Factors Influencing the Formulation of A Viable Urban Development Policy in South Africa

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Abstract

At the time of the 1994 democratic elections, South African cities were characterised by sub-standard housing, service delivery backlogs and serious problems in municipal spending. Indeed, there were, and still are, spatial anomalies associated with "apartheid cities" and the struggle to dismantle local government structures reminiscent of apartheid administrations. High unemployment and poverty-stricken households further exacerbated the urban policy landscape. Nevertheless, the way forward was directed by the ANC's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) that aimed to address basic human needs. That same development programme provided the backdrop for a South African Constitution (1996) that proclaimed inalienable rights for all South Africans – housing being one of those paramount rights. Sadly, urban policies for human settlements were hastily developed and driven by political agendas that focused too far into the future, failing to address immediate housing needs. Moreover, urban policies were at times simplistic and at times too complex, serving only to make policy formulation much more difficult. This article discusses policy for urban development in the context of the political economy of South Africa. The aim is to explore the challenges and barriers to formulating an urban policy.

Keywords: *Urban Development, Housing, Informal Settlements, Housing Policy.*

1. Introduction

At the time of the 1994 democratic elections, South African cities were characterised by sub-standard housing, service delivery backlogs and serious problems in municipal spending. Indeed, there were, and still are, spatial anomalies associated with "apartheid cities" and the struggle to dismantle local government structures reminiscent of apartheid administrations. High unemployment and poverty-stricken households further exacerbated the urban policy landscape.

Nevertheless, the way forward was directed by the ANC's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) that aimed to address basic human needs. That same development programme provided the backdrop for the South African Constitution (1996) that proclaimed inalienable rights for all South Africans – housing being one of the paramount rights. To that end, the White Paper on Local Government (1998) was

historic, as it facilitated an opportunity to transform local government in terms of urban policy, among others (Pillay, Tomlinson & Du Toit, 2006:1). Consequently, there was a sense of enthusiasm in those early post-apartheid years spurred on by local government negotiations and the National Housing Forum (South African Government Information, 1994).

Still, the policy formulation process was too simplistic in setting targets and failed to provide for a developmental agenda. Transforming local government was seen as a complex matter encompassing demarcating municipal boundaries, restructuring institutions, coordinating financial resources and municipal fiscal policies. There was an absence of a coordinated approach to building democratic local government structures and developmental institutions. Moreover, there have been significant challenges and barriers to formulating a viable urban policy in South Africa, for example a policy for the transformation of informal settlements and other types of human settlements. Recently, informal settlements have become an all too common part of the urban and suburban landscapes, creating an urgent need for an urban policy to accommodate the influx of migrants from rural areas. To address overcrowding in informal settlements in the interim, coordinated removals have taken place to relocate migrants, but uninformed forced removals have been met with bitter resistance.

Importantly, the urbanisation of South Africa's migrating population has been taking place at an alarming pace. Migrations from the rural areas are a challenge that requires the attention of municipalities and local governments. Most migrants live close to or below the poverty line and are in need of essential basic services that they cannot pay for. The inability of local governments to provide essential basic services has exacerbated the migration problem. The aim of this article then is to discuss policy for urban development and renewal in the context of the political economy of South Africa. A second aim is to explore the challenges and barriers to formulating urban policy.

2. Urban Policy

Formulating an urban policy entails the study of decision processes that involve collective consumption, relating to a series of public services (Craythorne, 1997:84). Public services include education, health care, social welfare services, public transport, housing and urban planning itself.

Critical factors to consider in policy formulation include the accelerated growth of cities resulting from the influx of workers from large informal settlements on the periphery, inner-city decay, outdated infrastructure, pressure on the education system and an inability to implement primary health care systems. These factors impact urban development policy, especially as it pertains to economic development, job creation and effective law enforcement. Rugged individualism (a desire to solve one's own problems) and minimal government involvement have also impacted policy for urban

development. As the 20th century drew to a close in South Africa, technological advancements and telecommunication have improved social interactions, contributing to population density and growth. Craythorne, (1997:85) notes that accelerated growth of cities has changed the operations of local government and made it much more complex in organisation and structure.

