertaining the number of unemployed persons, the skills they can offer to provide short term employment in the project, the tenure need or preference (renting / owning), the (rental) arrears, internal maintenance and repairs required and the financial circumstances of each family or individual occupant.

A team of eleven fieldworkers were sent to the buildings to interview the tenants and flat owners over a period of 7-10 days. In total, 302 (83.8%) households responded to the questionnaire.

The fieldworkers went through a "workshop" session with members of the OCR. Two of the fieldworkers were executive members of the organisation. The co-ordinator was OCR's deputy chairperson Mr Thembelani Adam Mncanywa and who was on site to intervene, redirect and collect the questionnaires, and when necessary, met with other OCR members and community representatives to "unblock" any impasse or find solution to any predicament.

Each household head / occupant had to respond to a set of 15 major questions and about 19 sub-questions. The fieldworker wrote down the responses and also ascertained the block the tenant / unit holder occupied. Fifty-eight households could not be surveyed although several attempts were made by the fieldworkers, including visits at night. These occupants were either reluctant, not interested, were not available or the flat was vacant.

SOME CRITICAL OBESERVATION BY FIELDWORKERS AND OCR MEMBERS

The response was “phenomenal” when one considers the fact that the Sydenham Heights community had responded to several questionnaires and petitions previously and had subsequently become disillusioned, distrustful and “suspicious” of “outsiders”.

The Municipality being the landlord of about 290 households (tenants) and trustee (one of the 70 flat owners), feelings and perceptions of distrust and scepticisms were strong towards the officials and councillors of Ethekwini Municipality by both tenants and flat owners. Similar feelings were expressed by some tenants together with feelings of bitterness towards the flat owners and those associated in promoting the sale, for “betraying” them in the purchasing of flats.

OCR put together a working group that included all interest groups, “friends and foes”, in October 2003. The Sydenham Heights Working Group is therefore one of the major stakeholders in the Project. Interest groups like TASH and the Sydenham Court Body corporate retain their independence in spite of being participants in the Working Group.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE SURVEY RESULTS

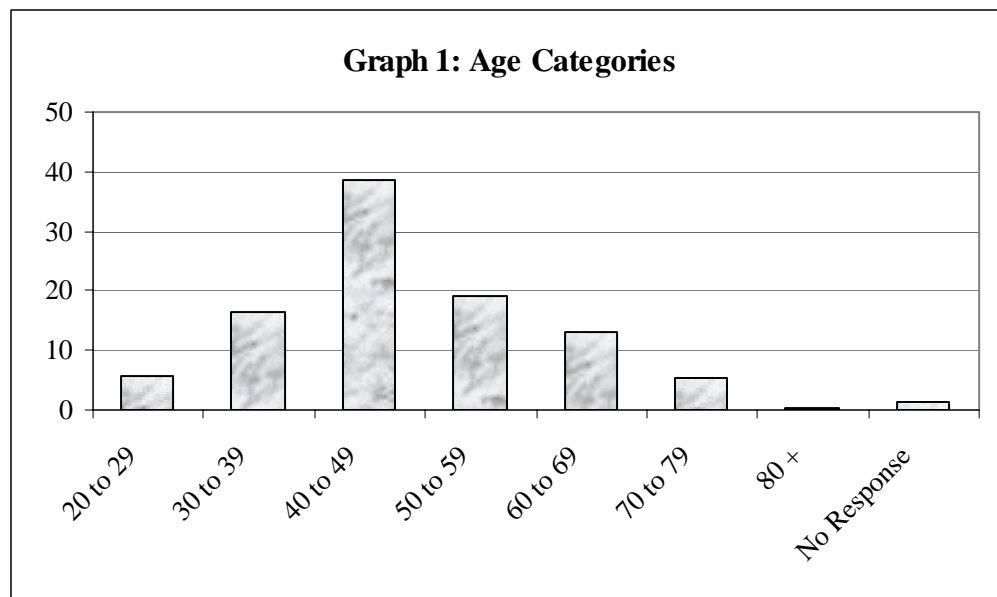
Below, some of the important questions were analysed for all three blocks. For the sake of convenience, the analysis and discussions focussed on the comparable data for all three blocks. Data for each block is included in the appendices.

