

The orderly urbanisation policy and the plight of the urban poor

The urban Witwatersrand has changed dramatically over the years. The new actors in the urban environment are the squatters and the poor.

Homeless people are vulnerable and powerless. The government's orderly urbanisation policy should be applying urgent methods to alleviate the existing crisis of the homeless. Instead, the processes and policies are making some things worse. The squatter, slums, health and building standards laws and the immediately apparent obstacles around land may yet ensure that many poor people do not have access to permanent and affordable land and shelter.

This article, written by the Community Research and Information Network (CRIN) and the Black Sash Urban Removals and Homelessness group, looks at the implementation and consequences of the urbanisation policy and suggests some urgent recommendations in response to the serious situation.

It is estimated that 1,6 to 2,4 million people in the PWV area presently live unlawfully in shacks, garages and informal settlements. There is a need for between 300 000 to 450 000 additional housing units (equal to roughly half the existing number of 650 000 units).

The above figures are probably underestimates in that they do not include all people wanting homes; domestic workers who presently live with their families unlawfully in servants' quarters, people living on farms and smallholdings, people living in hostels who would like to have their families from rural areas with them and the estimated 70 000 people living unlawfully in the "grey" areas.

The number of homeless people is not explained by the mass migration to the PWV since influx control was lifted. Our case studies (which began before the lifting of influx control) show that the majority of homeless people are the result of the natural growth of the existing population. (Their present living conditions are the result of years of neglect on the part of the authorities since housing development in the region was frozen

in the 1950s). Many others have been here for between 5 and 15 years, indicating the failure of influx control to prevent people moving to the cities for a long period before it was abolished.

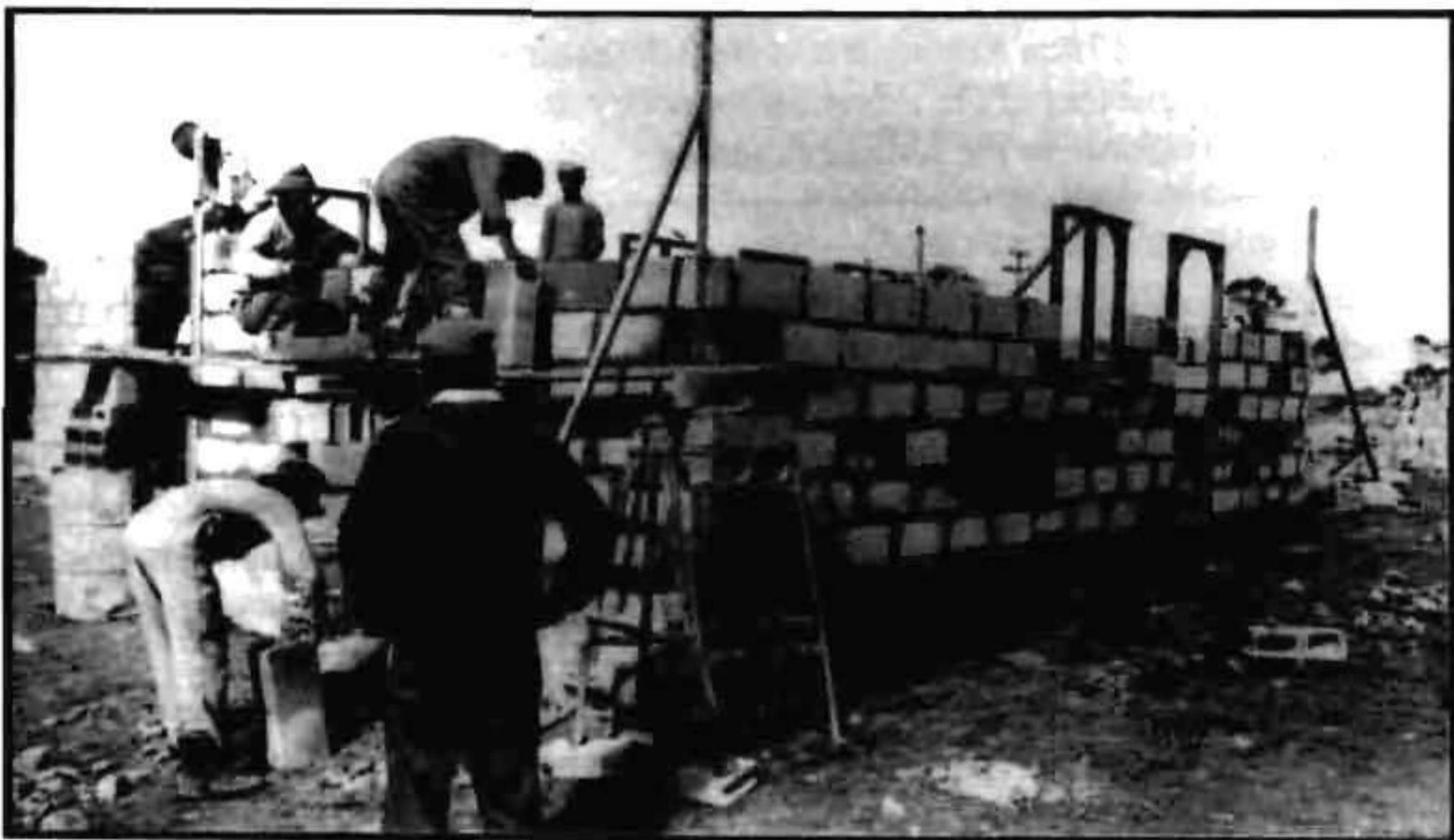
A further increase in population on the Witwatersrand will have radical implications if the needs of such people are not addressed. It is expected that in the next 11 years, the black population may increase at the rate of 5% annually, while all other groups may increase at the rate of 1% - 1,5% annually. At present there are about 5,5 million people living in the region. This will increase to about 8 million by the year 2 000.

