Chapter 5

Accessing Housing Finance in South Africa: The Role of Women Activism

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Abstract

Women's history in South Africa is replete with examples of exclusion, discrimination, and marginalization. The transition to democracy in 1994 and inclusion of gender equality in the post-apartheid constitution in 1996 were seen as steps in the right direction towards addressing women's oppression and creating gender equity in accessing housing finance. The subsequent formulation of policies and institutions meant to achieve gender equality put women's concerns in the public domain. However women's access to capital and housing finance in particular remain challenges in accessing improved housing.

An exploration of women's position with regard to housing finance points to the ways in which women were systematically excluded from accessing housing during apartheid. While the post-apartheid housing policies have been inclusionary to women, access to finance from both the traditional and non-traditional housing finance institutions remains a challenge. This paper argues that women's involvement in rotating savings schemes has been key in providing them with finance for the consolidation of subsidized housing in South Africa. Although micro-credit institutions continue to respond to women's need for housing finance, equality in access to housing finance will only be achieved when all the role players, both formal and informal, remove the obstacles that constrain women's access to capital and credit for investment in housing development.

Post-apartheid analyses (Peer, 1997, Ismail, 1998, Department of Housing, 1998, Department of Housing, 1999, Kallman, 1999, Ndinda, 2001) on housing point to women's increased participation in housing delivery, but few focus on their access to housing finance (Mjoli-Mncube 1998, Ndinda 2004). This paper examines the change in post-apartheid South Africa in terms of women's access to housing finance and what their activism has accomplished.

Land in Africa remains a significant basis of capital accumulation. In South Africa, where people were removed from the land through racist and segregationist policies starting with land appropriation in 1913 and the subsequent apartheid policies, few own land on which to build their homes. In 2001, the Black Economic Empowerment Commission stipulated that at least 30 percent of the land should revert to black ownership (Black Economic Empowerment Commission, 2001). Since 1994, only 3 percent of the land has reverted to Blacks. Yet, the stipulation that 30 percent of the land should be owned by blacks[3] does not address what this really means in terms of race and gender. The clause on the transfer of land ownership is generic in that it does not directly address the inequality of access to land in terms of gender.

In this article, housing finance institutions are taken to be those organizations that lend capital and credit to borrowers with the intent of investing in housing. Traditional housing finance institutions are the formal banks that lend funds for mortgage and bonds while non-traditional lenders are informal financiers such as micro-credit lenders who also provide capital and credit for investment in housing, however their terms might differ from those of traditional lenders. While the clients of traditional lenders can access finance from non-traditional lenders, most of those who resort to non-traditional lenders do so because they cannot access housing finance from traditional lenders.

The Context of Women's Access to Housing Finance in South Africa

The first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 saw the country make a transition from White minority apartheid rule to majority rule. The post-apartheid democratic order saw tremendous changes taking place in terms of constitutional rights and public policies. Before the notion of housing finance access for women is discussed, there is need to sketch the social, political and economic background of the current situation.

When the African National Congress (ANC) took over in 1994, the housing backlog was about 1.5 million units in urban areas (Department of Housing [DOH], 1994). One of the top priorities of the ANC was to deliver housing to the masses, as articulated in its policy document, *The Reconstruction and Development Programme* (African National Congress, 1994) in which a delivery target of one million houses in the first five years was established. By 2000, six years after the inception of the White Paper on housing, over one million housing opportunities had been delivered, benefiting approximately four million people (Mthembi-Mahanyele, 2000,[4] Streek, 2001, Mbeki, 2001). The housing statistics for 2007 show that 2.4 million houses have either been completed or are under construction (Sisulu, 2007).[5] The post-apartheid housing policy, *A New Housing Policy and Strategy for South Africa,* emerged from a strong culture of human rights activism reinforced by the 1996 constitution that recognises housing as a fundamental human right: "Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing" (26, (1)). The constitution also includes a non-discrimination clause: "The State may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds." While the current housing policy embodies notions of gender equality, it is also reflective of government redistribution efforts and anti-poverty measures. The housing strategy, "Breaking New Ground" (BNG) (DOH, 2004), which emerged after the first ten years of post-apartheid housing delivery (which resulted in further fragmentation of the housing environment and marginalization of the poor), focuses on the creation of integrated human settlements. Employment equity and affirmative action policies are some of the measures that the post-apartheid state has implemented to ensure greater racial and gender equity in the economy. Women's position shifted from having no rights to having an abundance of rights. Through legislative fiat, women have experienced a radical change from being powerless to having equal power to men. In terms of housing, these policy shifts represent a major transformation from having access to very little urban housing, to having broad access (at least notionally) to housing.

