

Sustainable medium-density housing

A resource book



Anzabeth Tonkin

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Development Action Group

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Development Action Group (DAG) is a non-governmental organization working, since 1986, to support and empower poor communities in need of adequate housing. DAG supports communities in need of adequate housing to lead, and engage with, their own development by enhancing their capacity and resourcefulness. This is enriched by undertaking research, training, lobbying and advocacy activities that contribute to urban development discourse and which influences policy and practice.

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- Officials of the Provincial Government of the Western Cape; and
- Officials of the City of Cape Town.

FOREWORD

Since the inception of the mandate of the right to adequate housing in 2000, the Special Rapporteur has advocated, through reports and activities, a broad interpretation of the right to adequate housing. This approach has been articulated in the definition developed: *“The human right to adequate housing is the right of every woman, man, youth and child to gain and sustain a safe and secure home and community in which to live in peace and dignity”*. The Special Rapporteur has worked on various elements of the right to adequate housing; identifying several elements that provide a more complete conception of this right, also taking into account its civil and political rights dimension. These elements, in their entirety, form the basis of a methodology that could be applied to assess both the realization and the extent of violations of the human right to adequate housing. Among these elements, location is crucial since a house is not four walls and a roof, but implies adequate access to sources for livelihood as well as economic and human development opportunities.

According to the South African Cities Network - State of the Cities Report 2006¹, *“Over the past decade, housing and service delivery interventions for the poor have continued to perpetuate apartheid urban form. This has resulted in the creation of large dormitory settlements of low-cost mass housing on the urban periphery where the price of land is cheap. These areas are typically far from economic opportunity and have limited and expensive transport access. They also tend to reinforce the segregation of the city along racial and income lines. This is likely to trap people in poverty and impose long-term social costs. (...) In an attempt to address the ongoing challenge of apartheid urban form, municipalities are placing an increasing emphasis on “integrated human settlement” in the approach to housing the poor. These efforts are focused on facilitating denser, better-located, mixed-income, environmentally sustainable government-assisted housing in line with the Breaking New Ground strategy. But there is still considerable work to be done in developing the policy, regulatory and financial instruments required for this approach to be implemented at a meaningful scale.”*

The Development Action Group’s Medium-Density Housing Resource Book is precisely devoted to provide information and analysis towards the production of affordable medium density housing – a necessary strategy to overcome the peripherization of low-cost housing, using local and international experiences. Political commitment combined with serious research and dissemination efforts is crucial to overcome the present constraints of sustainable housing and urban policies.

Raquel Rolnik

United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing

¹ Department Provincial and Local Government Republic of South Africa (DPLG), South Africa Local Government Association (SALGA), Cities Alliance, Swedish International Development Assistance (SIDA), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA).

SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This resource book aims to inform the creation of physical and social urban spaces, places and processes for human beings to interact with each other in environments that meet their needs. It is a tool for DAG, other non-government organisations (NGOs), community based organisations, community leaders, government officials and anyone interested in the support, design and implementation of affordable higher-density housing.

I. Why densify?

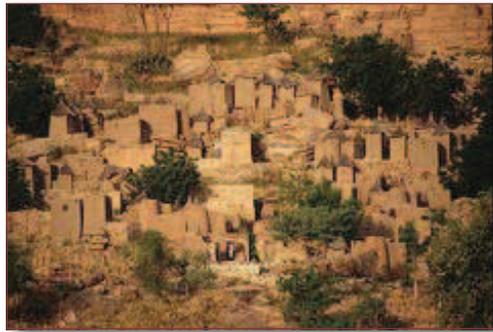
South Africa's settlement problems are a legacy of the colonial, apartheid and modernist systems, which used housing as an instrument of separation, segregation and economic deprivation. Our urban landscape is characterised by a lack of social and class integration, inequality of urban opportunities and a limited range of types of housing. Moreover, housing instruments are not able to cope effectively with growing demand. South African cities have some of the lowest urban densities in the world and the low-density, sprawling nature of the contemporary city stands in the way of attaining good urban quality, integration, sustainability and equity. The housing rights of the poor are compromised by sprawling, low-density settlements and a lack of affordable housing opportunities in well-located areas has thus relegated them to the urban periphery. People living in peripheral dormitory suburbs have to commute to their places of employment in well-located areas at great costs to themselves, government, the environment and South African society.

An increasing awareness of the ecological impacts of our cities requires that the ecological footprints of urban areas are reduced by limiting the amount of land required to support each individual's consumption; this includes the use of land for housing. Increasing urban densities can mitigate sprawl and lead to lower land use requirements. Studies have found that when residential density was doubled, private transportation could be reduced by as much as 20-30%.¹

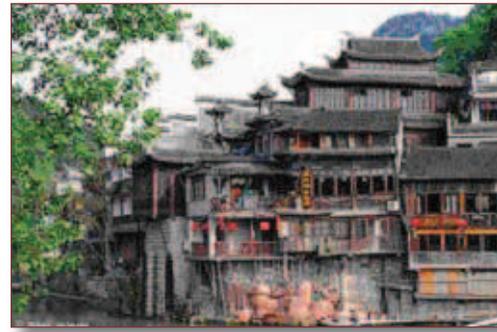
Without addressing the over-consumption of the developed world, the needs of the developing world will not be met without seriously jeopardising its survival. The industrialised countries (usually referred to as 'the North', and including Australia and New Zealand), consume excessive quantities of global resources, including land. A child born in an industrialised country will consume thirty to forty times more than a child born in a developing country, and in particular, fifteen times more paper, eighty times more energy and ten times more steel. The citizens of developed countries are responsible for 80% of the total global resource consumption, 75% of municipal and industrial waste, and 80% of carbon-dioxide emissions. Therefore, the real root of the problem, which is the unequal distribution of resource consumption and production, is still not being addressed.² However, the provision of medium-density housing presents opportunities for the efficient use of land as a scarce resource, and the strategic location of medium-density housing in locations providing high levels of urban opportunities will address issues of equity and sustainability.

Throughout this resource book 'medium-density housing' refers to increased gross residential density in urban areas by means of formal housing development. Medium-density housing, defined in terms of dwelling units per hectare (du/ha), is located at approximately 40–100 du/ha (gross). The dwelling types typically associated with residential densification referred to in the book are semi-detached housing, row housing, and three-storey walk-up flats.

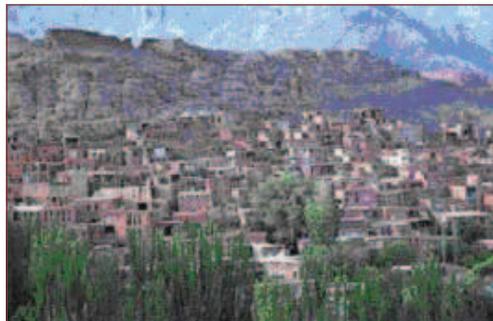
The provision of medium-density housing will create more sustainable human settlements, as was achieved in ancient cities where most housing was higher-density, creating vibrant, mixed-use environments close to fresh produce and other markets, major routes, and entertainment.



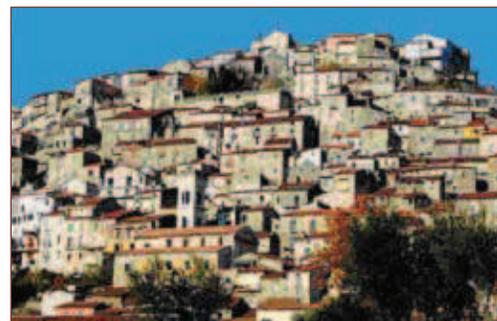
'Dogon Village' (Mali) by John Spooner. Uploaded 26 February 2007.



'Ancient Phoenix City, Hunan Province, China' by Steen Heilesen. Uploaded 7 May 2007.



'Iran, Abyaneh' by oriana.italy(away). Uploaded 19 April 2007.



'Padula – Country – Italy' by RayDS. Uploaded 1 December 2006.



'Newmexico-135' by marvin m. Uploaded October 2007.

Examples of higher-density housing from around the world³

2. About the resource book

DAG compiled this resource book as a study into the conditions required for sustainable and affordable medium-density housing, based on its strategic imperatives of supporting pro-poor urban development praxis and inclusive participatory development. This resource book is a response to the urgent need to develop new and improved skills in and approaches to the planning and design of sustainable housing environments, as well as a comprehensive understanding of the needs of housing end-users.

Motivated by its vision of the creation of sustainable human settlements through development processes which enhance human rights, dignity and equity, DAG set out to investigate the contributions of medium-density housing to its vision for South African society. DAG ascertained that medium-density housing provides a strong impetus for the creation of sustainable human settlements and identified the preconditions for development of such housing. The findings presented in this resource book resonate with DAG's mission to create, implement and support opportunities for community-centred settlement development and to advocate for and foster a pro-poor policy environment which addresses economic, social and spatial imbalances.

The purpose of the resource book is threefold:

1. To explore the preconditions underlying well functioning medium-density projects that are home to healthy, happy residents.
2. To create awareness of the importance of replicating these preconditions in housing projects.
3. To explore how affordable housing for lower and middle-income households on well-located land contributes to the overall sustainability of South African settlements.

The resource book reflects on data gathered in the period between June 2004 and April 2008. Primary and secondary research methodologies were used, including:

- a review of government policy documents and housing and urban development related literature;
- interviews with stakeholders involved in housing delivery, including consultants, project managers, relevant government officials, non-government and community based organisations (NGOs and CBOs);
- focus group discussions;
- investigations of projects; and
- surveys of residents.

Research into international and South African medium-density housing projects, as well as an overview of the South African housing context and pertinent literature were used to formulate guidelines for the provision of sustainable medium-density housing. Eight medium-density housing projects in South Africa were investigated, based on selection criteria which included location, size, tenure type, housing typology, delivery mechanism and household income. Housing typologies include three- to four-storey walk-ups, row housing, semi-detached and quad housing. Tenure types comprise individual ownership, social rental, co-operative housing, instalment sale (eventual ownership) and sectional title. Field research involved visits to housing projects in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Gauteng. Interviews were conducted with 40 resident households from each project. Although comprehensive information on international best practice examples of sustainable medium-density housing was particularly difficult to obtain, especially for projects in South America, nonetheless three international case studies were documented.

Throughout the resource book reference is made to the eleven case studies presented in the book. Specific discussions relating to the case studies are indicated by the following 'icons' for easy reference.

ST	Springfield Terrace	SV	Sakhasonke Village
CG	Carr Gardens	N2	N2 Gateway - Joe Slovo (Phase 1)
NU	Newtown Urban Village	WH	Washington Heights
SR	Stock Road Housing	VA	Vashi
MV	Missionvale	VI	Vitas
SM	Samora Machel		

Some argue that:

*“ ... professional attitude towards designing for the poor is questionable, and the resultant places as part of the face of the city are an aspect that needs to be corrected, through research, to understand the appropriate development concept that reflects people’s behaviour in space, activities and appropriate response to context and the environment”.*⁴

This requires that role players have an informed understanding of the norms and values of the society and of the communities they are concerned with, and make decisions based upon their understanding of the benefits and disadvantages of densely occupied urban environments.⁵ This resource book seeks to inspire an understanding and utilisation of the processes and principles underpinning sustainable and vibrant mixed-use, mixed-income, higher-density environments.

Table I: Summary of some key learnings emanating from the case studies

 <p>Springfield Terrace Cape Town</p> <p>ST</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An infill approach to urban development. New housing was provided on well-located but under-utilised land within the existing urban fabric, thereby restarting a land market on land effectively removed from the urban land supply. • Sectional title is deemed a complex tenure form but presents opportunities for residents to take control of their own housing, especially given the ongoing capacity building and empowerment of management and residents. • Public-private partnerships highlighted the need for greater co-operation between private and public action, and demonstrated the important role of the local authority in mobilising private sector capital toward creating housing on well-located land for lower-income households.
 <p>Carr Gardens Johannesburg</p> <p>CG</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability is achieved through balancing the parallel concerns of the triple bottom line (financial, social and environmental). • Social capital formation and capacity building need to take place on a sustained basis, based on household and community needs. • Needs of vulnerable people (children, women, the elderly and disabled) should be incorporated in the design. • The type of tenure or housing solution must be appropriate to the income of residents – social housing is not suited to households earning below R2,500 per month. • Use good quality, low-maintenance building materials.
 <p>Newtown Urban Village Johannesburg</p> <p>NU</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety and security, peace and quiet, affordability, and good location contributed significantly to respondents' satisfaction with their housing environment. • It is vital to the sustainability of any housing institution that members understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities. • Local economic development opportunities can be created through residents being involved in sub-contracting of cleaning, maintenance and refuse removal. • Co-operative members are encouraged to prioritise the payment of their monthly service charges through a savings club. • Democratically elected and accountable leadership are important preconditions for project sustainability.
 <p>Stock Road Cape Town</p> <p>SR</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project location close to social amenities and a regional transport interchange contributes to residents' satisfaction with their neighbourhood, but crime and lack of formal employment opportunities in the area militate against this. • Absence of community participation and effective communication led to a breakdown of trust, and the lack of a sense of community, resident satisfaction and ownership of the housing environment. • Tenure should be financially appropriate for the target market – two-thirds of Stock Road tenants had monthly incomes below R2,500 making social housing unaffordable. • Procedural irregularities from government and low levels of accountability from the housing institution resulted due to an ambivalent relationship between government and its partner. This should be avoided.



