

## Exploring the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) Residents' Perceptions of Housing Allocation Malpractices in Golf Course, Alice Town, Eastern Cape, South Africa

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**ABSTRACT** The present paper attempts to explore residents' perceptions of malpractices such as corruption, nepotism and favoritism and maladministration in the allocation of public housing, in an estate meant for people of low-socio-economic standing in the province of the Eastern Cape, South Africa. The study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches and used a case study and a mini survey designs respectively, with the qualitative approach being the dominant approach while the quantitative was less dominant. The qualitative sample included 22 beneficiaries of RDP houses; one social worker; one RDP housing administrator (who were purposively selected by the principle researcher) and 50 respondents for the mini survey. Findings indicate that most participants were not happy as they felt that allocation of houses was fraught with various aspects of malpractices such as bribery to facilitate fast allocation, nepotism and favoritism and allocating those who least deserved the allocation. The researchers, therefore, recommend to the government to seriously investigate the administration of the housing programme to get rid of its prevalent corruption practices.

### INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, many people are homeless, or living in degrading and dehumanizing environments. Although, South Africa is one of the middle income countries in the global economic classification, many of its people live in deplorable settlements that do not justify their human rights embedded in their country's constitution (Mutume 2004; UNCHS 1996 as cited by Tipple and Speak 2005; Republic of South Africa 1994). This scenario cuts across many countries of the developing world and has prompted most governments to come up with measures, policies and instruments to provide houses to the homeless (Kirwan 1996). Some of these commitments have been pegged to the globally driven Millennium Development goals (MDGs) as targets that need to be met before the year 2015 (UNDP 2004). This is all in hope that the housing needs of the vulnerable and the needy will be met. To say the least, housing problem is one of the many problems that the South Africa Post-Apartheid Government inherited from the apartheid regime (Zeg-eye and Harris 2003; Patel 2005). In fact, a larger part of the South African Blacks faces serious state of homelessness, or are living in squatter settlements devoid of human dignity (Republic of South Africa 1994; Mafukidze and Hoosen 2009; Manomano 2013). It is in the pursuit of the goal of housing provision that the Govern-

ment introduced the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) to facilitate the construction of low cost houses for the needy South Africans. On a positive note, so many RDP houses have been erected in almost all the provinces of the country (Glatzer 2002; Mafukidze and Hoosen 2009; Chakuwamba 2010). Nationally the government has so far managed to construct 3 738 818 RDP houses since 1994 while in the Eastern Cape Province, 12 646 RDP houses have been built since 1994 (Department of Human Settlements 2014). While nationally there is a backlog of 2.1 million houses needed (Hoffman 2014), this figure gives a grave concern regarding the housing provisioning climate as the number of those who need houses is increasing every year. Although, erection of the RDP houses especially in Eastern Cape has heralded a change of status of the house-needy individuals from homelessness to owners of the houses, the process of accessing these houses has faces innumerable malpractices such as bribery, corruption, nepotism, favoritism and gross maladministration making the housing beneficiaries or would be beneficiaries stressed and despondent. However, in an attempt to ensure that the vices of corruption and nepotism are regulated and zeroed, the government introduced platforms such as National Public Protector (Public Protector South Africa 2014) as well as the Public Accountability Monitor and Corruption Watch.

