

# THE FRED CLARKE CLINIC IN CHICKEN FARM

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Since 1983, The Health Workers' Association has provided a clinic service to squatters living in Chicken Farm, Soweto. In the following article, the HWA outlines some of the problems of dealing with ill-health, when this ill-health is caused by repressive influx measures, poor wages, inadequate and insecure living conditions, and extortionist local authorities.

## Squatters of Orlando become squatters of Chicken Farm

Chicken Farm has become the home of some 300 families. The first people to settle in this squatter camp came in July 1983, when officials of the West Rand Administration Board (WRAB) moved into Orlando and demolished the shacks which housed more than 200 so-called "illegals". After their houses were demolished, these families, most of them with babies and young children, had to sleep in the open.

Their plight was taken up by the Witwatersrand Council of Churches (WCC), which put up tents to house the affected families. The WCC also sent a memorandum to WRAB requesting:

- not to make more families homeless
- to provide alternative housing for the homeless people

## How the Health Workers' Association became involved

The Baragwanath Branch of the HWA began working among the squatters after many articles in the press drew attention to their plight. Meetings were held with interested organisations to find out whether the HWA had enough resources and medically trained people to sustain a health programme over a long time period. The initial aims of this programme were:

- to make health services available to the people squatting on Chicken Farm
- to provide health services mainly to children and adult emergencies
- to provide health services until the end of winter (1983) and to then reassess the situation
- to try and set up liaison committees in the community
- to try and persuade WRAB to rehouse the families

Besides providing a health service, the HWA has also been involved in:

- distributing clothes
- helping the squatters with problems relating to pensions, disability grants, maternity benefits etc.
- documenting health and social problems of the squatter population

The HWA was able to carry out this programme because it had the support of community organisation, doctors, pharmacists, health workers, sports bodies and businesses.

At present, the HWA runs one clinic service per week, where mostly children are examined and treated. On another week-day, health education talks are given, focusing on political and organisational aspects of living conditions in relation to health.

## **The squatter community**

The squatter community is not a settled one. Every week, new families move in. New shacks are built in between established shacks, so that the shacks now form continuous rows. This means that there is just about no flow of air possible inside each shack; for windows of old shacks that previously opened out to the side, had to be closed up.

The continuous stream of newcomers also means more overcrowding, less privacy, and more pressure on already inadequate sanitation facilities.

The new squatters come from various parts of Soweto and therefore it takes some time for a community spirit to develop.

