Community Organiser’s Guide
This guide was produced by the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI), in partnership with Sleeping Giant Films, as part of the Dear Mandela Audience Engagement Project. Funding for this project was generously provided by the Ford Foundation.

All photographs in this guide are from the documentary film Dear Mandela.

The views expressed in this guide are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ford Foundation.
Community Organiser’s Guide

contents

1. ABOUT THIS GUIDE 2
2. WHAT IS COMMUNITY ORGANISATION? 3
3. PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATION 5
4. ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATION 6
5. COMMUNITY MEETINGS 8
6. PROTESTS AND GATHERINGS 10
7. EDUCATION PROGRAMMES 12
8. SUSTAINING A COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATION 14
9. MANAGING AND SHARING INFORMATION 16
10. NETWORKING AND PARTNERSHIPS 18

IMPORTANT RESOURCES 22
The aim of this guide is to assist CBOs to organise effectively in order to facilitate social change in their communities. It draws on the experiences and practices of the South African shackdwellers’ movement Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM), which has achieved important gains for shackdwellers around the country.

The documentary Dear Mandela portrays the struggles of young activists from the movement who have resisted mass evictions in the face of violence and intimidation. This guide can be used by community-based organisations (CBOs) and community members together with the documentary to facilitate discussion about organisation and mobilisation.

The guide is one of the resources in a Dear Mandela toolkit aimed at informing individuals, communities and CBOs of their rights, and helping them to organise and mobilise around these rights.

THE OTHER RESOURCES IN THE TOOLKIT ARE:

» Resisting Evictions in South Africa: A legal and practical guide to inform people of their rights during legal and illegal evictions, and to show them how to resist evictions.

» Protesting Your Rights: A guide to inform people of their right to protest.

» Making Local Government Work: An Activist’s Guide: A guide to help people regarding the most effective ways to engage with local government.

ABOUT ABAHLALI BASEMJONDOLO
Abahlali began in Durban in 2005 and has become the largest organisation of shackdwellers in South Africa. It has developed a sustained voice for poor people who do not have secure tenure. Abahlali’s struggles and victories are numerous across a range of different arenas. The movement has boycotted elections, stopped evictions, democratised the governance of a number of informal settlements, won access to schools, stopped the industrial development of land promised to poor people, and successfully challenged the KwaZulu-Natal Slums Act in the Constitutional Court, the highest court in the country.

Due to Abahlali’s successes in holding government and private property developers accountable, much of this guide is based on the practices of the movement. These are practices that can be shared with communities facing similar struggles around the country.

ABOUT SERI
The Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI) is a non-profit organisation providing professional and dedicated socio-economic rights assistance to individuals, communities and social movements in South Africa.

SERI conducts applied research, engages with government, advocates for policy and legal reform, facilitates civil society coordination and mobilisation, conducts popular education and training, and litigates in the public interest (the SERI Law Clinic is registered as a public interest law centre).
Community organisation refers to efforts made by excluded groups to promote positive change in their communities. It also means resisting changes that will negatively affect people. Effectively organising your community is important for many reasons. The most important is that it is a powerful tool for protecting rights, improving services, and challenging unfair practices.

Community organisations form part of what is called civil society. Civil society is made up of different organisations including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), non-profit organisations (NPOs), trade unions and CBOs.

- **NGOs** are organisations that are not part of government, or conventional for-profit business. They are often focused on human rights and environmental and development issues at local, national, regional, and international levels.

- **NPOs** are organisations that use all of their surplus revenue to achieve their goals, rather than distributing it as profit or dividends. These goals are usually to change or improve social issues.

- **Trade unions** are organisations of workers who organise to protect workers. Trade unions are most often engaged in maintaining or improving the conditions of employment of workers.

At a community level, CBOs are often the most effective way to organise. This is because of three key factors that distinguish CBOs from the rest of civil society:

- CBOs are comprised of grassroots membership, rather than hierarchically organised technical staff.

- Leaders of CBOs are elected. As a result, members of CBOs dictate to their leadership, and not the other way around.

- The leadership of CBOs are accountable to their members only, and not to funders or a board of directors.

**Civil society** refers to a community of organisations located between the family, the state, the government, and the prevailing economic system, in which people with common interests and collective activity associate voluntarily.
WHY SHOULD YOU ESTABLISH A CBO?

