



# Vulnerable Communities Participatory Assessment

Piketberg, Western Cape  
South Africa

**ACDS CENDEP UGA Workshop**  
January 14-22, 2013

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This report has been produced by students from:

African Centre for Disaster Studies (ACDS), North West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa  
Centre for Development and Emergency Practice (CENDEP), Oxford Brookes University, UK  
Center For Community Design and Preservation, College of Environment and Design, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA

## **Authors**

Christiaan Becker (South Africa)  
Nadia Berger (Canada)  
Sophia Boyd (UK)  
Kamiya Keisuke (Japan)  
Ashleigh King (UK)  
Wilfred Lunga (Zimbabwe)  
Ann Nguyen (Vietnam)  
Coco Ogawa (Japan)  
Sifat Reza (Bangladesh)  
Ahmed Safi (Palestine)  
Lesego Shoroma (South Africa)  
Eduardo Tapia (Mexico)  
Mikaela Urgo (USA)

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# CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
Context	6
Cycle of Poverty	10
Social Problems	14
Community Support Issues	15
Environmental Hazards	16
Conclusion	18
Recommendations	19



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been produced by 13 postgraduate students from 11 countries. The research was conducted from 14th-22nd January 2013. 24 interviews were conducted with community members as well as government officials within the Picketberg area in South Africa's Western Cape. Discussions and interviews were also carried out with workers from a grape farm within the Bergrivier Municipality. Secondary research was necessary to develop an understanding of the local history and context.

The focus of our research was outlined by a Terms Of Reference (TOR) document, which required six recommendations and a report no longer than 20 sides that would address the following four questions:

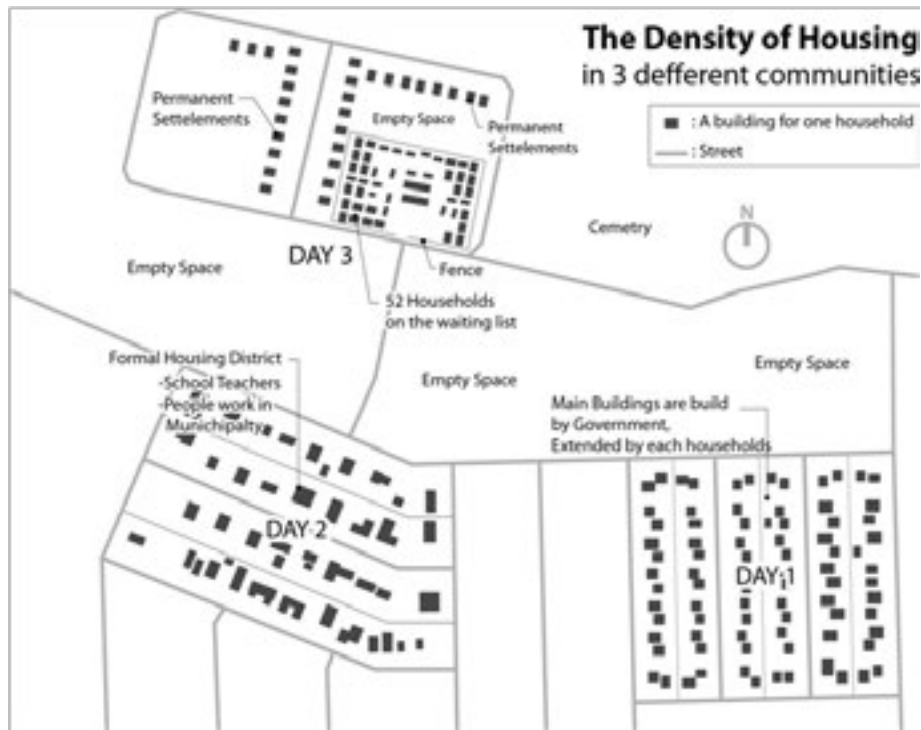
- Who is most vulnerable within the community and why?
- What are the major threats and why?
- Who were the major actors and what are their respective roles in increasing/ reducing vulnerability?
- What can be done to reduce vulnerability in the short, medium and long term?