Income figures of homeless people vary greatly. We found most homeless families of six persons have a monthly income of between R150 - R400. Most people requiring a place to live will not even be able to buy serviced stands costing R6 000, let alone privatised housing at R20 000 and more.

Failure of the government's orderly urbanisation policy to adequately meet this challenge will have obvious consequences. Besides land invasion, there will be stress placed on already overburdened services - housing, health, education, childcare, transport and recreation.

The present urbanisation policy and its implementation

Two features of the government's White Paper on Urbanisation (1986) illustrate its "orderly urbanisation" policy.



There is an urgent need for up to 450 000 housing units in the PWV area alone.



Much of the housing being built at present is unaffordable to many people.

1. Positive features

These include the acceptance of the permanence of black people in white urban areas (with the abolition of influx control); the recognition that land has to be made available, and that existing housing standards have to be reviewed (which implies a potential acceptance of informal housing).

2. Control elements

Residential segregation is to be maintained (the Group Areas Act stays); central government maintains control over the amount and situation of land to be allocated (the Land Acts are not abolished). Strong measures are used to prevent squatting: the punitive provisions in squatting legislation were tightened in 1989 and greater control of slums is planned with the slums legislation currently being amended. The principle that black local authorities and residents must pay the full costs of land, services and housing is also firmly established.

Implementation of government urban policy and its problems

An announcement by the Minister of Constitutional Development and Planning in June 1988 identified substantial amounts of land (for the first time since the 1950s) for black urban residential development. If all this land (some 42 600 ha) was immediately available for occupation, some 3 million people would find a place to live. There are, however, major obstacles to this.

Firstly, not all this land is suitable for development, being too expensive, and because portions of it are of dolomite stone. Secondly, much of the land is too far for easy and affordable access to urban facilities. It is, therefore, too costly to service cheaply enough for poor people who are, in terms of the policy, expected to pay for the full costs of it. Thirdly, land set aside is insufficient.