People living in poor communities use a range of different methods to ensure access to services, tenure security, local democratic participation and the protection of a range of socio-economic rights. Collective community organisation is central to any of these strategies.

Effective organisation is required for collective action. Collective action can achieve direct material gains, change public opinion and access broader support and solidarity. It can expose government failure to provide goods and services and the actions of private property interests in, for example, attempting to remove people from their homes.

Any community can set up a successful CBO if they have the will and the dedication. The transition from being a community to an effectively organised community is often a difficult one. It requires that people leave their comfort zones and take actions to hold those who are in power accountable.

No two communities are exactly the same. All struggles are unique. Nobody knows a struggle better than the community which is actually experiencing it. As a result, there are no hard and fast rules on how to organise effectively. However, this guide aims to provide you with information that should assist you to deal with your specific challenges.
There are a number of principles that should form the basis of the choices, actions and conduct of a CBO. These principles are important in order to maintain the integrity and credibility of the organisation and the efforts of the community. These principles of community organisation are:

» **Accountability**: The leadership should always be answerable to members, and members should always be accountable to the goals of the organisation.

» **Transparency**: Leadership should communicate openly with membership to allow members to hold them to account. Transparency ensures that corruption does not take root in an organisation.

» **Democracy**: Organisations should approach all matters in a democratic fashion. This means that the consensus of the majority of members should decide the organisation’s choices and actions.

» **Autonomy**: Organisations must decide their own agenda and programme free of the influence of political parties, NGOs or other interests.

» **Living politics**: Organisations should always be informed by the experiences of their members, and focused on alleviating their daily struggles.
It is very important that communities facing difficult living conditions, the challenge of poor services, and the threat of eviction organise themselves effectively.

Neighbourhood and community organisation is the most important and powerful resource available to any community. Some of the important responsibilities and tasks of community-based organisations (CBOs) are to:

» **Identify issues and struggles faced by their communities.** They are in the best position to do this because their membership is grounded in communities.

» **Conscientise and raise awareness in communities.** The struggle of communities is always stronger if the communities are aware of their rights.

» **Decide what should be done about the struggles faced by their communities.** CBOs are good places for communities to take decisions collectively because they should be accountable and transparent to their members.

These are some important steps to remember when establishing a CBO:

1. **Give your organisation a name.** A name shows that there is planning and coordination behind a CBO. Put the name on a letterhead to be used in all future correspondence on behalf of the community.

2. **Elect leaders for your organisation.** Elections should be conducted democratically, and women and the youth should always be represented in the leadership structure. One way of conducting democratic elections is to have the community nominate candidates for leadership positions. Once candidates have accepted their nominations, they can leave the meeting while community members conduct a vote by a show of hands. Votes are counted and the candidates who receive a majority of votes assume the positions of leadership.

3. **Decide on the goal(s) of your organisation and put them in writing.** Be as specific as you can. This helps everybody understand what you are about, from government to your own members. Remember that it is often not enough just to be against something. Try to present alternatives as well. If the alternatives that you are fighting for require legislative action, try and have a lawyer prepare the alternatives you set out as a specific proposal.

4. **Develop a constitution for your organisation.** This is a document that embodies the principles of your organisation. It is a written version of the way your community aims to organise to achieving your goals.

5. **Draw on what makes the struggles faced by your community unique and use this creatively.** Turn it into a metaphor, a slogan, a picture, or a memorable phrase that people will remember. It is often very effective to organise community action around messages.
Abahlali baseMjondolo have successfully used different slogans in their campaigns. Using slogans helps to condense the aims of a struggle into an incisive and powerful phrase. In 2006, Abahlali organised a boycott of local government elections. The boycott demonstrated that if the government did not deliver on issues important to the members of Abahlali, as well as other organisations, like land and houses, they would not vote.

The boycott was organised under the slogan NO LAND NO HOUSE NO VOTE, and the campaign ran successfully from 2006 until 2014.
Community meetings are important platforms for effective organisation. Above all, they are important for setting the agenda of a CBO. The leadership of a community should not make decisions for a community, but rather let the community make collective decisions. Community meetings are good places to achieve this. But meetings do not happen without planning – they require effective facilitation and good communication between the leadership and members of an organisation. Some important aspects to help you plan community meetings are discussed in more detail below.