The radical shift in women's access to housing finance is manifested in the 1994 housing policy where the eligibility criteria is progressive compared to previous policies that based access to housing on income. The post-apartheid housing subsidy is structured according to different income levels, with a focus on the poorest of the poor (those who earn R0-1500), a majority of whom are women (Statistics South Africa, 2000). The housing subsidy provides funding options to eligible people in the income bracket of R 3500 per month and below, including married couples and couples living together who are not married. All beneficiaries must be lawful South African citizens. Recipients of the subsidy must be over 21 years, be legally competent to contract and have financial dependents, a view that received wide criticism from various analysts and organisations (DOH, 2007). From 1994 until September 2005, about 2 750 566 subsidies were approved (DOH, 2006). Despite the huge budgetary allocations to housing and the large proportion of subsidies issued, it is not clear what proportion of these subsidies were allocated to women as gender disaggregated data on subsidy beneficiaries is not available from the housing department.

In addition to the capital subsidy scheme, various institutions have been created to mobilise finance for housing development. These include the National Housing Finance Corporation (NHFC), the National Urban Reconstruction Agency (NURCHA), and the Rural Housing Loan Fund (RHLF). The NHFC promotes access to housing for low and middle income groups by mobilising wholesale finance to retail intermediaries that deal with the targeted groups. From its inception in 1996 until March 2006, the NHFC provided R2.5 billion in facilities, disbursed R2.1 billion to intermediaries (191 317 in loans), and has created 249 687 housing opportunities thereby improving the lives of 1 167 210 people (NHFC, 2006). NURCHA, on the other hand, provides bridging finance to developers involved in the construction of low cost housing, while the RHLF provides loans to rural low-income households through intermediaries for households involved in incremental housing. Through its intermediaries, the RHLF has provided 45 000 low income rural households with end-user finance since 1997 (RHLF, 2006).

These institutions provide overall statistics of their activities but do not sufficiently indicate whether their work has led to women's greater access to end-user finance. Although effort has been made to disaggregate data in terms of regions, the overall picture is that of a gender-blind approach to assessing the impact of institutions that facilitate access to end-user finance for low-income households. The availability of capital and credit for housing development remains critical, but various factors such as unemployment, low income and institutional cultures continue to constrain women's access to end-user finance.

Unemployment and Underemployment

Unemployment patterns in post-apartheid South Africa display the persistence of race and gender inequalities. The unemployment rate is 26.7 percent (SSA, 2006) countrywide. The gender disaggregation of the data shows that the rate of unemployment among men is 22.6 percent compared to 31.7 percent among women (SSA, 2006), pointing to the vulnerability of women to poverty. The statistics on unemployment further indicate a differentiation in terms of race. Although the rate of unemployment is slightly higher among women than men, when racialized, unemployment rates are highest among Africans, at 31.5 percent, compared to Coloureds, Indians, and Whites whose unemployment rates are 22.4, 15.8, and 5 percent respectively (SSA, 2006). In this context, unemployment rates are higher among African women (29.3 percent), and lower among White women and men (3.7 percent and 4.6 percent respectively) (SSA, 2003).

Census data from 2001 indicate that although the status of Whites, Indians and Coloureds has changed, the majority of African women remain at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder and are the most vulnerable to poverty. The high unemployment rates among Africans—and African women particularly—may explain the high incidence of poverty, the inability to afford decent housing, or be involved in low-cost housing development on an incremental basis.

Whereas census data provide employment types by province and race, there is no breakdown in terms of occupation by gender; data that would shed light on whether the occupational patterns among men and women have changed since the end of apartheid and the transition into democracy in 1994.

Using the segmented labour analysis, women in South Africa, as in other developing countries, are employed in different sections of the labour market. These labour markets include the primary and secondary labour markets, but also unpaid labour (Makgetla, 1995). The primary labour market is the formal sector comprised of steady unionised occupations in the economy and the state. Unionisation in this sector protects workers rights, providing them with more stable employment. The secondary labour market is comprised of the informal sector in developing countries which is characterised by low or non-existent pay, weak legal protection and low levels of unionisation (Makgetla, 1995, Momsen, 1991, Hanson & Pratt, 1995). Analysts concede that most women are found in the secondary labour market where the incomes are low and irregular. In South Africa, these are almost exclusively Black women. In a study conducted in Ezilweleni (Southern Pine Town, Durban) among household heads, the employment data showed that more men than women were employed in the formal sector. Women comprised the majority in the informal sector employment (Ndinda, 2004). In this settlement (Ezilweleni), while 12.5 percent of women worked in the formal sector, no men recorded working in the informal sector.