The office of the Public Protector was established to “strengthen constitutional democracy by investigating and redressing improper and prejudicial conduct, maladministration and abuse of power in state affairs; resolving administrative disputes or rectifying any act or omission in administrative conduct through mediation, conciliation or negotiation and advising”. Its operations are mandated by Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996, Public Protector Act 23 of 1994, and Housing Protection Measures Act 95 of 1998 (Public Protector South Africa 2014) among others. It is therefore expected to assist in the interrogation and prosecution of individuals involved in various corrupt tendencies. The Public Service Accountability Monitor is a body instituted to promote and ensure that there is a visible interaction between the public and state based on transparency and accountability. It is therefore committed to evidence based research in the process of establishing the state of affairs (Public Service Accountability Monitor 2014). Furthermore, another body is known as the Public Service Commission which was established and mandated by Section 195 and 196 of the National Constitution of 1996. It is a body that investigates monitors and evaluates the administration of public services. In the end, this is expected to realize public accountability, efficiency and optimum performance by these public enterprises or ministries (Public Service Commission South Africa 2014). The corruption watch is a body that has also been put in place to investigate reports of alleged corruption which are brought to their attention by any citizen through an SMS or email among other things (Corruption Watch 2014). Unfortunately, and despite good intentions of these organizations against corruption and nepotism, the scale and level of corruption especially in the low cost RDP housing programme persists unabated. However, fingers need not be pointed only to the housing administrators as some members of the public especially those with some money to afford bribes have been accomplices in the corruption process.

Regrettably and unfortunately, there are indicators that suggest that many would be beneficiaries and other citizens are not happy with the running of the RDP programme. Subjective information from local people and media coverage continue to charge that the RDP housing programme is fraught with discrepant allocation of houses by the officials managing the project (Nengovhela 2012). This has made many

people waiting for these houses desperate, despondent and likely to be part of the ever increasing protests against the alleged malpractices (Damba 2013). Many complaints have been aired all over South Africa and importantly on almost all media platforms. This prompted the researchers to carry out an empirical investigation to explore the discrepant allocation of the RDP houses. For example, instead of the councilors acting as trustees of the resources for the poor in Free State, the people accused them of being part of the corruption team or influencing house allocation (Lodge 2003). In these researchers' contention, the phenomenon of housing allocation in many parts of South Africa has evoked emotions, despondency, hopelessness, with the very poor who may not have ways of influencing or corrupting their way to get houses almost feeling out of place and socially excluded. The process has had serious psychological drawbacks. To say the least, the state of malpractices surrounding housing allocation perpetuates poverty and is a hindrance to poverty alleviation strategies that the government has always promised to tackle (Chakuwamba 2010). It is the basis of these alleged malpractices that have motivated an exploration of these discrepancies. These researchers hope that full unearthing of the malpractices could prompt suggestions that the government, NGOs, communities and other researchers could take in terms of attending to the problem policy wise and strategically.

### **Problem Statement**

Whether globally, regionally or in national contexts, provision of houses to people without shelter, remains one of the important goals of countries' policy and programme implementation, South Africa being no exemption. Having shelter remains one of the inalienable rights embedded in many countries' constitutions. In South Africa, there are strong policy and programmatic goodwill to fulfill the mandate of giving shelter to especially people of low socioeconomics. However, though the initiative is commendable, the housing programmes are increasingly being accused of various forms of malpractices and discrepancies such as favouritism, nepotism and corruption. These have painted a bleak picture to the process of housing provision in many parts of the country. The researchers, therefore, consider it pertinent that these vices are validated and their magnitude

documented. The results could be used to confront the government so that remedial measures can be taken to address the quagmire. The results could hopefully guide the reformulation and restructuring of policies pertaining to housing provision in the country.

### **Study Aims and Objectives**

Although this paper has been derived from a research study that sought to explore the perceptions of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) Housing beneficiaries in South Africa on the extent to which the project meet their Housing needs through a case of Golf Course Estate in Alice Town, Eastern Cape Province, its succinct main aim is to explore the discrepancies emanating from RDP house allocations.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Design and Data Collection Methods**

The study is explorative, explanatory and descriptive in nature and utilized the triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative designs. The researchers chose both the designs to confirm and corroborate the results from one another (Fottler et al. 2008). The quantitative method was useful in collecting information pertaining to the magnitude of the various perceptible levels on housing problems such as the discrepancies associated with allocation of the RDP houses, while qualitative method was especially useful in collecting information on the feelings, views, opinions, thoughts, attitudes and views of the people (Blessing and Chakrabarti 2009; Strauss and Corbin 1998: 11 as cited by Fottler et al. 2008). The qualitative design was in the form of a case study while the quantitative was in the form of a mini survey.