In addition, substantial resources for the upgrading of existing townships, mainly through the Regional Services Councils (RSC), has occurred. To date there has been no indication of whether and how funds from this source are to assist informal settlement. Also, the private sector and organisations such as the South African Housing Trust are participating in the housing delivery process at the upper and middle income levels. Some, although very limited, recognition of the need for basic site and service schemes with tenure has occurred.

In the south

Of a total of 66 000 stands made available for black residential development in the south, only 5 300 (approximately 8%) fall into the category for poor people. Another 25 000 of the total will be developed by the SA Housing Trust and may cost R13 - R18 000 for the site and house.

The first Section two 6A areas (for informal settlement in terms of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act) are being developed. Orange Farm, developed by the Transvaal Provincial Administration, has 4 300 stands of 210 square metres each, costing R500 to buy or R10 to rent. Services charges cost about R13,50 per month. While there is one tap per thirty sites, graded roads, a bin per unit and rubbish removal, there is no electricity. At Evaton North, developed by the Evaton City Council, there are 1 000 stands, each with water and a toilet, at a cost of R7 500 per stand, plus service charges ranging from R50 per month. High mast lighting is provided.

Official estimates are of 30 807 shacks in this area - with about 185 000 people needing a lawful place to live. It is unlikely that more than 30% of these can afford the privatised housing being made available - indeed, some will be displaced by this housing since they are living on the land that is to be developed. In addition, it is proposed that squatters from the north, in Alexandra and Sandton, be relocated to Orange Farm.

In the West

Land was identified for the expansion of Soweto but has been found to contain dolomite, making large portions of it unsuitable for residence. The opening of 621 ha in the west at Rietvalei, south of Kagiso, which would have included some sites for squatters from Roodepoort and Krugersdorp, has fallen through because mining titles apply which do not permit the use of most of this land for residential development. The small portion left is badly located and expensive to develop. Official figures, however unreliable, indicate an immediate need for some 55 302 dwellings for some 331 812 people on the near West Rand.

In the East

An informal settlement of approximately 5 000 stands is being opened in the east at Rietfontein. At the time of writing, shackdwellers from Dunusa/Pola Park (next to Thokoza) and also from Kallehong are moving here, further away from work opportunities.

The urbanisation policy at work

1. Privatisation of housing

Since the early 1980s the government has claimed that the provision of housing for blacks is the responsibility of the private sector. Developers have snatched up what land has been made available to supply houses costing in excess of R20 000. At least 70% of the region's population cannot afford these houses.

In situations such as Alexandra, where compulsory upgrading is being applied, the system for the privatisation of housing may result in people losing their existing homes through inability to pay for them. They, together with tenants in the yards and shackdwellers, will not find a place to live in Alexandra, or anywhere else close by, as no land for low-income settlement has been identified in the north.

2. "Negotiated" resettlement

Although forced removals are no longer government policy, it is clear that people are going to be moved. For example, it is stated policy that squatters at Weilers' Farm are to be moved to Orange Farm. People will be squeezed out of Alexandra and are being told they can go to the already quota-filled Orange Farm about 50 km south from where they currently live, since no land for black informal settlement has been identified in the

north. Squatters from Thokoza, Katlehong and Mshenguville are reported to be due for removal. 1 000 stands at Orange Farm have been set aside for Mshenguville families. (There are about 3 000 families in Mshenguville.)

There are no known instances to date of plans to upgrade existing informal settlements outside of black areas. There have been reports, however, that "emergency camps" in Soweto, such as Tladi, will be upgraded.

3. The emphasis on the creation of "viable" urban communities

The implication of this is that urban residents must pay the full costs of land (services and housing) and that black local authorities must be financially viable, administratively sound and politically acceptable. This fits in with the constitutional proposals to include blacks living in white areas into the parliamentary structures.