Table 1: Type of Occupation by Household Head

Gender	Formal Employment	Informally employed	Unemployed not Seeking Work	Unemployed seeking work	Pensioner	Total
Male	31% (5)	0%	6.25 (1)	18.75% (3)	6.25% (1)	62.5% (10)
Female	12.5% (2)	12.5%	0%	6.25% (1)	6.25% (1)	37.5% (6)
Total	43.5% (7)	12.5% (2)	6.25 (1)	25% (4)	12.% (2)	100% (16)

Source: Ndinda, C. 2004. Gender Matters in Residential Construction in Ezilweleni, South Africa. **Wits Journal of Architecture and Planning Studies**, Vol 1:1

A survey of housing subsidy beneficiaries in Luganda (Southern Pine Town, Durban) showed that men comprised 75 percent and women 25 percent of those who worked in the formal sector (Ndinda, 2002). About 42 percent of all the residents in Q-section of Glenwood II worked in the informal sector. Among the women, 44 percent worked in the informal sector while the proportion of men in the same sector was 41 percent (Ndinda, 2002). While 23 percent of the men in Glenwood II worked in the formal sector, no women were similarly employed (Ndinda, 2002). The concentration of women in the informal sector implies that their incomes are low and irregular, which makes saving for a house difficult.

Income

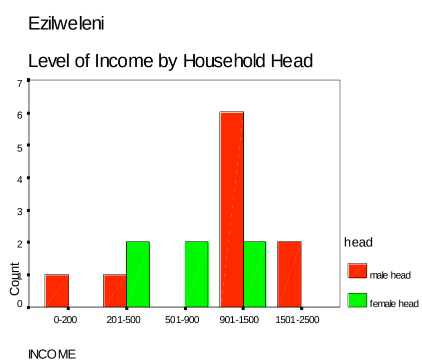
Housing research conducted in Ezilweleni showed that generally women comprised the majority of low income earners, with their incomes reaching a certain level and going no further (Ndinda, 2004). Whereas women in Ezilweleni earned incomes between 0-R500, most men in the same settlement earned incomes in the range of R900-1500 per month. As the table on income levels indicates, no women earned more than 1500, compared to the men who earned incomes above the R1500 bracket (Ndinda, 2004). While women (81 percent) in Q-Section (Glenwood II in Pietermaritzburg) earned between R200-900, most men (53 percent) were concentrated in the income category of R500-1500 (Ndinda, 2002). About 43 percent of male-headed households and 48 percent of female-headed households in Thembalihle (Pietermaritzburg) cited low income as the main constraint to making improvements to their starter housing (Ndinda, 2002).

Irregular income among the majority in Nthutukoville in Piermaritzburg (KwaZulu-Natal province), indicates that despite what the policy states, most of the poor are unable to top-up the government subsidy due to lack of income, let alone savings (Ndinda, 2003). The lack of income, coupled with government expectation that subsidy beneficiaries contribute financially towards their own housing, presents the discrepancy between policy and practice.

Finance is fundamental to the acquisition of housing, which is a capital intensive investment. The most common source of housing finance among the sampled households in KwaZulu-Natal was their own savings. While all the male-headed households (in Ezilweleni, Q-section, Luganda, Nthutukoville, and Thembalihle) relied on their own savings for housing improvements, among the female-headed households, the sources of housing finance were diverse, ranging from their own savings, bank loans, and stockvels (informal savings schemes) to other sources which were mainly remittances from their children. Only 25 percent of the female-headed households cited bank loans as the chief source of housing finance. By contrast, as much as 75 percent of the female-headed households depended on their own savings, stockvels, or proceeds from their children to finance their housing improvements (Ndinda, 2002).

Clearly, low income is a key constraint in women accessing finance for housing consolidation. Male-headed households (71 percent) pointed to the inability to get credit as the main obstacle to consolidating their government subsidised housing (Ndinda, 2002). Female-headed households (80 percent) pointed to low income as the main constraint to improving their housing conditions (Ndinda, 2002).

