

**RURAL URBAN STUDIES UNIT**



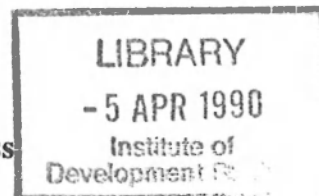
UNIVERSITY OF NATAL DURBAN

**MGAGA: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE**

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**CENTRE FOR SOCIAL AND  
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

**WORKING PAPER NO. 17**

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**Rural Urban Studies Unit  
University of Natal  
Durban**

**1988**

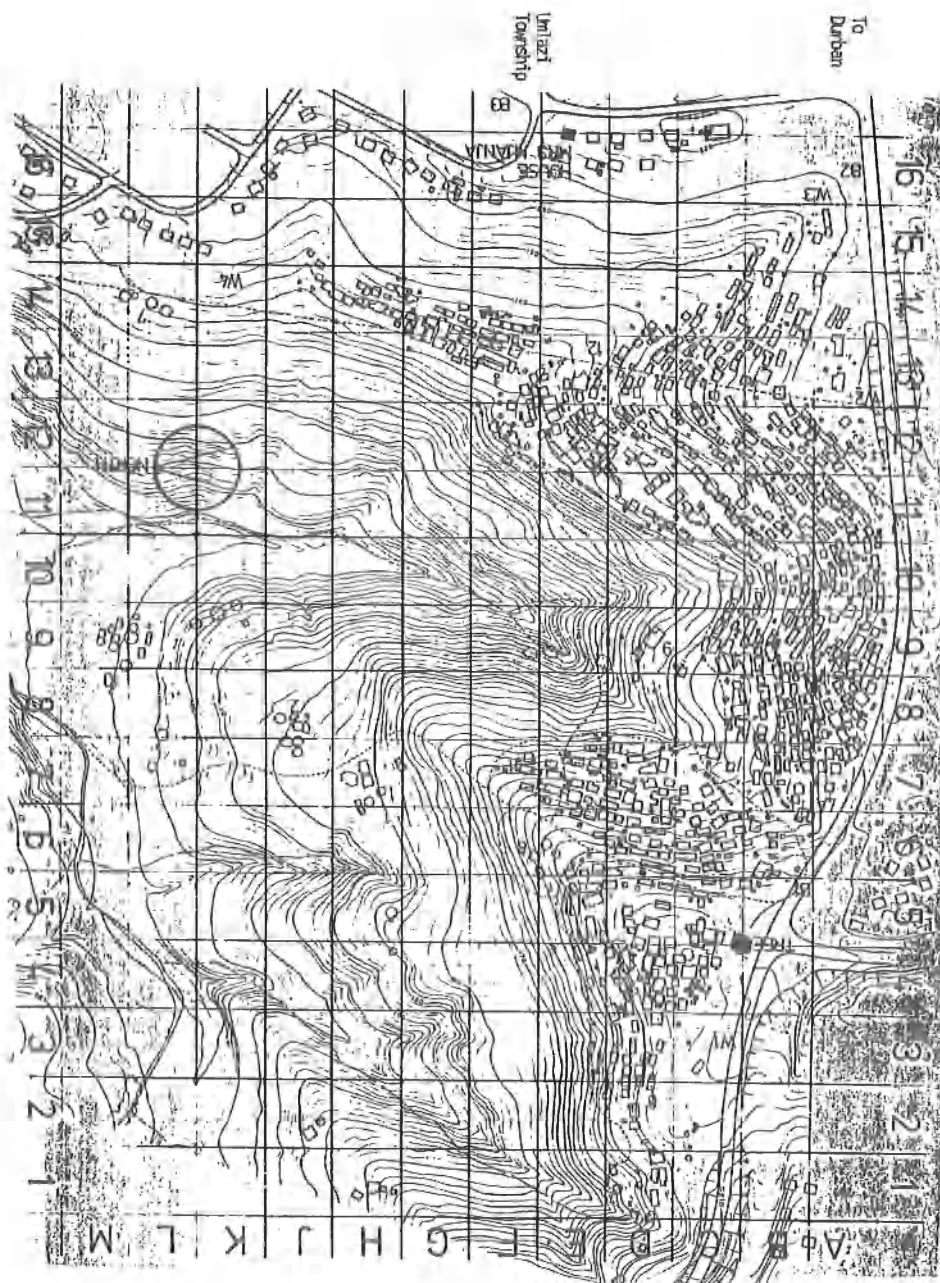
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### **Rural Urban Studies Unit**