### **Instruments**

This study utilized an interview guide as a data collection tool with unstructured questions to facilitate in-depth interviews with the social worker, RDP administrator and 22 beneficiaries. The social workers were especially important in this study as they are concerned with social prob-

lems while the RDP administrator is responsible for running and administering the RDP housing programme; a likert designed questionnaire was utilized to collect the perceptions of the beneficiaries on the discrepant allocation of RDP houses.

### **Sampling Methodologies**

The study utilized both probability and non-probability methodologies in selecting its participants. On non probability methodology, the study utilized purposive sampling in selecting the participants for interviews. Purposive sampling is especially useful in selecting those participants with the desired research characteristics who can give information required by the researcher (Moule and Goodman 2009). On probability methodology, simple random sampling and stratified sampling were utilized in selecting participants for the mini survey. Simple random sampling gives equal chance of selection to the research participants (Peck et al. 2008); while stratified sampling is useful in reducing the sampling error and promotes a better representation or generalization of the results (Black 2011).

### **Data Collection Process and Timeliness**

The data was collected in November 2012. While the social worker and the RDP Housing administrator were interviewed from their offices, the RDP housing beneficiaries were interviewed from their houses. The questionnaires were administered in the participant's houses by the researcher.

### **Research Domain**

This paper is based on the findings from the study conducted by the researchers on RDP houses in Golf Course in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Golf course estate was chosen as the site of research because there were subjective complaints of various malpractices involved in RDP housing allocation in the estate. The fact that Eastern Cape is one of the poorest provinces meaning that there could be many people in need of houses was also a considerable motivation factor. There were 1233 houses that were constructed on the Alice Golf Course Estate.

### Data Analysis and Representation

The researchers were assisted by one research assistant who also doubled as an interpreter of data from Isi Xhosa to English language. All the data that was collected from the in-depth interviews was audio taped using a tape recorder and was transcribed later on by the researchers. Notes were also taken by the researchers to complement the audio taped data from the study. Qualitative data was analyzed using the content thematic analysis whereby the data was rearranged, ordered and categorized into themes according to the emergent perceptions and views of the participants. The quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Software for Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented in charts, tables and graphs for clearer meaning.

## FINDINGS

### Profile

#### Gender and Race

The findings from this study indicated a gender discrepancy in that 62% of the participants were females while 38% were males (see Table 1). The findings from this study also indicated that the Black South Africans outnumbered the coloreds as they were 88% as compared to 12% respectively (see Table 1).

#### Marital Status

The study findings also revealed that 60% of the people were single; while 28% were married; and those that were either, windowed, separated or divorced constituted 2% of the study participants (see Table 2). This shows that most of the participants were single. This also indicates that there is an inextricable relationship between the state of being single and being needy, or being poor. Most of these single people were also unemployed (Manomano 2013).

**Table 1: Gender of the study participants**

S. No.	Ethnic groups	Frequency	%	S. No.	Gender	Frequency	%
1	Black	44	88.0	1	Male	19	38.0
2	Colored	6	12.0	2	Female	31	62.0
3	Total	50	100.0	3	Total	50	100.0

**Table 2: Marital Status**

S. No.	Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
1	Single	30	60.0
2	Married	14	28.0
3	Divorced	1	2.0
4	Widowed	3	6.0
5	Windowed	1	2.0
6	Separated	1	2.0
7	Total	50	100.0

### Socio-economic Status

The findings from this study revealed that 32% were employed; while 52% were unemployed; whereas 6% were casual laborers; 2% were self-employed and 8% were students (see Table 3). This revelation indicates that there is a great need for the government to work towards helping most of this population in uplifting its economic livelihood. This is because the state of its unemployment and vulnerability could be a vent leading to many other social ills such as excessive alcohol intake, prostitution and engagement in various kinds of criminal activities. With South Africa crime activities soaring every day, it is therefore critical that strategies to address this state of unemployment are sought.