In order to answer these questions, we approached our research using Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) tools in three different sections of the neighborhood (see graphic), including: mapping, transect walks, seasonal calendars, daily activities schedules, diagrams, ranking, matrix scoring, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The underlying belief of PRA is that community members should be central in discussions regarding their community, as they are more likely to have an accurate understanding of relevant issues than outside researchers would.

From an educational perspective, the purpose of the field trip was to learn and apply PRA in a real setting - a tall order, given that the majority of the group were new to both the methodology and the area. With this in mind, the report reflects both the findings of our research, and our own learning curve in using this approach.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Throughout the project, a number of assumptions have been made regarding the accuracy of translated conversations between community members and researchers, as well as any information that could be considered subjective.

Our team has identified a number of threats including:

- Cycle of Poverty
- Social issues
- Environmental hazards
- Issues around Community Support.

Several recommendations are outlined in this report to counter the aforementioned threats in the short, medium and long term. The recommendations include: the implementation of vocational training and skills development programmes; public works projects; extramural activities; construction of shell housing; strengthening of community networks; and improved drainage infrastructure.





# CONTEXT

The main source of information that the team has relied on is the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), which was produced and submitted by the Bergrivier municipality on 24th May 2012. The information provided in this document is mainly statistical data for the Municipality as a whole, and not specific to Piketberg. In total there are 9 urban settlements that constitute the Municipality. Piketberg is the administrative seat with a population of 11,900 (Community Survey, 2007) and a total area of 9.8 km<sup>2</sup>.



# CONTEXT

Bergriver Profile:

Area: 4407.04 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 44,742 (Community Survey, 2007)

8,384 households

63.2% are between the age of 15 and 65.

Education: Literacy level is 70.5%

21 schools in the municipal area, 11 are with no school fees.

Health Care: 14 health facilities which is the lowest number in the district. HIV/AIDS is the major health concern in the municipal area. Access to healthcare is limited even with a mobile clinic, people are not home etc.



# CONTEXT

**Housing:** Almost 4,000 applicants are on the waiting list for government housing. (In order to be considered for free housing, the applicant must meet different criteria, including having a monthly income and being a first time property owner). Houses are sometimes overcrowded. Farm workers are generally provided with housing on site. Permanent farm workers have their own house while seasonal workers live in hostels and tents. Although there is no formal township, there is a large proportion of 'back dwellers' that live in substandard housing conditions.

**Economy:** Bergrivier has a 2.5 % growth rate, compared to the district's rate of 3.1 % (2009). The agriculture sector provides more than half the total labor force, but the unemployment rate is 10.2%. However, the head of the planning team highlighted that this figure refers to a survey conducted during the high employment season; therefore it is believed that the unemployment rate could be as high as 36%.

The main sectors of activity are the agricultural sector, the fisheries industry (especially on the coast), and the cement company. The tourism sector, although not a big economic asset, has been pointed to as a growing sector.

**Poverty:** The poverty rate is 33.8%; the second highest in the district. We found that the community suffers from a shortage of resources, high poverty levels, and significant unemployment. The main forms of employment are farm work, often temporary seasonal work, or work in quarries. It was found that an average of 3 out of 4 Piketburg residents are farm labourers. Most unemployed and low-income earners are also reliant on government grants.







## WHO ARE THE MOST VULNERABLE\* AND WHY?

*“Who are the most vulnerable?  
Non-working women and children,  
youth, elderly. The most vulnerable  
are local people without skills  
and those who aren’t seasonal  
workers.”*

(Strategic Manager, IDP Department, Bergvriër Municipality)

*“I am glad that there are still  
people who care about this  
community”*

\*unemployed and seasonal workers are most vulnerable

# CYCLE OF POVERTY

Poverty was identified as a major underlying issue in the community that contributes to greater vulnerability. Factors associated with poverty include seasonal unemployment, dependency on social grants and low wages. Seasonal workers make up approximately 80% of the community, and many of them lose jobs from April to July when farms do not need such high levels of labour. In addition, there are a number of employees working in the quarry mines and cement production.

