



WHY A CIVIC?

How communities can act together to tackle their common problems

MORE THAN 2 million people live on the Cape Flats. Most of them earn less than R150 per month and qualify for sub-economic housing. The housing provided by the City Council, the Divisional Council and the Western Cape Administration Board are inadequate, badly constructed and poorly maintained.

Also, facilities such as street lighting, schools, creches, shops, playgrounds and sports fields are lacking. Day in and day out, people struggle with problems which come from poor living conditions. When Mrs Adams in Kewtown has a problem with her rent, she goes to the rent office to try to sort it out. Nothing is done about her problem.

But in the last few months, people have learnt to tackle their problems in

a different way. The meetings held to discuss the schools, rent and bus boycotts have taught communities to come together and in this way to solve their problems.

At mass meetings, people speak angrily against the conditions under which they and their children were forced to live. Parent-student committees were formed at the meetings and it is these bodies which are now forming the basis for residents associations. The people are realising that they cannot solve their problems if they act on their own. They must come together and act as one community with the same problems.

Grassroots spoke to members of civic and residents associations to find

out how powers coming together to solve the problems facing them.

- What did we learn?
- As many people as possible must take part in all activities and decision-making.
 - Large areas, for example Lotus River and Hanover Park, were broken up into a number of zones and small working groups in each zone. As far as possible, these groups were then joined together.
 - A working committee co-ordinates the activities of all the zone committees.
 - House meetings are held where members from about ten families meet at

one house to discuss problems in the area.

- Newsletters are issued regularly to inform the people of what is happening in the area.

On these pages Grassroots describes the activities of four associations. These associations have been chosen because they represent organizations in different forms and stages.

The Lotus River Ratepayers and Tenants Association was formed when the old Lotus River Ratepayers Association was taken over and refired. Of the four organizations to be discussed, theirs is the oldest.

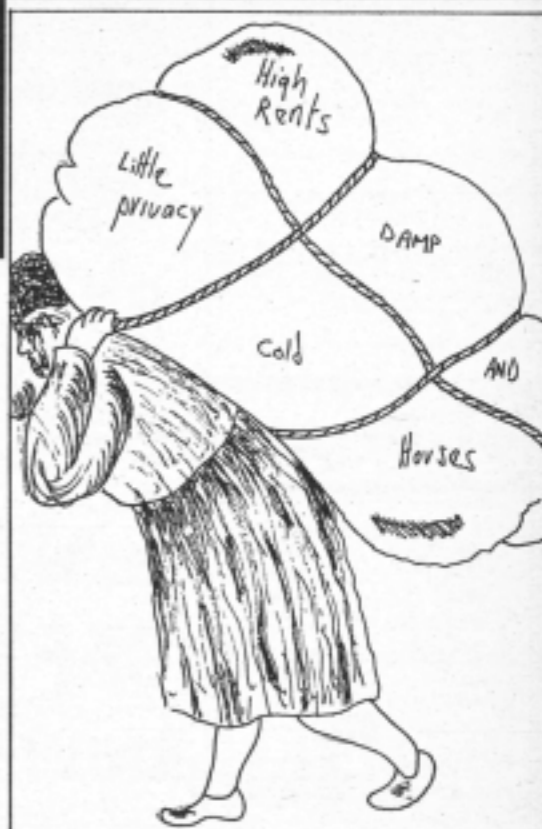
In Valhalla Park, residents face serious problems and are now trying to

work to overcome them. In Hanover Park, like in other areas, a youth group has sprung up which is part of the residents association.

Like Valhalla Park, residents in Bokmakierie, Bridgetown, Silvertown and Kewtown are coming together to begin to form an association.

There are many problems to be solved but before this can be done, the people must organise themselves in community associations and this is what committees in all the areas must do now.

Join your nearest residents association!!! Unity is strength! Saamstaan is krag!



READY TO DO BATTLE IN VALHALLA PARK

"THERE are no outside drains, no gutters - the water seeps up the walls until even the ceilings are black with mould. Our children are always sick because the houses are so damp and cold. They think that because we come from shanty houses we are used to this sort of life - that is why they put us in such houses. My shanty was much more comfortable than this."