Missionvale
Nelson Mandela Metro

MV

- A variety of higher-density housing typologies maximised the use of shared walling and services and were combined with departures from standardised service provision.
- Low-quality play areas for children and limited recreation facilities and opportunities for the youth seriously impact on residents' satisfaction with their overall housing environment.
- Low levels of community participation and leadership after implementation compromise both housing sustainability and resident satisfaction, and exacerbate households' social and physical problems.
- Continued home ownership and environmental education should form an integral part of any housing project to foster ownership and alleviate financial burdens.
- Public-private-community partnerships contributed to innovative planning, engineering and housing standards and methods of project implementation.



Samora Machel
Cape Town

SM

- Democratic community participation in the design, planning and decision-making processes, through clear lines of communication and regular meetings between all stakeholders, resulted in an environment more vibrant than that created through conventional RDP housing using the same funding amounts.
- High levels of sharing of and access to facilities support small pockets of medium-density housing at places of maximum accessibility and opportunity.
- Aesthetics and design of communal areas in higher-density projects need particular attention. Despite financial constraints, consideration was given to playgrounds and creative landscaping through contingency funding.
- Where a project presents opportunities for incremental building, education, training and guidance about house expansion should be provided to maximise the opportunities the starter house presents.
- Longer-term small business support and local economic development would have benefited the local community, which has high levels of unemployment and low skill levels.



Sakhasonke Village
Nelson Mandela Metro

SV

- Housing is not about the provision of a house alone, but about careful consideration of public, semi-private and private spaces, landscaping, cost saving, community involvement, social and human capital formation and livelihood considerations.
- Medium-density housing typologies yielded unit sizes at least 6m² larger than low-density freestanding units for the same subsidy amount. However, in accepting the higher-density model in principle, beneficiaries should understand the trade-off between smaller plots, shared walls and closer proximity to neighbours, and the benefits of bigger units.
- Active involvement of the community in the implementation stages of the project created a sense of ownership through skills improvement and capacity development of community members and beneficiaries. This was continued after implementation, through a livelihoods approach to development.
- The availability of a community centre/meeting hall/ offices supports community cohesion and provides space for community activities.
- Public-private-community partnerships result in higher quality housing environments.



N2 Gateway - Joe Slovo
(Phase 1)⁶
Cape Town

N2

- The project site is well located in relation to employment and urban opportunities across the city, and the provision of well-located state land for affordable housing is laudable.
- Relocating informal settlement dwellers to badly-located housing developments does not address government's objectives of building sustainable settlements. The project did not provide housing for the households originally targeted.
- Characterised by a lack of transparency, insufficient information flow and political infighting, this project stands as an example of the breakdown of inter-governmental relations.
- The failure in the Social Housing policy is demonstrated in this project, where monthly rentals are unaffordable to the targeted end-users. This highlights the need for affordable public rental housing.
- Inadequate community participation and consultation resulted in a lack of understanding of the needs and socio-economic status of beneficiaries. This impacted on affordability levels and resident satisfaction.
- As this was a pilot project, innovative energy saving options and environmentally sustainable technologies could have been incorporated through partnerships with the private sector.



Washington Heights
New York (USA)⁷

WH

- The process was resident driven – they formed an active association and requested assistance to establish a housing association.
- The management structure, which ensures that residents have a 2:1 majority on the board, encourages a strong sense of self-determination, ownership and pride through resident control.
- Comprehensive education and training efforts ensured residents had the capacity to participate in and manage a mutual housing association.
- The financial sustainability of the association was ensured through adequate funding for development from multiple sources, including significant contributions from government.
- The location, near to public transport, commercial and community services, contributed to the project's success.



Vashi⁸
Navi Mumbai (India)

VA

- A range of income diversity (though excluding the very poor), access to services, amenities and public transport to a major employment centre make this an integrated human settlement.
- Low- and middle-income earners can live together successfully in a medium-density housing co-operative-style development if the right conditions are in place. These include well-functioning and democratic co-operative boards, good social planning from the outset, facilitation of cultural and recreation opportunities, the provision of a range of services and amenities (such as an office from where the association can function) and access to economic opportunities. While the design allowed for larger homes for the higher-income group, access to all facilities and services, including to common space, was equal for all.
- Cross-subsidisation creates possibilities for the inclusion of housing for the low-income group and prevents the creation of low-income and middle-income 'ghettos'.
- Unit design should permit residents to make additions to their homes.



Vitas⁹
Manila (Philippines)

VI

- Complete lack of community participation, community development and resident control were seen to be central to the development's failure.
- The motivation for the project did not come from an organised group of citizens demanding their housing rights – there was a vacuum of motivated resident leadership from the start. There is no project-wide resident association.
- Government did not relinquish control over any stage of the project. This alienated residents and discouraged community organising and leadership development.
- Physical separation of income groups contributed to a 'them and us' paradigm.
- No planning for services or amenities was undertaken.
- Despite many residents being very poor, no local economic development or livelihood support programmes were instituted.

The most important factors in the provision of sustainable medium to higher-density housing emanating from the case studies are summarised as recommendations pertaining to the following:

1. Good location and higher densities.
2. An integrated approach to development.
3. Affordability of housing and services.
4. A sustainable livelihoods approach.
5. Community participation and leadership development.
6. Meeting needs of vulnerable people.
7. Appropriate tenure options.
8. The choice between social housing and public rental housing.
9. A range of housing typologies.
10. Good design and construction.
11. Government's ability to capture value.

3. Overview

The book is divided into six sections.

Section 1 is a brief introduction highlighting the role housing densification plays in addressing South Africa's settlement problems. It provides the background to the research and an overview of the 11 case studies. It indicates the target readership, with special reference to government officials, CBOs and their leaders.

The case for medium-density housing is made in **Section 2**, where the concepts of 'density' and 'sustainability' are clarified, laying the foundation for the research. A summary of key principles for assessing the performance of medium-density housing environments is also provided.

Section 3 provides a concise overview of the South African housing context including short discussions on the economic, social, political and policy contexts and the housing challenges. The most important international housing and human rights policies are also contextualised.

Drawing on the lessons and recommendations of the case studies as well as on theoretical tenets and best practice examples, **Section 4** provides guidelines for consideration in the provision of medium-density housing. It should be read in conjunction with the case studies.

Eight local and three international case studies are presented in **Section 5**. The local ones are structured around the results of interviews conducted with 40 households in each project as well as project managers and implementing agents. These case studies offer an in-depth look into life in medium-density housing environments. Valuable lessons resonate from their residents' voices.

Finally, **Section 6** contains annexures relating to the South African policy framework and the right to adequate housing, as well as end-notes, references, a glossary and acronyms.

Reading the book in its entirety will provide a wide-ranging understanding of well-performing settlements and communities.

Endnotes

1. Wackernagel, M et al 1993
2. Du Plessis, C 2002
3. Images: <http://www.flickr.com/>
4. Adebayo, A and P Adebayo n.d.:7
5. Acioly, C and F Davidson 1996
6. From JSAssociates 2008
7. Photo by Joaquin Alfredo Labour 2009
8. Wikipedia 2008
9. Images courtesy of School of Architecture and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

SECTION 2

HOUSING: DENSIFICATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

HOUSING: DENSIFICATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

I. Understanding densification

The anti-planner and urban activist Jane Jacobs's manifesto *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* opens with the statement: "This book is an attack on current city planning and rebuilding".¹ In outlining four qualities that any city neighbourhood must manifest in order to be healthy and desirable to residents, namely mixed primary uses, short blocks, aged buildings and high density, she revisits the subject of a timeless way of building and planning, radically different from the approach to urban planning at the time (the 1960s). She answers the question of what the proper densities for city dwellings should be as follows:²

"The answer to this is something like the answer Lincoln gave to the question, 'How long should a man's leg be?' Long enough to reach the ground, Lincoln said. Just so, proper city dwelling densities are a matter of performance. They cannot be based on abstractions about the quantities of land that ideally should be allotted for so-and-so many people (living in some docile, imaginary society). Densities are too low, or too high, when they frustrate city diversity instead of abetting it. We ought to look at densities in much the same way as we look at calories and vitamins. Right amounts are right amounts because of how they perform. And what is right differs in specific instances."

Residential density is a complex system in which various parts interact with each other and with parts of other systems in different ways, with influences on urban development and residential environments. It is impossible to establish all the components affected by or affecting density and the relationship between them. Moreover, the perception of density varies between countries, within countries among different social groups, and even within social groups, where factors such as gender, age, occupation, marital status and income affect people's perceptions of their environment.

There is no single definition of medium density. For the purpose of this resource book, 'medium-density housing' refers to increased gross residential density in urban areas by means of formal housing development. Medium-density housing, defined in terms of dwelling units per hectare (du/ha), is approximately 40–100 du/ha (gross). The dwelling types typically associated with residential densification referred to in the book are semi-detached housing, row housing, and three-storey walk-up flats.

I.1 Measuring density

Measurement of density consists of three components: building density, occupancy density and population density. They are interrelated, mutually dependent and determined by other factors. The relationship and interdependence between them and between the factors that determine them can be identified and calculated:

1. **Building density** refers to the number of dwelling units per area (usually expressed in terms of hectares and measured in floor area ratio) and is determined by the space between buildings, building width, building configuration and building height. Gross residential density refers to the number of dwelling units divided by the total site area, while net residential density refers to the number of dwelling units divided by the area of the site taken up by residential use only. Net residential density is always higher than gross residential density and can be increased by decreasing the size of units or plots and increasing the height and coverage of buildings. Different housing typologies (such as flats and row housing) can be compared using net residential density. The increase in gross density is limited by social facility and open space standards. When the number of people in an area increases, more facilities such as open space, schools and streets are needed, taking up more space and thereby lowering gross density.
2. **Occupancy density** (measured as floor space rate) is directly related to income, the cost of floor space, and the need for space in terms of family size, which refers to the number of people per dwelling unit.
3. **Population density** (measured as persons per hectare), is a product of building density and

occupation density. This is the number of people per hectare and is expressed as the number of people divided by the site area (for gross population density the total site area is applicable, and for net population density, only the area taken up by residential plots).

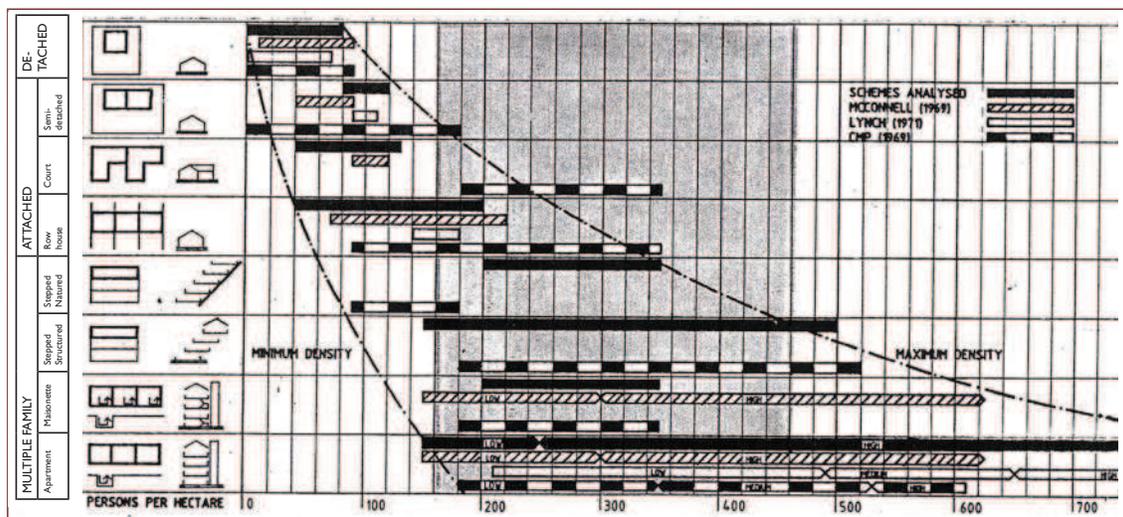
- **Perceived density** refers to the level of density which people feel an area has and is dependent on the individual and his/her background culture and on the nature of the built-up area.
- **Crowding** is closely linked to density and refers to too many people living or working in a room, dwelling, neighbourhood, or on a plot. There is an important difference between crowding and density: it is possible to have high-density housing without crowding.

1.2 Density, built form and housing layout

Building density is inherently bound up with built form and housing layout. Built form refers to the physical form of a residential area in terms of building height, land coverage and grain of the buildings, while housing layout is the organisation and utilisation of land for buildings, roads, cars, pedestrians, public and private open space and landscaping.

