

Challenges Facing South African Local Government in Shaping Housing-Driven Economic Development in Townships

A dél-afrikai helyi önkormányzatok előtt álló kihívások a lakhatás által vezérelt gazdaságfejlesztésben

LUCIA LEBOTO-KHETSI, VERNA NEL

Lucia LEBOTO-KHETSI: post doctoral fellow, Centre for Development Support; part-time lecturer, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of the Free State, South Africa; PO Box 339, Bloemfontein 9300, Republic of South Africa; lucialeboto@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8141-383X>

Verna NEL: emeritus professor, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of the Free State, South Africa; PO Box 339, Bloemfontein 9300, Republic of South Africa; vernel@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7446-5669>

KEYWORDS: township housing; local economic development; local government; South Africa

ABSTRACT: Democratic efforts to provide township housing in South Africa have made significant strides but largely failed to integrate local economic development. The disconnection between housing provision and economic strategies has perpetuated a fragmented urban landscape where township residents continue to endure inadequate living conditions and limited access to sustainable economic opportunities. This paper examines challenges faced by Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality in expediting coordinated township housing and economic development, with specific focus on the local governance characteristic. The municipality's struggle to uphold the constitutional right to adequate housing while fostering vibrant local economies underscores the broader national challenge of aligning housing policy with economic development goals. Drawing from the lens of top-down and bottom-up urban renewal approaches, the paper underscores the importance of harmonizing government-led strategies with community-driven initiatives to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Employing a qualitative research design, the study utilized purposive sampling to conduct in-depth interviews with key stakeholders including municipal officials, human settlements practitioners, and academics. Thematic analysis was applied to identify and categorize systemic barriers impeding effective integration of housing and economic development. Findings reveal that despite a robust policy framework, significant institutional weaknesses undermine progress. These include inadequate administrative and technical capacity among officials, restrictive regulatory frameworks and persistent political instability. Resource constraints such as chronic funding shortages and mismanagement, insufficient infrastructure and a lack of technical expertise, further exacerbate the challenges. Additionally, there are critical stakeholder-related issues including poor interdepartmental coordination and limited community engagement. These deficiencies hinder participatory planning, foster mistrust and contribute to social resistance towards the local government.

The paper argues that these systemic barriers undermine not only the municipality's capacity to deliver adequate housing but also its ability to leverage housing as a catalyst for



local economic development. In response, the paper proposes a set of local governance reforms designed to enhance service delivery, build institutional and stakeholder capacity and promote housing-led economic development. Recommendations include streamlining regulatory frameworks, improving interdepartmental coordination and institutionalizing community participation mechanisms. By addressing these structural deficiencies and leveraging both top-down and bottom-up approaches, the paper contends that it is possible to transform township housing development into a platform for economic empowerment, thereby advancing urban development and promoting social equity. Finally, the findings contribute to a growing body of scholarship that emphasizes the critical need for integrated approaches to housing and economic development in the pursuit of sustainable and inclusive urban futures in South Africa.

LEBOTO-KHETSI, Lucia: posztdoktori ösztöndíjas, Fejlesztési Támogatások Központja; óraadó oktató, Dél-Afrika Szabad Állami Egyetem, Városi és Regionális Fejlesztési Tanszék; PO Box 339, Bloemfontein 9300, Dél-afrikai Köztársaság; lucialeboto@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8141-383X>

NEL, Verna: emeritus professzor, Dél-Afrika Szabad Állami Egyetem, Városi és Regionális Fejlesztési Tanszék; PO Box 339, Bloemfontein 9300, Dél-afrikai Köztársaság; vernel@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7446-5669>

KULCSSZAVAK: lakhatás külvárosi negyedben; helyi gazdaságfejlesztés; helyi önkormányzat; Dél-Afrika