3. The Context for Urban Policy Formulation

The context of urban policy includes the size of an urban population, its geographic location and how rapidly the population is growing and where it is growing. Pillay *et al*. (2006:4) highlighted four types of urban areas: (1) tribal areas; (2) rural formal/ commercial farming area; (3) an urban formal area; and (4) an urban informal area. At the time of the 2001 census, South Africa's population was nearly 45 million strong, with about 57 per cent of the population living in urban areas and 43% in rural areas.[1] The most highly urbanized provinces were Gauteng (nearly 96 percent), Western Cape (86 percent), and Northern Cape (73 percent). The population of Northern Province, in contrast, was only about 9 percent urban, according to the Development Bank of Southern Africa (Country Studies, n.d.) The 2001 census further revealed that urban growth occurred mainly on the periphery of South African cities. Urban growth on the periphery was due to the subsidising low-cost housing from as early as 1994. Creating a culture of generational dependency, subsidised housing projects seem to perpetuate the marginalisation of the poor and limit their access to employment and social services. Service delivery, for example remains to me optimised urban areas on the periphery. In 1994, the government committed itself to developing more liveable, equitable and sustainable cities. Key to this commitment was a more compact urban structure that could accommodate higher population densities. The strategy called for mixed land-use development, integrating land use and public planning to ensure more diverse responsive environments. Despite all these well-intended measures, the inequality and inefficiency of apartheid linger on.

4. Household Growth: Housing and Services Backlogs

Pillay *et al*. (2006:8) noted that South Africa has experienced a sharp decline in household size despite a marked increase in the number of households. The two descriptive are important because rapid population growth coupled with declining household size accentuates the housing and services backlogs in an area. Possible explanations for changes in household size include:

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[1] At the writing of this article, the 2011 census data and findings were not yet released.

- South Africa has a very young population and the rate at which younger people enter the housing market exceeds the growth rate of the general population, leading to smaller average household sizes;

- Migrants from South Africa's northern neighbours come as individuals and not necessarily as families, thus reducing the average household size;

- Reportedly, the National Treasury has suggested that the availability of the housing subsidy causes families to disperse, separate or live apart in order to obtain the subsidy.

4.1 Household Incomes

Households that have incomes above the margin are able to afford private housing and services Consequently, they are able to contribute to the tax base and pay municipal rates; this minimises the need for capital and operating subsidies for municipalities. The provision of social grants in South Africa has a perverse negative effect, because it tends to nurture dependency and discourage self-reliance. In 1994, the government spent R10 billion on social grants to support 2,6 million beneficiaries.[2] Owing to social grants there has been a decline in households with an income of less than R800 per month. On the one hand this is positive, but on the other hand a sense of dependency and entitlement has developed. Yet still, owing to ever-increasing unemployment there has been an increase in households with incomes of less than R3 500 ($412 USD).

4.2 Challenges to Urban Policy-Making

In the field of local government, the political environment is generally smaller but more intense, because local government is closer to the people. However, every community has its own political environment and that environment shapes the actions of a council and how it operates. Outside of formal political structures are the structures of civil society that insist on being heard. The elected councils have to determine policy in a political environment that is not only influenced by political parties, but also by the structures of civil society. An example of such a scenario is the informal settlement of Plastic View, near Moreleta Park in Pretoria. People moved in and occupied vacant land. Some moved to Plastic View because it was close to their workplaces, while others thought they would find work in the area or they could start informal businesses there. The municipality tried to intervene. However, civil society of Plastic View, which insisted on being heard, refused to be moved far away from their places of work and informal businesses. The municipality had no choice but to

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[2] Comparatively, the government supported 12,4 million social grant beneficiaries by 2009 (SouthAfrica.info, n.d.).

provide water tanks and communal ablution facilities (toilets), while trying to negotiate with the community to move. This example shows that it is difficult for government to maintain a viable urban policy because there are so many unexpected changes.

4.3 Socioeconomic Environment

The socioeconomic environment relates to the nature of a particular society in terms of social advantage, or disadvantage, and economic states. In a town or city, there are people ranging from well-educated and trained professionals who earn high salaries, people who have recently arrived from a rural area, and people who may never have received any formal education. Taken together, the social elements of a society are economically interdependent, but they are separated into economic classes by education, training and skills. Despite this, all people still need public goods and services from their local authority.

