The South African Urban Renewal Programme (URP): Development of rural/urban nodes in the context of migration

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Urbanisation in South Africa

Urbanization trends in South Africa as in other countries are mainly driven by rural-urban migration, circular migration and natural growth. The rates of urbanization range between 3 and 5%.

In South Africa, due to the apartheid history, this reality coincidences with the fact that against great efforts taken by the government over the last decade apartheid townships and bigger urbanising agglomerations in former homelands are still suffering form huge public service back logs, further triggering the urban management challenge.

The aforementioned challenge is further amplified by the actuality that townships apart from hosting the majority of South African population and suffering from huge infrastructural back logs are increasingly netrecipients of migration flows both, rural-urban and circular.

Eventually, the concerted governmental efforts to increase service delivery at a rapid pace are more likely not to keep pace with the extent and the complexity of demand dynamics and to the contrary might contradict the efforts and achievements made to enhance the livelihoods of people in the townships.

Townships consequently possess a special disposition in the settlement pattern and play a vital role in development dynamics of South Africa.

The Role of Townships in the Context of Urbanisation and Migration

South African townships are densely populated areas with only rudimentary infrastructure remotely located in the vicinity of municipalities and in the outskirts of agglomeration areas.

The typical settlement pattern was less oriented to create “social environments” which might provide for livelihoods and “social identification” and “cultural expression” rather than to create geographically demarcated sub entities for to keep and to better administrate people.

Typical responses from the administrative and planning authorities to cope with huge infrastructure back logs usually take the form of bulk infrastructure provision and roll out of mass housing programmes in the absence of socio-economic amenities.
This practice very likely continues to promote dormitory types of settlements, hereby inhibiting the efforts to translate the new housing policy on sustainable human settlements into visible expressions of areas where people can live, play, work, and invest.

Because of the governance context under which townships have been created, South Africa’s townships remain symbolic to exclusion and poverty sustained by the widespread perception that they have no economic potential. However, numerous townships from across the country are known for their vibrancy in various aspects such as creative industries (arts & culture festivals, etc), mass transport activity (taxi industries), trade promotion (community markets) and cultural heritage promotion (emerging tourism industries).

Besides the persistent problematic it is therefore of utmost important to point out the vital role townships are playing for growths and stability in South Africa as they are the sites of transformation par excellence and can be labeled as laboratories of social and economic transformation and factories of democratization.

The aforementioned highlights the importance of coordinated governmental activities to concentrate on these areas. It also adds to the notion of localising migration policy as successful migration depends on “invitation and integration of people” and therefore is to be decided on local level where people could be personally reached.

The community is the arena to mobilise public participation and to improve local engagement of migrants and migrants self-organisations. The Neighbourhood is the stage for individual encounter, communication, sharing of experiences, creation of mutual visions and to start off joint actions for better livelihoods.

Accordingly municipalities should be encouraged and supported to deal proactively with public participation and migration especially in their townships as successful urbanisation in South Africa to a very high degree will be determined by successful transformation of apartheid townships and former homeland areas to “functional urban areas”, following the definition of “sustainable human settlements” (UN-Habitat).

By accepting this view, governmental structures and governance consequently have to be designed and set-up in a cooperative manner in all three spheres of government – national, provincial, local –, which clearly acknowledges the pressure on the local level and puts major emphasize on strengthening and capacitating municipalities in municipal services, area-based development, local economic development, public participation and engagement with civil society.
**INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES - BUILDING SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE CITIES**

Integrated development programmes are key in this respect. Since 1994, townships have started to receive the attention of Government in the form of the following time-bound pilot initiatives:

- The Special Integrated Presidential Projects (SIPPs) launched by President Nelson Mandela during his May 1994 State of the Nation Address, within the first 100 days of SA’s first democratic administration, as part of a broader set of lead programmes under the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

- The launch of the Urban Renewal Programme (URP) and its rural nexus, the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP), by President Mbeki in his 2001 State of the Nation Address to conduct a sustained campaign against rural and urban poverty and underdevelopment, bringing in the resources of all three spheres of government in a co-ordinated manner. The URP as a strategy is routed through local municipalities, using mechanisms of Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) as provided for in the Municipal Systems Act (2002).