This strategy involves the upgrading of historically neglected existing areas, such as Alexandra. It is policy too, that new development areas be incorporated into existing local authority areas. Low-income people within their jurisdiction would, in time, have to be upgraded to conform to local authority standards. The costs of this would have to be borne by the local authority and residents. Furthermore, the rent paying capacity of low-income people would be low. These factors have led to the resistance of local authorities being saddled with informally housed settlers, who are going to be a drain on resources and will adversely affect middle class hopes and image.

The poor will be unable in most instances to afford compulsory upgrading. Already the costs being levied on the residents at Orange Farm, for pitifully little services, are 3,5 times that paid for by citizens of amply serviced Johannesburg. The residents of these areas will be vulnerable again - this time to eviction for non-payment of costs they cannot afford. Some consequences of this process of squeezing out the poor are possible boycotts, and further invasion of land as people leave the untenable circumstances they find themselves in to try to find shelter for themselves and their families. The following high-priority issues need to be identified and addressed:

- land: faster delivery in greater quantity, closer to the urban areas;
- affordability of land and services: reassessment of the principle of "viable" local authorities; engagement of central government, province and Regional Service Councils in subsidies;
- access to finance for housing and land: consideration of one-off subsidies for serviced land;
- legitimisation of existing informal settlements and access to financing for upgrading these, where possible, where they have developed.

The obvious bottom line in the accommodation of homeless people on the Witwatersrand is the removal of discriminatory land acts and the Group Areas Act. While this may help alleviate market distortions, it will not in itself be the answer to the gigantic

housing shortage, nor will it meet the challenge of large-scale urbanisation within the region.

As a result of the historically unequal distribution of resources as well as land speculation (i.e. buying land at low cost and then selling it for very high prices when it becomes urgently needed), the high cost of land puts housing way out of reach of even middle let alone low income homeless people. Active intervention by government is required to acquire land and to stop further speculation, e.g. by price freezing, vacant land tax and land banking.

Furthermore, because of the high prices at which land will be acquired, consideration should be given to subsidizing it and the cost of infrastructure, so that people can buy land and be able to retain it. In the present circumstances it is more than likely that many people may lose their newly-acquired homes through inability to maintain payments even of the initial costs and service charges, let alone costs of upgrading in time.

Unless steps such as those suggested above are put in motion, we face the prospect of large-scale, uncontrolled invasion of land throughout the region, conflict between squatters/tenants and landowners and officials, and general insecurity among the homeless and the settled population. The consequences of this are huge both in terms of health (increased curative and preventative measures) and in social terms (crime and instability).

Further reading

1. *Informal Settlers: South Africa's New City Builders*. Ann Bernstein, Optima. Vol 37 (No.1): pages 18 et seq.
2. *Nearly an A-Z Guide to Homelessness on the Witwatersrand*: Black Sash Urban Removals and Homelessness Group and Community Research and Information Network, February 1989, pages 8-11.

This article is adapted from the "Nearly A-Z Guide to Homelessness on the Witwatersrand" compiled by Community Research and Information Network (CRIN) and Black Sash Urban Removals and Homelessness Group.

Key policy issues for South Africa's rapidly urbanising population

- The state and local authorities must acknowledge the real size and growth of urban and peri-urban populations.
- The state must provide accurate predictions of population trends as well as intra-urban differentials (i.e. the different health care needs in different communities and classes) to adequately allocate resources.
- There is a need to breakdown local authority fragmentation from multiple single-race councils into one local authority in each metropolitan area, for efficient functioning.
- There is a need to reduce the number of teaching hospitals in each metropolitan area and to desegregate all hospitals.
- There is a need for a national health service to cope with the health needs of impoverished, unemployed and indigent people that cannot afford private health care. The state should not allow the public sector to deteriorate by the selling off of hospitals to the private sector or by loss of personnel to the private sector.
- Curative and preventative components of health care should not be fragmented into provincial and local government departments. Local authorities should provide both components.
- Local authorities need to accept responsibility for the provision of adequate water, sanitation, waste disposal and electrification of areas under their jurisdiction as important health requirements.

(These points have been collated by Max Price, Centre for the Study of Health Policy.)