

MEDIA RELEASE
For immediate use

International plumbers bring about social change in Diepsloot
or
I love Diepsloot

(Johannesburg 28 June 2016) South Africa plays host to teams of international plumbers to bring about social change in one of Johannesburg's poorest and marginalized areas - Diepsloot.

In Anton Harber's pioneering and much-acclaimed book *Diepsloot* (2011), he writes that "people love the buzz, the liveliness and street life of Diepsloot. And even when they move away, they visit often to partake of that street life." Diepsloot had been getting a bad rap in the media, often for its violent service delivery protests and acts of xenophobia. But Harber's immersion into the daily life of Diepsloot meant he was opened to its complex and colourful reality: "Every day, I saw some nuance, some new detail which disrupted the pattern I thought I had seen the day before." Diepsloot has an interesting history – it is one of the few large townships to emerge after 1994 (when the apartheid government was officially replaced by a new, democratically-elected one), beginning as a relocation space for 200 families. Diepsloot's population is now estimated at between 300,000 - 800 000 residents, some from all over Africa.

Today, pictures taken by Diepsloot photographers show a prosaic life: men queuing to have their hair styled at their local barber; builders and welders busy running businesses from the street edge, a bustling car wash; high fashion along the road near the Diepsloot Mall and; children playing make-believe with a few wooden blocks. Like everywhere, the human spirit thrives.

Says Mr Obed Kekae, a Diepsloot resident for eight years and founding member of the WASSUP (Water, Amenities, Sanitation Services Upgrading Programme) community collective, "Here, you can associate with people from different races. We have electricity, street lights and running water. When I moved here, there were only three schools. Now I think there are seven. Whatever you need to buy, you won't have to go far to buy it. It won't even take you ten minutes to reach the Makula Shops."

Diepsloot is not without its major challenges however and life is hard for its mostly poor and marginalised inhabitants. In 2009 artists worked with visiting students as part of a design program called The Global Studio to develop the 'I Love Diepsloot' movement, which was in response to residents' frustrations as a place constantly depicted in the media as a violent place, stating 'that's our home'. I Love Diepsloot started as a t-shirt, and later in a 'love letter' workshoped by artists and residents in 2011 as part of a Johannesburg Development Agency public art programme, this is what emerged:

DEAR DIEPSLOOT,
From Monday to Wednesday, you make me love you like a butterfly, that comes out of its cocoon.

*I can only have a good time then, like a cat drinking its milk, like a rabbit eating its carrots.
When its Thursday, my feelings change about you.
You turn into a pack of angry dogs.
You make me angry like a chicken whose chicks have been taken away.
When its Thursday Diepsloot, you act like a bunch of baboons.
You forget I need to hunt like an owl, searching for knowledge, working at night.
When its Thursday Diepsloot, you let my prey escape me.
DEAR DIEPSLOOT, I LOVE YOU, BUT YOU BREAK MY HEART.*

Over two years, a team of 100 Diepsloot-based artists and artisans created an art piece that told a story reflecting this love letter. The art piece, built outside Muzomuhle Primary School, was celebrated by the community, who dressed up and staged a carnival.

Community groups take their work very seriously in Diepsloot, collaborating to bring about social change. Their efforts, together with the work initiated by government, means that Diepsloot is sometimes jokingly referred to as a “community under construction.” Ongoing government development sees constructions sites regularly erected for building or repairing roads, a police station, bridges for cars and pedestrians, and of course this development and jobs leads to increase in business trade.

In this spirit of collaboration to solve pressing socio-economic challenges, the Community Plumbing Challenge is taking place between the 9th and 15th of July 2016. Hosted in Diepsloot by the WASSUP and the Diepsloot Arts and Culture Network (DACN) , facilitated in South Africa by Sticky Situations, partnering with the Wot-if? Trust, international partners include the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO), Healthabitat and Autodesk Education. Eight defunct communal toilets have been plucked out of the ground in Diepsloot Extension 1, where four international student teams (representing Australia, India, United States and South Africa) will now collaborate to develop the most effective and sustainable new upgrade solutions. Teams will assemble and test their new designs, supporting WASSUP to reinstall and reconnect these communal toilets for local Diepsloot residents.

Local resident Philemon Mogasha, who has lived in Diepsloot for 13 years, explains the sanitation challenges he and others currently face: “The drains keep blocking and affect our water supply. The toilets are not suitable for people to use and the sewage is always running. It is bad for our health.”

Mr Mogasha adds that each communal toilet is commonly used by around 15 people, and they are very hard to clean. He doesn’t enjoy using them, preferring a bucket which he then empties into the toilet. Mr Kekae says that toilets often break and that with the increasing population year-on-year, the current sanitation measures are inadequate. Recent studies show that in Extension 1 anywhere between 13 – 45 households share one toilet, tap and drain.

As Harber points out however: “Residents are always finding solutions to their problems.” Together with external support, there is no doubt that a toilet and sanitation prototype can be made to scale in the other areas of the burgeoning Diepsloot.

Join the Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/CommunityPlumbingChallenge/> for live updates of CPC 2016 taking place in Diepsloot, Johannesburg South Africa.
Ends

Images

Credit: Diepsloot Arts & Culture Network [DACN]

Caption: In the spirit of collaboration, local and international communities join hands in solving pressing socio-economic challenges in Diepsloot, Johannesburg, South Africa



For Editors

For interviews and further information regarding the Community Plumbing Challenge 2016, please contact Alison Spratley +27 (0) 82 476 1213 or alison@brandvision.co.za

Background to Community Plumbing Challenge 2016 (CPC 2016)

The international Community Plumbing Challenge aims to contribute to improvements to public health in regions where communities are still threatened by a lack of basic sanitation and safe drinking water systems. Attitudes will not necessarily change because of targets, health surveys, or editorials and opinions in newspapers, which all too often preach only to

the converted. Rather, it is the actions of professionals working in the areas of health and sanitation which will demonstrate to the community how best to build local services, and will educate local communities about the benefits of such an approach.

Community Plumbing Challenge 2016 combines multi-discipline teams, with a cross-section of expertise expanding on the skills pathway and career options for plumbing apprentices and professionals in South Africa, and around the world.

The CPC is organized by IAPMO (International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials) in association with the World Plumbing Council. Hosted in Diepsloot by WASSUP (Water, Amenities, Sanitation Services Upgrade Programme) and DACN (Diepsloot Arts & Culture Network), in collaboration with Healthabitat Sanitation Studio and facilitated in South Africa by Sticky Situations.

Further event partners are Autodesk Education Experiences and the Wot-If Trust.