There is a constant trade-off between building density, building form and housing layout within the restrictions of standards and costs. The challenge lies in optimising these requirements. Density can be determined by decisions made on built form and housing layout. However, a prescribed density will restrict built form and housing layout. Senior states that existing theory poses the following:³

- as density increases, specific quantifiable patterns of housing form and layout emerge. For example, open space ratio falls rapidly as density increases;
- specific thresholds can be determined throughout the density range, below or above which certain characteristics of housing form and layout cannot be achieved;
- housing form and layout have social and economic ramifications – e.g. construction costs increase as density increases; and
- various researchers have ascertained that housing types conform to a regular density pattern.



A number of researchers confirmed that housing types conform to a regular density range. Housing types associated with approximately 30–90 du/ha are row/terraced housing, maisonettes, courtyard housing and three to four-storey walk-ups⁴

Building density does not determine the exact characteristics of housing form and layout, but creates certain limitations on them. Built form and housing layout options at any specific density are limited by the standards adopted for that specific scheme. Where different standards are applied to similar density ranges the housing layout and built form are changed and thresholds are affected.

A standard is a quantity regarded as having special value for the housing environment. It can be a by-law, design criteria or societal norm and is expressed numerically. An example is where a development with no parking and little space between buildings achieves a much higher-density than a similar development with normal parking requirements and greater space between buildings.

Terms and definitions pertaining to density

- Plot size – the total erf area.
- Setback – regulations specify the distance between buildings and plot boundaries.
- Coverage – this refers to the percentage of erf area that can be built upon. Coverage is determined by three elements: the width of buildings, the space between them and their configuration. Maximum coverage is usually 50% for single residential zones and 33,3% in general residential zones where flats are developed.
- Height – regulations specify the permissible number of storeys.
- Floor area is the key to building density, as it is a precise and absolute measure of amount of accommodation, irrespective of standards. It is valid across the whole spectrum of cultural and socio-economic boundaries as it requires no judgement relating to space utilisation or how the building is occupied.
- Floor area ratio (FAR) is the most relevant density control measure for buildings, being the ratio of floor area to land area. It is more complicated than residential density and is suitable for mixed-use development. Regulations specify the total permissible floor area in relation to plot size. FAR is considered the most effective way of expressing a density limit; i.e. the total floor area of the building (adding all floor levels) divided by the ground area of its plot. Ratios may range from 0.1 for very open areas to 2.0 for very dense areas, and have distinct effects on traffic, utility loads, street life, massing, public services etc.
- Rural farmland generally has a FAR of between 0.0005 and 0.02 (built up between 0.05% and 2% of total land area), while suburban areas generally have a FAR of between 0.05 and 0.18 (less than 20% of total land area occupied by buildings.) Inner city densities can range from 0.88 for townhouses to 5.05 for apartment buildings.

FAR is an appropriate density measure for mixed-use developments including business and other uses, whereas building density is suitable to residential areas only.

$$\text{Floor area ratio} = \frac{\text{total floor area of buildings}}{\text{total site area}}$$

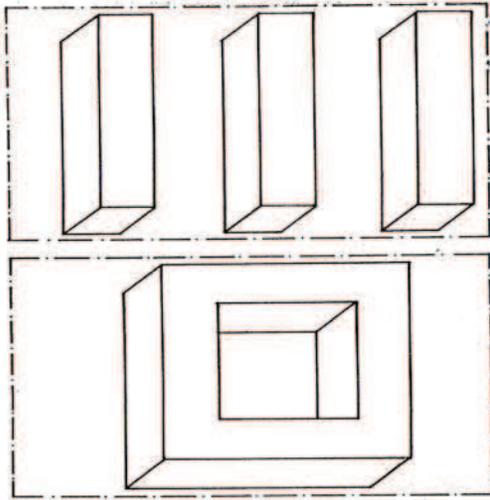
The density at which floor area is occupied determines the population density. The amount of floor space occupied by one person (floor space rate) is the measure of occupancy that can be used for direct conversion from building density to population density or vice versa:

$$\text{Population per hectare} = \frac{\text{floor area ratio} \times 1000}{\text{floor space rate}}$$

Therefore: the size of the plot, the amount of plot which can be built up (coverage) and the height of the building (FAR) give the dimensions of the most visible aspect of density: the amount of space which is built. This is determined by designers in the design phase, and reinforced and controlled in building and planning approvals and development controls. However, this does not necessarily guarantee success, as density is sensitive to external factors.

Acioy and Davidson 1996, Lynch and Hack 1984, Gillham 2002 in Arbury

Coverage and height are directly related to built form, and thus there is a direct relationship between built form and floor area ratio. However, a specific building density does not produce a specific built form because the



Two possible built forms at FAR 0.28⁵

way in which the coverage is distributed on the site can vary considerably – the coverage could be distributed in three buildings or in one building. The height remains constant, yet various built forms are possible.

1.3 Density as a standard

There is a tendency to associate poor environmental quality and low incomes with high-density development, and *vice versa*. User preferences based on experiences with medium-high density housing (for example, flats rented from City Councils), contribute to the negative light in which this type of housing is seen. Hence, the single dwelling unit is still the predominant model of state subsidised housing within the low-income group in most South African towns and cities.

However, environmental quality varies independently of density, with good and bad environments occurring at both high and low densities. It is impossible to relate residential density to environmental quality, as residential environments are determined by more than just density controls. Jensen⁶ states that “(d)ensity expressed as an intensity of occupation is not by itself the sole qualitative measure of housing development, which also depends greatly on planning and amenity standards, and the liveability of homes”. Density cannot be used as an all-encompassing measure of the environment, but is one of many factors affecting environmental quality. In an attempt to achieve better quality urban environments in South Africa, higher densities for new developments should be seriously considered.



High quality medium-density housing on well-located land



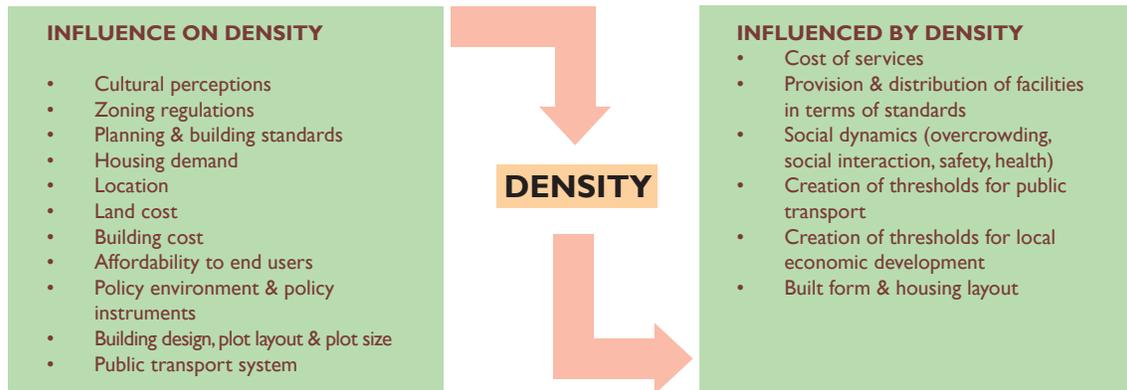
Marginalised low quality medium-density housing

Density controls were originally established when a correlation was identified between overcrowding and disease. Since its inception as a basis for public health legislation, density has been used in a variety of ways, for example in strategic planning, development control, detailed design, in the definition of development standards and as a means of maintaining property values in certain areas.

Density is one of the most important indicators and design parameters in the field of housing and human settlement planning and development. It is central to the technical and financial assessment of the distribution and consumption of land, infrastructure and public services in residential areas.

Density has implications for practitioners involved in urban development: planners, engineers, economists and architects use density as the basis for their decision-making. Local authorities, education and health authorities use density as a means of assessing the provision of facilities and services. Planning is strongly regulated by technical and programmatic standards such as density measures. Authorities dealing with urban development operate according to (usually inflexible and fixed) minimum standards formulated in isolation for the ‘optimal’ requirements of different urban elements.

- the choice of housing would be high for densities up to 300 persons per hectare, but would decrease for densities between 300–450 persons per hectare;
- parking would be detached from units; and
- the impact of cars on the environment would be significant.



A summary of factors influencing density and implications of density

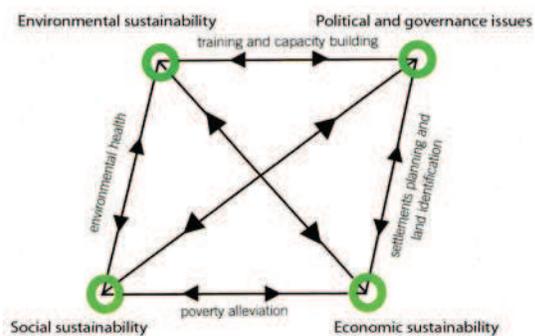
The demand for more efficient, sustainable and affordable urban environments where land is used more intensively, infrastructure and financial spending are applied more wisely, natural resources are used more sustainably and human resources are considered more carefully (especially resources available to the poorer inhabitants of the city), call for the importance of increased density to be recognised.

2. Understanding sustainable development

Sustainable development is defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development¹⁵ as:

“...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

- the concept of ‘needs’, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisations on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs”.



Four pillars of sustainability¹⁶

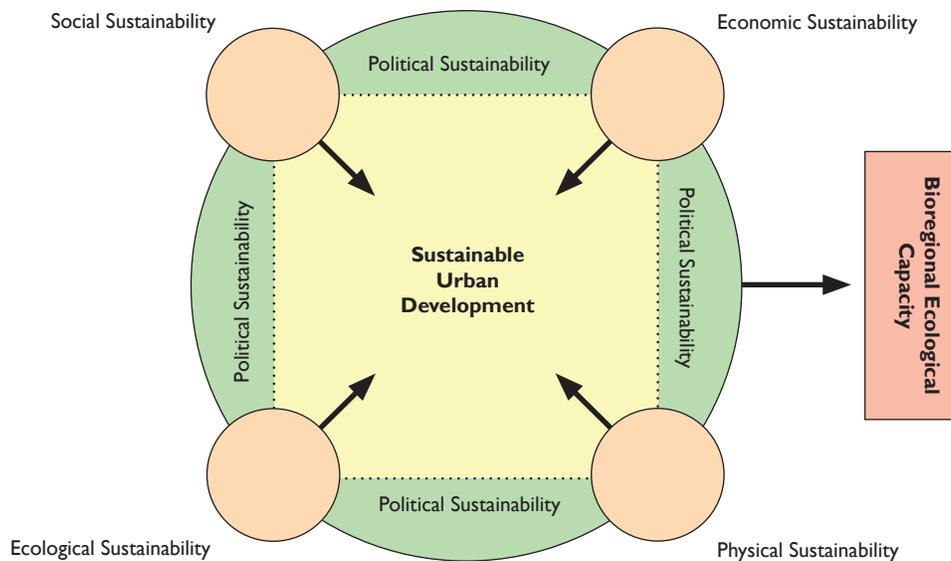
Adriana Allen, an Argentinean scholar, argues that overall sustainable urban development is possible when five distinct spheres are sustainable. These spheres are set out below:

1. **Economic sustainability** – the local economy sustains itself without causing permanent damage to natural resources and without increasing the city’s ecological footprint.
2. **Social sustainability** – policies and actions aim at improving quality of life, equitable access and distribution of rights over the use and appropriation of the natural and built environment.
3. **Ecological sustainability** – the impact of urban production and consumption on the city-region and

global carrying capacity is balanced.

4. *Physical sustainability* – the capacity and aptitude of the urban built environment and technological structures to support human life and productive activities.
5. *Political sustainability* – the quality of governance systems and frameworks guiding the relationship and actions of different actors among the preceding four dimensions. This includes the democratisation and participation of civil society in all areas of decision-making.

Allen asserts that political sustainability is the link between the four other spheres of sustainability, and highlights the importance of having strong political support for processes formulating policies and programmes that advance sustainable development. Importantly, she includes global political economic factors and their local manifestations as major determinants of policy decisions, as subsequent actions are often beyond the decision-making power of bodies such as local governments. In this way, a rebalancing of power is necessary where democracy, participation and discourse are put into effect by the poor and 'powerless' in decision-making processes. This model presents a politically informed approach to urban development in general and integration in particular.¹⁷



The five dimensions of urban sustainability according to Allen et al¹⁸

Achieving sustainability in each sphere is challenging and has rarely been achieved in the South African development context, where trade offs are often made by decision-makers both consciously and unconsciously. Nonetheless, it is important to realise that in order for housing development to be sustainable in South Africa, it must address poverty and the disparities in society. Without achieving sustainability in these spheres, housing development is ultimately unsustainable.

This book demonstrates that medium-density housing provides numerous opportunities to contribute to achieving sustainability if the right conditions are in place. It is critical for sustainable resource utilisation for productive, inclusive, redistributive and well-governed cities. Exploring these conditions is the motivation for the book. The case studies reveal in different ways that working with this framework for sustainability results in higher levels of community cohesion, resident satisfaction and the long term sustainability of vibrant housing environments.