Table 2: Income Level by Household Head



Source: Ndinda, C. 2004. Gender Matters in Residential Construction in Ezilweleni, South Africa. ***Wits Journal of Architecture and Planning Studies****.*

The low incomes earned by women in the formal sector condemn them to the status of the working poor. Women's wages are so low that they do not qualify for credit from financial institutions, and are thus condemned to the private rental housing sector, often living in squalid conditions for which they pay exorbitant rent. Casale's (2004) analysis of the October Household Surveys of 1995 and 2001 points to a drop in the average median earnings of women by 16.5 percent and an increase of 19.3 percent in men's earnings. The analysis suggests that there was a decline in the earnings of both men and women between 1995 and 2001. However the decline was greater in women's earnings (43 percent) compared to men's (18 percent) despite the increase of 52 percent in women's participation rates in the labor force during the same period. Yet, the gender desegregation of earnings conceals the racial differences in incomes earned by African men and women and White men and women, and fails to present a holistic picture of the situation. According to Casale (2004), the drop in women's earnings was due to the decline in African women's real earnings, which fell by 27.4 percent from R1711 in 1995 to R1242, while the median earnings fell from R1105 in 1995 to R568 in 2001. While African women experienced a drop in their incomes, White women experienced an increase with their average and median real earnings rising by 12.7 percent and 9.6 percent respectively. The gender differentials were insignificant as the ratio of female to male earnings was 0.654 in 1995 and by 2001 it was at 0.656. However, the racial differences were more pronounced, with the position of African women deteriorating relative to African men where the male-female earnings fell from 0.792 in 1995 to 0.718 in 2001. In contrast, the position of White women improved relative to White men with the female to male ratio in earnings increasing from 0.498 to 0.612. Most notable is that a greater proportion of employed Africans were concentrated in the lower income categories in 2001 than in 1995, but the crowding was larger for African women. The data highlight the persistence of race as an indicator of earnings as the positive change in women's earnings has been among White women. The differences in earnings of women of different races remain significant.

Current data suggest that while Africans comprise 79 percent of the total population of 44 819 777 of South Africans, they comprise a mere 74 percent of the economically active population which stands at 16 704 000 (Department of Labour, 2007). Conversely, whites comprise 9.6 percent of the total South African population, and 12.8 percent of the economically active population. Blacks (Africans, Coloureds, Indians) comprise a majority of the overall population in the country as well as the economically active population, but their representation in the top management positions is a mere 22.2 percent. Whites, who are a minority both in terms of the overall population and the economically active population, dominate top management positions where they comprise 74.9 percent. In terms of gender, Black women (Africans, Coloureds, and Indians) comprise 6.6 percent of those in top management positions. The breakdown of Black women in top management is 2.9 percent Africans, 2 percent Coloureds, and 1.7 percent Indians. There are huge inequalities even among "Blacks" where, despite being a vast majority among the economically active, African women are still largely underrepresented in top management positions. Whites represent 74.9 percent of top managers and White women's representation is almost double (14.7 percent) that of all Black women combined (Africans, Coloureds, Indians). According to Rospabe (2001), African women experience a higher rate of hiring discrimination than "average" women in the population. Although the state has put in place measures to address low-cost housing finance issues, access to credit remains a problem. The challenge then is to get more Black women (Africans, Coloureds and Indians) into top management positions. Yet representation in numerical terms is insufficient if not accompanied by substantive representation where women leaders advance the cause of fellow women not only getting better paying employment, but also in accessing housing finance.

The economic sociology school of thought explains position in the labour market, not only in terms of gender but according to other sociological variables as well. Exponents of this school of thought maintain that the embeddedness of economic activity in social life is not a result of accumulated human capital (education and training), but rather of "social and cultural capital" defined as "networks of personal contacts and the information, norms and values that are filtered through them… they are the medium through which individuals develop aspirations and often acquire access to jobs" (Hanson & Pratt, 1995, 7). This impacts on the economic practices of individuals and groups as well as access to particular occupations. The analysis explicates the position of women in the labour market and, consequently, their access to housing finance.