Before the Meeting

TIME AND PLACE
Organise the meeting at a convenient time and place for community members. Weekends are usually the best time, and Saturday even more so as many people attend church on Sundays. The venue for the meeting should be central for most community members, and should be big enough to accommodate the community members.

ADVERTISING THE MEETING
Try to advertise the meeting at least a week before it takes place. Some effective means of advertising include door-to-door canvassing, and pamphlets. For instance, if the meeting is to be held on a Sunday, go around the community knocking on every door and informing community members of the meeting. Be sure to let community members know what will be addressed at the meeting, and that these issues are important to them.

» Print and distribute pamphlets, and place posters around the community. These should include important information regarding the meeting: date, time, venue, issues to be discussed. The language used in the posters and pamphlets is important – make sure it is in the language that the majority of your community can read. Where you place the posters is also important. Make sure they are put in places where members of the community will see them: shebeens, spaza shops, communal taps, bus and taxi stops.

» Use a loudhailer to advertise the meeting. This is very effective in communities where members live near to each other. A community leader should walk through the community announcing the meeting and details over the loudhailer.

» Use social media to advertise the meeting. Make sure that you publicise the meeting and its details on all of your social media accounts, like Twitter and Facebook.

SETTING UP BEFORE THE MEETING
Arrive early on the day of the meeting to make sure that everything is set up properly.

MEETING AGENDA
Be sure that you know what a meeting is about before you call it, otherwise you run the risk of it being directionless and ineffective. Write this information down into an agenda, which will be used to organise the meeting.
During the Meeting

Circulate an attendance register at the meeting where people can provide their details. This will help your organisation to keep updated on its membership and attendance.

Be sure to allocate two key duties to members of the executive: chairing the meeting and taking minutes of the meeting.

CHAIRING THE MEETING

The chair of the meeting should manage the meeting as effectively as possible, allowing for questions from community members and making sure that the discussion focuses on the agenda as much as possible.

TAKING MINUTES

The scribe should record the meeting as accurately as possible, writing down everything that is said and asked as the minutes of the meeting. These minutes are very important, and should be stored for later use.

RESOLUTIONS

Be sure that by the end of the meeting, you have made clear resolutions about the matters that have been discussed. Effective resolutions must always answer two questions:

» What must be done about the matter discussed?
» Who will do it and within what timeframe?

After the Meeting

At the next community meeting, part of the agenda should always be a report back on the previous meeting, the resolutions that were taken, and the progress of those resolutions. For instance, if people raise the issue to the executive that police are threatening them with eviction, the executive should take steps to follow up on the matter.

The community should then be informed at the next meeting on the steps taken by the executive, and on how successful they were. The minutes kept at meetings are crucial to this process.
Abahlali did not begin as a social movement. It began as a protest. People living in the Kennedy Road informal settlement in Durban blockaded a road to protest the sale of land promised to them for housing by their local councillor. Soon people living in other shack settlements joined in protesting against their councillors. Thousands of shackdwellers organised to march on police stations, newspaper offices, municipal offices, and City Hall. By the end of the year, Abahlali baseMjondolo as a movement was formed, with thousands of members fighting for bottom-up popular democracy, the provision of basic services, and an end to forced evictions.

Everyone has the right to assemble, demonstrate, picket and present petitions as long as they are unarmed and behave in a peaceful manner. These rights are enshrined in Section 17 of the Constitution. Be sure to notify the relevant local authority if you intend to organise a protest.

Protests are very effective ways of getting the attention of people in power. They are also very effective ways of building momentum for your organisation because they are more than events. If they are sustained then they will strengthen your organisation.

Refer to the **Protesting Your Rights** guide to better familiarise yourself with your rights during protest.

**An example of sustaining protest:**

**THE 2005 KENNEDY ROAD PROTESTS**

Members of Abahlali baseMjondolo during a protest
The decision to protest must always be taken collectively by a community. Here are some basic steps to follow when organising a protest:

1. **Appoint a convener:** This should be the contact person of your organisation who is responsible for notifying the local authority about the protest and will be officially in charge of the protest. A deputy convener should also be appointed to replace the convener if necessary.

2. **Notify the local authority:** This is not asking the authority for permission to protest – you are not legally required to do so. Rather, it is letting them know that you will be using your constitutional right to protest, and how you will be using it. The convener should fill in a notice form provided by the local authority containing the details of the protest, the details of the convener, and the details of your organisation. If the local authority does not provide a form, your organisation should create its own document containing the above information and give it to the local authority. Make sure that this notice is given at least 7 days before your planned protest.