ABSZTRAKT: A dél-afrikai települések lakhatásának biztosítására irányuló demokratikus erőfeszítések jelentős előrelépéseket tettek, de a helyi gazdaságfejlesztés integrálása nagyrészt nem sikerült. A lakhatás biztosítása és a gazdasági stratégiák közötti kapcsolat hiánya egy olyan széttörözött városi tájképet állandósított, ahol a külvárosi negyedek lakói továbbra sem élnek megfelelő életkörülmények között, és korlátozottan férnek hozzá a fenntartható gazdasági lehetőségekhez. Ez a tanulmány a Mangaung városi önkormányzat előtt álló kihívásokat vizsgálja a koordinált városi lakás- és gazdaságfejlesztés felgyorsítása terén, különös tekintettel a helyi kormányzatra. Az önkormányzat küzdelme a megfelelő lakhatáshoz való alkotmányos jog fenntartásáért, és ezzel párhuzamosan a helyi gazdaság élénküléséért, aláhúzza a lakáspolitikát és a gazdaságfejlesztési célok összehangolásának szélesebb körű nemzeti kihívását. A felülről lefelé és alulról felfelé irányuló városmegújítási megközelítések szemszögéből vizsgálva, a tanulmány kiemeli a kormányzat által vezetett stratégiák és a közösség által irányított kezdeményezések összehangolásának fontosságát a fenntartható eredmények elérése érdekében.

A kvalitatív kutatási tervet alkalmazó tanulmány célzott mintavételezéssel mélyinterjúkat készített a legfontosabb érdekelt felekkel, köztük önkormányzati tisztviselőkkel, települési szakemberekkel és egyetemi oktatókkal. A szerzők tematikus elemzést alkalmaztak a lakás- és gazdaságfejlesztés hatékony integrációját akadályozó rendszerszintű akadályok azonosítására és kategorizálására. Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy a szilárd szakpolitikai keret ellenére jelentős intézményi hiányosságok hátráltatják az előrehaladást. Ezek közé tartozik a tisztviselők nem megfelelő adminisztratív és technikai kapacitása, a korlátozó szabályozási keretek és a tartós politikai instabilitás. A kihívásokat tovább súlyosbítják az olyan erőforráskorlátozók, mint a krónikus finanszírozási hiány, az elégtelen infrastruktúra és a műszaki szakértelem hiánya. Emellett az érdekelt felekkel kapcsolatos kritikus problémák is fennállnak, beleértve a gyenge tárcaközi koordinációt és a korlátozott közösségi szerepvállalást. Ezek a hiányosságok akadályozzák a részvételi tervezést, erősítik a bizalmatlanságot és hozzájárulnak a helyi önkormányzattal szembeni társadalmi ellenálláshoz.

A tanulmány szerint ezek a rendszerszintű akadályok nemcsak az önkormányzat megfelelő lakhatás biztosításának képességét ássák alá, hanem azt is, hogy a lakhatást a helyi gazdaságfejlesztés katalizátoraként használja fel. Válaszként a tanulmány egy sor olyan helyi kormányzati reformot javasol, amelyek célja a szolgáltatásnyújtás javítása, az intézményi és az érdekelt felek

kapacitásának kiépítése, valamint a lakásépítés által vezérelt gazdasági fejlődés előmozdítása. Az ajánlások között szerepel a szabályozási keretek ésszerűsítése, a tárcaközi koordináció javítása és a közösségi részvételi mechanizmusok intézményesítése. E strukturális hiányosságok kezelésével, valamint a felülről lefelé és alulról felfelé irányuló megközelítések kihasználásával lehetséges a települési lakásépítést a gazdasági szerepvállalás platformjává alakítani, ezáltal előmozdítva a városfejlesztést és a társadalmi egyenlőséget. Végezetül a megállapítások hozzájárulnak ahhoz az egyre növekvő számú tudományos munkához, amelyek hangsúlyozzák, hogy a fenntartható és inkluzív városi jövő kutatás érdekében Dél-Afrikában a lakhatás és a gazdaságfejlesztés integrált megközelítésére van szükség.

Introduction

Colonialism and apartheid distorted urban and rural areas in South Africa. Anyone not classified as “white” had to live in designated “Group Areas”. These areas had housing constructed by the government, leading to some 500 000 small houses that could not accommodate all household members comfortably (CAHF 2019). The apartheid government also tried to limit the number of non-white races in cities, but the growing economy required labour. Hence, houses were built in “lokasies” or “townships”, racially segregated settlements detached from the city. As guided by Annexure 7, townships had few sites allocated for businesses as the state wanted residents to buy the goods in the white areas. However, there were opportunities for them to work locally since they could practice business on their sites provided that the dominant use remained residential (Republic of South Africa 1984).