In South Africa, Black women's position can be understood in terms of the notion of social capital. While African women have a historically severely oppressed group—African men—as their counterparts, White women have a historically hegemonic group—White men—as theirs. The net effect is that while White men are evidently able to use their immense power to facilitate the access of White women into relatively powerful positions in the labour market, African (Black) men cannot do the same given that their position in the labour market allows them to access information and extend benefits commensurate with their low status. Most Black women within the formal sector work as messengers, clerks, receptionists, tea-makers, cleaners, and other lowly paid jobs compared to White women, putting them out of income levels that would help them qualify for credit.

Affirmative action and employment equity policies have obviously impacted on the employment scenario in terms of race and gender. The profile on leadership and income levels in the corporate sector displays a pattern where the impact of affirmative action policies appears to have been greatest among Black men, White women and Asian women. Race and gender continue to circumscribe African women's position in society (SSA, 2000, Mbeki, 2001, Mbeki, 2004). Black women remain at the bottom in terms of occupational status, income and, by extension, access to resources like capital and credit. On the other hand, White women, due to their human capital endowment and the strong social capital through association with those who dominate in economic power, are likely to rise up the corporate ladder faster than Black women of equal human but less social capital endowment. In this way, women's marginalization in terms of accessing credit and capital has an unmistakable race and class dimension. In understanding how women's position in accessing housing finance has changed since the transition to democracy the critical question to ask is, “which women”?

Women’s Activism in Accessing Housing Finance

Housing finance is important not only for acquiring homes and the benefits that adequate housing contributes to the health and safety of families, but it also reduces the economic vulnerability of marginal groups by building their net worth. The lack of assets is a particular problem for African women in South Africa. Where men and women are equal in terms of their salaries, it does not follow that they are always equal in terms of their financial security. The wealth gap between genders and races in South Africa cannot be explained by income alone. Other crucial factors, such as the lack of opportunities, capacity, security, and empowerment, included in the World Bank’s expanded definition of poverty (World Bank, 2003), are also indispensable. This partly explains women’s lack of access to finance and therefore, housing. In terms of race, Whites and Indians have an economic cushion due to their high levels of home ownership, while Africans do not. In terms of gender, more African men have a better economic cushion than African women of the same income level. The entrenched inequality is not only detrimental to the low income women who have to live in deplorable conditions, but it also reduces the amount of housing stock, an indicator of the total fixed capital assets in a country. Sexist practices that constrain women’s access to housing finance continue unabated due to women’s ignorance and the persistence of patriarchy in the public and private spheres.

The Beijing platform of action (1995) identifies measures which governments and commercial banks can take in order to increase women’s access to credit. These include the use of credit and savings approaches that are effective in reaching women in poverty, and which lower transaction costs and redefine risk. As most women lack traditional forms of collateral, such as property, the Beijing declaration recommends the introduction of specialized desks for working with them. Other measures include the reduction of the required minimum deposit to open a bank account. Some of the recommendations of the Beijing Platform of action have already been implemented in countries like Bangladesh through micro-credit finance institutions (MFI) such as the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh.

In South Africa, women are involved in mobilizing housing finance through savings and credit schemes. In their classification of these associations, Coetzee & Cross (2002) identify various types of savings and credit schemes. These include stockvels—“an Afrikaans term for co-operative savings groups” (Cotezee & Cross, 2002, p. 2)—rotating savings and credit associations, accumulating savings and lending groups, and commercial lending operations. Stockvel groups help members to save, and after a period of time they payout the amount that has been saved to all the members. Rotating savings and credit schemes (ROSCAs) operate differently in that members contribute and the payout is done on a rotating basis. Those who receive their payout first essentially borrow from the group, and are therefore obliged to continue contributing to the group until all members have received their payout. The members who receive their payout last save by making their contributions to the group until it is their turn to receive the payout. In this type of organization no loans or interest are involved. ROSCAs in South Africa do not have constitutions as all members are assumed to understand the rules of the scheme (Cross & Coetzee, 2002). The members of ROSCAs and stockvels are mainly women, and the funds saved are used for housing development due to the lack of access to formal housing finance institutions.

Accumulated savings and lending groups mobilize savings, and lend by adding interest to the principal amount loaned. The loan amounts may range from R100-R500 for periods ranging from two months to one year. Most groups give borrowers four to five months to repay the principal amount (Cross & Coetzee, 2002). This type of savings represents an example of the efforts that women make to mobilize finance for housing and investment in other productive activities. In commercial lending operations, the focus is on lending without a savings component. The amount made from the lending transactions is paid out to the members on an annual basis (Cross & Coetzee, 2002). Bauman (2005) notes that most clients of microfinance institutions are women, which is likely due to the high levels of exclusion from traditional housing finance institutions. Microcredit schemes are a major source of housing finance in South Africa.