In some households, families' expenditure exceeds their income, largely as a result of wages often being very low. There are some families who do not have any employed members, and so totally depend on government grants. Grants are given to the disabled, young mothers who are not married and the elderly, once they are 60 years old. There are a substantial number of community members still waiting for free housing to be provided by the government.



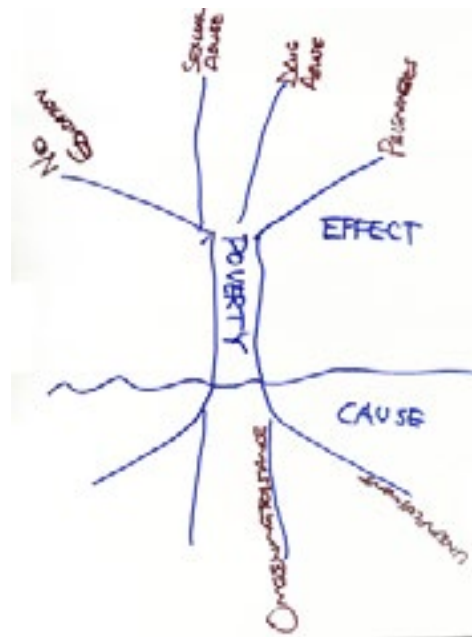
“We are struggling but nowadays there are better opportunities for our children and there is hope that they will succeed” (Christina, mother of two)



A focus group describing their issues and current lifestyles



Left: Diagram of household expenditure per month.



Right: Perception of the cause and effect of poverty in the community.

## CYCLE OF POVERTY

"It's not an issue of money, but the situation...some don't have electricity and when they get paid at the end of the week, they must give half of the money to the shop (owned by the farmer) and they don't have money to go to town... the money stays with the farmer."

"Most people are living on grant money and sometimes they are abusing the system"

(Diane, 35)

