

# Shelter Situation in the Republic of South Africa

## Issues of Housing, Planning and Equity



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### Abstract

This paper investigates the dynamics of the shelter situation for the poor in South Africa (Specifically the RDP-Rural Development Program- housing dwellers) and articulates the studies gathered around the issue of shelter in the country. Following a brief investigative analysis of the status quo of shelter situations, the main focus of the paper is to discuss numerous sections that distinguish discrepancies in shelter provision and development in our country pertaining to RDP housing, development and planning, these issues will be listed as follows:

Brief analysis of the current and historical influences in terms of planning, policymaking, and socio-economic dynamics that have had a bearing influence on the current conditions.

Ideologies of post-apartheid South Africa, as a new democracy and the paradigm shift in shelter development and planning.

### Introduction

An appalling shortage of homes, coupled with other major deficiencies such as socio-economic inequality had resulted in a marked deterioration in the quality of the living environment for many families in South Africa. Dr Kwandiwe Kondlo, head of the Human Science Research Council in South Africa argues that, the issue of shelter in our country bears its roots primarily from the all-encompassing issue of 'land equity' (HSRC report: 2008).

In our discussions in this paper we will incorporate the issue of land ownership as background information that at the end has a bearing influence on the legacies of the shelter situation in our country. Since the insertion of the new democratic South Africa, a declaration of 'housing as a democratic right' was one of the primary programmes endorsed by state to address the main problems of poverty and human displacement (RDP white paper, 1994).

This declaration has had its telling challenges as far as deliverance and management capacities are concerned, because of historic discrepancies and a general issue of mismanagement with the current governance, all of these issues will be mentioned. It must also be remembered that the issue of shelter in South Africa should not be viewed in isolation to other democratic factors, in terms of 'delivery' and 'access', it is also about **equity and ownership** as the main tools of poverty alleviation and balance in status of people in society.

# 1 Shelter Situation Analysis

## 1.1 Basic General Data

### Geography and Administration

South Africa occupies the southern most tip of Africa, its long coast line stretches more than 2500Km from Atlantic coast border of Namibia, southwards around the tip of Africa then North Easterly to sub-tropical border of Mozambique. South Africa is generally described as a medium sized country which has been sub-divided to nine provinces, namely Northern Cape (the biggest arid and least populated), Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Kwazulu-Natal along the coast, Gauteng (the smallest and the major urbanised and populated industrial magnet), Mpumalanga, North-west province, Free State and Limpopo which are all inland provinces characterised with extreme weathers. South Africa has an estimated land area of approximately 1.2 million hectares, and the inland mostly arid and semi-arid. Land use is generally arable land 12.1 %, permanent crops 0.79%, Other (which include mining, rural settlements, urban settlements, industrial areas etc.) is 87.11%.

Land in South Africa is mostly individually owned mostly by commercial and traditional farmers, as of late the current government has managed to recover most of the open land (farms, industrial land and former communal land) through survey programmes.

South Africa has a long history of struggle and administrative strongholds. In 1994 the first democratic elections were undertaken, since then the government has launched constitutional

methods of governance and administration, this includes all national structures including the so called private administration. The government has undertaken to fully administer all programmes of social and low-cost housing (as per national reconstruction programmes) to deal with the socio-economic inequalities left behind by the legacy of segregation.

## Demography and Health

South Africa has an uncommon demographic profile, marked by a heterogeneous population base, social issues brought on by the legacy of Apartheid, divisions within ethnic groups, HIV/AIDS, and emigration (human settlement report, 2001); these dynamics therefore play a big role in public policy.