- More recently (in 2006), the above presidential initiatives were flanked by the creation of another grant-based and time-bound initiative which is administered by National Treasury, namely, the Neighborhood Development Partnership Grant (NDPG), designed to support infrastructure development projects in townships.

The programmes distinctively highlight the importance of investment in infrastructure, governance reforms and systems reforms to initiate infrastructure-led economic growth.

They seek to enhance the institutionalization of an integrated approach to how government operates, to elevate Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) to influence resource allocation across all three spheres of government and to allow for tangible results and visual spatial impact.

The overall objective is to provide basic public services and to transfer the current situation of spatial marginalisation of townships in relation to the related cities into a pattern of spatial integration (desired endpoint); thus laying ground for the creation of single economic entities and social inclusion.

Central to the success is the need to integrate, cooperate and coordinate the investments made by the public sector. Fulfillment deserves a coherent strategically oriented area-based development approach as reference point for greater budget allocation and in addition improved capacities and efficiency in terms of implementation of projects.
As such, all departments, especially those that render services and interface with local governments, have to be active participants in the programmes relating to innovation in project conceptualisation, planning, financing and implementation.

Moving away from the notion that township renewal is a challenge to be addressed by government, both programmes emphasize the mobilization of resources and actors beyond government itself.

**THE SOUTH AFRICAN URBAN RENEWAL PROGRAMME (URP)**

In the context of integrated development programmes, the Urban Renewal Programme focuses on eight urban townships (so-called “urban nodes”), but the learning from these nodes is intended to improve the manner in which government support townships renewal across the country.

The “characteristic features” of the selected urban renewal nodes are:

- Apartheid townships, poverty and high crime,
- formal engineering infrastructure installed but decayed and in need of rehabilitation/upgrading,
- majority formal housing stock but also an informal housing component,
- need for substantial improvements in maintenance and operating,
- low in internal economic opportunities,
- low education and skills levels of resident population and
- poorly connected to surrounding neighbourhoods.

Given the characteristics of the townships selected, the agenda for the Urban Renewal Programme is physical and social re-engineering to break the inheritance of the past.

By the end of the programme, the intention is for township renewal support to become mainstreamed as a government function and for government policies and programmes to reflect more effective support for townships.

Therefore one central concern is to explore how to use intervention approaches to drive change in areas with unique developmental challenges such as urban townships.

The above outcome of was flanked by the following sub-outcomes:

- Intra-area mobility and integration of the areas (townships into the city) – focusing on socio-political integration, economic integration and spatial integration.
- Enhanced autonomy of nodal areas (townships) by improving intra-area access to services, infrastructure and information.
- Enhanced human and social capital, focusing on crime and violence, education and skills, local economies and capacity of local institutions.

- Greater connectivity – including enhanced intra-area circulation of purchasing power, increased generation and capture of savings. Connectivity also relates to increased access to governmental services.

In order to achieve these sub-outcomes, the following types of interventions were identified to guide practitioners working in the URP nodes:

- Crowding in of public investment
- Intergovernmental planning
- Area-based planning and budgeting
- Partnerships
- Community participation

Essentially, the above types of interventions are a set of process methodologies and intergovernmental approaches on how to achieve the following:

- To coordinate plans and budgets – vertically, horizontally and geographically;

- To share a local development perspective and pertaining risks between government, private sector and local communities in a particular geographic area (node); and

- To create legitimacy for development choices of a particular geographic area by involving the resident communities across the entire scale of development activities.

While the designated host municipalities started giving effect to the above intent through various activities, the programme concept has received a more structured shape only a few years later after inception, namely through the release of a URP Implementation Framework (dplg 2006). In the latter the chief outcome of urban renewal interventions was identified as the need to:

“... ensure that the majority of South African citizens who are residents of townships are enabled to move from the lock-in of the second economy into the opportunities of the first economy”. 
THE URBAN RENEWAL PROGRAMME IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION

As mentioned before, internal migration, whether rural-urban, within the urban areas or circular migration, is the main contributor to the process of urbanization in South African.