The Rural Urban Studies Unit was founded in 1983 by the Human Sciences Research Council for the purpose of studying the dynamics of the links between the rural and urban areas of South Africa. It is situated at the University of Natal, Durban and works in close co-operation with the Centre for Social and Development Studies.

ISBN NO: 0-86980-663-7

# Map One Mgaga





## **INTRODUCTION**

In May 1985, a survey was conducted in the informal settlement of Mgaga by Z Mpanza under the auspices of the Rural Urban Studies Unit of the University of Natal. The aim was to collect information at both the qualitative and quantitative levels in order to paint as accurate a picture of life in the squatter settlement as possible. Questions were asked about occupation, education etc as well as attitudes pertaining to life in the settlement and why people decided to migrate from the rural (and other urban areas) to Mgaga. Two hundred households were interviewed covering 1 213 people, i.e. 11 percent of Mgaga's estimated population of 11 000 (May, 1986 p2).

This paper draws together most of the information provided by the survey. It is divided into two sections. The first deals with the socio-economic profile of Mgaga and the second examines the reasons for migrating to and the nature of accommodation in the informal settlement.

Before embarking on the analysis, it is helpful to sketch briefly a few characteristics of Mgaga.

### **Mgaga Settlement**

Mgaga is an informal urban settlement located on the North West periphery of Umlazi township some 15 kilometres from Durban. There are two main settlement areas, one adjacent to the main road and the other approximately 1 500 metres further down the valley. The settlement dates from July 1976 and grew until mid 1979 when the KwaZulu government prohibited the erection of new dwellings and extensions.

Most of Mgaga is situated on steep slopes averaging 1:5 and is prone to flood damage. There are only 8 taps in the area, no night soil disposal, store, tarred road surfaces, refuse

removal or electricity. There is no permanent clinic nearby and no mobile clinics visiting the area.

## **PART ONE : THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF MGAGA**

### **Demographic Characteristics**

Mgaga's age pyramid bulges towards the younger age categories (as would be expected) but in a less marked fashion than other KwaZulu urban areas where between 41 and 43 percent of the population were found to be under the age of 15 years (Peters and May, 1984; May and Peters, 1984). By contrast 37 percent of Mgaga's population was found to be in the younger age group. This is also lower than developing countries in general where the relevant figure is 42 percent (Peck, 1974).

This is probably due to the fact that Mgaga is a relatively recent settlement with a high proportion of young families and young adults seeking work in Durban. Table 1 compares the demographic results of the survey with that of an income and expenditure survey of Mgaga (May, 1985) and Census figures on KwaZulu's urban population. From the table we can see that, apart from a relatively young population, Mgaga exhibits similar demographic characteristics to the urban Zulu population.

**Table 1: A Selected Statistical Comparison between Mgaga and the Urban Zulu Population**

Characteristics	Mgaga (May 1985)	Mgaga	KwaZulu Urban Population
Male:Female Ratio	46:54	49:51	52:48
% (Female) Over 64	57	60	56
% Under 5 Years	12	11	15
% Under 10 Years	24	23	26
% Under 20 Years	50	49	47

Source: May, 1985, Population Census 1980, Report No. 020804, p504.

### Education

As with demographic characteristics, Mgaga's educational profile was comparable with those found in formal townships in Natal and KwaZulu (See Peters and May, 1984; May and Peters, 1984). Ninety four percent of adults between the ages of 15 and 29 had attended school with 80 percent having got as far as Standard 10.