3. The case for medium-density housing

Breaking New Ground (BNG), government's sustainable human settlement plan, promotes densification and integration as key objectives to “integrate previously excluded groups into the city and the benefits it offers, and to ensure the development of integrated, functional and environmentally sustainable human settlements, towns and cities”.¹⁹ A mindful move towards low-rise medium-density housing that makes efficient use of land and resources is necessary. With a commitment to meeting and understanding the needs of end users, planning and design will open up possibilities of accessibility, affordability, integration, efficiency, safety, privacy and community development.

3.1 Urban sprawl

The most predominant form of urban development in South African cities is *urban sprawl*. This manifests in the separation of activities and land uses, the suburban or township ethos, freestanding buildings surrounded by private space, inwardly-oriented neighbourhood units and the domination of the private motor car. Sprawl involves more than just low densities and is a complex and contested subject that ultimately deeply entrenches segregation. Some major disadvantages that result from low residential densities and low levels of compaction are:²⁰

- where the market is thinly spread and thresholds are insufficient (as in sprawling cities) there are detrimental effects on small-scale economic activities. Small businesses are likely to be dominated by larger enterprises that can afford higher rents;
- in sprawling systems, unit costs of social and other services are high, due to low levels of support per facility, and the range and levels of commercial and social services are low, as are convenience and equity of access to them;
- a lack of mix, diversity and overlap of activities resulting in inconvenience for urban dwellers;
- access for pedestrians is particularly problematic. Public transportation is inconvenient, inefficient and unaffordable, especially for the poor;
- an increase in the rate of land consumption and environmental degradation; and
- large plots are costly to maintain, and often become derelict and unsafe.

Rather than the creation of compact, vibrant human settlements that encompass a range of housing types and densities, and a variety of urban opportunities and activities, housing delivery in South Africa has been characterised by low density, sprawling settlements. However, this form of urban development is irreconcilable with the notion of sustainability and has been condemned recently due to its high social, economic and environmental costs, which are often hidden and are borne by the poor.

The cost of providing adequate infrastructure, roads and services has become unaffordable and unsustainable for government. The time and financial implications are severe for the large number of people located on the periphery of urban areas. These are most often vulnerable groups such as the poor and women, who must travel long distances to access urban opportunities and employment. Urban sprawl is inappropriate in the face of growing environmental concerns, the shortage of land for development, changing household profiles and family composition and the shifting nature of employment environments.

3.2 Land and property markets: excluding the poor

However, sprawl is not the only factor standing in the way of human settlements meeting the needs of all inhabitants. Growing concerns about the rapid formation of informal settlements, overcrowding in backyards and existing housing, segregation entrenched by suburbanisation and the inaccessibility of well-located land for the poor in general, make this shift towards more compact and dense settlements imperative. The struggle of access to land for the urban poor is a critical issue in post-apartheid South Africa. The operation of land and property markets excludes the poor and exacerbates existing inequalities and is in contravention of legislation that protects the right of the poor to adequate housing. Government needs to intervene in the land and property markets to ensure that they work for the poor and increase the provision of higher-density housing in strategic locations.

3.3 Meaningful change in urban form and function

The provision of freestanding freehold houses cannot be sustained and there is a need for end-users and society in general to change attitudes towards medium-density (and particularly rental) housing environments. Meaningful change is required in the form and function of urban environments. Attention must be paid to developing a stronger sense of community and to the needs of pedestrians, a mix of different income groups and land uses must be accommodated and consideration must be given to livelihood considerations and the eradication of poverty.

A major challenge for a developing country like South Africa is to facilitate the redistribution of wealth in order to narrow the huge economic differences between rich and poor. Human settlement projects provide various opportunities to contribute to the economic and social empowerment of civil society and to bring about physical and social integration. Sustainable housing promotes the safety and dignity of residents and results in more vibrant human settlements which meet human and environmental needs.

3.4 Community cohesion and ownership

People living in medium-density housing environments are a community by virtue of sharing spaces, housing units in close proximity to each other, and are bound by these and other common factors. This is often a source of conflict, but if the necessary attention is afforded to design details, environments have the potential for high levels of community cohesion and ownership of the shared housing environment.

It is therefore essential that government makes the necessary processes of participation and capacity building an inherent part of medium-density housing delivery, and further, that funding for these components becomes part of the housing subsidy. The majority of community representatives interviewed for the case studies emphasised the importance of providing community meeting spaces as well as office space for community leadership. They saw these as central to the functioning of the housing environment. Equally important is funding for the creation of dignified shared spaces that become important extensions ('outdoor rooms') of the already small units that accompany medium-density housing on well-located land.

3.5 An integrated approach

This implies an integrated, multi-sectoral approach where co-operation between a range of non-government role players, the private sector and government departments is crucial in the creation of a milieu that serves the widest possible range of household and community needs. Such an approach, if participatory, is more likely to yield successful results relating to social, institutional, financial, economic, environmental and physical design issues. Sustainability, as defined by Allen, must form part of all medium-density housing provision.

The development of higher-density housing should form part of an integrated approach to sustainable human settlement development. It should be pursued in a regulatory environment where the 'triple-bottom line' and developmental local government are objectives for a city as a whole.

Poverty is multi-dimensional and complex. A multi-sectoral, holistic approach to development needs is required to improve the social, economic and physical conditions of poor households and to further the agenda of sustainable development. Effective integrated urban development is underpinned by good inter-governmental relations, collaboration between key role players, and active civil society participation in urban processes, such as the formulation of municipal Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and local economic development strategies. The availability of sufficient resources to provide a wide range of social and economic programmes, including the delivery of housing, infrastructure and facilities to address community needs, are vital components of the integrated approach. Housing policy should be expanded and the subsidy increased in all medium-density housing environments to make provision for social objectives such as recreation, social amenities and the needs of children and youth. Co-operation between the housing department and other government departments is crucial in this regard. Spatial integration rooted in access to facilities, amenities and urban opportunities is paramount.

The legacy of racial and economic inequality in South Africa makes it imperative to achieve integration between races and income groups. A mixed-income development is more likely to be sustainable than a project where poor people are doomed to 'ghettoisation'. However, real integration of very disparate income groups is difficult to achieve. The distribution of affordable housing among higher-income housing, and the design of affordable housing that is visually indistinguishable from surrounding higher-income housing are important factors in reducing perceived negative impacts on property values as well as social security.

3.6 A range of housing type and tenure alternatives

The provision of higher-density housing should form part of a mixed-use environment that encompasses a range of housing types and associated densities and tenure, as well as a variety of urban opportunities and activities. Higher-density housing provides the opportunity for higher levels of services, due to higher levels of support. The bottom line is that a range of land uses in close proximity to each other must be manifested in the planning and development of sustainable human settlements. Housing is not about the provision of a house alone, but also includes security of tenure for both rental and ownership housing. The promotion of alternatives to individual ownership is important as it allows for innovative designs (higher densities, communal spaces), while simultaneously providing some protection against downward raiding. Infill developments on small pockets of land (Springfield Terrace is located on an area smaller than a hectare) in existing areas present ideal opportunities for densification. **ST**

Innovative use of different housing typologies opens up new ways of increasing densities in the form of infill housing in urban areas. The provision of innovative medium-density housing that is able to meet the wide range of resident needs and create a unique sense of place and belonging requires a shift to performance-based planning controls. These should aim to achieve urban design, environmental performance, social, affordability and safety objectives rather than numerical restrictions on setback, height, plot ratio and density. Moreover, a range of house types and tenure will encourage social equity, as people of different income levels can interact in an environment that provides equal opportunities. It will also allow residents to move up or down the housing ladder at different stages of their lives without having to relocate.

3.7 Good location

Good location is a complex concept to define, but access to employment, transport and urban opportunities and facilities are useful indicators. Through efficient use of state and other well-located land (including infill housing in lower-density suburbs), and the use of value capture and tax mechanisms, government should ensure the provision of affordable higher-density housing on well-located land for households earning below R3,500 per month, including security of tenure in the form of both rental and ownership housing. Appropriate well-located sites in close proximity to transport, economic activities and services should be identified and 'banked' for the development of affordable medium-density housing. For the poor, location is often more important than housing quality as it directly impacts on the accessibility of urban opportunities and underpins social networks and livelihood strategies critical for survival. Greater social integration may also result from the location of low-income households on well-located land.

3.8 Sustainable design

The design of higher-density housing should give due consideration to all components of sustainability. Decisions should be rooted as far as possible in 'green' design principles and human needs. They should recognise the importance of sustainable building and construction in terms of environmental impact, affordability, end-user satisfaction and settlement quality. Energy efficiency and environmental sustainability have been explicitly addressed in very few of the medium-density housing projects discussed in this book, but given growing resource constraints (water, energy, agricultural land) this needs to change.

People are at the centre of sustainable development and therefore the pursuit of sustainability will only be successful if individuals, households or communities consciously choose to adopt the principles of

sustainable development as they manifest in medium-density housing opportunities. Ultimately, the construction sector will have to be completely transformed, from the materials used and how they are manufactured, to how development and the methods used to achieve it are viewed, and how end-users are engaged to commit to them. Developers, builders, architects and land-use planners should be involved, as should government, tenants and owners. Sustainability objectives will be achieved only if they are taken into account at all stages from design and construction to long-term use and eventual disposal and recycling.

3.9 A sustainable livelihoods approach

Unemployment and the often low levels of income among residents of government-subsidised higher-density housing necessitate the promotion of economic development and of opportunities to strengthen livelihoods as part of the planning and implementation of such developments. A livelihoods approach is based on understanding the way people make their living and recognises that there are differences within and between households in a given community. The approach enables implementing agents, together with the community, to design processes that take into consideration these differences in order for households to cope with risk and uncertainty. It recognises that households and livelihoods are constantly changing in response to shocks, stresses and seasonality.

Successful poverty reduction strategies have to address a range of issues over time, but a holistic diagnosis achievable through the livelihoods framework allows for the identification of the most strategic interventions. Moreover, a participatory, livelihoods approach to developing higher-density housing provides a useful framework for monitoring the impacts of the development initiative. This can be measured through indicators of affordability levels, livelihood sustainability, identifying unintended consequences, as well as devising meaningful interventions. Local economic development linked to livelihood assessments is a central component in the quest for redistribution. Complementary activities, co-operation and partnerships between different spheres and departments of government, the private sector and civil society produce improved living conditions, integration and diverse economic activity, resulting in empowerment of lower-income households.

3.10 Social and human capital formation, leadership and resident participation

Positive linkages exist between social and human capital formation on one hand, and developmental outcomes on the other. Everyone involved in the development of medium-density housing must place the sustained development of social and human capital at the centre of project planning at every stage of the process. Mobilising resources on the basis of trust, common norms and constructive communication, together with the prioritisation of information sharing, skills training, learning and education, will help to form networks that increase community participation, empowerment and sustainability.

The quality and extent of leadership and resident participation has a profound impact on the sustainability of a community or housing project. Part of the constitutional right to adequate housing is the right to participate in decision-making strategies and projects. Government and its agents should support the creation of active and knowledgeable leadership, so that poor communities can access their rights and resources. In this way, collective, ongoing participation in urban development policy formation and practice can be facilitated. To ensure sustainability, government and its partners should also have an informed understanding of and corresponding strategy to engage in a meaningful way with community needs and dynamics.

Participation requires time and resources. The provision of sufficient financial and human resources for meaningful and sustained community participation and capacity development should become part of government's engagement strategy and subsidy housing delivery mechanism. This needs to be developed together with the formation of appropriate platforms to engage at the local level. This includes a people-intensive engagement with communities in the planning and incremental phases of implementation (before, during and after), as well as intensive information sharing, education, capacity building and social capital formation. Social and human capital formation is at the root of sustainable communities – without

investment in people, investment in places and spaces is bound to be futile. Economic and environmental sustainability are underpinned by institutional, political and social sustainability factors, particularly strong and dependable, democratically elected leadership. This has proven to be a critical element of overall sustainability. The positive outcomes of community initiatives and projects, disputes, negotiation and decisions often depend on strong and reliable leadership.

3.11 Vulnerable groups

Vulnerable groups consist of a wide range of sub-groups with a variety of individual needs and are often at risk of poverty and destitution. The needs of women, often the caregivers of other vulnerable groups, are particularly important. Securing women's access to adequate housing is about more than just supplying physical shelter – housing is a facilitative right that allows women to enjoy other rights and basic needs like water, sanitation, electricity, health care, schools, employment and economic opportunity.

Government and implementing agents should consider the range of special needs of residents of medium-density projects and should develop integrated packages of services to address these needs in addition to housing. Design, organisational and institutional attention should be given to matters that concern them directly.

A multi-sectoral human rights approach is required where public, private, community based and non-government partnerships are able to co-operate effectively in meeting the needs of women, children, the elderly, the frail and disabled. A physical space such as a community centre in each higher-density housing development is paramount, as it will serve as the focal point of activities and initiatives that will meet the needs of everyone in the community.