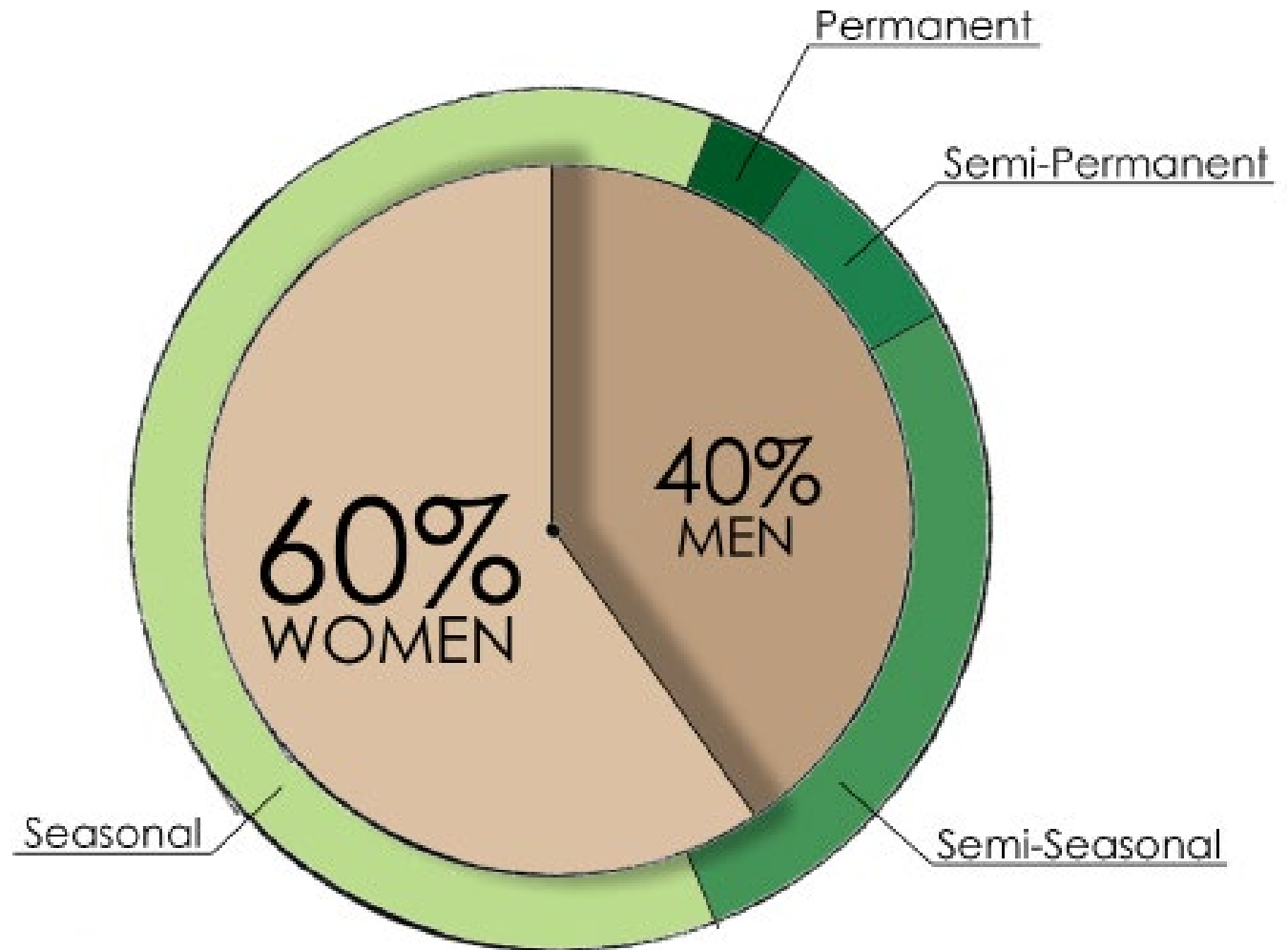
# CYCLE OF POVERTY

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Regarding seasonal employment and unemployment:

1. Improved access to schools, Vocational Training Centres (VTC) and higher education institutions for skills development programs. Access will empower people - the youth in particular- with useable skills to ensure more secure job opportunities. Suggested fields of study include: nutrition and agricultural skills; construction; plumbing; computer skills; home economics and entrepreneurial training. (Example: start a school gardening program which will train community members in gardening, rainwater harvesting, small business skills, provide good nutrition, and fundraising opportunities)

2. There is also a need for scheduled public works projects to reflect and accommodate season migration, i.e. road maintenance, trash collection, sewer maintenance, in order to develop pride and ownership within the community.





# CYCLE OF POVERTY



*"I do not work on the farms; I am self employed and charge my own price, that's my story. Those that work on farms work the whole day without food, they have no choice"* (Male, 37)



*The sketch illustrates the housing situation on the farms. The quality of housing decreases for those that are not permanent workers. Employees working for short seasonal periods are expected to live in tents with up to 20 other workers.*



# SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Although most of those spoken to agree that their community is a safe and quiet place to live, many have also identified a series of social problems. Amongst these, drug and alcohol abuse seems to be a key issue, to which women and young people appear to be the most vulnerable to. It may be that the roots of this issue are related to a lack of community structure, with relatively few activities and opportunities, available to the youth. Some respondents complained that nothing is done in the community about substance abuse, and want to find ways to encourage the community to fight against such problems. Another key point was that it was highlighted that drug and alcohol abuse was most prominent during the high employment season (between July and March). Alcoholism also appears to be a significant issue on the farms themselves. One of the farms visited did, however, mention that rules are in place to control drinking on site.

Other social problems include domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, petty crime, and gang violence. Discrimination where the richer oppress the poorest in the community was also commented upon by some respondents.



*“The community must have the courage to stop people from drinking and using drugs” (Diane, 35)*

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

3. It is suggested that social problems can be dealt with through the use of extramural activities (i.e. clubs and sport teams), which can be used as an opportunity to educate the youth about alcohol and substance abuse, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases etc. This could be done within the public school system as well as through community organizations and institutions. (e.g. the successful ‘12 Step Programs’ for addictions and abuse)

4. The local government could subsidise the construction of shell housing, to be carried out by farmers, home owners and beneficiaries. This could be implemented and monitored so as to create standardised homes that are culturally appropriate and of an acceptable quality. This must also ensure fair equity for farm owners and builders. For farm workers, this encourages personal pride, empowerment and a greater sense of place. (e.g. design and build fireproof housing using sustainable local materials such as rammed earth.)