Amongst the older group (over 29 years) the position is not as good with 16 percent having received no education at all. As one would expect, things have improved over time with 4,8 percent of the 10 - 14 cohort having received no schooling whatsoever, as opposed to 5,7 percent of the 15 - 29 age group and 27 percent of those over 50 years of age (May,



1985, p19). Overall, it appears that the majority of students continue their schooling beyond standard 6.

Nevertheless only 2 percent of those over 15 years had received a post matric qualification and were at university and only 12 percent had standard 9 or 10. To the extent that higher levels of education can be expected to improve both the chances of obtaining a job and job expectations, the work seekers in this group are unfavourably positioned within the labour force.

#### **Occupational Structure**

The occupational distribution of Mgaga (excluding pre-school children and children not at school) is given in Table 2.

**Table 2: Occupational Distribution**

Occupation	Percentage
Domestic	5
Manufacturing	12
Commerce	6
Construction	3
Professional	1
Unemployed (Seeking Work)	17
Unemployed (Not Seeking Work)	17
Pensioner	2
Self Employed	3
At School	34
	100

The relative importance of manufacturing employment is not surprising given the extent of manufacturing industry in Prospecton and Jacobs in Durban and around the Pinetown area. Incomes varied from R24 to R770 per employed person per month with the mean being R215 and the median R200. Manufacturing employment provided the highest return with 72 percent earning R200 or above and domestic service providing the lowest with 97 percent earning less than R100 per month.

### **Unemployment**

The most disturbing aspect of Table 2 is the extent of unemployment. Thirty four percent were unemployed work seekers or just unemployed. These percentages are higher than in formal townships in Natal (May, 1985, p33). As one would expect, the bulk of the unemployed comprised females (75 percent), 82 percent were between the ages of 15 and 44 and 69 percent had standard 6 or less.

Of those unemployed, 67 percent had worked before. Forty three percent of these people, however, had previously been employed as farm labourers and thus are unlikely to find work in the industrial sector unless substantial economic expansion takes place.

Interestingly enough, only 17 percent of the sample believed that the current recession was the biggest problem facing workseekers. Sixteen percent saw it as the lack of suitable housing and seventeen percent believed it was the general lack of marketable skills amongst the unemployed. By far the greatest problem isolated (50 percent of all answers) was the difficulty associated with getting legal work status.

This finding was supported by the answers given by those unemployed who were asked why they had given up looking for work. Thirty four percent cited their lack of work permit as the reason and 44 percent cited lack of time and money. Only 13 percent believed that

there was simply no work available and, therefore, no point in looking for it. There was no significant correlation between a person's previous occupation and whether they were looking for work or not. The decision appears to be more individualistically determined. Likewise, there was no correlation between a person's previous occupation and how much time he had been unemployed. Only farm workers and miners had no one who had been employed less than two years previously in the category. Otherwise, the length of unemployment varied from less than a year to four years and above in all the occupational categories.

Table 3 cross tabulates the unemployed person's work with the reason for previous job loss.

**Table 3: Previous Job by Reasons for Leaving It**

	No Reference Book or Permit	Retrenched	Fired	Resigned because of Personal Commitment elsewhere
Domestic	45	33	0	22
Manufacturing	2	58	15	25
Farming and Mining	33	67	0	0
Construction	22	67	11	0
Service	11	48	11	30

Across the board it appears that retrenchments and losing jobs for apartheid bureaucratic reasons are very common ways of becoming unemployed. This is a function of the general economic slowdown in the 1980's and the tightening up of influx control after the Riekert Legislation of 1979. One would expect the inhabitants of Mgaga to have a higher percentage of "illegals" as it is an informal settlement. Therefore, it is not surprising that so many of the unemployed had lost their jobs once the costs of employing illegal workers was

raised by the State. Also, as the settlement contains many recent migrants, it is not surprising that they would be among the first to be retrenched assuming that firms retrench workers according to the "last in, first out" principle.

As regards those who were actively looking for work, 84 percent went about it by canvassing employers. A further 11 percent relied on contacts and information through family and friends. One percent read the papers for job information and only 4 percent went through the labour bureaux. The disregard of the labour bureaux is possibly a reflection of the lack of permits amongst the unemployed and general disenchantment with the possibility of finding work that way given the length of the queues there.