The population of South Africa can be distinguished mostly along racial and tribal ethnicity. 79.7% of the population is black population, 9.1% is white population, 8.8% coloureds population and remaining 2.4% is Indian/Asian. The population of South Africa is estimated at 48 282 000 people and it is alleged that the figures are growing especially in urban areas at a projected average annual growth rate of 2.27% per annum and an average household size of 4.8 persons, the high rate of maternity amongst the youth between ages 16-38 years and the escalating rate of urbanisation (population studies: 2008). On the contrary the rate of immortality is also high due to crime and, diseases such as HIV and AIDS and TB in informal settlements. Life expectancy for South Africans is 50 years for males and 53 years for women also major factors being exposure to crime and diseases, especially for the urban dwellers.

Studies have been gathered around the social and health issues in informal settlements, townships and rural villages and the new RDP developments, that the outbreaks of pandemics and other fatal diseases have had their root cause from poverty, malnutrition and poor living conditions. The table figure1 below shows the income group figures that map out the housing stock as will be mentioned later.

fig 1 : income group data

<b>No Income Category Percentage Number of Households</b>		
<b>income in SA rands</b>	<b>percentage</b>	<b>no. of population group</b>
R 0 - R 800	39.7%	3.30m
R 800 - R1,500	29.0%	2.41m
R 1,500 - R2,500	11.8%	0.98m
R 2,500 - R3,500	5.6%	0.46m
R >3,5001	13.9%	1.15m
<b>TOTAL 100.0% 8.3m</b>		

## 1.2 Shelter Related Fact and Figures

Urbanisation has become a major phenomenon in South Africa at a rate documented elsewhere in the world. One of the major aspects of this phenomena include immigration of the rural dwellers or the so called migrant labourers from farms and rural areas, and also the African Diaspora of foreign African nationals (human settlement indaba: 2008).these issues together with the decline in the country's GDP have led to a decrease in the real per capita income(Housing Policy:2006), hence informal housing tendencies and unprecedented housing backlog and reduced access to adequate or formal housing stock especially for low-income earners.

A relatively limited formal housing stock, low and progressively decreasing rates of formal and informal housing delivery in South Africa have resulted in a massive increase in the number of homeless households(housing report:2000). Most people are consequently forced to seek accommodation in informal settlements, backyard shacks and in overcrowded conditions in existing formal housing. As stipulated by the "South African review on housing" it is evident that there are a numerous types of housing stock which are prominent in South Africa. The 'formal' housing stock comprises of about 61% of urban households in the form of formal houses, town houses, flats, and retirement homes.

Urban informal housing is approximately 1.5 million units (South African housing report: 2009), these are mostly easier and cheaper to access and constitute serviced sites with basic amenities.

Hostels comprise approximately 5.2% of the urban household accommodation, although in this current government their construction was discontinued and only upgrades exist.

Approximately 13.5% of all households live in squatter housing nationwide, mostly unemployed urban dwellers or those that rely on informal income for survival.

The estimated population growth of 1 million people in South African urban areas also indicates that the rise in housing deficit is also on the rise, currently there is a housing deficit of 4, 000 000 units with governments initiative to building over 1000 000 RDP houses per annum has only led to a greater housing problem, which will be discussed later on the chapter about quality quantity and sustainability of RDP houses. Approximately 48% of all the already built RDP houses have failed the quality test audit and many will have to be re-built, while a large amount needs to be repaired. There is an estimate 'RDP' backlog of 1.5 million units and the largest percentage is in urban areas. To this result land invasion is prominent and access to

“RDP” housing has reached complicated and detrimental levels of violence, hence the 2009 violent attacks on African refugees in major city centres like Cape Town and Johannesburg. Other forms of tenure are as follows.

Approximately 58% of all households (4.8 million households) have secure tenure (ownership, leasehold or formal rental contracts) over their accommodation; whereas an estimated 9% of all households (780,000 households) live under traditional, informal / inferior and/or officially unrecognised tenure arrangements in predominantly rural areas; and An additional estimated 18% of all households (1.5 million households or 7.4 million people) are forced to live in squatter settlements, backyard shacks or in over-crowded conditions in existing formal housing in urban areas, with no formal tenure rights over their accommodation.