**Table 3: Occupation of study participants**

S. No.	Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
1	Employed	16	32.0
2	Unemployed	26	52.0
3	Casual	3	6.0
4	Self	1	2.0
5	Student	4	8.0
6	Total	50	100.0

### Corruption

The findings from this study indicated that 86% of the study participants perceived that corruption was high; while 14% of the study participants perceived it was low (see Table 4). These findings were corroborated with the following qualitative sentiments from beneficiaries who were subjected to a one-on-one interview:

*“It is very difficult for one to access an RDP house; the process is corrupt; because civil servants and people who don’t deserve them get these houses before us”;*

*“It is common knowledge that those who get preferential treatment in accessing these houses are those who bribe the housing officials while the people who are supposed to have these houses are still staying in shacks”.*

*“Bribery and favouritism are important factors in accessing these RDP houses”*

The above perceptions indicate that most of the beneficiaries were not happy with the various housing malpractices surrounding the RDP housing allocations by the housing administrators. This has led to a situation whereby those who are well to do end up benefiting from the programme designed to assist the vulnerable and needy in the country. The discrepant allocation of the houses is flawed with bribery and favouritism that have seen government officers such as the police, nurses and those who are close to the housing officials who do not meet the requirement being part and parcel of the beneficiaries. This raises pertinent questions and concerns as to whether the government ever takes it seriously when implementing social programmes like RDP. One ponders whether the government monitoring and surveillance mandates are ever operationalized. This has seen the government being accused of corruption that it alleges it is trying to eradicate. The boards and placards may talk about zero tolerance for corruption without considering the moral and ethical sensitization education to all the government officials.

**Table 4: Perceptive levels on corruption**

S.No.	Level of corruption	Frequency	Percentage
1	Low	7	14.0
2	High	43	86.0
3	Total	50	100.0

### ***Nepotism***

The findings from this study indicated that 64% revealed that nepotism was very high (Table 5); 32% indicated that nepotism was low; and 4% of the study participants revealed that there was no nepotism; The findings are supported by verbatim statements from the participants:

*“It’s easier for those that are related to the housing officials to get these houses ahead of others on the waiting list”.*

*“There is a lot of nepotism going on and this is delaying many people who deserve these houses”.*

*“We do not know what to do to reduce the state of nepotism affecting housing. Who do we turn to? All are corrupt and nobody ever sacks them”.*

These findings indicate that nepotism in house allocation was crippling the transparent issuing of these houses to the deserving needy and vulnerable beneficiaries. This is a very bad style of administration given that the government is racing towards reducing the backlog of the people without houses. People were worried that there was no authority that appeared to listen to their woes and grievances over housing allocation discrepancies. They felt that corruption was a chain from the most senior to the least senior in the hierarchy of housing administration. On the other hand, perhaps those that felt that corruption was low could have been part of the malpractice machinery or direct or indirect beneficiaries. This is because one of the researchers who collected the data had noted that those who were living in the estate and were apparently not targeted beneficiaries echoed that the rate of corruption was low.

**Table 5: Perceptions on nepotism**

Perception	Frequency	%
None	2	4.0
Low	16	32.0
High	32	64.0
Total	50	100.0

### ***Irregular Allocation of RDP Houses to the Undeserving Individuals***

The findings from this study indicated that the study participants decried irregular allocation of the RDP houses. They wondered that most of those allocated were employed and well to do people. Some had either to rent them or give them to their kins to be staying there. The following sentiments support the findings.