4.4 Public Needs

The South African population is a blend of races, societies and cultures, and the majority generally has fewer assets than the minority. This means that real public needs cannot be overlooked or ignored. If they are, the country will be consumed by negative dissatisfaction. While no single local authority can prevent this from happening, municipal administrators, by applying their professionalism and expertise, can bring public needs to the notice of the political decision-makers.

4.5 Interest Groups

Craythorne, (1997:91) states that the activities of interest groups should not be underestimated. This is indeed the case. Interest groups could be general or localised and parochial, such as ratepayer or resident associations. Local ratepayer associations tend not to be very that representative, but because they can influence the choice of candidates at election time, they often receive a careful hearing. In addition they represent a form of contact with the local population.

4.6 Laws and Controls

The laws passed and controls imposed by other spheres of government affect the making of policy at local government level. The more the law-giver places obligations on local government to follow particular policies, the less room there is available for municipalities to formulate their own policies. Likewise, where legislative and administrative controls are imposed, the result is the same. Excessive control and regulation not only deaden the ability of local councils to frame their own policies, but

also diffuse accountability and open the way for manipulation for ulterior purposes. Externally imposed laws and control are some of the biggest problems that have a huge impact on urban policy.

4.7 Physical Environment

The term physical environment is defined as the "aggregate of surrounding objects, conditions and influences that influence the life and habits of man or any other organism or collection of organisms" (Craythorne, 1997:94). A key phrase in this definition is the reference to influencing the "life and habits of man". A society that destroys its natural environment is a society permanently impoverished. The question arises: what does this have to do with urban policy-making? An informal settlement springs up next to a natural forest and the inhabitants start chopping down the bushes and trees for construction materials and firewood. The solution here would be to provide electricity to the shacks and to provide building timber at a minimum cost. In such a situation, financial resources need to be allocated to a problem that has just emerged. Firm leadership is required during such phases to ensure that only those solutions are identified that are practical, feasible and likely to solve the problem in the most satisfying way and with the means available. It is a frequent fault in the practice of public administration that officials promote solutions that strain resources and that, if accepted, leave little or no resources for the solution of other issues. South Africa simply does not have the resources to guarantee the standards and quality of service of advanced countries such as the United States of America. Sometimes, strange as it may sound, the ideal solution could be to do nothing and to leave the issue to the community or to be sorted by the rule of law.

5. Contextualising Challenges: Informal Settlements

When families move from rural areas to urban areas, they are always faced with the problem of finding housing. Firstly, the family must find and buy a piece of land – a building stand – on which to live. Secondly, the family must buy a house that may already have been built on the building stand selected. However, if there is no dwelling to live in, the family must build a house. Most people who move to urban areas are relatively poor or extremely poor, and they cannot buy land on which to build or a house. The result is that poor people settle on land belonging to municipal authorities, public bodies or private individuals. These people then construct buildings from all sorts of material that are often unsuitable for building purposes, for example tin, cardboard, pieces of plastic and low-quality wood. No provision is made for the proper division of the land into building stands and for streets and other essential services, such as water, electricity and rubbish removal. Cloete and Thornhill (2005:10) noted that it must be borne in mind that informal settlements provide homes for the poor. Such people have homes, even though these homes leave much to be desired,

where they have their friends and know their enemies. The inhabitants can also live cheaply, albeit possibly dangerously, because of unhealthy conditions in their settlements. Owing to the relatively low cost of living in such areas, the people reconcile themselves with the unsatisfactory surroundings where they have houses and enjoy essential services. When this stage is reached, the informal settlement is regarded as an established settlement, which often creates challenges for municipalities. Information on the number of people living in informal settlements is often limited, since inhabitants are often only inadequately covered by formal settlements. Challenges often arise when decisions have to be made about the number of people living in informal settlements and the environmental health risks they pose.

5.1 Johannesburg's Park Station

If people have to stay close together in large numbers in urban areas, it is essential that conditions that could possibly endanger them should not be allowed to develop. Therefore rules have been in all urban areas made to prevent people from constructing unsatisfactory houses or other buildings. However, even when such rules are enforced, it is possible, as the result of poverty, that people may neglect their houses or allow the buildings on their land to decay until they reach a stage where they are dangerous to live or work in. Neglected and unsatisfactory houses and other buildings can also result from economic and social changes in urban areas. For example, the area around Park (Transportation) Station in Johannesburg is surrounded by old decaying buildings that   are nearly inhabitable.