3.12 Vibrant environments

There is no direct relationship between density and quality of housing. Consideration of and attention to a range of design and process factors relating to housing typology has the potential to enable vibrant and sustainable higher-density environments in well-located areas with high levels of resident satisfaction. Vibrant medium-density housing environments result from a range of higher-density housing typologies arranged carefully and creatively in relation to each other, public open spaces, the surrounding area and natural characteristics of the site. A range of different housing typologies and the creative application thereof should be used to achieve different densities and types of housing environments that meet the social, physical and economic needs of the greatest number of households.

With smaller housing units and diminished private outdoor space, the importance of shared spaces becomes increasingly important. Attention should be paid to those factors that help build a positive sense of place. These include:

- landscaping and planting;
- orientation of buildings;
- environmentally sustainable technologies and practices;
- urban design;
- safety; and
- contextual suitability.

Additional funding from government and an innovative approach to maximising limited resources will significantly alter the appearance and functioning of medium-density housing environments. This will lead to increasing levels of resident satisfaction. Some interventions require low financial investment but have major impacts.

3.13 Social housing and public rental housing

The success of settlements depends largely on the availability of a range of affordable housing options. The rental housing sector has the potential to contribute significantly towards urban renewal, restructuring of

the apartheid city, poverty alleviation and meeting critical housing needs, especially for people who work in well-located areas. However, government's choice of rental instruments (such as social housing) does not currently meet the needs of the majority of the urban population.

Social housing as it is currently operating in South Africa serves a small segment of the population, is not truly social, and is unaffordable to households with monthly incomes below R2,500. The social housing model should be revised to enable a significantly larger number of households to access affordable rental housing and to make social housing 'social'. In addition, the re-introduction of public rental housing as an opportunity to provide well-located affordable housing for low-income households would fill a crucial gap currently existing in the housing continuum.

Well-located, adequate, well-designed and well-managed public rental housing is an important collective asset that can be used by successive generations for sustainable human settlement advancement. Capacity should be built in local and provincial government to develop and manage a programme for public rental housing. In addition, government should encourage small-scale formal and informal landlords to provide adequate housing and provide the necessary regulatory frameworks, such as a landlord/tenant backyarder assistance programme.

Government policy calls for all spheres of government to ensure that housing development includes a wide range of tenure options and housing types. These include individual and collective home ownership as well as a range of rental options. Rental housing is the most widely used tenure option for medium-density housing and is especially suited to low-income households. Before deciding on tenure, government, implementing agents and households need to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of different tenure options and of their applicability to particular community contexts and income levels. Importantly, residents need to understand their tenure type in order to exercise their rights and responsibilities, to take 'ownership' of their housing environment, and to avoid compromising the economic and social sustainability of their housing. Consumer education and capacity building of end-users in the language of their choice is vital.

3.14 Access to urban land

The land and property market excludes the poor and exacerbates existing inequality. Government needs to intervene to make it work better for the poor. A number of mechanisms should be used to support the efforts of poor communities to access urban land. Government could enter into new fiscal relationships with its citizens aimed at capturing unearned increases in land value and directing urban land development for the common good of all citizens. This could be achieved through land value taxes, land banking and land pooling/readjustment, and other mechanisms. Appropriate use of these mechanisms could potentially increase the provision of medium-density housing in strategic locations.

3.15 Partnerships

The main lesson learned from the case studies with regard to enhancing capacity for appropriate housing delivery is the importance of partnerships between the state and other role players. Additional resources for housing and urban development need to be mobilised from as many sources as possible – the state, household savings, micro-loans, international donors, the private sector and others. With support from technical and social support organisations, communities themselves can be capacitated to play an important role in both delivery and sustainability of their housing environment.

3.16 Affordability and forward planning

Affordability impacts on a wide range of factors and is in turn a function of a variety of dynamics, ultimately influencing overall sustainability of settlements and society. Affordability levels for the majority of the population are very low and render them dependent on state subsidised housing. Matching the tenure type, socio-economic profile and needs of target households with the housing product and overall settlement environment is an overriding factor in affordability.

Government must take responsibility for the performance of the entire housing market and should expedite and streamline housing development functions. Barriers and enablers influencing housing demand and supply in all sub-markets must be monitored and addressed. Mechanisms should be implemented to intervene in and rectify blockages that undermine a functioning market.

In addition to ensuring that land, property and housing markets are functional, it is important to both apply existing instruments and devise innovative new instruments for effective spatial planning and land development. Spatial Development Frameworks (SDFs), restructuring zones, zoning regulations, urban edge instruments and Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) should be focused on achieving spatial and social equity in land and property markets. This will involve developing pro-poor mechanisms for value capture from surplus values accruing from ‘boom conditions’ in the upper end of the land and property market. These mechanisms will promote densification, integration and the generation of resources for low-income residential developments on well-located land. Government needs to explore both the ‘carrot’ of incentives and ‘stick’ of legislation in implementing inclusionary housing programmes.

Social and human capacity development and resident participation are decisive factors in the provision of medium-density housing to reduce household vulnerability and ensure financial and economic sustainability. This will help realise the social, financial and economic asset value of housing. National government subsidies should include a financial component for capacity development of beneficiary communities, with an emphasis on livelihood considerations and local economic development. An integrated approach to housing and settlement development is key to affordability.

4. Characteristics of medium-density housing

The key guidelines in this book are based upon certain performance criteria, key principles, or urban qualities. *“Beneath the underbrush of particular situations and special groups, we find some common ground – fundamental criteria shared by all human users.”* This statement by Lynch and Hack²¹ illustrates that ideally an understanding should be sought of the specific end users of a particular environment, but that some generalisation about the interaction of people and place can be made. In order to remain desirable over many years, housing and urban environments must display timeless qualities that transcend the values of any particular generation or group of end users. The following table²² summarises the most significant qualities:

Table 2: Performance measures for medium-density housing environments

Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An over-arching quality that embraces all other qualities. • Encompasses the quality of ‘sense of place’ (“how we perceive an image and feel”²³), acknowledging natural, cultural, social, historical and spatial distinctiveness of a certain place or time. • Balance in the interaction between people is evident in the way in which spaces, places, channels of movement and institutions contribute positively to the interactions between people.
Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of processes, institutional and urban management arrangements, role players and stakeholders, various sectors, and physical aspects that contribute towards the creation of medium-density housing environments. • Different parts and elements must be integrated to ensure optimum performance and satisfaction of needs. • Medium density allows for a greater range of opportunities and facilities to be generated with increasing agglomeration. • In positively performing medium-density housing environments, poorer residents have access to opportunities and facilities generated by the wealthy.

Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages and supports the highest degree of freedom for individuals to act in a medium-density environment. • High degrees of freedom are achieved through provision of stimulating, complex and diverse environments: medium-density housing units close to employment opportunities, adequate public facilities, safe and efficient public transportation, safe recreation areas and usable open space and meeting places.
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhances and promotes urban activities and processes of urban life. • Through affordable, well-located medium-density housing, low-income citizens are also allowed easy access to urban opportunities.
Intensity, diversity and complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Densification and compaction are vital preconditions for high performance urban environments that provide the necessary complexity, diversity and intensity. • Presenting diverse opportunities over a relatively short distance, with high population thresholds created by medium-density housing to support urban activities and opportunities. • Urban dwellers are able to exercise real choice when they can choose to live in high-intensity environments without completely sacrificing access to privacy, quiet and nature, or in lower-intensity environments without totally sacrificing access to the benefits of urbanity, that is, high levels of service, opportunity, convenience and interaction.
Densification and compaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compact urban environments offer higher levels of support per facility, thereby reducing unit costs of social and other services. • They offer greater range and higher levels of social and commercial services, with more equitable and convenient access to them, particularly for pedestrians. • Public transportation is more viable in higher-density than in sprawling environments. • Places of economic opportunity are more widespread, which benefits small economic enterprises. • Greater diversification and specialisation occur, as agglomeration and scale economies stimulate the generations of new economic opportunities. • In order to limit sprawl <i>“people should have the freedom to choose between ranges of intensity, convenience and arcadianess, but only within limits defined by the good of the overall system. The critical issue in this regard is not maximum densities, but the achievement of minimum densities sufficient to support public transportation and basic services within a range defined by movement on foot. This restriction offers not less, but more freedom”</i>.²⁴
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community is a complex issue relating to a sense of identity and belonging. • There is no simple correlation between community and space/territory. • Primary places where interaction and communication occur are vital – they affect processes of urban socialisation, people’s sense of identity and richness of urban experience. • All needs cannot be met at household level: communal spaces provide experiences and opportunities. • Supports social ties in medium-density housing environments. • Complex social and cultural fabric should find freedom of expression in the built environment – not reflecting imposition of uniform values.

Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable development encompasses interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars – economic, social and environmental, physical and political. • It relates to balancing the need for economic and social development so that society, its members and its economies are able to meet their needs and express their greatest potential in the present, while preserving biodiversity and natural ecosystems, and planning and acting to maintain these ideals in a very long term.²⁵ • It should be a central guiding principle of government and private institutions, organisations and enterprises, as the declining state of the human environment and natural resources has negative implications for economic and social development.²⁶
Urban generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A medium-density environment sufficiently meets the needs of its inhabitants if it generates and creates necessary pre-conditions for economic, social, cultural and recreational opportunities and facilities. • This is achieved through the agglomeration of people, and the way the urban environment is structured.
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refers to both spatial and a-spatial aspects. • Spatially, access should be maximised through the availability of opportunities and facilities within walking distance of medium-density housing or the vicinity of an efficient and co-ordinated public transportation system. • A-spatial barriers (economic, social, political, regulatory, attitudinal and others) need to be broken down to allow people to maximise the benefits provided by medium-density housing. • To ensure equity, existing opportunities and facilities (to sustain livelihoods, for example) must be accessible to the majority (often the poorest) of the urban population.
Promotion of collective activities and contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Places where formal and informal interaction and communication take place usually offer the widest range of opportunities. Attention should be given to the provision of these spaces in medium-density housing environments. • Emphasis should be placed on the collective activities and social networks provided as part of medium-density developments as they impact significantly on residents' quality of life.
Individual need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-conditions to meet individual needs such as physical, social, psychological and sensory needs must result in freedom of choice and action for residents to engage constructively in their housing environment.

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SECTION 3

THE SOUTH AFRICAN HOUSING CONTEXT

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I. International context

Policies of the democratic government in South Africa were informed by international codes and practice as well as the needs of the people.

The international definition of the *right to adequate housing* is generally more comprehensive and detailed than the South African definition. Interpretations of the obligations imposed by the international right to adequate housing are thus important in determining the key components of a rights-based approach to housing. They can be a useful tool in arguing that a particular strategy meets the requirements of the right to adequate housing.¹

The right to adequate housing is protected by various international human rights policy instruments, such as covenants, conventions and declarations. Together these form the body of international law recognising housing rights. In legal terms, the most powerful documents are *conventions, covenants* or *charters*. They are legally binding treaties for the countries that have ratified or acceded to them, and States Parties have clearly identifiable legal obligations to fulfill the particular housing rights provisions they contain.

United Nations *declarations* (e.g. Habitat Agenda) are accorded less legal weight but are important political documents that represent the commitment of States towards a particular goal.

The *recommendations* of UN treaty bodies are also important, as they are generally regarded as being authoritative interpretations of the treaties.

Declarations and recommendations are generally documents of intent, but usually do not create legally binding obligations on the countries that have signed them, although a declaration may gain the force of binding law if it achieves the status of customary law.

Resolutions are adopted by bodies consisting of governments (with the exception of the Sub-Commission on Protection and Promotion of Human Rights), and others, such as 'individual experts' rather than government representatives. *Resolutions* are generally not considered to be legally binding, except resolutions of the UN Security Council.²

The international human rights policy instruments state clearly that governments have obligations, including legal duties in terms of these instruments, to enable people to access shelter and to improve their living conditions. This implies that a government must create an enabling policy environment to eventually achieve the objective of providing adequate housing for all its citizens but does not mean that government must immediately provide the homeless with houses.³

The most significant international policy instruments are listed below:⁴

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

- was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly;
- was the first major international agreement on human rights, and is the motivation for all subsequent human rights treaties and is widely regarded as having achieved the status of international customary law; and
- specifically recognises housing rights in Article 25.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966)

- is the most significant articulation of the international right to adequate housing; and
- has not yet been ratified by South Africa (for reasons that are unclear) but the fact that it was

signed (in 1994) indicates intent to ratify, and in terms of international law, government should not act contrary to it.

General Comments

- are official interpretations or elaborations on a specific right enumerated in an international instrument; and
- General Comments Numbers 3, 4 and 7 are significant General Comments on the right to adequate housing in the ICESCR.

Other international human rights treaties of the United Nations

- Those that establish committees of experts ('treaty bodies') to monitor their implementation include:
 - the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women;
 - the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
 - the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
 - the International Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.
 - the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families includes a housing clause, but South Africa has not yet signed and it has not yet entered force.

Agenda 21 (1992) and Habitat Agenda (1996)

- are two significant United Nations declarations that impose certain obligations on governments in terms of the right to adequate housing, although they have less legal weight than treaties;
- have been adopted by 171 countries, including South Africa; and
- the Habitat Agenda contains over 100 commitments and 600 recommendations on human settlements issues.

