

SPEECH BY L N SISULU, MP, MINISTER OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AT THE UNISA
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Theme: “How the Human Settlements Sector is responding to the rapid increase of urbanisation in South Africa.”

Vice Chancellor
Deputy Minister
Members of Council
Members of Parliament
Ladies and gentlemen

Introduction

We in South Africa have held a very advantaged position in relation to the development of policy and in the research we have we have invested in this respect. From 2004 we held the Chair of the African Ministers Conference on Housing and Urban Development for five years from where a great deal of our current policies were crafted. In that way we were ahead of our time. There are now more than a dozen research Centres on Human Settlements, putting us well ahead of any country except India in our understanding of matters of shelter, urban migration and informal settlements.

Because of this and other advantages we have been at the forefront of developing international responses to issues of urbanisation and shelter in the developing world. And we have held positions in various International Councils and bodies on sustainable development and settlements

Last year we hosted an International Thematic Conference on behalf of Habitat 111. The theme was Informal Settlements because that had particular resonance with the housing problems of much of the developing world. We spent a very productive week analysing urban migration trends and informal Settlements. We reached the conclusion from statistics before us that urbanisation was upon us and all we can do is accept that reality and plan for it; that urbanisation will grow rapidly and reach its peak in five years time and thereafter grow consistently; and that by 2040 more than 80% of the world's population will be in urban areas.

We drafted and adopted the Pretoria Minute and we were pleased with ourselves. We ensured that the matter was on the agenda of Habitat 111 in Quito and again we were pleased with ourselves. We hosted a session on Informal Settlements at Quito to overflowing attendance and we were further pleased with ourselves. At the conceptual level, at the level of theory we have grappled with this matter and though we may differ on emphasis, we believe we have fairly good grasp of what we are dealing with. That's where our good story ends.

At the implementation level we have serious challenges. First we were unprepared for the level of urbanisation we experienced, we hadn't planned for it. We only got clever after the fact and in that space we were reactive and did not take advantage of the positive effects of urbanization. Urbanisation for the most part us became a problem. A

problem, because we had not developed the necessary instruments and responses for it. We had not had the foresight. Our data system was nowhere ready to offer us solutions. We were a new government dealing with so many other matters of competing urgency and now we are playing catch up against large scale informality and attendant poverty and hazards. We have paid a heavy price of people's revolt and an even heavier price in the opening up of opportunities for nefarious acts if corruption and numerous instances of successful cheating of the system and exploitation of the poor and desperate.

Our people, having grown up in a geo politically, insular world of apartheid have responded with heightened levels of what can only be described as xenophobia. These are some of the negative externalities that flowed from our slow response and our lack of planning. We have had our setbacks. However, from every set back we have learnt. Urbanisation for us is a real challenge. A challenge, because we did not have the foresight to plan for it. Our data system is nowhere ready. We were a new government, dealing with so many challenges of co-urgency. And now we are playing catch up.

Rapid urbanisation and the challenge of sustainable development

Urbanisation is a powerful tool for development and the provision of adequate strategy to combat poverty, to provide adequate housing and to ensure access to basic services. At the same time, however, when not properly designed and managed, cities often pay the high price of negative externalities, such as congestion, contamination and wide inequalities, often leading to social unrest and instability. The "urbanisation of poverty" and the concomitant informality continue to be a growing challenge to the future sustainability of our human settlements

The real challenges faced by urbanisation, when its positive aspects are recognised, are sustainability in the social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Sustainable urban planning and development is necessary to eliminate the causes of segregation and exclusion and support the social, spatial, and economic transformation of our cities and towns.

In the United Nations State of African Cities report (2014) it is noted that the rapid urbanisation prevailing in large parts of the African continent, and in South Africa, obviously bring additional and new challenges, but should also be interpreted as opportunities for deep review of African nations' policies and strategies.

Real opportunities exist for embracing new urban paradigms that are more conducive to both the present and long-term needs of our cities and towns. Urbanisation presents an opportunity for economic, social, and spatial transformation by harnessing the advantages of agglomeration and concentration of population to share in the so-called "urban dividend". South African cities may also have a competitive advantage because for instance their development could leapfrog conventional urban development paths to greener urban economies.