When South Africa became a truly democratic country, the government had to deal with the pent-up demand of people already residing in the cities as well as the significant rural-to-urban migrants. The socialist tendencies of the Mandela government are reflected in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution. One of the rights is access to adequate housing, which the government must, within its resources, progressively meet. Furthermore, the state must respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights (van Wyk 2020). The state has thus provided at least 4,3 million ‘housing opportunities’ to citizens. Nearly one-third of all houses have been built by the state. The Constitution also provides for three spheres of government which are distinct but interrelated. Several problems have been encountered due to this provision. One of them pertains to housing (now human settlements). Provinces are responsible for this function, yet municipalities must provide serviced land (roads, water and sanitation). It has occurred that houses are constructed with services or residents have been allocated serviced plots where they build their own homes (CAHF 2019; Rapelang et al. 2018).

By 1986 the apartheid government realized that urbanization would occur with or without permission. Many informal settlements emerged in well-located yet hazardous sites that had access to employment opportunities, and others as extensions of existing townships far from employment, schooling and health

facilities. Small businesses, locally known as ‘spaza’ or ‘tuck-shops’, began to operate from their homes. Others now generate income by leasing entire houses to businesses. The spaza shops, informal traders and other informal food businesses generate over ZAR 30 billion (\approx USD1,7 billion) per annum and backyard rentals a further 87 billion (\approx USD4,7 billion) (Thwala et al. 2023). The link between housing and economic development has received far less attention than each component has. Local economic development (LED) initiatives tend to focus on formal business development, ignoring the vast contribution that the informal sector makes to the economy and as an employer. Housing development often emphasizes the physical dwelling and narrowly considers the comprehensive context of adequate housing.

This paper links housing and LED and how they support each other. It notes the regulatory barriers such as restrictive zoning and the limited resources – financial, labour and appropriate skills – of most municipalities. Other limitations are the lack of political will to support those who do not pay municipal taxes and the poor quality of construction by contractors and site owners. Legislative, governance and changes of perspective are necessary to overcome the barriers to supporting the link between housing and economic development. Given this background, the paper explores necessary governance reforms for sustainable township housing and economic development by identifying challenges faced by the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality (MMM) in implementing related policies, strategies and initiatives.

The paper starts by reviewing the link between housing and local economic development, followed by South African policy perspectives. It proceeds to methodology, findings and discussion, and lastly the policy implications, recommendations and conclusion.

The link between housing and local economic development (LED)

The primary land use in cities is residential, occupying 65% to 75% of the surface area while driving national economic growth, stability, resilience and social development (UN Habitat 2016). According to Shannon (2018), LED is intrinsically linked to spatial considerations of an area, especially growth patterns and development potential based on housing, transport, water, sanitation and electricity infrastructure, amenities, environment and strategic growth zones. Housing probably forms the largest part of the construction sector creating employment for skilled and unskilled labour alike through the construction, extensions and maintenance of dwellings. The need for housing drives the construction industry in both the formal and informal sector, as workers from this sector are often employed in the maintenance of formal structures. The Centre for Affordable Housing Finance in Africa calculated that the housing

construction sector added ZAR 8.4 billion (\approx \$460 million) to the economy in 2017 (CAHF 2019). It also calculates workers' wages which would flow the neighbourhood and city's economy. Charman et al. (2020) have identified far more informal enterprises in 'townships' than can be discerned through a land use survey. Their work stresses the function of dwellings as more than merely a place to live, but a socio-economic asset to derive an income.

The quality of neighbourhoods and housing determine whether it attracts or repels the necessary human capital for economic growth. Areas with high demand and supply foster housing price hikes, excluding the urban poor who are often pushed to urban peripheries where housing is cheaper, yet transport costs are higher and commuting time longer, hence decreasing efficiency, work performance, quality of life and the economy (Satterthwaite 2020). Areas with cheaper housing attract the poor, low-skilled and unemployed who subsequently deter external investments. Yet there are many informal enterprises in low-income areas. Rather than the current focus on formalisation of informal enterprises, their growth should be encouraged and enabled. Municipalities should prioritize individual skills improvement through capacity building, as this is more likely to foster long-term growth (Cheshire, Nathan, Overman 2014).