Other United Nations recommendations on the right to adequate housing in terms of governments' obligations

- UN Commission on Human Settlements Resolution 14/6, 'The Human Right to Adequate Housing' (1993);
- United Nations Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1995/12 on the Right to Adequate Housing (1995): 'The Realisation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: The Right to Adequate Housing'; and
- the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities resolution 1997/19 entitled 'Women and the Right to Adequate Housing and to Land and Property'.

Regional human rights instruments

- There are an increasing number of regional human rights instruments, such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (adopted in 1981 by the Organisation of African Unity), which South Africa has ratified. While this document does not specifically mention housing, it is regarded as containing an implied right to housing.

2. South African context⁵

The following sections provides a cursory overview of the South African government's response to the right to adequate housing.

South Africa has a long history of colonisation and institutionalised racism, which resulted in great inequalities and racial divisions. The effects are still very much present today. Until 1996, there was no single housing market for South Africans and there were no coherent national housing and settlement policies. Housing therefore became a political rallying point during the struggle for liberation and majority rule, and

a top priority for the post-1994 government. Today, the housing crisis is an important dimension of the overall poverty problem in South Africa. Many people live in inadequate shelter and do not have access to basic services such as water and sanitation. Inadequate housing conditions lead to many health and social problems. Despite the delivery of about 1.8 million subsidised houses between 1994 and 2005, the number of families living in inadequate housing in urban areas grew rapidly during this period.

The national housing vision includes the values of sustainability, viability, integration, equality, reconstruction, holistic development and good governance.⁶ Since 1994, the government's advancement of the right to adequate housing and related policy shifts has been significant. Major inroads have been made into the complicated housing framework inherited from the previous government⁷ to meet the challenge of housing millions of homeless and inadequately housed citizens. Major policy shifts resonating with a rights-based approach emphasised co-ordination and policy alignment, improving the quality of the end product and urban environment increasing the delivery rate and the People's Housing Process. Yet, housing rights as an organising principle for housing policies and programmes are not explicitly mentioned and the participation of citizens and civil society in housing-related decision-making is not emphasised.

The most significant shortcomings are that:

- inadequate quantitative progress has been made;
- a lack of integrated development has resulted in unsustainable settlements; and
- there has been a shortage of programmes that address specific housing needs and specific vulnerable groups.⁸

In 2004, there was a major shift in housing policy with the introduction of the BNG plan, which focuses on the upgrading of informal settlements and the creation of sustainable human settlements. In practice, however, pilot projects, such as the Joe Slovo N2 Gateway Project (Phase 1) in Cape Town, show that delivery is still usually happening in a top-down non-participatory way that does not address the real needs of people. The first phase of this project involved the relocation of residents of the Joe Slovo informal settlement to the distant area of Delft and the building of blocks of flats in Joe Slovo. The rentals for these flats are unaffordable for most of the people who previously lived on the site. **N2** The BNG strategy also introduced a new subsidy mechanism, the finance-linked individual subsidy. This was linked to housing loans from accredited lenders for borrowers in the R3,501–R7,000 monthly income range. The subsidy ranges from R3,369–R23,584 (2006), depending on income. The introduction of this programme has its roots in the Financial Sector Charter, which is a commitment by banks to extend their services to lower-income earners. Some banks have subsequently introduced affordable mortgage loan programmes aimed at this income group.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act no. 108 of 1996)

Through its commitment to the Habitat Agenda (1996), South Africa is obliged to

*“...Improve living and working conditions on an equitable and sustainable basis, so that everyone will have adequate shelter that is healthy, safe, secure, accessible, affordable, and that includes basic services, facilities and amenities and will enjoy freedom from discrimination in housing and legal security of tenure”.*⁹

Section 26 of the Constitution states:

- Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing.
- The State must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right.
- No one may be evicted from their home, or have their home demolished, without an order of court made after considering the relevant circumstances. No legislation may permit arbitrary evictions.

This provision corresponds with the ICESCR and accordingly, 'adequate housing' is measured by:

- legal security of tenure;
- the availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure;

- affordability;
- habitability;
- accessibility; and
- location and cultural adequacy.

South Africa's housing policy is consistent with this concept of housing. Constitutional Court rulings on housing rights (and the South African Human Rights Commission's Reports on Economic and Social Rights) often refer to the General Comments of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The Grootboom Case

Residents of Wallacedene (Cape Town) lived in severe poverty in a waterlogged area without basic services such as water, sewerage or refuse removal. Many had been on the government's waiting list for low-income housing but to no avail. In September 1998, faced with the prospect of remaining in intolerable conditions indefinitely, 900 people moved from Wallacedene onto adjacent, vacant, privately-owned land that had been earmarked for low-cost housing, called 'New Rust'.

The private landowner obtained an eviction order and on 18 May 1999 occupants' shelters were bulldozed and burnt, and their possessions destroyed at the municipality's expense. The magistrate recommended that the community and the municipality negotiate the community's temporary or permanent relocation to alternative land. Unable to move to their former sites in Wallacedene, they moved onto the Wallacedene sports field and erected temporary structures. Through their legal counsel, the community formally notified the municipality of the situation and demanded that it meet its constitutional obligation to provide temporary accommodation.

In the absence of a satisfactory response from the municipality, the community launched an urgent application on 31 May 1999 in the Cape High Court under the name of 'Irene Grootboom and 900 others'. The community based their case on two constitutional provisions:

1. Section 26 of the Constitution provides that everyone has a right of access to adequate housing. It obliges the State to take reasonable measures, within its available resources, to make sure that this right is realised progressively.
2. Section 28(1)(c) says that children have a right to shelter.

Not satisfied with the ruling of the High Court, government appealed to the Constitutional Court where it was affirmed that national government bears the overall responsibility for ensuring that the state complies with its Section 26 obligations. It further found that:

- the current housing programme fell short of the State's obligation to provide relief to people in desperate need, and that a reasonable part of the national housing budget should be devoted to providing such relief. If this was not done, the State's housing programme could not be considered reasonable for the purposes of Section 26(2); and
- the State's direct obligation would apply primarily when children were removed from their families, orphaned or abandoned.

The Grootboom case confirmed that the State must respect and fulfil the realisation of socio-economic rights as enshrined in the Constitution. The Constitutional Court recognised the close relationship between the right to equality and socio-economic rights, including housing rights.¹⁰

Section 25 of the Constitution is also important in that it relates to property rights. It states that government "must take reasonable legislative and other measures within its available resources, to foster conditions which enable citizens to gain access to land on an equitable basis".¹¹ The cases of *Soobramoney vs. Minister of Health* in 1997 (KwaZulu-Natal),¹² the *Grootboom* judgment and other court rulings have, with the assistance of international recommendations, interpreted what this right means for the State.

The key principles are as follows:

- the State must establish comprehensive and coherent programmes capable of facilitating the realisation of the right;
- the measures adopted by the State must be ‘reasonable’ within their context and within the availability of resources;
- the needs of the most vulnerable require special attention, and the State must “*devise, fund, implement and supervise measures to provide relief*”¹³ to those in desperate need. In contrast to international interpretations of the obligations of the State, the South African courts have rejected the concept of an individual right to a minimum core entitlement, and have instead emphasised the collective right to a reasonable policy.

2.1 Housing challenges

The housing crisis means that rapidly growing numbers of people are unable to access adequate housing. They are forced to live in poor conditions, with inadequate access to basic services, protection from the elements, living space and protection from arbitrary evictions. It is difficult to quantify the large housing backlog due to a lack of reliable statistics and lack of agreement on a suitable definition of inadequate housing. At the time of South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994, it was estimated that approximately 1.5 million families lived in inadequate housing conditions in urban areas.¹⁴ This figure included families living in shacks in informal settlements and the backyards of formal houses, sharing overcrowded formal houses and living in overcrowded hostels. Seven years later, in 2001, the number of families living in inadequate housing conditions in urban areas had increased to 2.4 million (and this figure is believed to still be increasing).¹⁵ The rapid increase in informal settlements is a very visible manifestation of the increasing housing backlog. From 1996 to 2001, the number of families living in shacks increased from 1.45 million to 1.84 million. This is an increase of 27%, which is far greater than the 10% increase in population over the same period.¹⁶

The root of the housing problem lies in South Africa’s apartheid history. Apartheid was a model of social engineering that pervaded every level of existence and social fabric. Under apartheid, more than 80% of South Africans were denied land and housing rights. Apartheid laws controlled where people could live and resulted in large numbers of people having to live in unacceptable conditions in informal settlements, backyard shacks and hostels. Growing poverty and unemployment and increasing income inequality have increased these problems. The South African Cities Network’s *2004 State of the Cities Report*¹⁷ was the first to analyse development trends in the nine cities and metros since 1994, in terms of the Habitat Agenda’s categories of demographics, productive cities, inclusive cities, sustainability and governance. The report confirmed that:

- migration into the major cities had stabilised to 1970s rates;
- the traditional economic sectors (primary, secondary and tertiary) were declining;
- the apartheid spatial patterns of growth were being reinforced in cities, with hard class lines replacing the racial structure;
- cities were more unequal than they were 10 years ago; and
- capacity and institutional frameworks for managing growth and transformation were facing complex challenges.

In terms of housing affordability, the Banking Council of South Africa estimated that only 20% of new households could afford mortgage loans to buy housing through the market, and only 22% of households had access to non-mortgage finance (typically loans of less than R10,000). Up to 80% of new households were therefore unable to gain access to adequate housing on their own, and this proportion has continued to increase.¹⁸ Inadequate housing conditions have enormous implications for health and the quality of life. Inadequate access to water and sanitation are strongly linked to a variety of illnesses, especially diarrhoea, which is the leading cause of death in most areas for children aged one to five.¹⁹ Households storing water are 4.6 times more likely to have diarrhoea than those who do not have to store water.²⁰ It is estimated that improving access to water and sanitation can reduce the number of cases of diarrhoea by up to 50%.²¹ There are also strong linkages between the prevalence of damp and respiratory diseases. Women are especially affected by inadequate housing as they are usually the homemakers and housing is the base for raising children and family life. Children are also severely affected, as

overcrowding and inadequate access to services can negate the effects of health and education programmes.

In quantitative terms, delivery has been impressive since 1994 (see Table 3). However, this level of delivery has been insufficient to decrease the backlog. An average of about 200,000 subsidised houses per year were delivered from 1996–2001. However, during this time the number of households living in shacks increased by about 400,000, i.e. by about 80,000 per year. This indicates that almost 300,000 new households per year are unable to access housing through the market.

Reasons for these inadequate levels of housing delivery and the growing housing backlog are, among others, attributed to inadequate resources devoted to the housing problem, poor capacity in government departments and skills shortages. This is partially because of the government’s macro-economic policy, which has cut state expenditure in order to reduce the budget deficit. The housing budget is particularly vulnerable to cuts as over 90% of it typically comprises capital expenditure, whereas other budget lines, e.g. health and education, are over 95% operational expenditure (mainly salaries) and are consequently considerably more difficult to cut.

As stated earlier, the Housing White Paper gave the National Housing Goal of increasing the housing budget to 5% of the total budget, in order to achieve a delivery rate of 350,000 houses a year (which was estimated to be necessary to reduce the housing backlog). In reality, housing expenditure has declined to below 2% of total government expenditure, and the housing delivery rate has decreased to less than 200,000 housing units per year (see Table 4). By comparison, the international average for developing countries is that about 2% of government expenditure is spent on housing and in many countries the proportion has been considerably higher – for example, the average proportion in South Asia has been more than 5%.²²

Table 3: Subsidised houses delivered per financial year 1994-2008²³

Housing units completed & in process of completion	Eastern Cape	Free State	Gauteng Province	Kwa-Zulu Natal	Limpopo Province	Mpumalanga	Northern Cape	North-West Province	Western Cape	South Africa TOTAL
Accumulated total 1994 - 1998/1999	63,393	48,434	185,333	149,126	49,750	47,595	13,821	60,631	103,730	721,813
1999/2000	20,345	7,177	45,384	28,997	12,401	4,808	2,600	12,944	26,916	161,572
2000/2001	34,021	16,088	38,547	28,547	20,996	16,457	4,148	14,109	17,730	190,643
2001/2002	10,816	7,005	46,723	14,379	16,667	14,584	2,588	13,885	16,634	143,281
2003/2003	58,662	9,155	24,344	24,485	14,953	21,649	6,056	23,784	20,500	203,588
2003/2004	27,119	16,746	49,034	33,668	15,810	21,232	3,787	10,484	15,735	193,615
2004/2005	37,524	16,447	66,738	36,734	16,514	18,000	3,598	10,037	11,756	217,348
2005/2006	19,825	20,536	59,310	35,872	10,112	14,986	8,667	35,515	11,310	216,133
2006/2007	16,526	19,662	77,044	38,290	23,609	10,651	3,880	46,972	34,585	271,219
2007/2008	12,684	12,482	90,886	34,471	18,970	16,569	8,686	19,945	34,157	248,850
Units completed & in process of completion: 31 March 2008	300,915	173,732	683,343	424,569	199,782	186,531	57,831	248,306	293,053	2,568,062

There have also been problems with the quality of housing delivered. Evaluations of the impact of the Housing Subsidy Scheme have found that though it has contributed towards an overall general improvement in people’s lives (e.g. with regards to access to secure tenure and basic services), in general, the real needs of people have not been adequately met and beneficiaries are highly dissatisfied. The location of new housing projects, typically on the periphery of towns and cities where large amounts of cheap land are usually available, was also found to be a major problem due to the inaccessibility of employment and

urban opportunities. Equally troubling has been the lack of people-centred approaches, with low levels of community participation in most aspects of housing projects.

