JOHANNESBURG’S LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS ARE FIGHTING FOR DECENT HOUSING

How have low-income tenants and unlawful occupiers mobilised for better housing in inner-city Johannesburg?

On 30 November 2018 the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI) will launch a new research publication, a community practice note entitled *Inner City Federation: Fighting for Decent Housing in Inner-City Johannesburg*, in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. The note documents the struggle of the Inner City Federation (the Federation), a self-organising coalition of tenants and unlawful occupiers from over 40 buildings in inner-city Johannesburg that advocates for better housing and basic services and challenges the stigma associated with low-income residents in inner-city Johannesburg. The Federation is the first self-organised group of low-income residents living in Johannesburg’s so-called ‘bad buildings’ in over a decade that is challenging the lack of decent, affordable housing.

The note examines the struggles of poor inner-city residents to resist evictions, harassment and displacement; establish and maintain effective self-management structures in dilapidated buildings; collectively mobilise; and advocate for decent housing. It also highlights the dark underbelly of the City of Johannesburg’s recent regeneration initiatives under Herman Mashaba, who has insisted on pursuing heavy-handed military “shock and awe” tactics against low-income residents in inner-city building by subjecting residents to police raids and harassment (raids that are conducted without warrants). More than anything else, the note dispels the idea of ‘demobilised’ or ‘dependent’ communities by showing how low-income residents have organised and responded collectively to these challenges.

Siyabonga Mahlangu, General Secretary of the Inner City Federation, said: “The voice of the poor inner-city resident has been ignored for far too long. This publication will change that, it will assist us to reclaim the recognition and dignity that we have been denied. It will show that poor people can think and act for themselves to change their situation for the better, being poor does not mean the inability to think and act.”

Stuart Wilson, SERI’s executive director, said: “Community struggles often come across in superficial and inaccurate ways in the mainstream media. For this reason, SERI has set out to document the struggles of the social movements and community-based networks we work with. Through this note we want to inform a more nuanced debate on the participation and effect of the City of Johannesburg’s regeneration processes on low-income tenants and unlawful occupiers.”
• Download the community practice note here.

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