

Boitumelo Veronica Matlala (South Africa)

The University of the Witwatersrand, Urban and Regional Planning

*NGO mediation in Urban Development: the case of the Development Action Group*

My PhD explores the role of an urban sector NGO in what was intended to be a community-led urban regeneration project in one of Cape Town's oldest and most diverse suburbs. Specifically, I examine the collaboration between the City of Cape Town and the Development Action Group (DAG) in designing and implementing a public participation process related to social housing plans in the Woodstock-Salt River area. My research focuses on DAG's approach to involving civic and resident groups in the City-initiated engagement processes, analysing the outcomes of these practices as a form of mediation between the local state and these groups. Mediation has become a key mechanism in providing access to public decision-making institutions that would otherwise be inaccessible. NGOs have increasingly become crucial intermediaries, capitalising on formal requirements for more inclusive policy processes and implementation. These organisations have stepped into a growing space for participation, situated at the intersection of state decentralisation—manifested through trends like partnerships, co-production, and contracting—and participatory development. My research critically examines the outcomes of NGO mediation on the relationship between the local state and social groups, as well as the broader implications for democratising urban development through citizen participation.