Table 4: National housing expenditure²⁴

Year	Housing expenditure (millions of Rands)	National expenditure (millions of Rands)	Housing expenditure as % of national expenditure	Number of subsidised houses delivered
1997/98	4,520	189,947	2.4%	295,811
1998/99	3,748	201,416	1.9%	248,391
1999/00	3,494	214,750	1.6%	161,572
2000/01	3,329	233,934	1.4%	190,643
2001/02	3,721	262,905	1.4%	143,281
2002/03	4,218	291,529	1.4%	203,588
2003/04	4,560	331,685	1.4%	193,615
2004/05	4,808	368,904	1.3%	178,612
2005/06	5,256	404,654	1.3%	-

Reasons for the inadequate quality of much of the subsidised housing have been:

- a lack of government capacity for supporting housing delivery;
- the severe constraints of the subsidy amount, which is insufficient for an adequately sized housing unit on an adequately-located and -serviced piece of land; and
- a lack of real support for people-driven housing processes.²⁵

Evaluations have shown that projects where there has been real participation by the beneficiaries are more successful in providing good quality housing and better living environments than conventional top-down mass contractor-delivery of standardised units.²⁶ Although the People's Housing Process (PHP) programme was introduced in 1998 to support people-driven housing processes, government staff generally lack the skills to work in a participatory, bottom-up way, and there has been insufficient funding available to support the facilitation of people-driven housing processes by NGOs.²⁷ Since 1994, international donor finance has shifted away from the NGOs that support people-driven housing and development projects towards government bodies. These have generally not been effective in utilising donor funds.

2.2 Economic context

South Africa has an estimated population of 46.7 million people (2005 estimate), of whom 79.3% are Black, 9.4% are White, 8.9% are Coloured and 2.5% are Indian.²⁸ South Africa is characterised by great cultural diversity and enormous inequalities. Between 1991 and 2001, South Africa's Gini-coefficient (which measures income inequality) increased from 0.68 to 0.77 (0 being absolute income equality and 1 being absolute income inequality).²⁹ A survey on household expenditure by Statistics South Africa revealed that the country's Gini-coefficient currently stands at 0.72. Without social grants the measure weakens to 0.8.³⁰ South Africa is ranked as one of the ten most unequal countries in the world in terms of income. Income inequality has increased within all race groups (see Table 5).

Table 5: Changes in Gini-coefficient in South Africa 1991–2001³¹

Race group	1991	1996	2001
Black	0,62	0,66	0,72
White	0,46	0,50	0,60
Coloured	0,52	0,56	0,64
Asian	0,49	0,52	0,60
TOTAL	0,68	0,69	0,77

South Africa has been experiencing modest economic growth, with real growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 5.0% in 2005, up from 4.5% in 2004 and 3.0% in 2003.³² The economic growth over the past decade has, however, been accompanied by a decrease in formal sector employment. It is estimated that the number of formal sector jobs in South Africa decreased by 15% in the decade to 2000, and, despite fairly strong growth in the economy, decreased by 3% in the year 2000 alone.³³ The 2001 Census showed an unemployment rate of 42%, up from 34% in 1996.³⁴

Poverty is an enormous problem. In 2002, 48.5% of the population lived below a national poverty line of R355 per adult (1995 prices), a slight decrease from 51.1% in 1995.³⁵ Using this measure, 56% of Black, 36% of Coloureds, 15% of Indians and 7% of Whites can be classified as poor.³⁶ The population living in extreme poverty, using the international poverty line of \$1 per day, was 10.5% in 2002 (up from 9.4% in 1995).³⁷

HIV/AIDS is expected to have a severe social and economic impact and the government has been much criticised for not responding effectively to this challenge. South Africa has a larger number of people with HIV/AIDS than any other country in the world and AIDS is believed to be the leading cause of death in South Africa. HIV/AIDS has resulted in average life expectancy in South Africa decreasing from 61.4 years in 1995 to 51.4 years in 2002.³⁸

2.3 Social context

The last ten years have seen a complex and evolving policy framework and a related persistent restructuring of local government bodies. They have also seen a gradual decline and evolution of civil society in South Africa. Changes in macro-economic policy have meant that many social development initiatives are under-funded and have not had an optimal effect.

Despite this, South Africa has a rich tradition of community-based organisations. Participation in stokvels (savings clubs), burial clubs, church associations and sports clubs help people to cope with everyday life. In the early 1980s, civic associations, i.e. organisations claiming to represent everybody in a specific geographical area, arose as a result of the apartheid government's clampdown on Black political movements. Due to political parties such as the African National Congress being banned, civics were at the forefront of resistance against apartheid in the mid-1980s. In the early 1990s South Africa underwent major change and civics became increasingly involved in development projects, usually via community-based trusts. In 1992 the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO) was formed.

Many SANCO leaders became local government councillors in the 1995–1996 local government elections. This weakened the civic movement, which was already suffering as the spirit of voluntary involvement declined after the 1994 national election. Local government, which set up development forums and ward committees to facilitate participation in local government matters, has also increasingly marginalised the civic movement. The 1990s also saw the rapid growth of organisations such as the South African Homeless People's Federation and other independent housing associations, which acted as community self-help organisations concerned with housing and development issues and which were not linked to the civic movement or political parties. There was also a rise of social movements opposed to particular State programmes, such as the Anti-Eviction Campaign, which campaigned against the eviction of people for non-payment of rates and service charges.

The NGO sector has undergone great changes. Non-profit welfare and charity organisations have a long history in South Africa, but the real growth of the NGO movement occurred during the 1980s. Voluntary organisations were formed to support community groups in their struggle against the apartheid state and many of these subsequently obtained foreign funding, which was fairly accessible at the time.

Since 1994, however, much foreign donor funding has been redirected from NGOs to the government. Government has often been inefficient in the use of funds for development, for example, in failing to spend over R1 billion set aside for employment creation initiatives and for being very slow and inefficient in channelling funds through the National Development Agency (NDA) and in allocating funds from the

national lottery. However, NGOs continue to play a major role in many government programmes and are able to address the needs of the very poor and pioneer innovative approaches where government bodies are unable to do so. The Department of Housing in its latest review of housing expenditure says:

*“... In recent years, the number of NGOs that are active in the housing sector has declined, mostly as a result of declining levels of donor funding. In 2005, the Urban Sector Network was dissolved and many of its former affiliates have since been disbanded. This reduces institutional capacity in the sector and weakens housing delivery outcomes because of the absence of advocacy and community consultation capacity”.*³⁹

2.4 Political context

In 2003, in a foreword to a comprehensive report published on the growing problem of urban slums worldwide, United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan said:

*“... The locus of global poverty is moving to cities, a process now recognised as the urbanisation of poverty. Without concerted action on the part of the municipal authorities, national governments, civil society actors and the international community, the number of slum-dwellers is likely to increase in most developing countries”.*⁴⁰

The report's chief concern is that the world's rural population has reached its peak and almost all further population growth will be absorbed by urban settlements. The sheer magnitude of the housing demand, particularly in cities and towns of the developing world, makes it difficult to set targets. The rates of urbanisation and pent-up demand often overshadow and even backlash against the gains made from slum improvements.⁴¹ This critical situation is recognised by the South African government, which is committed to the Millennium Development Agenda, Goals and Targets.

Goal 7 is the most relevant of these goals as it relates to environmental sustainability, especially Target 11: *by 2020, to have achieved significant improvements in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.*⁴² However, despite the South African government's acknowledgement of the pressure to deliver and to 'accelerate delivery', the approach taken by government towards meeting Millennium Development targets is often inconsistent with Millennium Development intentions, and the way in which these targets are pursued is further impacting on poverty.

Service delivery protests across the country and the court case in Joe Slovo, Cape Town (related to government's N2 Gateway project in Cape Town) represent a desperate call for appropriate solutions to our housing problems. Fourteen years into democracy, despite shifts in policy and vision, very little has changed for millions of households in need of adequate housing. Communities countrywide, anguish over inferior quality housing. They have lost patience with slow and/or non-delivery of housing and settlement-related services, as well as with the lack of communication clarity from government. Although some protesting has become violent, the concerns of protestors are legitimate and need to be addressed.

The scale of the problem is increasingly evident as informal settlements mushroom. The settlements themselves are continually growing and many reach densities significantly higher than the average low-income housing development, with some reaching densities as high as 300 dwelling units per hectare. The proliferation of informal settlements testifies to the absence of a plausible and comprehensive plan to deal with the land and housing problem. It also illustrates that many people in backyards and overcrowded housing have lost faith in the government's housing programme. More importantly, it speaks to the failure of the market-driven economy to provide for the most basic needs of the poor.

The N2 Gateway Project, government's most substantial attempt to tackle the problem head-on, was billed as a national pilot to demonstrate the new housing vision articulated in BNG. Initially, it was promised that the project would demonstrate co-operative governance between the State's three spheres, employ a range of alternative typologies and fast-track delivery. The project has been riddled with technical and

political difficulties and, more recently, seems set to demonstrate some of the fundamental problems with housing delivery in South Africa. In 2005, DAG wrote:

“... The top-down approach in the N2 project undermines its overall sustainability... the casual, continued and increasing practice of excluding people from decision making about development processes that directly affect their lives is an obstacle that communities are unlikely to tolerate for much longer”.

Whereas BNG makes an important shift towards upgrading informal settlements, the N2 Gateway project is a completely unsustainable approach to doing so. Relocating informal settlement dwellers to badly located housing developments in the name of ‘slum eradication’ does not address government’s objectives of building sustainable settlements. Nor does it address the Millennium Development Goals. This antediluvian approach to community participation works against *Batho Pele* principles and against the notion of a developmental local government. Moreover, it pits one poor household against another in the desperate battle to secure shelter. This compounds the pressures on the state to deliver and spurs the ongoing protests.⁴³

The politics of housing and other areas of delivery has made politicians and officials averse to collaborative action, placing sustainable solutions further out of reach. The competitive nature of party politics and the tendency to use housing as a political football perverts the delivery process. Even within parties, individuals use housing delivery to leverage support bases and to secure their places within party ranks. This generates a low trust environment all round and gives rise to the ‘cloak and dagger’ shenanigans manifesting in the N2 project.

Politicians need to look beyond a five-year horizon and commit to resolving the problem in a lasting way. Politicians need to be less self-congratulatory about massive capital investments that make little meaningful impact, and must sacrifice short-term gain for the long-term benefit of all.⁴⁴ Meeting the future challenges of South Africa largely depends on how the three spheres of government and other important role players, such as civil society and the private sector, are able to work together to address problems and seize opportunities.

2.5 Policy response

The most pertinent policies concerning medium-density housing are discussed below. Broader policy and institutional contexts can be found in the Addendum.

2.5.1 The Department of Housing’s White Paper: A New Housing Policy and Strategy for South Africa (1994)

The overall housing policy approach taken by government in 1994 responded to the housing crisis through the scale delivery of subsidised housing for low-income households. They delivered over two million houses, predominantly in the form of low residential density individual ownership RDP houses. These were typically a 30m² subsidised unit, usually one room with a toilet, on a 250m² plot, generally located on the periphery of towns and cities. This may have been due to the lack of legal access to land, shelter and property rights for the majority of South Africans under apartheid, and the perception that individual ownership was a way of rectifying injustices of the past.⁴⁵

From a numbers perspective, the success of the housing programme has been astonishing: to date, the Department of Housing has delivered more than two million subsidised houses, providing secure tenure for over six million people. However, there has been some criticism.

Housing quality has been a main concern, together with the location and value of subsidised housing. New township developments have perpetuated rather than overcome apartheid spatial patterns and have been little more than expensive shelter, failing to provide beneficiaries with the financial asset that higher-income households realise in their housing. Despite policy intentions set out in the White Paper to develop more compact towns and cities, the delivery of medium-density housing for low-income households on well-

located land (typically in the form of rental or sectional title tenure) has been limited since 1996, despite the introduction of the institutional housing subsidy. In a media briefing in September 2001 the national Minister of Housing declared that:

*“... Within the 1,194 million houses that we have built to date, only 33,000 units were medium density. 100% of this stock has proved to be of better quality and the maintenance thereof has not proved to be difficult as the beneficiaries are also involved in the management of their structures”.*⁴⁶

However, the demand for well-located affordable housing is increasing, fuelling a sense of impatience with government’s progress. This is evident in the proliferation of informal settlements and other informal living arrangements as the poor search for access to the city and the urban opportunities it provides. The complex nature and scale of the housing crisis necessitates a sustainable solution that requires more than the simple provision of thousands of houses, based on the suburban model of freestanding residential dwellings, to rectify the enormous backlog.