*“The people here feel that the people who were supposed to get these houses are not the ones who got them. Some people who access them are living comfortably. They do not ex-*

*perience what we go through because they do have the money”.*

*“Those who easily get these houses do not need accommodation. They live elsewhere in big houses. They either rent the RDP houses or give them to their kins”.*

These findings indicate serious malpractices by the housing officials through the allocation of the houses to those who have no need of them. This indicates a sheer lack of accountability and social responsibility. This therefore perpetuates the suffering of the vulnerable and needy whereas they are supposed to benefit from these programmes. These researchers wish and advocate to the government to consider the services of Public Protector to investigate the RDP house allocations across different RDP estates in the country. This is because subjective, print and electronic media appear to agree that there are immense malpractices surrounding the allocation of the RDP houses. This research also discovered that only a few were saying that nepotism was low, but the fact that they are outnumbered by those that confirmed nepotism was high reveals that nepotism is a serious problem that needs attention.

#### ***Allocation to Those Who Sell Houses to Make Money***

The findings of the study indicate that beneficiaries were disappointed with the allocation of most of these houses to those who sell them to make money instead of giving them to the targeted beneficiaries. This was worrisome because some houses ended up in the hands of individuals of foreign nationals. The findings were supported with the following sentiments from beneficiaries who were subjected to a one-on-one interview:

*“It’s totally wrong the way the administrators give these houses to the undeserving ones who are working for the government. They only rent or sell these houses”.*

*“Majority of people who acquire these houses are those who will make an income from them by selling them. Some houses are ending up in the hands of individuals of foreign nationals”.*

The findings revealed a painstaking process in which some people as soon as they got the houses they would sell them leaving the poor and the deserving in their shacks and ghettos.

This, some participants echoed, were some of the reasons why South Africans are always at war with the government of the day. Some people believed that it was only when people engage in some civil unrest that the government of South Africa listen to some grievances. However, it should be noted that a bigger proportion of the houses had been allocated to the deserving. The fact of some houses are sold immediately after the allocation clearly indicates that the allottees are usually not deserving. This is a phenomenon that calls for scrutiny. Perhaps involving the office of the Public Protector and other corruption investigative bodies would be critical.

#### ***Allocation to Government Officials***

These findings indicate that some of these houses were given to government officials who are not supposed to be benefitting from the programme as they are not in the list of the possible and desirable beneficiaries. This happened through corruption. These findings were supported by the following sentiments from the beneficiaries who were subjected to a one-on-one interview:

*“But now you find it interesting that even the police and the mistresses are accessing these houses and they are extending these houses and they have cars”.*

*“It is so bad; people that deserve these houses struggle to get these houses whereas those that are not meant to get them are getting them with ease”.*

These findings indicate a state of impunity whereby those who allocate the houses corruptly and those who acquire them do not fear any consequences. According to the participants, corruption was allowed among the housing administrators and nothing was going to fall on them. They therefore felt desperate, despondent and were psychologically hurt without anybody to heal the wounds in their hearts. These researchers think the government needs a total clean up exercise to rid all practices that are not ethically correct and in line with various aims and objectives of the programme. To add on although corruption was high accessing these houses to the deserving beneficiaries remains a commendable exercise which needs to be prioritized to ensure that corruption is destroyed.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicate a state of gender discrepancy with regards to the number of housing beneficiaries with females outnumbering the males. This means that more households are headed by females than males. This could also suggest the poverty of most participants in the estate. To say the least, statistics in South Africa indicate that female headed households are far poorer than other categories of households (www.etu.org.za 2013). To corroborate this finding, literature on statistics pertaining to female headed households indicates that female headed households experience over 50% poverty higher than those headed by males (Statistics South Africa (SSA) 2010). The Blacks also outnumbered the Coloreds. This supports the statistical validation that 95% of South Africa's poor are Black (SSA 2010). It is also shocking to discover that on marital status, there were more single people than all the other categories. This also confirms the perceptions that it is women who own most RDP houses (Rodgers 2006 as cited by Manomano 2013).

The findings also indicate a deplorable state of unemployment as most participants indicated that they are not employed and indicating signs of anxiety and desperation because of the current hardship they are going through. This is not a shocking stalemate in South Africa as most people who are unemployed are from poor backgrounds and hence there is a striking link between poverty and unemployment (Mohanty 2010). The painful experiences of unemployment necessitate the government to expand its Public works programme whose implementation has been perceived to be slow. If the Public works programme could be expanded, it could prompt other measures like wage subsidies that could possibly remedy the state of unemployment especially among the needy and the vulnerable (OECD 2013).