Furthermore, housing markets impact place economies based on their unique context of labour markets, enterprises, infrastructure and business. Regularized housing generates capital through construction, rentals and ownership opportunities, therefore boosting economic functioning and place desirability (Glossop 2008). However, economic benefits gained from housing construction usually diverge housing costs. The mismatch in demand and supply of affordable housing in cities leads to informal housing such as backyard shacks in townships and decayed suburbs, which has implications for housing adequacy, tenants' and landlords' rights and health, hence affecting labour performance (Turok 2020; Scheba, Turok 2020). Therefore, various housing options are necessary to allow tenant mobility and freedom of choice pertaining to affordability and convenience, which improves the labour market functioning.

Efficient infrastructure attracts human capital and investment necessary for strong economies. There is an innate linkage between housing and the adverse impact of tenancy on services and infrastructure. With increased housing and subsequent population growth must be adequate infrastructure, failing which a city faces economic, social and environmental consequences (Govender et al. 2011a; 2011b). For example, inefficient transport infrastructure causes delays, thus affecting economic costs tied to the labour market and associated services. Residents are attracted to areas in proximity to amenities, job opportunities and transport linkages (Hardekar et al. 2018). During housing development, economic infrastructure such as "banks, business services, logistics, serviced land, industrial areas, business parks business incubators" and public transport must also be implemented (Scheba, Turok 2020, 80.). Infrastructure also contributes to city

competitiveness. Investors are rarely attracted to cities with poor services, say insufficient electricity, water, sanitation and refuse disposal, or inefficient transport routes necessary for the labour market. Human capital, especially highly skilled labour, is also attracted to infrastructure and service delivery efficiency. Poorly serviced areas constrain residents' access to employment hubs, deter investment and limit business growth, thus intensifying prevailing deprivation levels (Hardekar et al. 2018). With economic infrastructure having such significance, derelict or vacant houses, businesses, and public buildings negatively impact the security, aesthetics and the local economy of such areas (Pernegger, Godehart 2007).

In neighbourhoods where housing dilapidation hinders its optimum use for economic purposes, urban renewal approaches including conservation, rehabilitation or redevelopment can be applied depending on the extend of transformation necessary. In the US, Western Europe and the Netherlands, regeneration programmes engage in the demolition and renewal of social housing, partial and comprehensive restructuring, and alteration of housing composition in deprived localities (Hochstenbach 2017). Housing conservation entails minor repairs, extension and maintenance without transforming the character. Rehabilitation involves major renovations like rebuilding, recovering and upgrading to meet adequacy measures and conform housing to building standards. Redevelopment is a comprehensive restoration where decrepit housing is demolished, and new housing developed. This is the least advocated approach as it is less sustainable and requires greater resource use (Adedeji, Arayela 2018; Ho et al. 2012; Massey 2013). Within these approaches, several top-down and bottom-up processes implementable at individual, public and private sector levels exist to enhance the physical, social and most relevantly, the economic function of housing.

Residential gentrification, as a top-down public tenure restructuring strategy, involves middle-income households moving into low-income neighborhoods, replacing deteriorated housing with marketable alternatives. This process can diversify amenities, reduce crime, stimulate low-interest credit access, and boost the creative industry, benefiting local economies. However, it often leads to displacement, social cleansing, unequal resource allocation, and increased social inequality, sparking resistance in the global North, though it is more tolerated in the global South, as seen in cities like Istanbul, Karachi, and Seoul (Hochstenbach 2017; Maculan, Dal Moro 2020; Lees, Shin, López-Morales 2015). While measuring gentrification's impacts faces methodological challenges, some governments have sought to mitigate displacement and inequality through tenure mixing and stakeholder engagement (Hyra 2016; SACN 2016). The Maboneng Precinct in Johannesburg, South Africa, exemplifies this approach. Revitalized from a derelict industrial area into mixed-use spaces, it has drawn criticism for social exclusion and displacement but is praised for fostering entrepreneurship and local economic activity, with rental housing as a key component (Gregory 2016).

