

OVERVIEW OF DIEPSLOOT

History of Diepsloot

The settlement area known as Diepsloot was established in 1995 by what was at the time known as the Rand provincial administration as a temporary (informal) shelter for people who had initially been evicted from informal settlements in Honeydew, Sevenfontein and Alexandra. The first residents were 200 families evicted from Sevenfontein who settled in what is today known as Diepsloot extension 1. They were followed by other evictees from Honeydew who had been 'adopted' by the Rhema ministries. The people who came from the Rhema church and those from Sevenfontein were integrated with the original workers of the farms in the area who lived around the Tanganani area. People were shown a stand on which to construct their own shacks. There were no toilets (only bucket toilets existed) on the stands. By 1996, Diepsloot was still a reception area with temporary settlements in Diepsloot West in what was then mostly a privately owned farm. Since then, Diepsloot has expanded to a total of 13 extensions.

The construction of RDP houses began in 1999 and many changes have occurred in the area since then. In 1999, the then Rand provincial government had already started preparations for the transition to formal structures through the establishment of the transitional metropolitan council in charge of making a register of all people in the area so as to start developments here. The transition metropolitan council introduced a new sub-structure in Northern Randburg in the restructuring of the new Gauteng provincial government to serve Diepsloot. This

was responsible for designing strategies that would best serve Diepsloot. They identified areas in need of attention for development, particularly in relation to the provision of water, electricity, and housing.

Physical description of Diepsloot today:

The three main types of houses in the area are 1) shacks made of corrugated iron sheets; 2) RDP houses made of brick walls, iron sheet roofing and 3) bond houses in Tanganani (extension 3) made of brick walls and tiled roofing.

The following extensions have shacks only: 1, 12 and 13. The following extensions have RDP houses: 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 (said to be over 8000 units) but all the areas have shacks as well. Extension 3 (Tanganani) has bond houses, tarred roads, and less trash in the streets.

In Diepsloot it is common to see excessive litter of all sorts (especially plastic bags, rotten foods and vegetables) in the streets. Burst sewers are also a common feature in the area giving it an unpleasant smell most of the time. With a few exceptions, the roads in extensions 1, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 are not tarred. In extensions 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 11, even what were previously tarred roads, are now in deplorable conditions with patches or potholes in many parts of the road. The area roads have recently (2008) been named even though a majority of the people do not seem to be aware of the names. When a number of residents were asked their address, none used the street name. Instead, they gave the house numbers and the extensions. There are a few bridges in the area that link up different sections and cross a stream that runs through Diesploot from the west to

the southwest. However, the bridges are too low and respondents said that when it rains, water overflows on the bridges and sometimes sweeps people away. The situation is even more dangerous for the many people in informal settlements lining both sides of the stream because their housing structures frequently get swept away by flash floods every rainy season.

There are many informal businesses in the area. There are people on roadsides selling wares ranging from cooked food, vegetables, fruit, live chicken, blankets, electronic goods, etc. There are also many traders whose businesses are housed. These are either at the Diespoot Mall as well as in the streets of Diepsloot. These businesses sell electronics (mainly cell phones, radios and TVs) groceries, and clothes. Other traders have spaza shops and taverns which are mainly extensions of their own houses, or kiosks built of corrugated iron sheets. There are also a few open air vehicle panel beaters and mechanics in the area.

Ethnic Composition of Diepsloot population:

Diepsloot is mainly a black African neighbourhood that is fairly ethnically mixed. The majority of the people are from Limpopo and of Shangaan, Veda, Tshonga, or Phedi ethnicity. One resident stated that this group could be as high as 50% of the population in Diepsloot. There are also Tswana, Xhosa and Zulu residents in the area. There are also foreign nationals from Mozambique, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Somalia, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali populations are mainly traders and do not live in the community but

rather commute to and from the area every day. The exact population of Diepsloot is not known but some estimates are that there could be well over half a million people living there.

Relations between locals and foreigners:

Many residents who have lived in the community for as long as it has existed said that initially, there were no tensions when people moved into Diepsloot. The tensions witnessed nowadays are a recent phenomenon and are related to the intense competition between locals and foreigners for scarce resources such as housing and jobs.

Economic Changes:

For a location that started off as an informal settlement 15 years ago, there have been many physical changes in the area, especially with the ongoing expansion of settlements. However, economic changes in Diepsloot have been minimal and slow. This is because majority of the people in Diepsloot live in abject poverty with inadequate housing and high levels of unemployment, crime, and disease. Much of the economic activity in the area is survivalist with profit margins insufficient to get people out of the poverty traps they find themselves in.

A shopping mall was opened in Diepsloot just outside extension 9 in 2007 and some major South African brands (e.g. Absa, Nedbank, Standard Bank, FNB bank, and Pep among others) moved in. More mid-level businesses also moved into

the mall. This could be an indicator of the potential the population in Diepsloot offers for big businesses.