Planning and financing for sustainable urban growth are priorities that can generate opportunities towards higher employment elasticity, secure ecosystem services and affordable public services. Indeed, the time is ripe for a rethinking of past and present development trajectory choices and for exploring new visions, interventions, and adaptations in response to changing contexts. Whereas a 're-imagined African urbanism' would undoubtedly embrace some parts of the 'Western urban model', Africa has an opportunity to also seek policy and strategic directions that incorporate long-term sustainability for social, environmental and economic development that will better deliver than the imported urban paradigms have done so far.

Transforming our urban landscape through focused government partnerships – where we have come from and where we are heading.

Achievements

Looking back over the past two decades since the dawning of our democracy we as a nation have much to be proud of in the area of human settlement development. Since 1994 the provision of housing to the poor and most vulnerable has been an important pillar of the government's strategy to manage urbanisation and enhance sustainability. To date we have provided some 4,5 million houses and housing opportunities with access to land secure tenure and engineering services.

However, South Africa's cities still reflect apartheid planning with the poorest communities tending to live far away from services and employment. They suffer not only spatial, but also social and economic exclusion. The form and structure of apartheid cities could also not cope with the dismantling of apartheid, especially the continuing massive rural to urban, and urban to urban migration. The resultant growth of informal settlements, that lack connections to public transport and infrastructure networks, makes it costly for new urbanites to commute and find and retain formal employment.

We are very aware of the sometimes less than optimal outcomes of our policy and practice over the past twenty years– often continuing the legacy of urban apartheid - and the need to rethink how in future we develop our settlements to be more inclusive, sustainable, and liveable. We aim to turn this around.

The New Urban Agenda

Our New Urban Agenda promotes a model of urban development that is able to integrate all facets of sustainable development to promote equity, welfare and shared prosperity. It builds on some 20 years of experience and learning in implementing housing and related human settlements programmes targeting the most vulnerable members of our society.

Thus government's Integrated Urban Development Framework sets out a policy on how the urban system in South Africa can be re-oriented so that cities and towns can become increasingly liveable, inclusive, and resource-efficient over the next 20 to 30 years. It also recognises

that urban and rural areas operate on a continuum and proposes measures to strengthen the rural-urban linkages.

The strategic goals include:

1. To ensure people have access to social and economic services, opportunities and choices;
2. To harness urban dynamism for inclusive, sustainable economic growth and development;
3. To enhance the capacity of the state and its citizens to work together to achieve social integration; and
4. To forge new spatial forms in settlements, transport, social and economic areas.

This includes supporting urbanisation, integrating equity into the development agenda, fostering national urban planning, supporting development goals through sustainable urbanisation, and aligning institutional arrangements to ensure effective delivery.

Our “New” Urban Agenda encourages an integrated approach to human settlement planning that is based on a sustainable livelihoods approach and promotes higher densities in good locations, universal design (ensuring access to all), an emphasis on the green economy, and spatial economic inclusivity. Our Agenda includes the provision of transport, a healthy and ‘liveable’ urban environment, clean drinking water, energy provision, sanitation, health, education, roads, job opportunities, and food security.

Achieving the goals of the New Urban Agenda through Mega- and catalytic-projects

In October last year we participated in the Third UN Conference on Sustainable Human settlements (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador. Here we confirmed that in implementing our settlement transformation agenda we would continue to put housing at the centre but by approaching it somewhat differently.

One of the important lessons we have learnt is that small isolated “housing” projects are not conducive to fostering integrated and inclusive human settlements and delivery at scale in order to deal expeditiously with housing and service backlogs.

We have thus embarked on repositioning human settlement projects based on the so-called 3C protocol namely:

- Coordination;
- Cooperation; and
- Collaboration.

This protocol will serve to develop “catalytic” Mega projects of no less than 15 000 rental, subsidised, and mortgaged housing units supported by engineering, social, and economic infrastructure. These projects will each provide housing for an estimated 45 000 to 60 000 individuals.

The strategic levers for the successful delivery of the Mega projects include:

- Integrated development planning;
- Radical spatial transformation;
- Mixed housing and tenure typologies;

- Security of tenure;
- Urban renewal;
- Strengthening institutional delivery capacity;
- End user management; and
- Most importantly strategic partnerships with the financial sector, developers, the built environment professions and communities.