These tenure conditions in some cases makes it difficult for certain groups to access mortgage therefore the security of ownership and tenure is very low in most cases.

The initiative of ‘RDP’ housing has in some ways brought about opportunity in term of accessible housing, based on the ratio of cost of price compared to income of many South Africans. Also land is still the major pressing issue especially in urban areas, most of our urban land belongs to individual entities and local authorities have very limited control thereto.

Usually any form of housing development for the poor finds land on the peripheries of our cities and that has proved very costly and unsustainable to manage our cities. Land invasions in our cities have taken place, with the rapid sprawl of shanty towns or informal settlements (FRESCURA, Franco. 1977). These informal settlement are often located on the peripheries of our cities, in land below flood plain, close by hazardous situations e.g. near railway tracks close to major highway or underneath electricity power lines, these land invasions are also charectised with lack or no security of land tenure.

There also exist a parallel in terms of housing construction in South Africa, as mentioned elsewhere about different types of housing, formal housing construction is most popular and the average cost of a ‘RDP’ house starting at (R 45 000) this figure might have dropped over the years and these are brick-mortar buildings with corrugated iron roofs. With the informal houses which most driven by the immediate need for shelter, quick construction etc are usually self-help houses which are built out off reused corrugated iron sheets, used timber, sail ect. Therefore the issue of the availability of community skills and materials in low cost

housing is of crucial importance, and needs institutional role play (e.g. banks and the enthusiasm of private sector, as major supporters).

### 1.3 Historical Housing Policies and their influences

#### The Pre-Apartheid Land Act

By 1910 the government of South Africa had consolidated most of the provinces into what was termed Union of South Africa (Christopher 1994, 32) which was later followed by series of policies that prohibited non-Europeans from access to economic opportunities and land. Under the 1913 Natives Land Act, only a total of 8.9 million hectares, equivalent of 14 per cent of the total country's land was allocated to the native South Africans (the so-called 'native reserves'), the Act also prohibited the others from purchasing land outside this jurisdiction (Smith 1992, 54). This has become a major obstacle in our settlements and cities to allocate land that will be suitable for housing and conducive for sustainable communities.

#### Urbanization Housing and Planning

By late 1950's the population in Johannesburg had doubled to about 3 million people (Christopher 1994, 64), because of the tremendous influx of the migrant workers especially from the 'reserves' coming to the big cities looking for work.

In 1960 just under half of the native rural population lived on all categories of designated black areas or so called 'townships' in the cities (Ronald 1977, 32), these areas were characterised by small box houses, dusty streets, lack of or no basic amenities and blatant poverty.

#### Apartheid Housing and Shelter development

The government provided through its 'Group Areas Act' of approximately 700 000 homes to those born in the cities and the migrant working class. Initially shelter provision for migrant workers was communal hostels, which were often overcrowded and were provided for men workers. Women in this juncture were completely excluded from housing and life in the cities. People resorted to be lodgers or squatters with main tenants or homeowners in stand alone houses. On the other hand the rentable row houses known as, 'Standard NE 51/6' which were built extensively in Cape Town did not accommodate lodgers because of how they were planned and managed. This situation has created difficulties in terms of accommodating immigrants into cities who have to find work before they can access housing, in Cape Town

and Johannesburg many people still rent a backyard shack from a land owner as their initial means to shelter, while they will be queuing for an 'RDP' house or saving enough money to rent a room.

#### 1.4 Shelter situation in the New Democratic South Africa

The 1994 democratically elected government led by Nelson Mandela as its first democratic president drew a comprehensive programme that would drastically deal with the poverty and inequality that some estimated 12.5 million South Africans were subjected to. Government therefore will vigorously promote an effective right to housing for all, within the resource and other limitations applicable to it.