The findings of the study also discovered an alarming rate of malpractices with over 80% of the participants perceiving that the housing allocation was fraught with corruption such as people bribing the house officials in order to be allocated the houses without following the queue, or even when they did not deserve the allocation at all. Elsewhere, in EThekweni, Durban, corrupt activities were also exposed as RDP housing administrators kept secret the list of

the targeted beneficiaries whereas close to 400 000 people had been waiting to receive their houses. To worsen the matter, the officials were entrusted with 3 billion Rands to construct 15 000 houses for beneficiaries but shockingly, 60% of the money was spent on only 3000 houses with the remainder of the money reported to be missing (Harris 2013). Other views also indicate that housing officials take bribes from the people to enable them to come on top of the list (Mwakikagile 2008). In Mogale, West Rand, Johannesburg, more than 200 houses of the 700 built on phase one were corruptly given to people who did not deserve while some were allegedly sold to unsuspecting beneficiaries at hefty and unacceptable prices (Mahlangu 2012). The findings also revealed that there was allocation of RDP houses to government officials. Surprisingly, this problem is rife in South Africa as exemplified by the Seri Report which indicated that some of the government officials were receiving subsidies for the houses meant for the needy and vulnerable (Corruption Watch 2013). This state of affairs reveals that governance and sanity is lacking in the administration of RDP houses and this defeats the obligation of the government towards ensuring that housing is accessed by all. In the same vein, these discrepancies are also manifest in Gauteng where a senior government official was arrested after fraudulently selling RDP houses at 100 000 rands each (Rubin 2011). Furthermore in Harrismith, Eastern Free State Province of South Africa, protests erupted over bribery and nepotism in the allocation of RDP houses (Buhlungu et al. 2007). Moreover, in Buffalo City Metropolitan, the illegal sale of RDP houses has become a major concern while in Mogwadi, Limpopo, some of the RDP houses were allocated to government officials (Mahlangu 2012; <http://www.property24.com> 2013). In Gauteng hundreds of houses were reported to have been turned into money making machines as the owners were renting them out, using them as spaza shops and some were not even staying in those houses (Matlala 2011). This abuse of RDP houses calls for an intensive monitoring and evaluation programme to inspect occupation and legality of owners who reside in those RDP houses to ensure that the deserving and those who are waiting for a house will access one. It is also frightening to recommend for police services to be engaged as a report by Corruption Watch indicate that 'half of the police

officers of the Johannesburg Metro' have taken bribes and 'one in four of the city's motorists has paid a bribe' (Mulholland 2012: 4 as cited by Light 2012: 334).

### CONCLUSION

The RDP housing programme should be commended as an initiative to address South African's social problem of housing. However, the documented and subjective complaints surrounding the malpractices such as bribery, nepotism, allocating individuals who least deserve, needs to be timeously addressed. It is recommendable that there are transparent audits of the RDP houses. It is also critical that the office of the Public Protector get interested in the running of the RDP houses. This is to ensure a transparent process of housing allocation is put in place. More research into the affairs and programmatic implementation of the RDP houses needs to be pursued.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers recommend to the government to show goodwill by ensuring a fair and transparent commission of enquiry into the malpractices surrounding RDP housing allocations. Moreover, the community should be sensitized to play the role of whistle blowing if some corruption is discovered. Also, the public should be sensitized to report such anomalies to the office of the ombudsman. Furthermore, those who report should not be victimized. The government should ensure that the theoretical advocacy of "zero tolerance to corruption" is operationalized within the housing administration. To this end, the NGOs and other rights based bodies should continuously engage the government on issues of corruption within the RDP housing allocation. The researchers call for the auditing of the RDP houses to determine the validity and truthfulness of those who have been allocated the houses.

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