# COMMUNITY SUPPORT ISSUES

Our research has highlighted a range of existing services and structures that are available to the community. The church, the community hall, the hospital, the community clubs and the secondary school have been identified by the respondents as the key institutions. However, it appears that some links are missing and that the communication channels between these services providers and community members are almost inexistent. The waiting list for government housing, for example, seems to be a pressing issue in terms of communication. Some respondents believe that the municipality does not understand their issues. One of the key informants also recognized the need for better municipal and community partnerships. Our research has also identified a distance lack of infrastructure for the youth. A key point of note is that there is no youth desk at the municipality.

Above: A family's map highlighting the locations they frequently visit.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

5. Strengthen community social networks to reduce the impacts of poor communication between respective groups and beneficiaries. Additionally, practice a bottom up approach through the ward committee recommended structure. The government should work *with* the community to solve local problems, in the spirit of openness and transparency. Engagement with the community should be encouraged, through the use of Participatory Assessment approaches, eg. PRA, in order to map both threats and opportunities. The results of these assessments can be used in planning and implementing community programmes, better housing standards, and encouraging continued community involvement.

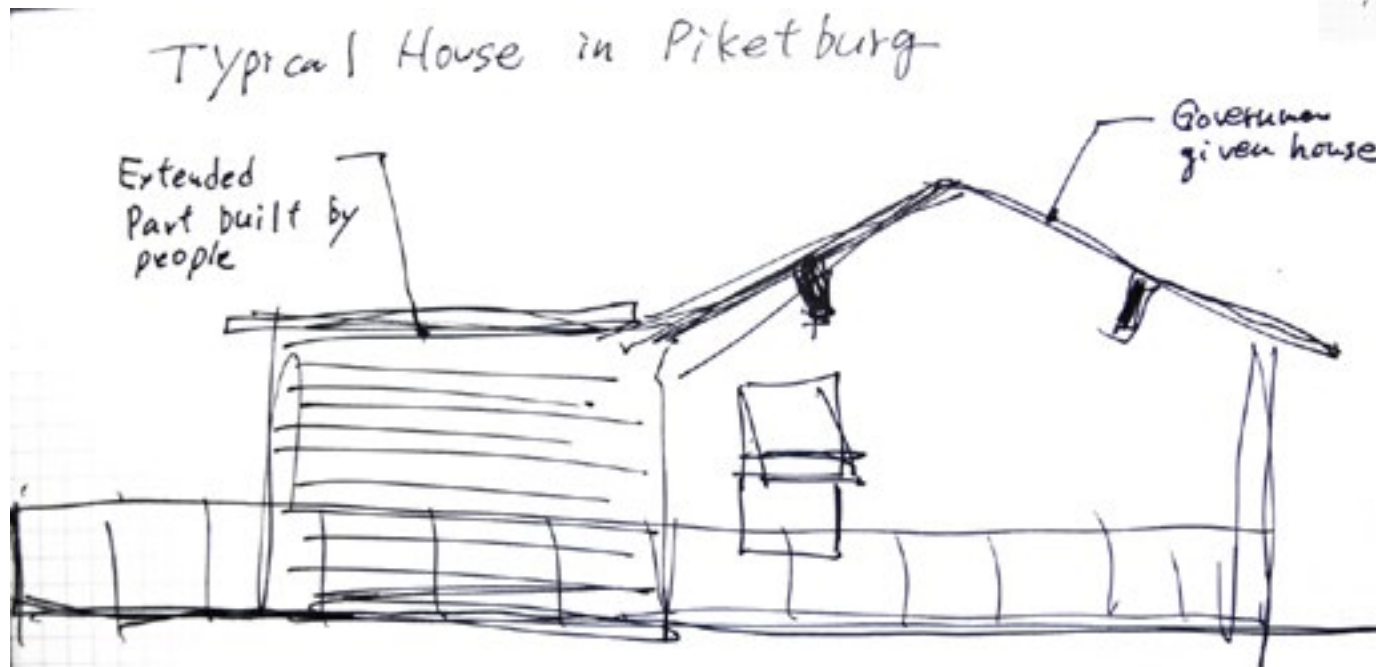
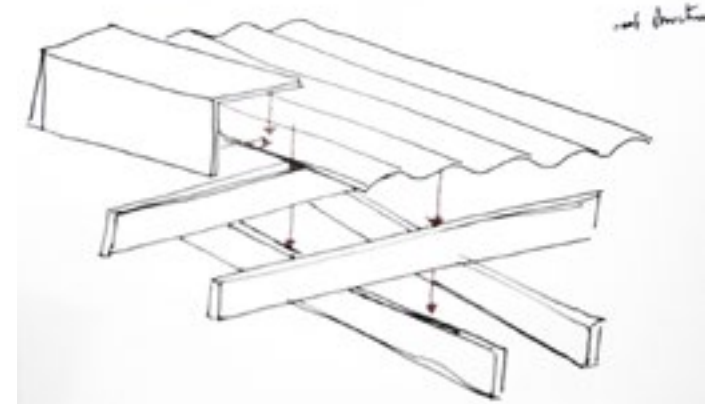


# ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

The main environmental issues that have been detected in the areas of study are flooding and fires. Flooding mostly occurs in June and July, with many of the lower income houses being significantly affected by high levels of rainfall. During interviews, many informants identified Riemvasmaak as the most vulnerable area to flooding. Substandard drainage systems and poor building structures leave inhabitants exposed to environmental threats, and often those that are most vulnerable lack the sufficient means to overcome them.

Another issue stemming from high rainfall is that farmers reduce their workforce, as many tasks cannot be carried out during such weather. This affects their own economic productivity and that of the seasonal workers.

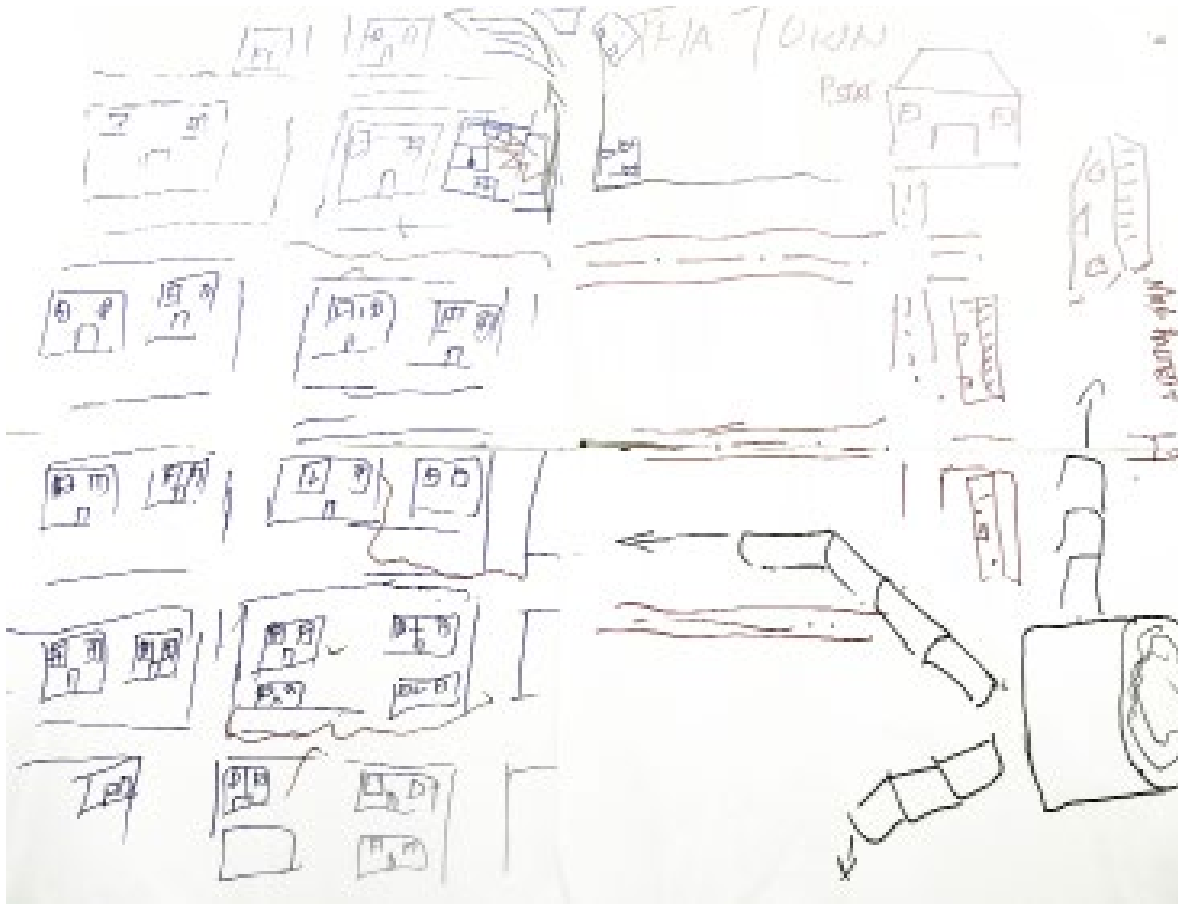
Fires are more frequent in densely built areas, as flammable materials in construction are more common and the close proximity of buildings heightens the risk of fires spreading.