This paper will be discussing some of the cases, situations and influences that came with new socio-economic and political model of reconstruction. It must also be remembered that the situation had knotted into some very complicated strongholds from the apartheid regime and require endless long-term strategies that prove time consuming for the desperately poor households.

The socio-political and economic discrepancies will not be discussed in this paper but it must be remembered that they are integral to the socio-economic problem of South Africa where the poor have very little access to, **adequate shelter**, proper facilities (including financial assistance), health, sanitation, **clean water, land** etc.

South Africa government has been busy adopting many paradigm shifts in the form of shelter provision strategies, land reform programs and rendering of basic services to the poor, which will be discussed in this section of the paper, which every role player in shelter development should be updated with.

#### Shelter Policies in the New Democratic South Africa

David Dewar, University of Cape Town argues some shelter developmental strategies in the current situation 'RDP housing development (architecture South Africa, 2009), he points out the issue of management as the fundamental failure with shelter provision in new democratic South Africa. The issue of housing specifically 'RDP' housing has been used sometimes as a political tool during political campaigns and also as a quantitative service provision rather than qualitative developmental strategy, but as a basic programme 'the existence of 'RDP' programme has brought about opportunities for shelter improvements and tremendous challenges. Another major challenge from this discourse is urban sprawl that will have to be addressed as one of the major priorities. Many city centres have experienced immense decay

due to this issue. We will be briefly discussing a few major problems of shelter that came about with changes in South Africa.

### Shelter Initiatives

The democratic government had embarked on rapid transformation initiatives that would be the stepping-stones for development in poor areas. One of the major issues has been:

Inhumane informal settlements

Shortage of houses and shelter in general

Poor or sometimes no basic services in certain areas e g water and sanitation

Developmental involvement of communities in their own community development.

Poverty

Gender equality and equity

Sustainable urban/rural development and planning.

These are the issues that have led the government to start with 'RDP' (Rural Development Programme). This program has been generally involved in many aspects, mainly housing, poverty, and service delivery.

Essentially this program together with the land and human rights department had embarked on programmes to build one house per stand houses of a minimum 45sqm.

This housing stock does allow a degree of equity (free house and stand), on land that the government buys from municipal and sometimes farmers or private owners (Architecture SA, 2009). At the end of year 2007 some of the major concerns, which are the issue report of this paper, are as follows.

The growing number of shack dwellers.

The quality product of RDP houses in terms and their sustainability, planning and construction.

The major concerns of equity of these housing developments.

Management and service delivery.

The other main issue is that of management, firstly government often finds land on the outskirts of cities, then allocates it to construction of these houses in a desperate attempt to speed up delivery and meet backlog demands. This essentially raises issues of planning e g: issues of transport networks to places of work and access to city centres.



Almost all RDP housing complexes have no civic hub, which is never considered in pre-planning. Material and quality control is highly overlooked  
Lastly the issue of services to these areas prove to be highly unsustainable and costly

## 2 Organisation

Savage + Dodd was formed and registered by Colin Savage and Heather Dodd, the company has been involved in numerous city renewal projects and affordable housing schemes. Savage + Dodd have designed social housing schemes in the inner city for a government subsidized company named JHC (Johannesburg Housing Company). The major projects that the company has been involved with are Elangeni new build social housing followed by Brickfields social housing. Both these projects have provided viable housing stock options ranging from family units (two bed rooms) to single persons (bachelor units). Also as part of a great strategy to improve and build communities, the company has intensively been involved in conversions and upgrades on the decaying environments in Hilbrow and city centre. The EKHAYA community development is one example, taking a whole block of buildings that used to be luxury apartments and re-densifying them, and upgraded to suit a new urbanisation demands mainly for medium and lower income earners. the company has been involved with housing for the poor, which has been the parallel of government RDP houses (matchbox houses on stand alone site), instead the model cluster housing development, with shared facilities like day-care centres and meeting halls. All of these initiatives have been very successful in shelter development around Johannesburg and are adopted in some parts of South Africa as meaningful models.