3. **Meet with the authorities:** In most cases, the convener will be invited to a meeting by the municipality to discuss any possible changes to the protest as it is described in your notification. If the convener is not called to a meeting within 24 hours of delivering the notice, the protest is immediately considered legal. These meetings are a negotiation about how the protest should proceed, taking things like safety into account. They are not platforms for the local authority or the police to tell you what you may or may not do.

4. **Communicate the protest to the community:** It is important that any protest action is properly communicated to the community. This should be done across as many platforms as possible. If there is enough time, the community should discuss protest action at community meetings. Also, the community should be informed by door to door canvassing and via social media (see later in the guide). Protest action is often quite spontaneous and there is little time to communicate it to the community. Whenever a protest is being organised by the CBO, effective communication with the community about the protest should be prioritised.

5. **Communicate the protest to the media:** Protests are often more effective when the broader public are made aware of them because those in power are forced to take notice. If the media is covering protests, it also becomes more difficult for police to violently quell dissent. Any planned protest should be communicated to the media. Use announcements and contacts in the media (see later in the guide) to make sure that your protest is as well publicised as possible.
CBOs can only succeed if they have the support of their community. But most people who have not been active in political work before are unaware of how political processes work or the extent of their rights and government’s responsibilities in the Constitution. People often trust that the government’s processes will eventually succeed in delivering to them their basic rights and services. But this is often not the case.

PARALEGAL EDUCATION
A community that knows its rights is a formidable force.

One way to make community organisations more effective is to provide information to communities by setting up education programmes. There are some useful resources that an organisation might use to this end such as the Resisting Evictions in South Africa guide produced by SERI to educate your community about the law around evictions. You stand far more chance of resisting evictions, both as a community and as households, if you are aware of your rights.

Make contact with outside organisations and ask them to share their expertise with your community. An example would be contacting SERI to run paralegal workshops with your community about the rights of people in the community.

These are examples of some important legislation you should make known in your community:

- **Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA)** – this sets out your right of access of information.
- **The PIE Act** – this sets out your rights in the case of an eviction.
- **The Regulation of Gatherings Act** – this sets out your rights in the context of a protest or public gathering.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION
Also make your community aware of the responsibilities of local government. Local government has the obligation to provide basic services to communities. That means that your municipality is legally required to provide communities with basic services:

- Water and sanitation
- Electricity
- Refuse removal
- Municipal health services

Local government is legally required to promote social and economic development, and a safe and healthy environment. It is also legally required to encourage community participation. This means the municipality must consult with your community as well as allow and promote your community’s participation in decision-making.

Local government is also legally required to respect, protect, promote and fulfil human rights such as the right to water, a clean and healthy environment, and housing. The government is required to make a plan to realise rights within their available resources, and to carry out the plan step-by-step to improve people’s enjoyments of their rights. If local government fails in any of these duties it is a violation of human rights and the law.

ORGANISATIONAL EDUCATION

Education programmes are also good ways to build leadership and to inform members of their responsibilities.
When building leaders, emphasise the following:
» Leaders of a CBO must always represent the interests of the community.
» Leaders must always be accountable to their community.

When informing members of a CBO about their responsibilities, emphasise the following:
» It is important for members to be active in the organisation, and to regularly attend meetings and events.
» Members should make efforts to recruit other community members as members of the organisation.
» Members are ambassadors of the organisation, and should always try and advertise the organisation.
» It is every member’s responsibility to hold the organisation’s leadership accountable.

An example of a political education initiative:
THE UNIVERSITY OF ABAHLALI BASEMJONDolo

Abahlali baseMjondolo is involved in conscientising and raising the awareness of its members. One example of this is the political education that all new Abahlali branches undergo at their launch. Another is the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo. Abahlali was an intellectually serious movement from the beginning, and the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo came out of the realisation that elites in government and academic institutions did not think that poor people could develop their own politics. So the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo, which makes all information about Abahlali’s politics available to members and the public, was advanced as a platform to communicate the political positions developed by Abahlali in contexts like discussions in meetings and innovations in song.
Sustainability is one of the biggest challenges faced by CBOs and social movements. Giving community members a reason to remain with a CBO after the initial impetus for joining the CBO is a challenge. One way to ensure the continuation of a CBO is to make sure your organisation is engaged in a living politics. This means that you should always be concerned with daily issues affecting the community – the purpose and activities of the organisation should always be shaped by its members’ daily struggles. This is different from organisations, like political parties, who are often more concerned with seasonal issues like elections.