Townships are the catchment points for migrants, however they are primarily perceived as first entrance and potential gateways to a better life and economic prosperity people seek to find in primary cities and far less as desired areas for long-term settlement.

The main concern of people migrating is to „maximise family household livelihoods“. Migrants therefore in many cases stay attached to their home region and migration is temporarily or circular.

What might at first sight look like a benefit for both regions (sending labour and receiving money) in the long run might have a boomerang effect and add to social and economic destabilisation.

Migrants who stay closely connected and emotionally attached to their home regions are reluctant to establish permanent and thus predictable household structures, to invest and to engage themselves socially and politically in the “place of work”. Sometimes family structures deteriorate, are built up a new or are even doubled and tripled eventually causing short cuts in social and economic support, as social safeguarding basically depends on family support.

The aforementioned circumstances negatively contributing to the fact that receiving areas of migration are sometimes limited in benefiting from migration, e.g. influx of skilled labour and innovation potential to unlock development.

To turn around the wheel it is essential that municipalities at both ends of the migration lines or circles are encouraged and capacitated to endeavor for social and economic inclusion. Accompanied by a concerted effort for better public service delivery and new partnerships which might bear the potential to create ownership and provide for job opportunities.

The main focus of Urban Renewal Programme is the renewal of townships in the sense of spatial, social and economic integration.

Township renewal in a wider sense could and should be interpreted as the design and creation of human settlements and the provision of livelihood opportunities to make townships a place where people can and are attracted to live, play, work and invest.

One of the major issues in this respect for townships in South Africa is better service delivery, connectivity and job creation which in short sum up to: the provision of ample technical and social infrastructure and transport in an environmentally friendly and thus sustainable way, which may account for predictable household structures and stimulate private investment and political engagements of both inhabitants and newcomers (migrants).
By nature, it is a very complex task requiring a holistic and area-based approach for development by all relevant actors on municipal and provincial level (e.g. politicians, officials, and the community).

The essential challenges are coherent with topics discussed for successful migration policy as there are:

- Land Management and Real Estate
- Provision of infrastructure
- Integration of informal housing and economies
- Public participation, community building and mutual engagement
- Social networking and local economic development
- Local crisis prevention and management systems (Xenophobia)

In short: transformation or renewal of townships and successful migration are inseparable; both related and interdependent.

**THE TECHNICAL SUPPORT FACILITY TO THE URP**

The overall objective of the contract was to improve the effectiveness of cooperation across government spheres and sectors relating to urban renewal – leading to a more enabling environment for urban renewal in selected urban nodes:

The project had three specific objectives:

1. To strengthen the Urban Renewal Programme within all three spheres of government;
2. To improve inter-governmental relations leading to a focused support to the nodes from provincial and local government;
3. To disseminate and incorporate learning into provincial and national programmes and strategies to establish a viable system of institutional learning.

Accordingly, the programme had three main layers of interventions and result areas respectively, these are:

1. To develop and build capacity in the areas of strategic and systems development (Result Area 1: Improved Policies / Strategies).
2. To set up, operate and integrate ways of accessing and providing resources to the nodes from the provincial and national departments; (Result Area 2: Coordination Mechanism and Integration).
3. To set up, operate and integrate systems and services for knowledge and information management. (Result Area 3: Learning and Knowledge Management).

The TSF contribution was primarily directed towards CGTA (former dplg), and the Eastern Cape Province (Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs). During implementation, stronger links and more direct forms of cooperation and support were formed with the municipalities of Nelson Mandela Bay (Port Elizabeth) and Buffalo City (East London) with their selected urban nodes of Motherwell and Mdantsane.

One of the challenges with integrated or multi-sector programmes like the URP and the ISRDP is to ensure better monitoring & evaluation so that learning and achievements can be better recognized and strategically guided to initiate a more self-sustained and less state-driven approach.

The TSF during its lifespan has elaborated a range of knowledge products to encounter that challenge comprising of:

(i) URP Knowledge Management Framework;
(ii) Mainstreaming Guide to Urban Renewal;
(iii) Monitoring Guide for multi-sector programmes like the URP and
(iv) “Creating Competence for Urban Renewal” training module.