## 3 Shelter Problem (RDP housing and post development)

The ANC's chief aim in developing and implementing the Reconstruction and Development Programme, was to address the immense socioeconomic problems brought about by the consequences of the struggle against its predecessors under the Apartheid regime (RDP white paper, 1994). This chapter will be dealing primarily with the pitfalls of 'RDP' housing and later some proposed interventions in curbing the shortcomings. It must be clearly understood that the purpose of this paper is distinctly to analyse the 'existing RDP state' and means to

deal with the existing, hence the keyword: **post-development, remodelling of those communities through retrofit programmes and integrated community models.**

While many have criticised the unsustainability of 'RDP' housing which has led a monumental paradigm shift in terms of its modelling, a great question arises as to what should happen to all those millions of already built houses (those so called unsustainable communities) who represent failures of this development strategy. Firstly let us briefly describe some facts about the 'RDP' house. After democratic elections of 1994, a programme was required that would be achievable, sustainable and meet the objectives of freedom, and an improved standard of living and quality of life for all South Africans within a peaceful and stable society characterised by equitable economic growth. The programme also aimed at addressing such issues as **growth, development, reconstruction, redistribution of wealth and land, reconciliation, people participation and nation-building.**

The 'RDP' house is then the integral product of this program; it is a prototype single storey house on an allocated stand. This product is initiated through purchase of land or identification of unused municipal land, the land would then be made available for the government produced mass 'RDP' housing development. It was established by council of 'RDP' officials that the house would be a minimum of 40sqm which is a basic one-bedroom house with kitchen and dining areas and also some two-bedrooms of approximately 60sqm, the house is constructed from concrete blocks with sometimes smooth plaster or bag plaster and corrugated iron and timber roof. The nominated beneficiaries of the house are the poor household who are of South African nationality, shack dwellers, migrant workers, and urban lodgers, illegal tenants in illegal occupied urban buildings, backyard tenants in existing formal households, rural dwellers and many others with no access to adequate housing. Also the prerequisite of being eligible to an 'RDP' house is that you must have a legitimate South African ID document and be of an age older than 21 years and also do a formal application of the house or be part of a consensus of a group to be relocated either from an informal settlement or land that government is retrieving back to the original owners e.g. farms and small farm holdings that no longer are yielding produce. Approximately there are over 1.6 million 'RDP' units already built since 1994 (insertion of **Reconstruction Development Program**).

Furthermore the housing component of this program has some developmental mandates as part of the holistic planning (government gazette:2002), these are.

**Housing** as the basic provision with standardised materiality, size and space planning

Access to **clean water** reticulated to each house and also communal water tap points

**Electrification:** as part of access to electricity, a growing percentage from 12% to about 55% poor South Africans have been legally connected to the grid.

**Land reform:** approximately 3.5% of the previously displaced families or households without land have been resettled in land redistributed through the 'RDP' program.

**Health care and other institutions:** while some still argue that little has been done by the program in terms of access to healthcare, schools and enterprise. The program does have in its mandate to incorporate these institutions.

On contrary it can be generally argued that the above mentioned ideals have been met with some degree of failure, and this can be attributed to numerous factors.

Politicisation of the housing part of this program is the major factor and has led to an unprecedented amount of corruption and smuggling of 'RDP' houses from nepotism on construction contracts to the illegal sale of houses to desperate beneficiaries on waiting lists and to foreign nationals (who are not eligible to the housing).

Lack of expertise from the developers, planners and contractors have led to the inferiority of the quality 'RDP' house as a sustainable product, which as of February 2010 a total of about 24% of the national housing budget will be used to fix or reconstruct most of these houses which have been recalled.

Issues of management have also created complicated situations from house allocations, management of these areas and ownership procedures. This can be blamed on dysfunctional municipal programs or leadership.

Lastly the lack of professional participation (especially architects and sociologists) at any level has created a developmental gap that makes these communities hard to manage and sustain.