Question 1 required the name of the occupant. The list of names of the 302 respondents together with their flat or unit number and the block (A, B, C) is shown in Appendix 1. This list also includes the services / skills of the occupant (Questions 8.4 and 8.5 discussed below).

*Q 1
Name
& 2
Flat No.*

As for the age of the occupants (Question 3), 38% are between 40 and 49 years, 19% between 50 and 59, about 13% indicated their age to be between 60 and 69. Twenty two percent stated their age in the category of 20 to 39 years.

*Q 3
Age*



Sixteen persons (5.2%) are between 70 and 79 years and one person indicated his her age to be 80 years and above. Four respondents did not respond.

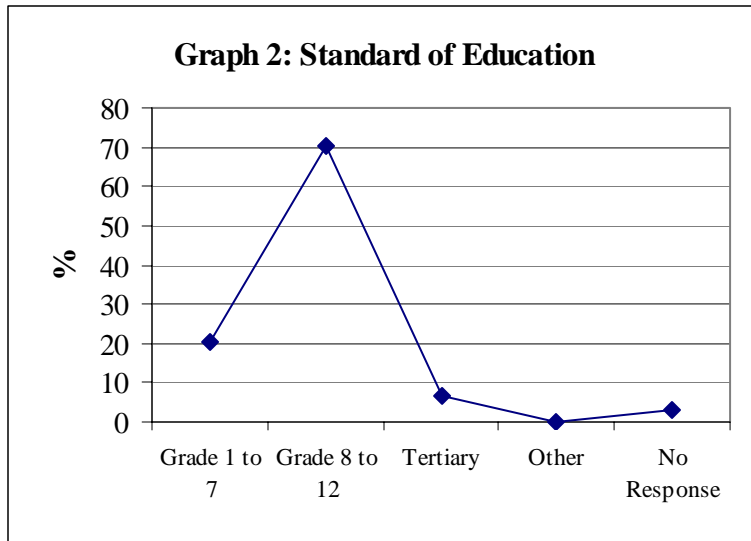
Approximately 67% of the respondents were female and 32% male.

Table 1: Error! Not a valid link.

*Q 4
Gender.*

Seventy percent of the respondents have been to high school, 20% have primary school education and approximately 6.6% (20 respondents) indicated tertiary education.

*Q 5
Education*



The unemployment rate is almost half of the 302 households surveyed. Forty eight percent are unemployed while 44% said that they had a job with 7.3% not having responded.

Table 2:

Employment Status	Totals	%
Yes	134	44.4
No	146	48.3
No Response	22	7.3

This may explain approximately 36% of the occupants being in arrears (Question 10.5). Seven people owed rentals of R500 or less, 16 occupants between R600 to R999 and ten occupants owed between R1 000 to R1 500.

It would appear that most occupants (39) owed between R1 600 to R5 000, fourteen were in arrears ranging from R5 100 to R10 000. Nine occupants owed between R12 000 to R15 000, six between R16 000 to R20 000, seven between R30 000 to R50 000.

One said he or she owed R100 000. This does not seem possible from information OCR has received from the Sydenham Heights Working group and the Municipality that have pegged the maximum arrears a household to be around R50 000. It is possible that the fieldworker misunderstood the response, made a mistake when writing the amount owed or the respondent

The total rental arrears at the very least due to the Ethekwini Municipality are approximately R600 000 of the 302 respondents surveyed.

According to the Ethekwini Municipality's record, the total outstanding amount is R1, 664m as at end of October 2003.