Another important tool for maintaining the relevance of a CBO is to have a clear programme. An easy way of doing this is to set up a calendar, which the organisation will follow. This helps to keep the movement and also its leadership disciplined because it needs to be followed and adhered to.

A good idea is to organise and include different events on this calendar. Events are one way of keeping community members interested in the activities of the organisation. Young people may not be very interested in attending community meetings, but they may be interested in attending a soccer match organised by the CBO, for instance. Events also serve as a useful platform to keep in touch with members, as well as to gauge membership numbers and community interest.

“Our living politic talks about the fact that shack settlements have been denied life saving basic services such as water and sanitation. It talks about the fact that there is no road access, no refuse collection and no electricity. … that the intelligence of the majority has been denied while all decisions are taken by a minority. … that everyone in our society counts be they rich or poor and without regard to what language they speak or to where they or their ancestors were born.”

S’bu Zikode, Abahlali baseMjondolo Founding President
Sustaining a CBO, and holding events, requires sustained membership fees and donations and funding from outside of the CBO. The management of a CBO’s finances is very important. Like the running of all aspects of the organisation, management should be transparent. Financial transparency helps to overcome corruption and should be central to any successful CBO. It sets them apart from local political parties.

One way of doing this is to establish a receipt book to be stamped by the organisation. This receipt book should be used to account for all money used in the name of the organisation, and the use of all money given to the organisation by donors or in the form of membership fees.
Information allows communities to be critical and engaged. If communities are informed, they can subject government and private property developers to criticism and thereby ensure some measure of accountability. Information and access to information are also important to accessing resources.

**Accessing the right kinds of information successfully is easier when a community is united.**

Peoples’ access to information is enshrined in the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA). Getting the right kind of information is crucial for any CBO. For example, it can help an organisation find out what government is doing and can assist with community campaigns.

Local government is required by law to provide the public with information about by-laws, resolutions, minutes of meetings, IDP and performance management reports, and other records.

To access this information directly, you need to make a **written request to the municipal manager.**

**1. ORGANISING INFORMATION**

The organisation of information is important for a number of reasons. It helps when mobilising a community, for instance. Knowing the people available to your organisation, and how they can contribute to the organisation, is very important. You want to be able to access at a moment’s notice people who can write letters, organise or attend meetings, make phone calls, or even contribute money.

The most important way of organising information is to create a **filing system** for your organisation. Your filing system should keep the following information:

- Minutes of organisation meetings
- Original correspondences
- All legal documents involving your organisation
- Names and addresses of members of the organisation
- Names and addresses of supporters of the organisation
- Political contacts
- Copies of newspaper stories about your organisation and related topics

**2. SHARING INFORMATION**

Members of a CBO should always have access to important information. If information is made easily available to them, they are better informed and can make better decisions. Members are also able to keep track of the activities of the CBO and can contribute more effectively to its work. A CBO should do two things to ensure information is effectively shared amongst its members:

- **Make sure that all information that affects members directly is communicated to members at meetings and events, and is easily accessible from the CBO.** This information includes a contact list of important people and groups, the rights of members and the communities, and the processes that members of the CBO should follow if they are under threat of evictions, experiencing poor service delivery, or experiencing illegal actions by government officials. This information should be displayed at the CBOs offices and in public places, and should be kept in the CBOs filing system in the event that a member requests it or it must be distributed to the community.
Always share important organisational information directly with members. This information includes any details about planned CBO activity like a meeting, an event, or a protest. This information should be shared via communication platforms like social media, as well as face to face with members if possible.

3. KEEPING A CONTACTS LIST

A contacts list is a list displaying the contact details of all the people that the organisation needs to communicate with.

It is important to have a contacts list because having these details readily available simplifies the communications processes that organisations frequently have to conduct.

Compile a list of important contacts and make sure it is always easily accessible to the community and to the leadership of the CBO. The contact details of important local government officials should be available at the offices of your local municipality.