Home Ownership:

People living RDP houses are generally the owners of their homes as they are beneficiaries of the public housing projects in the area. Strictly speaking though, the RDP houses are owned by the state as one will have to have lived in the house for over 7 years to qualify for title (i.e. we were told this is the law guiding the RDP houses). There is also a substantial population that rent some RDP houses. Most of the shacks are rented by their occupants however there are some who own their shacks. Those living in the bonded houses generally own their homes.

In the initial provision of housing in Diepsloot between 1997 and 1999, the government encouraged residents to construct their own houses through what was known as peoples housing process (PHP) where the state would give a subsidy of R7500 for every house built. In 1999, changes were introduced as the government moved into the construction of RDP houses as the PHP was proceeding too slowly to cover the entire population.

Services and infrastructure:

Generally speaking, Diepsloot has many services and infrastructural challenges in terms of the indicators below:

1) **Roads:** While there are some paved roads, the majority are not and even the paved ones have numerous potholes.

2) **Sewer/Electricity:** There are many sewer blockages in the area. This is generally related to the population pressure resulting from the growing number of residents using the sewer system. The same issue applies to electricity supply.

3) **Crime:** Crime is a big issue in Diepsloot. Despite these problems, for a long time, the area was served by Erasmea Police station over 45 kilometers away in Pretoria. Early this year (March 2009) a temporary police post was set up in extension 1 (next to the housing department offices). They are also building a police station in Diepsloot West next to the taxi rank.

4) **Clinics:** With the continued influx of people, a clinic was built in the Diepsloot West area in 1999. A second clinic was recently opened in Diepsloot South in 2008. The congestion of patients was readily apparent during a visit to one of the clinics. There are no ambulances and the only emergency service in the area is the fire department. People still go as far as the Witkopen clinic (about 20 kms) for treatment.

5) **Unemployment:** Unemployment in Diepsloot today is said to be somewhere between 45-50%. Some residents argued that it was higher than this in the mid 1990s and that today, there are more employment opportunities. Previously, people needed to travel further to find work. However, today there are internal economic development activities in Diepsloot like road and housing construction where people can find jobs. There are also businesses and many residents have set up their

own small businesses. However, a majority of the respondents were of the view that things have been getting worse over time.

6) Housing: Initially, Diepsloot was only shacks but the building of RDP and bond housing has created more diversity in housing types. However, as people continue arriving, it has not been possible to provide everybody with RDP houses. There are only about 8,000 RDP houses and demand continues to outstrip supply. This leads to a constantly increasing number of shacks in the area. There are over 50,000 shacks in Diepsloot with more everyday. Only about a third of the population lives in RDP houses and tensions arise as people claim that these houses are being allocated unfairly.

7) Electricity, trash collection and water supply: Some residents argued that while the Johannesburg city council has tried to provide decent utility services like litter collection, water and sanitation, and electricity, through its subsidiary companies like Pikitup, Johannesburg Power, Johannesburg Water, there continues to be a serious problem with illegal electricity connections in the area. The number of illegal connections has been increasing over the years.

8) Emergency services: A Metro police station was built only three years ago while a fire department was built 2 years ago.

9) Schools: New schools are being built every year to cater for the ever increasing population in the area. However, they have not been sufficient and many residents bus their children to far away schools. There is only one public high school in Diepsloot.

10) Recreation facilities: There is only one park (Serafina Park) situated in Diepsloot West for all of Diepsloot. The same applies to the community centre. There is not a single swimming pool, playground, or stadium in Diepsloot.

Government offices and police stations are concentrated in Diepsloot West. Therefore, this area is better serviced than others. For example, all the roads in Diepsloot West are tarred and there is street and high mast lighting for this entire area. However, this infrastructure is lacking in other parts of Diepsloot.

Politics:

The African National Congress (ANC) has been the dominant political party in Diepsloot since its establishment. Other political parties such as the African People's Convention (APC), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the Democratic Alliance (DA), United Democratic Movement (UDM) and lately the Congress of the People (COPE) are present in Diepsloot but these are less visible. The ANC has a local branch which is very active and meets every Wednesday afternoon. COPE has also established a branch in the area. Community mobilisation around local government elections has been high and many people vote. People see local politics as the drivers of development in Diepsloot and literally everything starts through politics. However, many people interviewed expressed their displeasure with the ward councilors and accused them of being too corrupt and not doing enough to help the people.

Relationship between government and the community:

From the perspective of government officials, the relationship between the community and the government was generally seen as positive. However, others felt that the councilors were not doing enough for the community. The recent service delivery protests and the xenophobic attacks were cited as indicators of this. Community engagement in public meetings was said to be very high, however many people attend only when the issues being addressed are dear to them.

There are NGOs and faith based groups that are involved in community development and in linking the people to the government. This was seen to be a result of the weaknesses of the South African National Civics Organization (SANCO) in the area, which seems to have become co-opted by the ANC.

The churches specifically are doing a lot spiritually as well as materially helping the community. They have also helped residents by starting self-help initiatives and cooperatives through skills training in dressmaking, brick making, welding, etc and offering seed funding for the initiatives. They are also sponsoring kids through school.

Photos of Diepsloot





Diepsloot South Clinic



RDP housing





Diepsloot Mall