Work seekers were in general fairly desperate. When asked what sort of work they were looking for, 42 percent replied that they would accept any job offered to them. Furthermore, 83 percent of the respondents said they could start work immediately and a further 11 percent said they could start within the next month as they had family commitments to settle first.

Thirty three percent of the sample of unemployed said they would work for R100 or less per month and 65 percent said they would work for R200 or less. Only 9 percent had reservation wages (i.e. the lowest wage they would accept) of R500 per month or above. The desperation for work is reflected in the fact that income in Mgaga is extremely dependent on wage income. May found that 87 percent of household income stemmed from wages, 8 percent from informal sector activity, 3 percent from pensions, one percent from rent and one percent from other sources such as gifts and disability grants. Pension income is relatively low in Mgaga due to its young demographic structure. Informal activity is higher than in urban formal townships - probably because of overall low levels of income and the concomitant need for alternative sources. The settlement is very dependent on wage income for survival and, in this context, it is not surprising that workseekers are desperate for work.

## Income

As one would expect in an informal settlement like Mgaga, income levels are low. Per capita income averaged out at R41 per month and cash contributions to household expenditure came to R19 per month. According to May (1985) contributions to household income were sharply differentiated between the sexes. Sixty five percent of men contributed over R5 per week whereas 74 percent of women contributed less than R5 per week. Similarly, 20 percent of men in Mgaga earned in excess of R45 per month as opposed to only 5 percent of the women. This is not surprising given the South African labour market which is substantially geared towards the employment of men.

Contributions to household income varied positively with education, especially once standard three had been reached, and no consistent relationship between the size of the weekly contribution and the activity of the individual (beyond that those who were unemployed contributed least) was found.

Not only are income levels low in Mgaga, they are also very unevenly distributed. The poorest 20 percent of households received only 7 percent of total income whereas the richest 20 percent received 38 percent of total income with the top 5 percent taking 13 percent of the total income (May, 1985, p54). Half of all households received a total income of R50 per week or less. This is R35 lower than the median income of eSikhaweni township (Peters and May, 1984) and R27 lower than the median income for Sundumbili (Ardington, 1984), the semi-urban township in the Isithebe area. Thus, in comparison to other urban areas in KwaZulu, the survey indicates Mgaga is a relatively poor settlement with a high degree of inequality.

## **PART TWO: MIGRATION AND QUALITY OF LIFE**

Mgaga has a fairly high percentage of relatively recent migrants. Thirty eight percent had arrived in Mgaga five or less years before the survey and 64 percent had arrived seven or less years before. The 36 percent who had arrived more than seven years back probably had very high hopes as far as being in line for the sub-income township housing that was still being constructed in that period.

Residents in Mgaga can be differentiated according to kinds of accommodation. Thirty nine percent bought a portion of land from communal landholders and constructed dwellings at their own cost. Prices of plots ranged from R20 to R400, with the mean being R84. The advantage of such a situation is that the resident could claim ownership and thus, in the event of a forced removal, demand resettlement rather than repatriation. Whether such a demand will carry any weight with the authorities, is still a moot point however.

Thirty three percent opted to simply construct a dwelling on any open available piece of land. Confusion regarding ownership and the generally haphazard and chaotic growth of housing allows for the high percentage of people choosing this path.

The rest of the sample rented accommodation where they paid a monthly or annual fee for an already constructed shack. The average rental was R7 per month. Sixty three percent paid rent to fellow shack dwellers, 31 percent to owners of shacks who now lived in townships and the balance was paid to other individuals such as land owners.

### **Why People Migrated**

Overwhelmingly, the residents of Mgaga were migrants from rural areas. Ninety two percent traced their origins to the countryside (with the balance being born in local townships (6 percent) and other urban areas. Tribal lands were the main source of out-migration (90 percent) with white farms, mission stations and townships in KwaZulu accounting for the rest of rural migration.