Keep a copy of this list in your filing system and always update it when necessary. But also make a list visibly available to the community. Put a copy up in the offices of the CBO, and distribute copies to the community.

This list should include the contact information of the following people:

» The leadership of the CBO
» The local police
» The local sheriff of the court
» The local ward councillor

» The municipal manager
» Lawyers whom the CBO have chosen to represent them
» Journalists with whom the CBO has chosen to work.
Forming strong **partnerships** with other groups and building effective **networks** of strategic associations are important measures for making CBOs resilient and for accessing funding opportunities.

Partnerships with other groups means solidarity and support for the actions and campaigns of a CBO. Effective networks help CBOs with different kinds of assistance, and to communicate their struggles and activities to wider audiences.

There are a number of networks and partnerships that all groups should consider establishing, discussed in more detail below.

**Partnerships** are relationships or alliances between groups facing similar struggles for the purpose of solidarity and support.

**Networks** are associations between a CBO and other individuals or groups who have a common interest and may be able to provide assistance or helpful information.

**OTHER CBOS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**
Developing relationships with other community based groups or social movements is an effective way of adding strength to your cause and applying more pressure on local government or private property developers.

Abahlali baseMjondolo is an example of an effective partner in solidarity that CBOs can approach.

**THE MEDIA**
Media coverage for a CBO alone cannot achieve the goals of the organisation. But positive coverage of CBOs and their struggles and initiatives can be useful.

Often journalists, editors, and even publications might develop negative opinions of your organisation. It is important that you try to develop relationships with people in the media who will give you fair coverage and will report accurately on events. Keep the contact details of these journalists, and be sure to contact them whenever you need to have anything covered by the media.

Elect one person to deal with media relationships. This helps to overcome some of the problems mentioned in the previous section. This person should always be accountable to the community. Problems arise when one person makes decisions without informing others. It might also lead to public confusion about the nature of your organisation. And if the public become confused, your organisation loses credibility. So all communication with the media should first be cleared with the community.

Some ways to engage effectively with the media are discussed in the following section.
USING THE MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Try to publicise the issues of your organisation as much as possible. To maintain momentum, it is very important that the public is aware of your organisation. Use announcements and press releases to generate news about your organisation. Letters to editors can also be effective ways of getting media attention. These are even more effective if they come from as many people as possible. Encourage members to write letters in their own capacity as well whenever the organisation writes a letter.

While good media coverage is important, it is important to remember that it is no substitute for effective action. There are also dangers that go hand in hand with conveying information through the media. One is that often the meaning of what a CBO might be trying to convey is lost in the interpretation of the journalist or reader/viewer. Another is that whatever is said in the media might be used against a CBO. If a member makes a mistake when talking to the media, there might be legal implications.

CHECKLIST FOR A GOOD PRESS RELEASE

» Keep it short (maximum two pages)
» Set out your message in the first line or paragraph
» Highlight the facts
» Highlight your demands
» Be clear about what you want
» Provide telephone numbers of two people from your organisation who can provide more information and are willing to talk to the media and have their names used in the media.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Another way of reaching large numbers of people and making them aware of the struggles of your community is via social media. Millions of people are now connected to each other on internet platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Mxit, and Whatsapp. Communities and activists around the world have used these platforms successfully. They are very useful for communicating with and organising your community. You can use them to spread news about a meeting or community action like a protest. Some positive aspects of using social media are that it is very easy to set up an account and to use that account, anyone whose phone has access to the internet can view your account, and it is free.
LAWYERS

Communities struggling to access housing and basic services or facing the threat of eviction are often in situations requiring legal advice or representation. These situations are complicated and organisations should try to get a lawyer, or lawyers, to represent their community members.

Make sure that you use lawyers whom you trust and who are willing to listen to your story. Be wary of lawyers who ask for money up front. If you cannot afford a lawyer there are places you can approach to get free legal representation.

Some of these are Legal Aid SA, different university law clinics, pro bono (free) lawyers at private law firms, or legal NGOs.

NGOS, ACADEMICS AND RESEARCHERS

There are NGOs, academics and researchers around the country that work on issues of government accountability, housing, basic services, and evictions. NGOs have often been doing this kind of work for a long time and are well-resourced. They can be useful allies.