### Inside the 'RDP' box

The basic 5 meter by 4 meter box house with minimum 40sqm allocated to a given household of approximately 4.8 persons or more, the houses cost approximately \$ 5920 to build and

owners are not allowed to sell the house before 8 years and they receive the house for free. Some of the most basic problems of the ‘box’ are:

1. technical issues like, poor foundations and unevaluated soil conditions that lead to structural cracks on walls and sometimes collapse of the entire roof structure
2. Poor materials which do not pass the on-site approvals and verification, e.g. door and window frames that buckle easily, and roof sheeting that get easily punctured by hail storms.
3. The houses being single storey detached houses lack variety in the plan typologies and the houses all look the same.
4. Some experts point out the issue of energy efficiency in these houses, in winter they are extremely cold inside, leading the owners to use heat generating means like paraffin stoves and indoor open fires that lead to accidents and pollution.
5. Lack of income generating means like job opportunities is the most pressing issue that creates unprecedented poverty in these communities. Figure 1 above shows typical income categories in South Africa, and the first two categories fall into the scope of ‘RDP’ dwellers.
6. Pandemics like TB and AIDS are some major issues in households
7. lack of security and high levels of exposure to crime
8. Domestic violence due to some social issues, abuse of alcohol ect.
9. lack of post-allocation assistance in terms of securing land and house titles, access to a financial loan for house improvements and extensions.

The table below shows some facts collected on a field study I conducted in the Tyutyu north ‘RDP’ housing on the 08/01/2010, we had the following findings.

<b>interviews of families in Tyutyu north ‘RDP’ housing</b>		
<b>family facts</b>	<b>household facts</b>	<b>livelihood</b>
Nqwamla family: headed by 60 year old man, 3 members (children ages 12-36) and 1 grand child, registered for a child grant of \$ 35 per month	1 bedroom with bath area and kitchen/ lounge open plan, tv set, 1 bed and kitchen unit	head of family retired and has chest infection, retired and not yet registered for pension grant, family lives off informal income
Miss G peter family: headed by single mother and her sick brother, with 5 children and a grand child total of 8 family members	1 bedroom with bath area and kitchen/ lounge open plan, with some second hand household utilities, the house had many construction defects.	informal income, she is working as a volunteer on some of the community programme
Moshadiba family: headed by wife and husband, with 2 children, husband is working as low income earner, wife unemployed	2 bedroom, 60sqm house furnished. And some roof leaks	lives on single income and some informal income generated through selling of basic commodities.

## Proposal for Change and Improvement

Post-development and retrofit are the new terms used these days as part of integrated development strategies.

The proposal for change in this project will be first a development of a methodology (snag survey) conducted through census of a specific community, followed by listing of individual households into 'recall' categories or need based basis.

**TYPE1:** structural defects before and after occupancy, therefore technical service in terms of availability of funding and technical support

**TYPE2:** construction defects caused by poor workmanship and the recall of all inferior materiality, to be funded by government as part of its already started program.

## Conclusion

According to the issues of shelter in our country, it can be observed that a great majority of our people still live under severe conditions with lack of basic services, inferior qualities of shelter, and difficult integrating systems like transport to allow them to play a meaningful role in economic growth in the country. I also would like to mention a few point form descriptions of some of the rendering by many to fight this huge backlog of availability of proper shelter, these issues will be addressed fully in the course of training in Lund, but primarily dealing with RDP housing development as the main matter of concern:

The issue of tenement (illegal renting of flats in city centres, especially Johannesburg), which results in overcrowding.

Smuggling of RDP houses which are usually rented or sold to foreign nationals, and we have experienced tragic xenophobic flare-ups due to this

The growing number of SHACKS as opposed to eradicating them for proper housing stocks.

Also the participation of private sector in meaningful development, by creating viable environments around shelter for development of the poor.

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