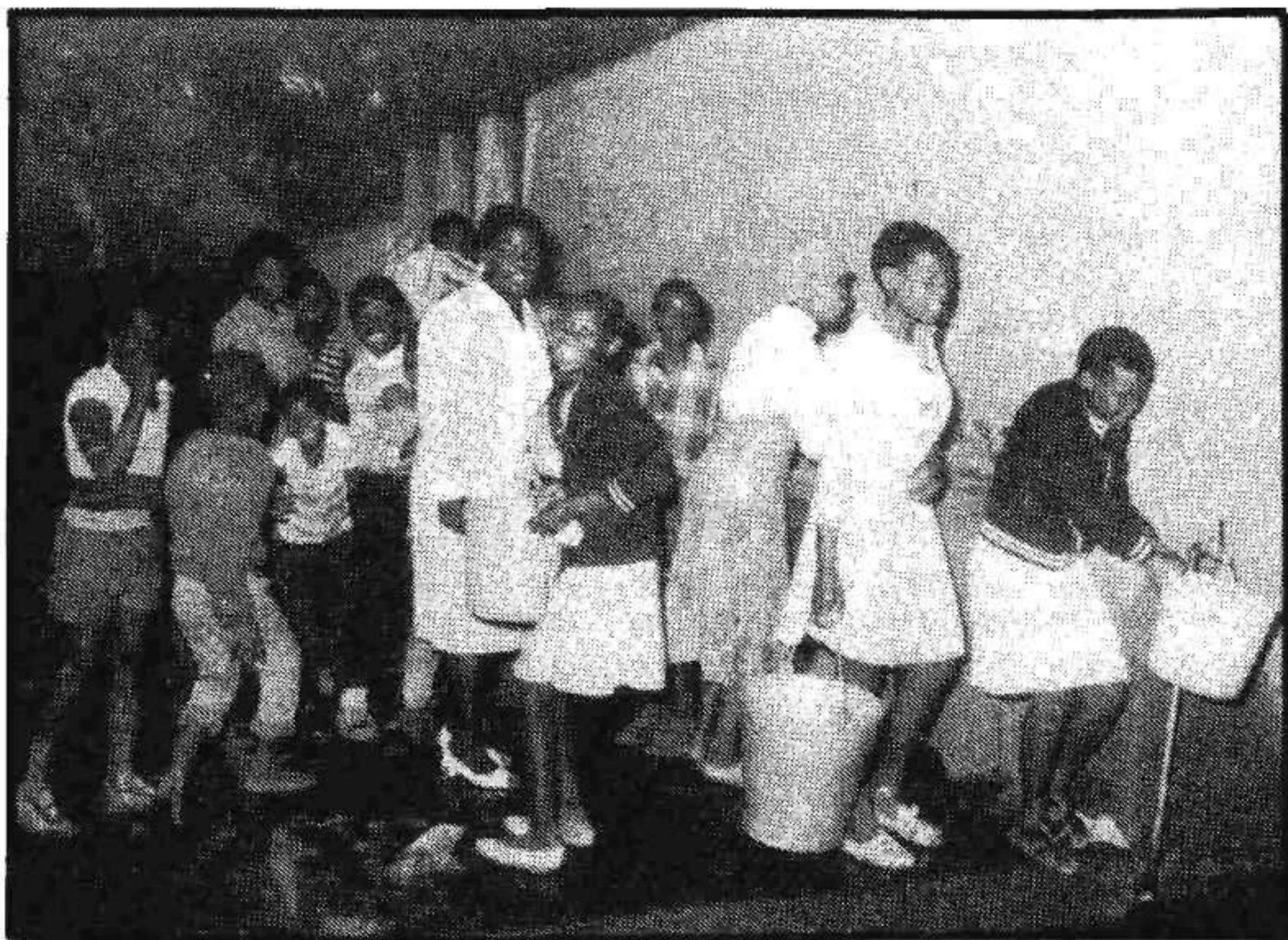
## **Living conditions**

Each family is housed in one shack regardless of the number of members. The shacks are not fit for people to live in, because:

- the 3x3 metre shacks are too small for the average of five people who inhabit them
- the shacks provide no privacy
- there is no provision for running water in the shacks themselves; the community of approximately 1 500 people has to share four taps for drinking, and four areas for washing clothes.
- for these 1 500 or so people, there are only three areas for toilets. One of these is a bucket toilet. The other two are flushing toilets, which are continuously blocked. The sewerage water from these blocked toilets runs across the paths between shacks where children play.
- constructed of sheets of corrugated iron, the insides of the shacks become very hot in summer and very cold in winter
- there is no flooring, no ceiling, no insulation
- there are no recreational facilities

All these conditions create serious health hazards for the people living at Chicken Farm. The HWA believes that health is directly related to people's socio-economic and political conditions. That is why the HWA sees its role first and foremost as making people aware that good health is their right, and that health is a political issue.

Health education discussions form an important part of the health service that the HWA provides. The HWA acknowledges that the clinic in itself can only provide temporary relief; any lasting solution rests squarely with the government and its regional administration agencies.



The community of approximately 1500 has to share four taps

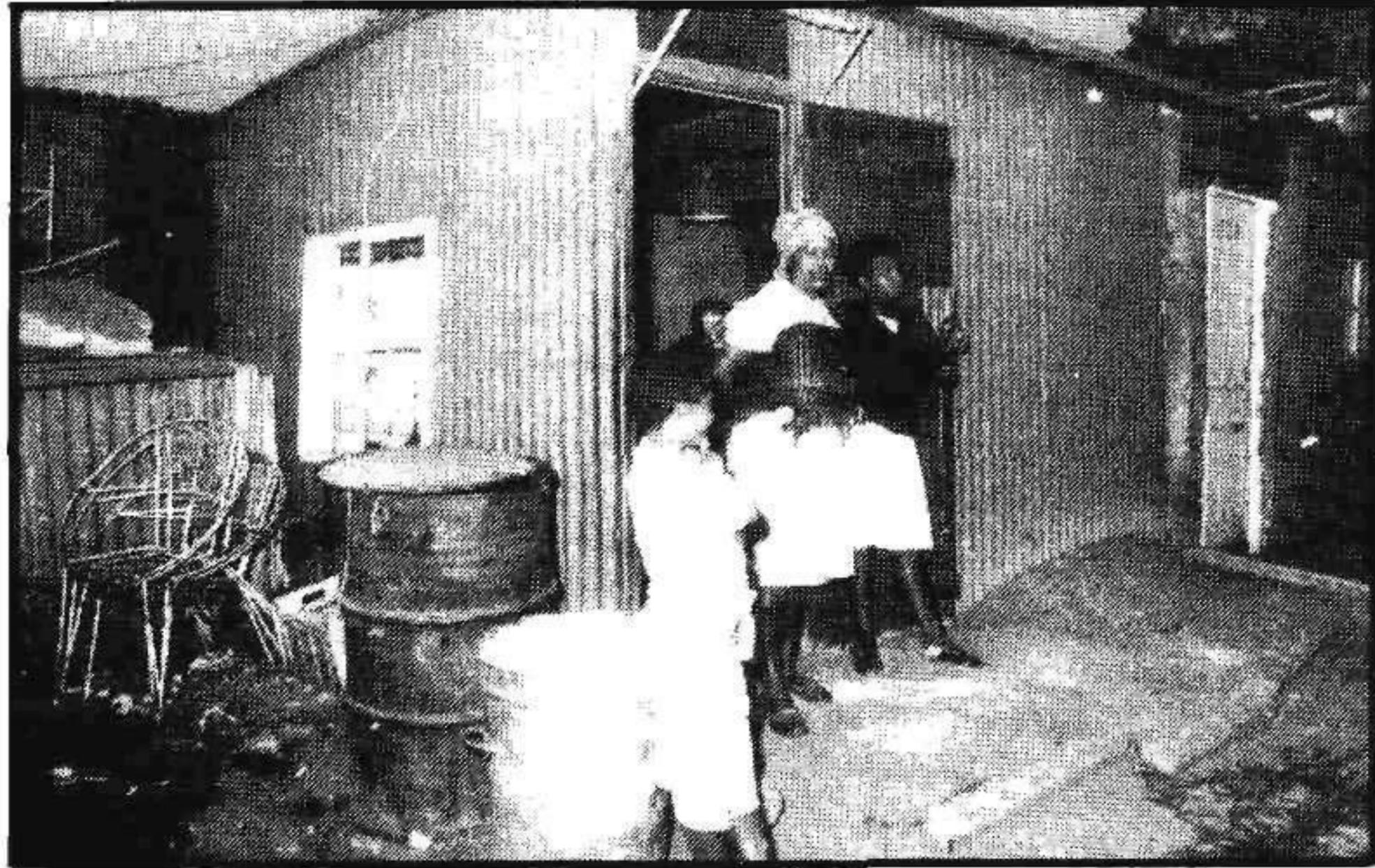
### **The ill-health profile of Chicken Farm's slum conditions**