Table 3:

Table 4:

The analysis in Tables 3 and 4 show the following: -

- Twenty eight percent of head of household earns less than R1 000 per month while 21% represents the total household income.
- In the income level between R1 000 to R2 000, 22.5% of head of household fall within this income bracket, while 26% applied to total household income.
- Thirteen percent (13.6%) stated between R2 000 to R2 999 as monthly income of head of household, while this was 18% for total income of household.
- 7.5% and 10.6% were the income of head of household and total household respectively.
- About 20% did not respond, one person was a pensioner, one applied for social welfare grant and one respondent's income per month was R10 000, 8% and 2.6% had no income at all for head of household and total household respectively.
- There appears to be very little improvement in the income of families when total household income is compared with income of household.

Question 8:

The number in household varies from 1 person to 10 persons. Between 1 and 3 persons made up 42.7% of the number of persons in household, 50% of the household stated 4 to 6 persons and 4.6% had 7 persons in the household. Three households indicated the number of persons as 8, one household as 9 and one as 10.

Question 9: Period of Occupancy

About 57% of the respondents are in occupation for more than 11 years. If one were to look at occupancy for more than 7 years, the number of respondents is just below 70%. There appears to be a fairly large, stable, homogenous community. 27.3% of the respondents are occupying seven years and less.

Question 10.8:

As for tenant-landlord relationship, about 62% of the respondents are Ethekwini Municipality's tenants occupying on a rental basis, 12.5% are tenants of sectional title owners. Five percent stated that they are sub-tenants with ownership around 11%.

Question 12: Tenancy Related Matters

Lease Agreement: 71% of the respondents said that they signed a lease agreement and 69% stated that they received copies of the signed agreement.

Question 13: Maintenance

Most respondents did not have a problem with maintenance to the interior (78%) or exterior (75%) of their flats. Of the 15% who indicated maintenance problems to the inside of their flats, 64% said plumbing was a major problem, 55% referred to water leakage and 39% stated structural defects.

As for the exterior, lifts presented a major problem that affected 80% of the respondents, followed by painting (55%) and cracks (46%).

Specific Flats

As part of the rehabilitation process, the Ethekwini Municipality as landlord of two and half blocks (approximately 290 flats) and “developer” / trustee of the sectional title scheme in Block C (approximately 70 individual owners), is keen in investigating and responding to specific maintenance problems in individual flats / units.

Question 14: Type of Tenure Preferred

The sales campaign was and perhaps still is the Ethekwini Municipality’s main goal. It is also the sale of flats that divided the Sydenham Heights community. Two major groups emerged: TASH (Tenants’ Association of Sydenham Heights) and later the Body Corporate (Block C). TASH led the struggle with the assistance of the Concerned Citizens’ Forum for the need to improve the conditions of both the dwellings and those of the tenants.

Against this background and further factionalism and growing anger and distrust against municipal officials, this survey in the context of the R9m rehabilitation revealed: -

- Approximately 74% of the respondents (tenants) are interested in owning their flats.
- 77% of these indicated that they were not in a financial position to buy the flats.
- About 25% preferred renting as their choice.

The breakdown for each block is shown in table 5 below in percentage.

Table 5:

<i>reference</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>Totals</i>
<i>Interested in owning flat</i>	23.5	29.4	20.8	73.7
<i>Not in a position to purchase</i>	17.8	24.5	14.5	56.9
<i>Occupy on rental basis</i>	9.2	9.2	6.2	24.6

A total of 223 (approximately 74%) said they were interested in owning their flats. 172 respondents of the 223 (77%) while having expressed their interest in owning their flats, indicated that they were not in a position to buy them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ethekwini Municipality had already set aside R9 m to upgrade / redecorate the 3 blocks. This survey is an essential component of the project and the OCR has passed on relevant information such as: -

1. Details of services available by head of households and members of households.
2. Specific internal maintenance problems.
3. Held meetings with various stakeholders that required information that included names of potential lift wardens, community liaison officer.