Self-help housing exemplifies a bottom-up approach pioneered by low-income communities, predating public and private sector involvement. This market-oriented, participatory strategy refurbishes abandoned or dilapidated housing in impoverished neighbourhoods to create affordable housing, reduce homelessness, and foster local capacity-building and skills development that can be economically beneficial beyond project timelines (Pattison, Strutt, Vine 2011; Newton 2013). Its participatory nature enhances social cohesion and emphasizes the creation of „homes” that reflect beneficiaries’ needs and aspirations (Gumbo, Onatu 2015). Effective implementation requires demonstrable local housing needs, vacant housing stock, community buy-in, financial resources, and external support (Mullins 2018). However, self-help housing is reactive rather than proactive, often failing to generate new housing or diverse tenure options, as it primarily emphasizes individual ownership with limited rental provisions (Yap, De Wandeler 2010). Funding constraints further slow progress, limiting its ability to address housing deficits effectively (Newton 2013). Excessive state involvement here can undermine community participation, while inadequate state support risks exploiting local labour (Gumbo, Onatu 2015). Despite these limitations, self-help housing capitalizes on existing infrastructure and enhances residents’ skills, thus delivering economic benefits. Urban renewal approaches depend on an enabling legal framework and strong political commitment to steer concurrent housing and economic development. Without integrating housing development into broader economic strategies, exclusion, congestion, and concentrated poverty persist (Mokoena 2019).

Local government role in housing-led economic development

How legislation and policy view the contribution of housing towards LED determines how housing development enables sustainable LED. If governments ignore this relationship, they often encounter conflicts in their approaches to housing and LED implementation (Meyer 2014). Governments should establish relevant policies in which housing is developed in line with the wider economic context, thus enabling local governments to drive economic growth through housing supply (Shannon 2018). Although the policy in South Africa calls for the development of ‘human settlements’ the focus on building houses often ignores their role in LED or livelihoods once housing has been built. Where LED aims for capital accumulation by increasing production and prosperity it instils the capitalist ethos of non-inclusive economic development particularly when the poor are located on peripheral land with scarce economic opportunities or limited access to social services (Kamara 2017). Some governments take minimal responsibility towards the housing supply for poor urban dwellers and instead focus more on education and healthcare (Henilane 2016). This contrasts with the

South African perspective, where the government's innate responsibility has instilled a culture of entitlement without contribution to housing provision, or dependency on a welfare state. It is also imperative for housing policy to warrant housing densification for stabilizing the housing market and diversifying housing options to ensure that broader housing needs are met, thereby creating enabling environments for vigorous economies (Satterthwaite 2020; Urban Landmark 2008).

The South African Constitution mandates local governments to govern, promote socio-economic development and provide services and safe and healthy environment for residents (The Government of South Africa 1996). This directs local human settlements, town planning and local economic development departments to cater for the socio-economic needs of townships, by incorporating them within relevant strategies. Notwithstanding this clause, the constitution lacks concrete guidelines for capacitating the local government to execute housing delivery. This gap has led to marginalization of the poor, owing to failure of many local municipalities to provide adequate housing due to insufficient financial resources and poor management and implementation capacities (Turok 2016). Moreover, the decisive powers of the parliament are weakened by asserting housing provision through „reasonable legislative and other measures” (The Government of South Africa 1996). In practice, the 2009 Housing Code contains more vital housing development guidance than the Housing Act No. 107 of 1997, thus giving parliament secondary role in housing decisions (Bilchitz 2016).