Locally, some of the microcredit schemes that have helped women access housing finance include Utshani fund and Kuyasa fund. The Utshani Fund was set up in 1995 by the South African Alliance, comprised of the South African Homeless People's Federation (SAHPF) and People's Dialogue which were grassroots organizations for mobilising access to land and housing (Utshani, 2006). The SAHPF is a movement of the homeless coming together from informal settlements and backyard shacks in formal townships (Baumann & Mitlin, 2003, p. 33). Women comprise 90 percent of the membership and leadership of the Federation which has branches in major urban areas such as Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth. Members are involved in group savings and can borrow housing finance from the Utshani Fund. The SAPHF mobilises grants and capital from local and international development assistance agencies to provide housing for the poor through two strategies. One of which is through the award of small grants that enable community groups to visit other communities to learn about housing construction and finance management to better implement housing projects.

Utshani Fund, a revolving loan fund, lends to any housing savings scheme that provides the affordability assessments of their members, and the building plans of the intended dwellings. New housing savings schemes that apply for a loan have to have at least ten members. The members of the savings schemes need to have secure tenure (which most do), building plans approved by the municipality, and a bill of quantities for the required materials (Baumann, & Mitlin, 2003). Groups applying for a loan must also provide proof that they have a bank account into which funds can be deposited. Some of the experienced groups are required to have “assessed their capacity for construction work and manage the associated financial processes” (Baumann, 2003, p. 34).

To qualify for the initial loan, saving schemes are required to have at least ten members, but subsequent groups can be larger provided they are able to keep up with the repayment rates. The interest rate charged by the Utshani Fund is 1 percent per month to cover administration fees and inflation. Although group members are often encouraged to borrow small amounts from the Fund, most choose to take the maximum loan size of R10 000. The loans are used as bridging finance and top-up to the state housing subsidies. The South African housing subsidy scheme targets South African citizens or permanent residents over the age of 21 whose total household income is below R3500 (RSA, 1994). Most members of savings schemes are eligible for the government housing subsidies. Most of the beneficiaries of the Utshani loans are able to settle these using the housing subsidy which pays between 70-100 percent of the loan. The approach by SAHPF that combines loans (from Utshani Fund) with the state subsidy has resulted in the construction of houses that are larger than those built with the subsidy funds alone. So far the Utshani fund has made loans to over 300 households (Utshani Fund, 2006) and built over 7 261 homes in South Africa.

The Kuyasa Fund, which was established in 1999 by the Development Action Group (DAG) in Cape Town, lends to housing subsidy beneficiaries who have title deeds, no funds for housing consolidation, and are members of savings groups, mainly in Kayelitsha (Cape Town) (Finmark, 2005). In this way, the Kuyasa fund lends consolidation finance to the poorest households, with the average loan being about R3500. These are grassroots savings schemes and many more have emerged throughout country. In terms of overall statistics, most institutions prefer their lending to have an impact on the lives of women. Other institutions, such as the Small Enterprise Foundation (SEF), have adopted a case study approach in which their loan beneficiaries provide a narrative of how the loans have transformed their lives. Although the Microfinance institutions (MFIs) are impacting the lives of the marginalized members of society such as women, this impact needs to translate into adequate housing for the majority of women. Specifically, rural women still need to be reached by such schemes. At this time, there are very few institutions, such as the Rural Housing Loan Fund, that reach them.

Women’s activism is demonstrated by the numerous organizations that have been formed to assist women in their efforts to gain better access to housing finance, including South African Women in Construction (SAWIC), Women for Housing, and South African Women Entrepreneurs Network (SAWEN). Established in 1997, the purpose of SAWIC is to help women contractors gain access to housing finance as well as contracts and networks in the broader construction industry. The organization draws its membership from all nine provinces in South Africa, and 90 percent of its members are black. The focus on contractors suggests that members of SAWIC are able to use the organization to access development finance.

Established in 1996, Women for Housing (WfH) is composed of women professionals involved in the housing sector. Although the mandate of WfH is broad, it is actively involved in providing training to women contractors in areas such as project and financial management. Due to its link to Nurcha, WfH members are able to easily access information on how to apply for bridging finance. The emergence of women in the finance sector has been crucial in the formulation of policies, and the setting of targets that will help women gain greater access to housing finance as a whole, exemplified by the financial sector charter.