As to why they migrated, forty two percent of the sample gave reasons relating to the lack of job opportunities in the rural areas. Fifteen percent cited lack of access to land, 10 percent claimed rural unrest, faction fighting, witchcraft etc drove them away and 6 percent were evicted. The balance left for personal reasons such as marriage, joining parents etc. Clearly, the forces which structured the decision to migrate to Mgaga were economic in character.

Economic reasons also dominated the choice of destination. Fifty four percent chose to move to Mgaga because of its proximity to places of employment. Other reasons included the relatively cheap rents, presence of friends and relatives and closeness to Durban's infrastructure.

Because economic reasons dominated the decision to migrate, a lot of the respondents had fears relating to what would happen to them if the income earners in the household lost their jobs. Table 4 shows the specific fears isolated by the respondents in the event of loss of employment.

**Table 4: Fears Connected with Loss of Employment**

Expressed Fears	Percent
Starvation	48
Removal of Children from School	22
Hire Purchase and Rent Default	18
Depletion of Savings	10
Repatriation	2

Interestingly, 33 percent of the sample said that the entire family moved together. This is quite high as one would expect the family to uproot itself only after an income earner has found a job and accommodation in the town. Only 40 percent of the respondents said that they moved after a parent or spouse had established themselves in Mgaga. Of those who had not brought all their family with them, 31 percent intended to bring them out later once income levels and accommodation were deemed to be appropriate.

The decision to migrate from a rural to an urban environment is obviously a major one and involves considerations other than purely economic ones. The perceived fate and future of children for instance, would be an important variable in the decision making process. Seventy four percent of the sample said they were happy bringing up their children in the urban environment, mainly because of the improved facilities (such as health and education) and closer parental supervision that it offered. Twenty nine percent of these respondents believed that having children with you made urban permits easier to obtain - an additional advantage to migrating with an entire family! Of the 26 percent who expressed misgivings about their children growing up in Mgaga, their overriding concerns



related to the increased chance of their children becoming delinquents and internalising "loose" morals.

Overall, the respondents appeared to have very positive expectations regarding their children's prospects. Seventy nine percent believed that their children would, in the future, be living in a township house as opposed to only 19 percent who believed they would be resident back "home" in the rural areas. Only 2 percent thought that their children would make their lives in Mgaga. Mgaga, thus appears to be regarded as a transitional stage in the migration process from rural to formal urban townships.

Nevertheless, rural links were still strongly maintained in many cases. Twenty eight percent still owned a house in the rural areas and 24 percent expressed the desire to return to the rural areas and live there permanently. Of those who wished to return, 30 percent said they would leave after attaining a target income, 15 percent said once the children were independent and 23 percent wanted to retire to the rural "home".

#### **Perceptions of Life in Mgaga**

In order to build up a picture of the qualitative aspects of living in Mgaga, several questions relating to perceptions of life were asked. In response to a question concerning the major fears the respondent had about living in the informal settlement, 38 percent referred to the poor physical shape of the dwellings which were susceptible to demolition by fire and rain. The widespread rain damage (which has exacerbated since the survey) was fresh in peoples minds. Thirty four percent were worried about the possibility of contracting diseases due to the lack of sanitation and clean water. Cholera was a major concern.

Interestingly, 20 percent cited fears of removal by the authorities as the most pressing concern. There was widespread awareness of state repression of squatters in places like Crossroads in the Cape. Only 7 percent cited crime as the most pressing problem.

Whether this reflects the fact that the community is closely knit and thus less prone to crime, or that other concerns outweigh the distress caused by crime, is unclear.

#### **Attitudes to Authorities**

Questions were also asked in connection with what the squatters felt those in power could do to alleviate some of their problems. Thirty two percent argued that the authorities should provide township style housing. Many, however, expressed reservations about the size of the average township unit and argued that they should be given the option to expand it if so desired. Thirty percent believed that authorities should rather concentrate their resources on upgrading existing structures and providing basic infrastructure such as roads, water, taps etc. In a similar vein, 24 percent argued for site and service schemes such as that provided in Mfolweni, a resettlement area on the outer periphery of Durban. The subsidised services of building contractors was another idea, favoured by 14 percent of the respondents.