Images illustrating the basic infrastructure of government housing in the community. Reclaimed and bought materials are used to construct extensions, making each home unique.



# ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS



A member of the community illustrates the water flow and piping system in the community.



## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

6. Design rain water harvesting systems and raised gates to reduce water inflow from pavement to household. Gravel would also help to reduce the mud that frequently occupies roads and other playing fields.

“If you have a lot of unmanaged shacks, you could have fires. [It is] too dense. [These residents] use any type of material just to get a roof on their head.”  
(Head of Human Settlements in Bergriver Municipality)

# CONCLUSION

Prior to this project, few members of our group had any experience in PRA. By using this methodology in a real life scenario, our understanding of its strengths and limitations has significantly improved. Although more time would have benefitted us in understanding the underlying problems of this community, our process has nevertheless produced some valuable results.

The results produced from our work in the Piketberg area has enabled us to suggest some key recommendations based on our limited, but thorough, research. In addition to this, we have broadened our understanding of South Africa's wider political, social and economic context.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that access to schools, Vocational Training Centres (VTC) and higher education institutions for skills development programs is made more readily available. This will empower people- the youth in particular- with useable skills to secure better job opportunities. Suggested subjects include: nutrition and agricultural skills; construction; plumbing; computer skills; home economics and entrepreneurial training. (e.g. Start a school gardening program, which will train community members in gardening, rainwater harvesting, small business skills, provide good nutrition and fundraising opportunities)
2. There is a need to schedule public works projects to reflect and accommodate season migration i.e. road maintenance, trash collection, sewer maintenance, in order to develop pride and ownership within the community.
3. Social problems need to use extramural activities (i.e. clubs and sport teams) as an opportunity to educate the youth in matters of drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases etc., both within the public school system as well as through community organisations and institutions. (e.g. As seen in the success of the '12 Step Programs' for addictions and abuse)
4. The local government might consider subsidising the construction of shell houses, to be completed by farmers, home owners and beneficiaries. This should be implemented and monitored so as to produce standardised homes that are culturally appropriate and provide acceptable living conditions. This must also ensure fair equity for farm owners and builders. For the farm workers, this will help to establish personal pride, empowerment and a strong sense of place. (e.g. Design and build fireproof housing using sustainable local materials, such as rammed earth.)
5. The strengthening of community social networks is recommended, so as to reduce the impacts of poor communication between institutions and beneficiaries. Additionally, a bottom up approach should be practiced through the ward committees. The government should work *with* the community to solve local problems, in the spirit of openness and transparency. Engaging the community through the use of PRA tools and other participatory methods should be adopted by the local government, so as to map both threats and opportunities. The results such work can then be used to inform the planning and implementation of community programs, better housing standards and encourage continued community involvement.
6. The design of rain water harvesting systems and raised gates is suggested, so as to reduce water inflow from pavement to household. The use of gravel is also recommended, to reduce mud, which frequently occupies roads and playing fields.