   A village grows into a town and over time into a city. The houses and buildings in the central area go out of fashion and may no longer be economically viable. The result is that these houses and other buildings in the central areas of the cities degenerate. In every urban area, the authorities are on the lookout to prevent properties from developing into slums. If the owner of the property that has become a slum neglects to carry out orders to repair and clean the property, he or she will eventually be ordered to break down the buildings and to clean up the stand on which the buildings stood. It is not as simple as it may seem, as there is often resistance from owners who provide a minimum maintenance and service support.

5.2 Knoppieslaagte – Laudium, South Africa

A vacant farm near an industrial park in Laudium, Gauteng Province, has been occupied by people in order to be near their places of work at the industrial park. Others who come from rural areas where there are no job opportunities work as domestic workers and gardeners. The government had no choice but to acquire the land from the farmers, who had to abandon their farms as a result of land invasions in the area. The local government, in partnership with other agencies, provided

communal toilets and mobile water tanks. The government is currently involved in a process to formalise the establishment of a township with the view to provide services such as the building of infrastructure (roads, health centres and the provision of electricity and water). Relevant departments have been instructed to make the necessary budgetary allocations to allow for the provision of services as soon as the land has formally been acquired and a township has been proclaimed.

5.3 Diepsloot Informal Settlement

Diepsloot, a former informal settlement west of Johannesburg, has recently developed into a big township. Some sections of Diepsloot are still informal settlements. Infrastructure developments such as roads, electricity and water are provided by different government departments in partnership with other agencies. Schools have recently been built. Owing to high rates of crime in the area, Diepsloot is in need of an operational police station. The nearest fully operational police station is more than eight kilometres away.

6. Olievenhoutbosch – Centurion, South Africa

The whole of Olievenhoutbosch (Oliven) was a vacant farm before an informal settlement was established there. Initially the Council of Centurion wanted to remove the squatters forcefully from the land, but their efforts were met with resistance. Olievenhoutbosch has now been acquired and proclaimed as a township. Large parts of Olievenhoutbosch are still underdeveloped and many residents still live in shacks. Houses (RDP houses) are slowly being provided and sites are allocated to those who can build their own houses. Banks such as Absa and property development companies are now providing mortgages on houses to those who have higher incomes. Roads, water and electricity are now provided, except in areas that are still considered to be informal.

7. Conclusion

In almost all the cases cited in the article, government does not seem to have a clear urban planning policy, but there is often reactionary response, as people invade land and refuse to be moved to alternative sites. There are often legal challenges with regard to forced removals and evictions. Sadly, during the 20th century people became urbanised to such an extent that most of them came to live in towns and cities, and as a result became dependent upon the goods and services provided by the local authorities. To counteract the influx of migrants, factors such decreasing job opportunities and decreasing employment in the cities, the prevalence of urban crime and violence, high infrastructure costs, the high cost of land and housing, and the continued social relationships with rural communities need to be considered by the

authorities who are designing policy. South Africa in particular is undergoing an accelerated phase of urbanisation, which means that cities are growing in size and larger cities will increasingly exhibit the symptoms of urban growth, such as large informal settlements, inner-city decay, pressure on the education and primary health systems and the like. The effect of this is an increasing need to consider and analyse urban policy realistically and in the light of the real circumstances. The real circumstances will largely turn on the needs of both informal settlements and leafy suburbs within the context of economic development and job creation, primary health care, housing provision, meeting recreational needs and effective law enforcement. There has been insufficient research into urbanisation patterns in the many years after 1994 and there are currently more questions than answers. Once there is a better idea of how migrants can be accommodated at their destinations most effectively, so that they can achieve their maximum economic potential as soon as possible, a new set of questions should be posed. Given these insights, the paucity of government information about different types of migration becomes a real constraint in the design of policy. There is simply not enough information about how many people are moving to different kinds of destinations, from where, for what reasons and what skills they have. It should also be noted that there is a growing trend towards reverse urbanisation, as people leave large cities and move to small towns in rural areas. Given this information, it is to be expected that it will be a demanding task for politicians, planners and administrators to find a system or a number of systems (or even a policy plan) for local government that will give general satisfaction and incorporate all these changes.

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