

Report on health and flooding workshops in informal settlements¹

Fall 2010

By Laura Drivdal

Purposes and organization of workshop

As a part of the research for a project on flooding in informal settlements, two workshops on 'health and flooding' were organized in two different informal settlements in Philippi. This is an evaluative report on the process and some of the outcomes.

The purpose of these workshops was twofold:

1. To generate data for the thesis. A part of the workshop was organized as a 'focus group interview'², where participants discussed several questions. Compared to single interviews, it is a quick way of gaining insights into topics that interest residents, and on group dynamics.
2. To facilitate discussion between residents in the informal settlements and people with experience in the field (the facilitators from NGOs), thereby increasing learning s in addition to facilitating motivation and advice.



Picture 1: Group presentations in workshop 1

¹ This is meant as a preliminary report of the research process and findings, not as an academic paper.

² For further readings on Focus Group interviews, se:

Bloor, M., J. Frankland, M. Thaoms and K. Robson (2001) *Focus Groups in social research*. London: Sage Publications

Silverman, David (2006) *Interpreting qualitative data*. London: Sage Publications

How the workshops were carried out

- Facilitation: Two women from a local health CBO which themselves been living in informal settlements but had built houses through saving schemes, were employed to facilitate and lead the discussions.
- Duration: Each workshop was carried out the over two days, lasting approximately four hours each day.
- Food: With support from the project, two residents in each settlement were engaged to prepare food for the workshops, which was much appreciated.
- Location: Two of the larger shacks inside each settlement was used, limiting the walking distance for the participants.
- Attendance: Around 20 residents attended each workshop. In the first workshop a municipality worker joined in.

Outputs 1: Indications thesis

Arranging these workshops provided a possibility to use them as unstructured focus group interviews. Such group interviews can give interesting data since the researcher is less present and the participants can drive the discussion. Thereby, the researcher can spend time observing what issues that seem important to the participants, where there are disagreements, and how the group members respond to each other. The outputs are indications on meaning behind the group's assessments, information on uncertainty and group processes, and information about what normative understandings lie behind the groups' collective decisions.

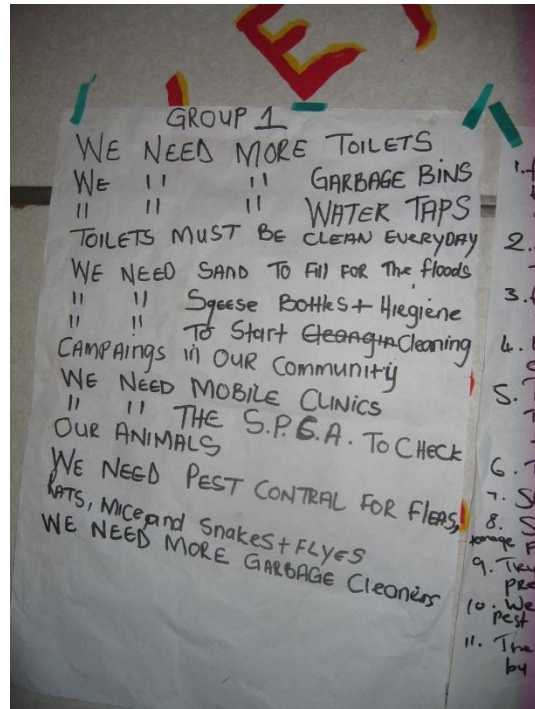
Here is a list of some indications that emerged through two workshops:

a) On the nature of flooding:

- Flooding is more difficult to handle than other hazards like fires, because it is difficult to know what to do. With a fire, everyone can help putting the fire out but with flooding you cannot take away the water.
- Residents relate flooding to health problems because of the still-standing green / grey-water; people get flu, TB, rashes and more mosquito bites during flooding.
- In one of the settlements there are drains, but they are not working because the pipes are thin and people throw garbage there. In the other settlements, there are no drains because it is situated on illegal.
- There have been external engagement by NGOs, churches and Disaster Risk Management when flooding, but residents often don't know who these people are (who they represent). It was also argued by one participant that the people from the local government do not enter the settlement where the flooding is the worst because they don't want to get wet.

b) On flooding adaptation and collaboration:

- Residents are reasonably informed about the health, flooding and waste problem and their interconnectedness. Many are concerned about hygiene, and worry that the settlements are too dirty.
- Since the problems are many, people are frustrated, and have high expectations to both local leaders and municipality help solving these problems.
- There are indications of neglecting attitudes with some residents. Some would waste water by letting taps run and washing cars, which adds to the flooding problem due to rainfall. These residents are difficult to talk to, even for health club members, because they don't like that other people tell them what to do.
- In both the settlements difficulties of internal collaboration were pointed out, especially when sharing toilets, often related to drunkenness.
- The discussion of the health inspector form local government and participants indicated that collaboration might be difficult due to the wide range of needs, demands and expectations.



Picture 2: Group discussion of flooding issue, workshop 1

Picture 3: Notes on poster, workshop 2



Picture 4: Facilitator explaining procedures. Workshop 2

Outputs 2: Participant motivation and learning

Prominently, the workshops were intended to facilitate learning through discussion. They were carried out through a process where the participants themselves had to identify the problems related to flooding, hygiene and waste in their own settlement. They did so by discussing in groups and noting on flip charts, before presenting to the rest of the workshop. The participants took these tasks seriously, the discussions and presentations went smoothly and good explanations of the problems in addition to suggestions for improvements were given.

The facilitators were focusing on motivating the participants to take charge of developments, as their own experiences indicated that much is possible. They first made the participants work in groups and discuss own ideas, before giving feedback and advice. The advice the facilitators gave was mostly on taking responsibility and actions, not wait for others to solve the problems for them. Practically, they recommended the participants to organize themselves through e.g. health clubs and saving groups, and then connecting to NGOs to get assistance in leading own development. The participants seemed to take this advice seriously and were interested in forming a health club in one of the settlements. I visited them again after the workshops, and they had formed an organization but are still waiting for official registration. Lastly, as the picture below shows, the facilitators also gave practical suggestions on how to improve hygiene and thereby health problems in the informal settlements. Since the settlements are dirty due to few toilets (that often are broken), waste problems and children playing in the dirt, proper hand washing is crucial. Using the 'squeeze bottle' is a practical way to make hand washing more hygienic.



Picture: Health club members showing how to use 'squeeze bottle' Workshop 1

Conclusion

All in all I would say that the two purposes were fulfilled. Some interesting indications for the thesis emerged, and the participants indicated that they were happy with the workshop. The main problem however, is that only 20 residents from each informal settlement could participate. It seems that most of the residents that attended the workshop already were motivated, but that there are many residents in the settlement that don't care and it is difficult to reach out to. Therefore, many of the participants requested more workshops in order to cover a wider audience, also because the participants indicated it is difficult to make people listen if they approach them on their own.