Valhalla Park was built nearly four years ago by the City Council to re-house people who had been living in shanties all over Cape Town. People who had been living in Sunny Estate, Athlone, Belgravia, Rylands' Bush and Crossroads were resettled in Valhalla Park.

More than a thousand sub-economic houses were built. The houses were built in two stages. First, 775 houses were built and then another three hundred "very low cost" houses were built.

A Valhalla Park resident explained to GRASSROOTS that because the houses were built so cheaply, the quality was very poor. The houses were built of cheap ash bricks and have concrete floors. There are no gutters, down-pipes or outside drains so the water stands for days and gets under the floor and into the walls.

Many of the houses have only one door which makes them very dangerous if a fire were to break out. The doors are made of thin board and can be easily broken into. In many houses, the door frames are loose and the doors could fall over.

Because of the way the houses are designed, there is very little privacy. Some of the rooms do not have doors and the toilet and the kitchen are not separate from the rest of the house. Although the houses are not old, many of the walls have cracks in them. These cracks allow the cold

to come through and also become a breeding place for insects. The electricity boxes are placed outside on the street. They are easily built (plastic) and can easily be broken. This means that people's electricity supply is always being cut off and it is also dangerous for children.

"The council should never have let anybody live in houses like this in the first place. The construction and design of the houses is very important because people relate to both matters and it became linked to the living standard of the people," explained the resident.

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THE YOUNG MOBILE UNIT

"WE CALL ourselves the mobile unit of the Civic Association," a member of the Hanover Park Civic Youth Wing to cater for the social needs of young people and to strengthen the Civic Association - in fact it was started soon after the Civic Association was launched, about two months ago.

It has nearly 100 members. "We use ourselves as working under the Civic Association, so some of our activities

are civic related such as raising money or any other activity that needs a lot of manpower, like the distribution of newsletters and notices, which we help to draw up," said a member. The Youth Wing also alternates with the Civic Association in providing entertainment for the pensioners every month. A number of groups have been formed to arrange weekly social programmes. These groups include music,

art, film and fund-raising activities. They work these of the group present a programme. "In activities everyone participates - it is not something that a few people present to anyone else," a member. To the most young people in their activities, they have divided Hanover Park into 7 zones. The target is to be active members in each zone.

Success after setback in Lotus & Grassy Park

IN LOTUS River and Grassy Park last year, residents were faced with the problem of rising rates. Civic associations in the area arranged meetings and although the people were interested in doing something they were not getting involved in existing organizations.

At the annual meeting in October of one of these organizations, the Lotus River Ratepayers Association, which was virtually dead, it was decided to try to revive the organization so that the problems facing the people could be tackled.

A vote of no confidence was passed in members who belonged to management committees and a new executive committee was formed. The constitution was changed to include tenants and the new association was named the Lotus River Ratepayers and Tenants Association.

Today, nearly eight months later, this association has 1 000 members who have joined to fight against high rates, rents, high electricity accounts and problems in sanitation.

How did this association become so strong? And how does this association work?

There are nine members belonging to the executive committee. When the first problems of electricity accounts and sanitation were discussed, one member of the committee was put in charge of organizing people to try to solve the problems.

The member had to get other people to help him or her work out a way in which to tackle the problem.

To tackle a problem, it was always necessary to find out all the facts about it first. Surveys were carried out from door to door to find out what problems the people were having with their electricity accounts.

The Data Bank at Divisional Council offices in Cape Town was also visited. This is where facts can be found about all areas which fall under Divisional Council. Some officials at Divisional Council are also willing to explain to anybody who is interested how rates and rents are calculated.

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BBSK unity drive

"WE NEED one residents' association to represent people in Bokmakierie, Bridgetown, Silvertown and Kewtown so that we can work together as one big community and not as separate ones. One large organisation will be very much stronger than small ones."



This is what the action committee working in the area believes. Formed from the parent/student body in the area, the committee is trying to set up a residents' association through which the people can work.

There are many problems facing the people in these areas. Many have been living there for more than 20 years. They have been paying rents to Council for years and still they get nothing from Council.

"Council can still increase our rents, although we have already paid the houses off over and over again," say the people.

"Our houses are small and overcrowded. Many of us have married children and their families staying with us," they say. "There are no houses for them."

"And now, Council wants us to pay for all repairs to their houses. A fee for maintenance has been included in our rents - we have already

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