Job creation

The human settlement development activities will also make a substantial contribution to employment creation, both during and post development. Based on the Expanded Public Works Formula it is estimated that, in Gauteng alone, we will over the next 15 years directly create 250 000 jobs in construction of housing and infrastructure.

These will of course further increase by the number of strategic partners in both private and public sector as they invest to serve the new client portfolio of Mega projects with retail, office, entertainment, and social facility developments.

Informal settlements

The upgrading of informal settlements will be an integral part of the Mega project approach. The focus will be on establishing tenure security, provision of basic services and infrastructure, community participation and skills development, livelihood creation, incremental housing development and support, social facilities such as clinics, schools, and playgrounds, as well as safety and security.

Township regeneration and mining towns

We will also include the revitalisation of “old townships” and support mining towns through improving infrastructure and housing, supporting the development of businesses, and recreational facilities – in fact all the elements that go into make settlements sustainable and liveable. We will strive to change these settlements from “desperate and desolate to positive and participating”.

This will also include the rejuvenation of our inner cities and will be done by tracking down absent landlords or expropriating unused buildings where landlords cannot be traced, and assigning them for the purpose of building social housing next to places of work and student accommodation close to places of higher learning.

Conclusion

A significant policy shift

During my budget debate in the NCOP this year I also indicated that:

“We will now concentrate on being an enabler to those who can and being a provider to those who can’t. We are calling on our people to play their part in executing their responsibility together with us in delivering a right. We need to be aligned in this, as we both have a responsibility. We are accordingly shifting our focus to strengthen our strategies by providing land for people to build with our assistance, coupled with our temporary shelter programme, approved by Cabinet in 2007. Working together with the Departments of Rural

Development and Land Affairs and Public Works we will establish a collaboration that will release land and municipalities will be required to prioritise the provision of infrastructure.”

Partnerships and the role of the development professions, universities / academia and research institutions

We are all partners in this great venture to turn our common destiny around and make our cities, towns and other settlements vibrant, productive, sustainable, and great places to live in. To quote Mr Josep Roig, the Secretary General of United Cities and Local Governments:

“The only sustainable city/ (settlement) is the one created by all of us.”

We have formed a Social Compact with all our stakeholders including the development professions and academia. We recognise that the existing development professions (Planners, architects, engineers etc.) have very specialised knowledge in their own fields. In order to augment our implementation capacity I have however become convinced that there is a need for a new class of trained professional to draw together all the strands of sustainable human settlement development.

Hence, we have entered into a special relationship with a number of academic institutions, of which UNISA is one, to develop a curriculum and institute a study programme for a human settlements profession. I am very pleased to announce that our combined efforts are bearing fruit and that the Online Distance Learning Bachelor of Public Administration in Human Settlements at UNISA has enrolled some 100 Students since its first intake in 2016.

The skills and job opportunities so created will fill a very important gap in the successful implementation of our New Urban Agenda. We look forward to welcoming these graduates into the human settlements family and thank the academic fraternity in providing the knowledge and research that is key to the success of our endeavours.

Consolidating human settlements research

Human settlement professionals and researchers need to stay up to date with good practice and keep on learning throughout their careers. To this end UN Habitat developed an international online database of good practice case studies and research, called the Global Urban Observatory. In order to be at the forefront of research and development we need such a consolidated source of knowledge and information pertinent to our local development needs.

Last year we hosted a National Human Settlements Conference in Nelson Mandela Bay, at which the CSIR indicated that they are developing an online “South African Urban Knowledge Exchange” that would serve as a space where human settlements research and good practice could be shared. I have been informed that the Exchange will probably go live early in 2018.

Such a knowledge depository could also serve to identify knowledge gaps and areas of new research that academic and other research institutions could use to focus their research efforts. This is good news for the sector and I urge all research institutions to partner

with the CSIR so that we can consolidate our knowledge and learning to benefit all working in the human settlements sector.

Lastly, I would like to wish you well in your deliberations and that they will enrich our debates and knowledge of this complex phenomenon of sustainable urbanisation.

I thank you