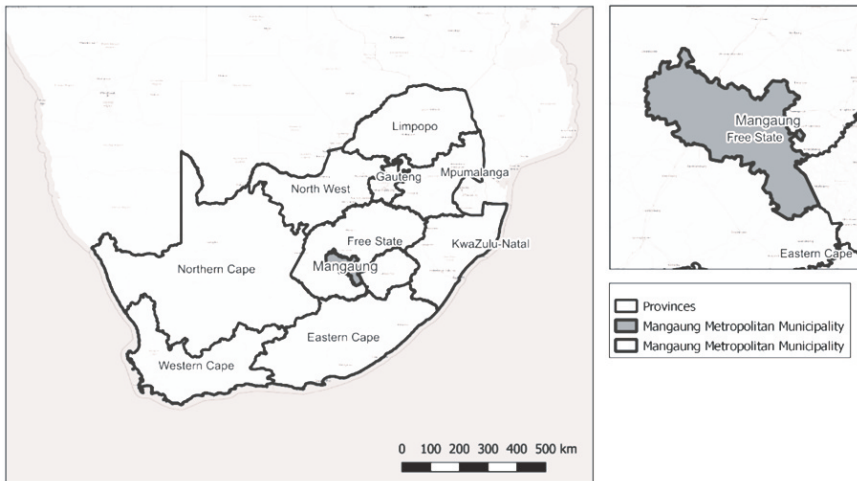
To avoid a silo mentality between departments, South African municipalities are required to prepare integrated development plans (IDPs), being strategic document that guides the local authority's activities for the municipal council's term in office. The department's strategies and activities should be aligned through the strategic plan development and identification of projects' phases. The IDP's process should thus align the LED and housing department's activities. Unfortunately, this is not the case. (Dlamini, Reddy 2018; Dlamini, Zogli 2021; Odendaal, 2007).

The Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality Context

MMM is situated within Bloemfontein city in the Free State Province (Figure 1). Bloemfontein, established in 1946, is now the sixth largest city in South Africa, functioning as the national judicial capital and the provincial administrative capital. Compared to the other municipal economic hubs, Bloemfontein has the largest population, and its primary economic drivers are community services, trade, finance and transport, with farming mainly based on livestock production and poultry and small-scale mining opportunities perceptible. While MMM contributes the largest GDP share in the province, it has a 25.3% unemployment

rate, despite most residents having completed their high school education. (MMM-IDP, 2023/2024; Mphambukeli, 2015; South Africa History Online 2011).

Figure 1: Position of Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality in South Africa
Mangaung városi önkormányzat elhelyezkedése Dél-Afrikában



Source: Authors' construction

Urban sprawl exists here, with most formal areas to the north and west and low-cost housing locally known as 'townships' situated in the southeast of the city. Informal settlements occur on the outskirts of the 'townships'. Two settlements created by apartheid but included in Mangaung are located much further to the east. MMM has struggled to provide services to its residents due to widespread corruption and inadequate capacity (skills and staff) (Marais 2021; Ruwanika, Maramura 2024). Like other South African municipalities, it faces increasing urban poverty and inadequate housing, with backlogs in the National Housing Needs Register estimated at 59,714, mostly in the townships (MMM-IDP 2023/2024).

The MMM's IDP envisions integrated human settlements, addressing urbanization, housing shortages, and spatial fragmentation. Its housing strategy emphasizes diverse and affordable typologies, linking residential areas to workplaces, services, and infrastructure to reduce poverty and unemployment. To answer to the housing need, MMM expedited land proclamation for township establishment during the IDP 2017–2022 period, followed by Community Residential Units projects, townships development, and inner-city social housing upgrades. These initiatives integrate mixed-use developments including residential, commercial, educational and recreational facilities while promoting diverse, affordable housing typologies to support densification and link housing with industrial development, labour, and employment

opportunities (MMM-IDP 2023/2024; Mangaung District Development Model 2020). Despite these efforts, informal settlements on private land have proliferated due to poverty and rural-urban migration. A draft White Paper on Human Settlements seeks to address this through a holistic approach, integrating living standards with socio-economic opportunities.

Economic development initiatives in MMM are geared to support small enterprises, establish economic integration zones and implement catalytic projects (MMM-IDP 2022/2027; MMM City Wide IPTN 2019). They also prioritize maintenance and upgrading of bulk services, roads, stormwater drainage, and heritage sites, guided by municipal land use by-laws. Through these measures, MMM aims to integrate housing and economic development for sustainable urban growth.

Methodology

This qualitative case study applied purposive sampling because specific knowledge was required from the participants' institutions. This also fitted the study's pragmatic approach due to its simplicity, time efficiency, affordability and practicality (Welman et al. 2011). Selected key informants were highly relevant to the study topic as they worked in the human settlements, housing, local economic development and tourism sectors. Sixteen invitations for the key-informant interviews were circulated in November 2021. Eleven key informants participated, including three municipal directors, one municipal and two provincial officials, one private practitioner and one academic, plus three community leaders comprising a businessman, community forum chairperson and community-based organization manager. The interviews proceeded from November up to March 2022.