During the first 13 months of the clinic's existence, 542 patients were examined and treated.

Most of the children were found to have illnesses that were either directly caused by unsatisfactory living conditions or aggravated by them. Disease spectrum includes the following: Upper respiratory tract infection 177; Pharyngitis 53; Tonsillitis 58; Ear infections 30; Pneumonia/Bronchitis 47; Skin conditions 55; Gastroenteritis 59; Malnutrition 11; Burns 9; Worm infestation 15; Eye infections 6; Referrals to Baragwanath 12.

## Fees for services that do not exist

Each family pays the Soweto City Council R20 to R35 per month. It is claimed that R15 of this amount is spent on services. But these services do not exist. No further taps and toilets are provided, blocked toilets are not being repaired, and there is no rubbish removal service.



The 3 x 3 metre shacks are too small for the average of 5 people who inhabit them

## Exorbitant rents

The different rentals (anything between R20 and R45) point to the possibility of corruption and bribery among municipal officials. The same applies to the differing amounts of money that people are made to pay to be able to get a shack in the first place. Newcomers at the moment pay anything between R200 and R600 just for permission from a councillor to build a shack (not including the building materials or the monthly rentals and "service" fees).

The R20 to R35 rental which people have to pay for each shack, seems exorbitant compared to the average of R36 which other Soweto residents pay monthly for a four-roomed house.

## No security

With the new Abolition of Influx Control Bill, millions of people, and especially squatters, will be worse off than under the old pass laws. The old influx control

laws are now being replaced by new laws on citizenship rights and housing.

Instead of controlling people's movement from rural into urban areas, the government now wants to strictly control the conditions within the urban areas. One researcher gave an example of this new policy: "It is okay for more than 500 000 squatters to live in Winterveld outside Pretoria, but they cannot occupy the open plains of Sandton". (Weekly Mail, 4-10 June 1986.)

This is all done in the name of good health standards. One of the aims of these laws is, as it says, "To combat nuisances such as disorderly squatting, slums, and conditions that contain a health hazard".

The laws affecting squatters will become stricter. Seeing that there is a severe housing shortage in the urban areas (the official waiting list for houses in Soweto alone is more than 20 000 families) many people are forced to become squatters, and fall under the new tough restrictions.

To be a lawful resident in South Africa, a person would have to have a housing or lodger's permit, or a job. This means that people awaiting houses in urban areas could be forcibly moved to a homeland.

Squatters in urban areas are therefore very insecure. Their shacks could be demolished at any stage, and they could be deported at any time. Under the new law, the Minister (of Constitutional Development) can prohibit a landowner from allowing people to settle on his land.

This is exactly what happened recently at E.T. Tshabalala's Mshengu squatter camp in Mofolo, Soweto. Most people at the Mofolo squatter camp, like those at Chicken Farm, are people who have lived in the urban area for a long time, but have not been able to get houses. Most of the Mofolo squatters were sub-tenants of Soweto households who grew tired of living in overcrowded conditions, together with their landlords or with tenants, and wanted a house of their own.

## Organisation

As long as there are great housing shortages in urban areas, there will be squatters. Under these conditions, no government programme of "orderly urbanisation" will be able to eradicate squatting communities. Oriel Monogoaha, a Soweto squatter leader in the 1940's, once said, "The government is like a man who has a cornfield which is invaded by birds. We squatters are the birds. The government sends its policemen to chase us away and we move off to occupy another spot. We shall see whether it is the farmer or the birds who get tired first." (Weekly Mail 16-22 May 1986).

Even though the people of Chicken Farm have to pay a high price, both in terms of money and in terms of living in bad conditions and poor health, they are happy to have found a place to live. They have paid dearly for just the permission to live there.

They will therefore fight for what is theirs by right. At the moment, the squatter community is becoming organised to demand better housing and sanitation for their money, and to expose bribery and corruption among the authorities. And if their right to live there is threatened, their struggle will not end there.