The Financial Sector Charter in South Africa seeks to address some of the problems related to accessing finance by recognising that the sector has not risen to the challenge of availing credit to black entrepreneurs, and that a large pool of capital exists in stockvels, informal traders, and in short-term savings, which are outside the formal financial system. In terms of addressing these challenges, the Financial Sector Charter commits itself to providing retail financial services, including contractual savings schemes and credit for small and micro enterprises and poor households (Financial Sector Charter, 2006).

Furthermore, the Financial Charter provides targets for increasing the proportion of black senior women managers to a minimum 4 percent, middle management to 10 percent, and junior management to 15 percent per institution by 2008. Setting these targets is a positive move in ensuring that women's finance concerns are represented in the highest levels of decision-making. Obviously, representation in terms of numbers is not a guarantee that women's concerns will be addressed. When such decisions are based on numbers, women would still be out-voted in critical decisions. White men constitute between 4-5 percent of the South African population (Qunta, 2004), but dominate management positions in financial institutions. Considering this dominance, the Financial Charter targets are too low to radically alter the position of Black women in the financial sector. The best that the Charter might achieve in the short term is to get more women into junior management positions in finance, where they often get stuck, unable to break through the glass ceiling. Clearly the question is how to get more women into senior management where significant decisions are made. Without substantive representation in the financial sector, women will be unable to affect the accessibility of housing finance for other women.

While targets are set for increasing women in management positions, little focus is given to setting targets to increase lending to poor women for purposes other than investment in enterprises. More women in management does not necessarily translate into more credit and capital for the masses of women. Proportional representation needs to be accompanied by raising awareness among women in managerial positions that their participation in decision-making translates into substantive representation which clears the obstacles to housing finance. In the same way that targets have been set for getting more women into managerial positions, similar targets should be set by the formal banks for lending to the masses of women. In this way, the impact of the Financial Sector charter can easily be assessed after a specified period of time.

Conclusion

Women's activism in accessing housing finance has resulted in the formation of organizations that have provided the impetus for addressing women's housing needs by helping them to access financing. For instance, the formation of groups like SAWIC and WfH suggests that women contractors recognize the benefit of confronting the challenges to finance as a group. While the SAHPF is committed to assisting women to access end-user finance, the broad mandate implies that they must focus on a myriad of challenges other than finance that confront poor women. Given that organizations such as SAWIC and WfH address access to housing finance among other concerns, finance remains a key obstacle to the growth of contractors. There is a need for such organizations to devise programmes committed to specifically helping women access housing finance.

When the *White Paper on Housing* was formulated in 1994, the emphasis was on ensuring that groups who were disadvantaged under apartheid housing policies would be given priority in accessing state funded housing subsidies in the new democratic dispensation. Whereas the post-apartheid housing policies have targeted the poorest in society, the impact of government subsidies, as well as that of financial institutions, in addressing the demand for housing finance among women needs to be examined through the disaggregation of data regarding their beneficiaries.

Women's participation in micro-credit schemes, such as People's Dialogue, Kuyasa Fund and Utshani fund, demonstrate the innovative ways in which women have sought to mobilize finance for their housing development needs. Women are not just victims of the exclusionary practices of traditional and non-traditional lenders; women's agency is illustrated in the ways they seek to access housing finance. However, women cannot be left to their own devices in the pursuit of access to proper housing. Beyond the need of introducing state-driven targets for women's economic empowerment (to match political office targets), there is also a need to educate all financial sector managers—particularly economically dominant White males—about the importance of broad-based access to social benefits such as housing. This is crucial given the reality of continued White male dominance of the financial sectors in the foreseeable future. Perhaps organizations and state institutions like the Department of Housing can identify and initiate specific achievable performance targets for financial institutions. Such an arrangement can be monitored and given routine publicity.

Clearly, post-apartheid South Africa has achieved much that eluded it during more than 300 years of systematic racism and almost 50 years of apartheid. Yet, the pervasiveness of gender inequality remains a palpable obstacle in terms of access to housing finance for women. The attainment of equality needs to include egalitarian access to opportunities, including access to credit. Policies aimed at granting access to capital and finance need to be specific in their targets. This implies unpacking terms such as 'Black' and 'women', as people in these groups were not equally disadvantaged by apartheid. The focus should be on getting the most marginalised women to a position where they can access capital and credit for investment in housing.

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