The set is complemented by the “Township Transformation Timeline”, an advocacy tool based on a documentation of the history of townships and their evolution, using a time line methodology, in a manner that increases understanding on how townships can be best transformed and integrated into the urban framework and to position townships in on-going and future policy debates and agenda-setting platforms and processes.”

Noting the “imperative for delivery” and the significance of a strategically-oriented, coherent and cooperative government approach for public sector investment as well as improved efficiency in terms of budget allocation and implementation of projects as outlined before, three approaches which the TSF elaborated together with the partners on national, provincial and municipal level should be accentuated.

1) Area-based Development Approach

Area-based development conceived as a holistic approach to development is one of the key drivers for social inclusion, investment attraction and job creation. The success principles are the following:

- area-based development strategy
- people-driven approach, champions
- anchor and catalytic projects
✓ intergovernmental cooperation and information management
✓ integrated, well coordinated service delivery

Sharing a local development perspective and strategy as well as creating legitimacy for development choices through participation and ownership could be stipulated as the centerpiece of the area-based development approach and principal to establish “sustainable human settlements”.

(2) Sector Master Plan Approach

The sector master plan approach broadly defined is a tool for management, dialogue and participation which supports the elaboration of realistic implementation plans in coherence with the area-based development strategy. It visualises different budgeted sector interventions and their eventual spatial impact, assists in integrated planning and inform council of development priorities. A handful of priority sectors could be selected, around which the sector master plan is designed. This will put emphasis on a few sectors, where the backlog is particularly large and communicate the respective urgency to the political leadership of the municipality. In the end the sector master plans would serve as a handle to allocate funding not only per ward but more strategically across the township.

(3) Catalytic Project Approach

The sector master plan should then focus on ‘catalytic’ projects in each of the priority sectors, which are then packaged for implementation during the next two to five years. The applied criteria, as proposed by the TSF, included alignment with the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), assessments of their state of readiness, their potential of being catalytic projects and the availability of seed funding from municipal line departments for the project. For the allocation of provincial funds, the provincial Department of Local Government could implement the policy of only funding projects that have been assessed as being catalytic and which form part of the IDP.

The combination of the three aforementioned approaches could go a long way in substantiating the IDPs, better aligning provincial funds to the IDP cycle and also in aligning provincial support to the municipal priorities. The model of the project life cycle applied to catalytic projects would assist staff in monitoring project implementation and spending of funds.

CONCLUSIONS AND STATEMENTS

The preceding explanations and experiences gained throughout project implementation are summarized for discussion in the following statements:

→ Urbanisation in South Africa could be equalized with township renewal or transformation;
→ Townships are the main catchment points of migration, rural-urban, in between urban agglomerations and circular migration;
Migration dynamics and a huge backlog in infrastructure and public service delivery in the influx areas accumulate to high socio-political, socio-economic and environmental pressure;

Townships are sites of transformation par excellence and can be labeled as laboratories of social and economic transformation and factories of democratization;

Townships therefore possess a unique disposition in the settlement pattern and play a vital to crucial role in development and migration dynamics of South Africa;

Land management and an area-based approach to development is essential for spatial, social and economic integration (part of migration policies) and provides a terrain for public participation, discourses, and empowerment;

Customized urban design of neighbourhoods and public space and intra-area access and connectivity to public services and information are significant means to overcome the structure of exclusion;

Successful migration depends on “invitation and integration of people” and therefore is to be decided on local level where people could be personally reached.

Community building and new forms of partnerships for development are preconditions for enhancing participation, engagement and self-organisation of residents and new-comers (migrants);

Culture is a vehicle for integration: cultural expression and sharing of traditions can create a bridge to increase perception and understanding of one another, thus paving the way to peaceful cohabitation;

Central to the success is the need to integrate, co-operate and co-ordinate the investments made by the public sector.

Greater ownership by municipalities for area-based programmes is another critical precondition for success as they are the ones to steer the process;

The basic principles and approaches for township renewal apply for both, urban and rural areas;

The former dichotomy of urban and rural areas will be eventually dissolved by migration, circular migration, increasing commuting distances and poly-centric agglomerations and urban sprawl.