Low-density suburban sprawl in South Africa

An approach to housing delivery must take into account factors such as spatial and social segregation, a dysfunctional market, inequality, poverty, an absence of social and human capital formation, and a range of other problems.⁴⁷ The National Housing Code cautions against an approach that is not integrated:

*“... Our response to this crisis must be innovative and diverse. If we respond only to the numbers that must be built, we risk replicating the distorted apartheid geography of the past. If we respond only to the dysfunctional market, we risk alienating households so impoverished that they are unable to access any market. And if we develop our houses as though the housing crisis is only about bricks and mortar, we risk wasting the enormous potential for gearing the massive reconstruction and development effort happening in our country”.*⁴⁸

Integration requires high level planning. However, urban development processes are not planned and consciously

used to achieve integration and resolve our housing woes. Dominant practice focuses on the physical delivery of houses, underpinned by a greenfields-type engineering-driven development practice, characterised by big delivery arrangements. Social and economic development programmes are added afterwards, if at all.

This disjointed incremental experimentation prevents progressive and innovative improvements in human settlement development practices. In informal settlements, the priority should become the *in situ* upgrading of shelter and livelihood conditions of these established communities, rather than the eradication approach adopted merely to enhance the aesthetic appeal of our urban landscape. Broader strategic and integrated planning is also found wanting, as is innovation in addressing the questions of financial packaging, alternative design and capacity constraints.

Careful forward planning which draws on international best practice and on the experiences of various local communities can generate viable well-informed solutions and cheaper, shorter learning curves. Inclusive city-wide visions and strategies that are politically led are needed to address inadequate housing within a broader framework of poverty alleviation, in order to create a city spatial structure and urban economy that equitably redistributes the benefits of economic growth to all communities, especially the poor.

Recent discourse has shifted broadly from a housing supply emphasis to one that seeks to enhance the housing assets of low-income earners so that urban land markets work for the poor. The government may have accepted a markets framework in its poverty alleviation and reconstruction objectives; however, engagement with actors in the sector is needed, in order to develop a credible, coherent position around the cost of land, the persistence of informality, access to and availability of land to the poor, urban-rural linkages, legislative and regulatory issues, and the intention for sustainable human settlements. The nature, extent and variety of interventions may need to be more aggressively progressive and innovative if they are to speak to the need for a developmental state that is able to:

- use land and other resources to influence pro-poor investments in the land, property and financial markets; and
- use innovative planning and land developments to influence urban socio-spatial and economic restructuring.

Housing policy and practice in South Africa has recently shifted towards alternative tenure arrangements and more compact urban development, as put forward in BNG. Taking into account the shift in policy towards providing sustainable human settlements and achieving balanced growth and development across the country, it becomes apparent that a shift is needed in the implementation approach. This has implications for both institutional capabilities and capacity. Capacity and skills levels in government are currently at a deficit, impacting severely on implementation.

2.5.2 Breaking New Ground: A Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Sustainable Human Settlements (2004)

In September 2004 the BNG plan was approved by MinMEC, marking a turnaround in housing delivery countrywide. The strategy refocused policy attention on the development of sustainable human settlements, as opposed to the delivery of subsidised housing units. BNG re-evaluated housing delivery and recommended bold changes to the traditional ways in which housing has been delivered:

*“ ... The new human settlements plan reinforces the vision of the Department of Housing, to promote the achievement of a non-racial, integrated society through the development of sustainable settlements and quality housing”.*⁴⁹

The sustainable human settlements discourse, as articulated in BNG, is couched within the emerging international language for addressing global urbanisation, as encapsulated in the goals, principles and commitments set out in the Habitat Agenda and Global Plan of Action, endorsed by world governments for urban sustainability. It was also informed by the Millennium Development Goals, which has led to the

national housing minister's goal of 'eradicating informal settlements' by 2014. The announcement of BNG provided the impetus for new thinking around developing sustainable human settlements through targeted investment in infrastructure and using revised housing instruments (such as social or medium-density housing). BNG proposes a shift from product uniformity to demand responsiveness:

"... The dominant production of single houses on single plots in distant locations with initially weak socio-economic infrastructure is inflexible to local dynamics and changes in demand. The new human settlements plan moves away from the current commoditised focus on housing delivery towards more responsive mechanisms which address the multi-dimensional needs of sustainable human settlements".⁵⁰

The plan envisages a:

"... diversified range of support measures which are able to accommodate qualification and affordability variations, tenure preferences and investment priorities" and recognises the need to "stimulate the supply of a more diverse set of housing environments and settlement types through greater choices of housing types, densities, location, tenure options, housing credit, and delivery routes".⁵¹

The plan offers additional housing instruments to supplement existing instruments, "to provide flexible solutions to demand-side needs",⁵² and attempts greater levels of responsiveness to local circumstances. The plan is underpinned by an increased focus on the development of sustainable human settlements to aid housing delivery (emphasising planning and engagement), the quality of the housing product (both in terms of location and final housing form), as well as the long-term sustainability of the housing environment (leading to a focus on institutional capacity). BNG has the specific objectives of:

- accelerating the delivery of housing as a key strategy for poverty alleviation;
- using the provision of housing as a major job creation strategy;
- ensuring property can be accessed by all as an asset for wealth creation and empowerment;
- leveraging growth in the economy;
- combating crime, promoting social cohesion and improving quality of life for the poor;
- supporting the functioning of the entire single residential property market to reduce duality within the sector, by breaking the barriers between the first economy residential property boom and the second economy slump; and
- using housing as an instrument for the development of sustainable human settlements, in support of spatial restructuring.

Specific objectives put forward in BNG include, but are not limited to, the following five areas:

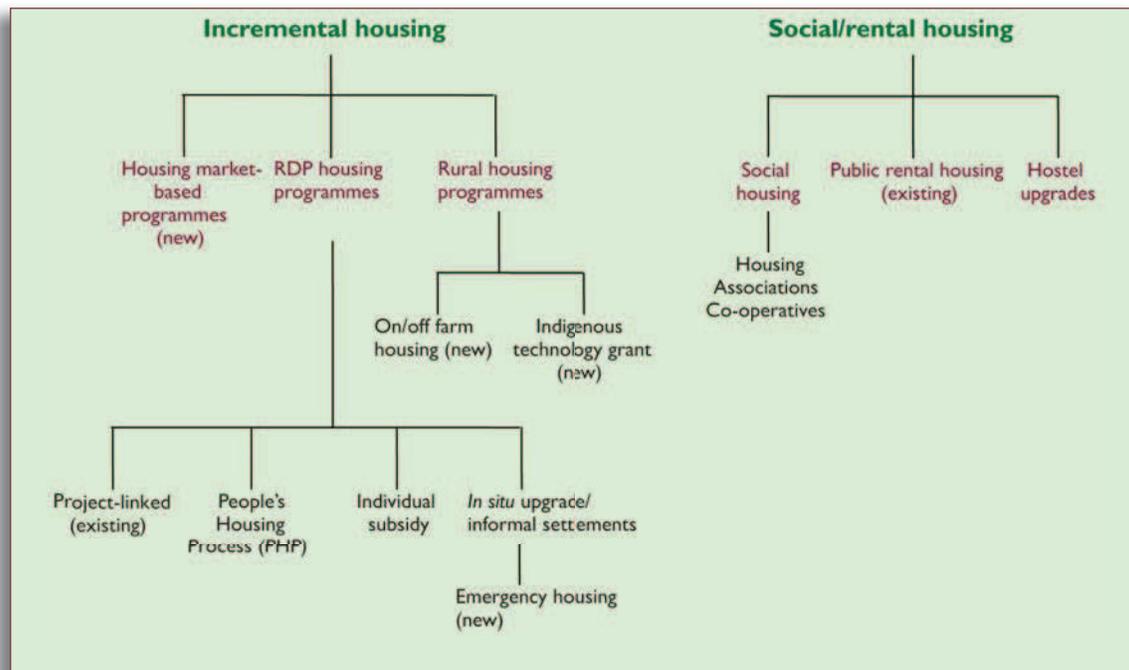
1. *Promoting densification and integration:* The National Department of Housing in conjunction with the Department of Provincial and Local Government will investigate the development of suitable policy instruments and adjustments to promote densification. Aspects such as planning guidelines, property taxation, zoning, subdivision, land swaps and consolidation will be included in a draft densification policy. Measures to promote higher-density development include:
 - a. the promotion of higher-density in existing built areas, i.e. densification;
 - b. promoting the development of large vacant sites within built urban areas, i.e. infill development; and
 - c. restricting the outward expansion of urban areas and forcing development inward, i.e. containment.

Residential permits will be introduced, aimed at facilitating income generation by obliging developers to either set aside units within residential developments for lower-income groups, or developing lower-income residential accommodation in adjacent areas. It is proposed that 20% of all residential development constitute low cost to affordable housing.

2. *Enhancing the location of new housing projects:* The location of housing projects has been criticised for reinforcing apartheid spatial settlement patterns. The plan acknowledges that the objective of spatial restructuring demands a more decisive intervention in land markets and envisages the

- following interventions:
- a. accessing well-located state-owned and parastatal land: an inter-governmental overall strategy to facilitate the release of well-located public land to municipalities will be developed. Public land and land held by parastatal organisations, where deemed suitable for housing purposes, is to be transferred to municipalities at no cost;
 - b. acquisition of well-located private land for housing development: land will be acquired by municipalities in line with municipal IDPs and spatial development frameworks. Private land will only be acquired where there is no appropriate state-owned land and does not exclude expropriation at market value as a final resort;
 - c. funding for land acquisition: the cost should not be borne by the poor, but should be treated as a broader social cost. Therefore, funding for the acquisition of land will no longer form part of the housing subsidy; and
 - d. fiscal incentives: the development of fiscal incentives to promote the densification of targeted areas and disincentives to sprawl, will be introduced in co-operation with local governments, the South African Revenue Services, Treasury and the Department of Local and Provincial Government.
3. *Supporting urban renewal and inner city regeneration:* Housing plays an important role in resuscitating urban centres and exclusion areas, and municipalities are striving to prevent inner city housing from becoming unaffordable. The BNG plan will support incentives for the redevelopment of properties within inner city areas by encouraging social (medium-density) housing. They will increase effective demand by facilitating access to loan finance in the middle-income group (above the R3,500 per month income limit) as well as the reintroduction of demand-driven individual subsidies.
 4. *Developing social and economic infrastructure:* The plan recognises the need to move away from a housing-only approach towards the more holistic development of human settlement. It proposes the following:
 - a. construction of social and economic infrastructure determined through a community profile and facilities audit, to ensure that facilities are appropriately targeted;
 - b. introduction of a new funding mechanism to fund the development of the primary social/ community facilities; and
 - c. municipalities will be the primary implementation agencies, and responsible for the operational and maintenance costs. Facilities may be managed/operated by CBOs and NGOs.
 5. *Enhancing the housing product:* There is a need to develop more appropriate settlement designs and housing products and to ensure appropriate housing quality. BNG proposes the following:
 - a. the development of design guidelines for designers and regulators to achieve sustainable and environmentally efficient settlements; and
 - b. Changing the face of the stereotypical RDP houses and settlements through the promotion of alternative technology and design, including support and protection of indigenous knowledge systems.

More specifically, the social (medium-density) programme covering rental housing options and alternative tenure housing options such as housing co-operatives is one of four main programme thrusts proposed in BNG (see figure below).⁵³ In June 2005, MINMEC approved *A Social Housing Policy for South Africa* in order to ensure alignment with the broader national strategy (see addendum on the policy context for details on the social housing policy). However, to date, delivery of a medium-density housing programme has been limited, especially in light of a non-functional medium-density rental-housing instrument able to provide for the needs of low-income households. (The Community Residential Units Programme has been introduced recently and is not yet operational.) This under-performance is mainly due to severe capacity constraints (institutional, and in terms of knowledge and human resources) in government departments, a non-commitment to the overall goals of sustainability, as well as political tension between and within spheres of government, despite the official obligation to advance inter-governmental relations.



Broad programmatic thrusts of BNG⁵⁴

Although the social/rental housing thrust of BNG concerns itself primarily with medium-density housing, the subject matter of the present research does not exclusively deal with housing as it pertains to the social housing programme. In fact, the research demonstrates some of the shortcomings of social housing in meeting current demand and highlights the need for medium-density (public rental) housing that is well located. Case studies contained in the resource book containing lessons regarding social housing include Carr Gardens, Newtown Urban Village, Stock Road Housing, and the N2 Gateway project. **CG NU SR N2**

Section 4.8 provides insights into the social housing vs. public rental housing debate. The Missionvale, Samora Machel and Sakhasonke Village case studies demonstrate that medium-density housing can be delivered successfully using subsidies such as project-linked and individual subsidies generally associated with RDP housing delivery, alternative architectural typologies such as semi-detached and row housing, and other spatial, social and institutional preconditions. **MV SM SV**

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