As to who the 'relevant authorities' were, 85 percent believed them to be the KwaZulu Government, 7 percent the local councillors. For many respondents, however, the distinction between the KwaZulu Government and the Central Government was blurred as the Central Government was regarded as the real power and provider of resources - even if they appeared to come via KwaZulu.

Interestingly, only 22 percent of the sample believed that alternative organisations existed which were actively concerned with the plight of the squatters. Half of these people named Inkatha with the rest referring to the Urban Foundation, Burial Societies, Churches and the United Democratic Front. It would appear that residents felt themselves to be at the mercy of structures of authority and were unaware or cynical of alternative organisations. As brief examinations of the way people perceived Inkatha is illuminating in this context.

### **Relevant Attitudes to Inkatha**

Whereas 98 percent of the sample knew of the existence of Inkatha, only 32 percent were members and only 11 percent believed it was interested in their plight as squatters.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the fact of Inkatha membership does not indicate universal understanding of the organisation's aims nor support for it. Judging by the answers given to the questions concerning Inkatha's aims and whether it is successful in pursuing them, there is a high level of opportunistic support. People often feel that Inkatha has influence in the KwaZulu Government (or is the same thing) and that joining it cannot harm. Table 5 tabulates the kinds of answers given.

Categories 2 and 3 indicate that the respondents believe that Inkatha was simply a Government wing, or at least had influence in the Government. Inkatha was, for example, often credited with the stopping of removals and the provision of water by people when asked if Inkatha was successful or not. The blurring of the distinction made by people between Inkatha and the KwaZulu

Government is clearly shown by the following answers by Inkatha members to the question of Inkatha's aims.

"We joined (Inkatha) so we could continue staying here because this is KwaZulu Government's land" (Questionnaire No. 149).

"I don't know (what their aims are). I do not get their explanation. They say they work for Ulundi but I don't know what that has to do with our situation here" (Questionnaire No. 179).

- "They aim to see to it that all of us shack dwellers become accommodated in the new plan - I don't know what their plan is, but they are speaking for us" (Questionnaire No. 176).
- "(Their aim is to) fight for our rights within this setting. They have put us under KwaZulu and now we are going to be registered as part of Umlazi township even though we stay here" (Questionnaire No. 145).
- "If you are a member it has a way of helping but we don't know what power they have to help - the extent and scope. So far they have halted removals" (Questionnaire No. 146).

At the same time, because Inkatha is seen by several respondents as having the power to do a fair amount of harm to its opponents, many joined unwillingly. This aspect is illustrated by the following:

- "If you have not joined Inkatha you are threatened with not being helped with your problems - of whatever nature, be it organising for your child's wedding etc. Also, they said that if we are not members of Inkatha we will not be included in all the privileges they mean as we (are) still in this mess" (Questionnaire No. 140).
- "All shack dwellers are required to join, it's the rule - for accommodation" (Questionnaire No. 186).

Given the wide (and often the confused) nature of responses to the questions on Inkatha, one must be very cautious about concluding anything concerning actual and active support for the local organisation from membership figures alone. Organisational issues seem to

take second place to the more basic and burning issues of employment and income in the settlement.

**Table 5: Attitudes to Inkatha**

Perceived Aimes of Inkatha	Percentage in Category	Percentage of Each Category- Which Said Inkatha was Successful
1. General problem solving in the community	34	19
2. Push for urban, legal and housing rights, stop removals	24	55
3. Take problems to Ulundi and put pressure on the Government	6	0
4. Do not know - I was forced to join	11	0
5. Liberation	7	0
6. Organise the youth	2	100

**Note:** The research for this paper was undertaken by Ms Mpanza who left the country before writing it up. Nicoli Natrass analyzed the data but, as there was a disjuncture between the design, implementation and analysis of the project, a number of problems were encountered. This accounts for the loose structure of the paper and tentative nature of the conclusions.

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