Academics and researchers can also be useful allies to a CBO. As long as their work is grounded in the struggles of communities, it can prove very helpful to the community and should be encouraged. Academics and researchers are well-resourced and have extensive contacts. They also understand the politics of funding, and can help organisations to access sources of funding.
HOW TO ESTABLISH AN ABAHLALI BASEMJONDOLO BRANCH

A CBO could consider whether or not to join a broader social movement. Abahlali baseMjondolo has extensive experience and knowledge on how to effectively hold those in power accountable, how to support communities under threat, and how to resist illegal actions by government and private property developers. There are a number of steps a community can take if they would like to establish an Abahlali baseMjondolo branch.

1. A community should at first approach Abahlali, making them aware of their community’s struggle and their readiness to join Abahlali.

2. Abahlali work with communities and not with individuals. This is because they believe communities are more effective than individuals at holding government and private business accountable and achieving real social change. Working with communities also mitigates the threat of individual interests. After a community approaches Abahlali, they will be asked to prove that there are at least 50 people in the community who are willing to join Abahlali.

3. Thereafter, Abahlali will visit the community and conduct a political education programme aimed at raising the community’s awareness of their rights, as well as of the responsibilities of government and the private sector.

4. After the political education programme, the community, together with Abahlali, will decide on an official launch date for the branch.

5. At the launch, the community will democratically elect a 7-member branch executive committee. The role of the committee is to communicate on behalf of the community members to Abahlali baseMjondolo. The committee comprises a chairperson, a deputy chairperson, a secretary, a deputy secretary, a treasurer, a spokesperson, and ordinary members. Thereafter, the committee will meet weekly, and organise community meetings monthly.

6. All members who have joined Abahlali will pay a membership fee of R20, upon which they will be issued with a membership card valid for one year. Members will need to pay R20 every year to renew the membership card.
ABAHLLALI BASEMJONDOLO
South African social movement of shackdwellers.
Suite 517-20 Tower B
Salisbury Centre
347-351 Dr Pixley kaSeme aka West Street
Durban
4001
www.abahlali.org
Phone: 031 304 6420

COMMUNITY ORGANISATION RESOURCES CENTRE (CORC)
Resources Centre providing support for urban and rural poor communities.
Unit 7
Campground Centre
Durban Road
Mowbray
Cape Town
7705
www.courc.co.za
Email: sdi@courc.co.za
Phone: 021 689 9408

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION INSTITUTE
A not for profit non-governmental organization protecting the right to freedom of expression.
PO Box 30688
Braamfontein
2017
South Africa
www.fxi.org.za
Email: fxi@fxi.org.za
Phone: 011 403 8403/4

INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS NETWORK
A bottom-up collection of settlement-level and national-level organizations of poor people.
The Informal Settlements Network has offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. Use the contact details below to find out further information.
www.sasdialliance.org.za
Email: admin@courc.co.za
Phone: 021 689 9408
OPEN DEMOCRACY ADVICE CENTRE
An organisation specialising in relation to access to information and freedom of expression.
Springtime Studios
1 Scott Road
Observatory
Cape Town
www.opendemocracy.org.za
Phone: 021 447 1177

PUBLIC PROTECTOR
A Chapter Nine institution whose mandate is to guard democracy. The Public Protector can investigate any level of government.
The public protector has offices in all 9 provinces as well as regional offices. Contact the head office or visit their website for further details.
Head office:
175 Lunnon Street
Hillcrest Office Park
Pretoria
0083
www.pprotect.org
Email: julietn@pprotect.org
Phone: 012 336 7108

SHACKDWELLERS INTERNATIONAL
SDI is a network of community-based organizations of the urban poor with a mission is to link urban poor communities between cities.
www.sdinet.org

SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS INSTITUTE OF SOUTH AFRICA (SERI)
A non-profit organisation providing professional and dedicated socio-economic rights assistance to individuals, communities and social movements.
6th Floor, Aspern House
54 De Korte Street
Braamfontein
Johannesburg
2001
www.seri-sa.org
Phone: 011 356 5860

SOUTH AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
The SAHRC promotes, protects and monitors human rights in South Africa. It also has a specific responsibility to promote and monitor the implementation of PAIA.
Braampark Forum 3
33 Hoofd Street
Braamfontein
Johannesburg
www.sahrc.org.za
Email: info@sahrc.org.za or complaints@sahrc.org.za
Phone: 011 877 3600