Given the lingering COVID-19 skepticism at the time, most interviews were conducted via online platforms including WhatsApp, Microsoft Teams and Google Videos and a few were face to face. An interview guide was used for all while recordings and notes were captured during each interview to later remind spoken or observed information relevant to the study. The level of experience and relevance of those who responded, coupled with their willingness to engage in constant follow-up interviews, provided rich and informative data for the study. This aligned to Rule, John (2011) articulation that instead of prioritizing representation, a case study aims for a sample familiar, knowledgeable, and interested in the subject, thus generating trustworthy comprehensive information. Interview notes and recordings were transcribed verbatim to Microsoft Word. The transcribing was consistent as all participants were asked similar questions in Sesotho or English, depending on their understanding and acceptance. Sesotho entries were translated to English during transcription. An immense amount of data entailing many words given the study's qualitative nature was accumulated.

Thematic analysis was selected for its flexibility across various research paradigms (Kiger, Varpio 2020). This required a line-by-line review of all data to examine and compare the content. The process involved identifying and analyzing key data elements relevant to the research objectives. Different sections were color-coded to highlight key ideas. Steps included reading transcripts, taking notes, coding relevant words and sections, grouping codes into categories, merging similar ones, and ranking categories to identify emerging themes. The research questions guided the initial categorization of data in Microsoft Word, where themes were developed based on these questions. This cyclical process continued throughout the analysis until clear, concise categories emerged. Inconsistencies in the transcribed data were corrected before transferring it to NVivo, where it was further grouped by similarities, ensuring alignment with the research objectives.

Table 1: Respondent Information
Információk az interjúalanyokról

| <i>Respondent Code</i> | <i>Respondent Position</i> | <i>Mode of Communication</i> | <i>Interview Date</i> |
|------------------------|---|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| A | Director – Municipal Human Settlements Department | Face to face interview | 31 January 2022 |
| B | Town Planner – Provincial Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Department | Microsoft Teams | 02 February 2022 |
| C | Director – Municipal Tourism Development Department | Face to face interview | 11 February 2022 |
| D | Town Planner – Municipal Town Planning Department | Phone call | 24 February 2022 |
| E | Director – Municipal Intergovernmental Relations and Funding Department | Microsoft Teams | 28 February 2022 |
| F | Senior Lecturer – University Urban and Regional Planning Department | Face to face interview | 08 March 2022 |
| G | Town Planner – Private Practice | Google forms | 10 February 2022 |
| H | Official – Provincial Department of Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs | Google forms | 22 February 2022 |
| I | Chairperson – Community Forum | WhatsApp Video | 12 November 2021 |
| J | Manager – Community Based Organization | WhatsApp Video | 24 November 2021 |
| K | Businessman | Face to face interview | 28 November 2021 |

Source: Authors' construction

Findings on Housing and LED Implementation Challenges faced by MMM

Governance, laws, and policies are crucial to economic development and housing adequacy. While MMM operates under constitutional provisions with regulatory tools like the IDP, its governance effectiveness is undermined by being under national administration. Findings reveal significant institutional, stakeholder, and resource challenges in implementing development plans, raising concerns about its capacity to deliver efficient services, socio-economic progress, and a safe living environment.

Institutional Challenges

The primary institutional challenge lies in unclear regulation interpretation, insufficient raining, policy neglect, and reluctance to fulfil civic duties. While regulations are seen as critical for job creation, housing, and resource allocation, their practicality is questioned due to inconsistent understanding among departments and unsuitable regulations for townships. As Respondent F (2022) stated, *„legislation does not feature to me as a priority so long as its applicability is weak.”* Respondent A (2022) echoed that *„There is a conflict in how the constitution, other relevant legislation, implementing officials and residents define adequate housing.”* This disconnect hampers housing development and reflects Turok’s (2016) sentiment that the South African constitution fails to adequately guide local governments to deliver housing.

Role misunderstandings stem from inexperience and incompetence among implementers. According to Respondent E (2022),

“To convert policy into action, where you need to start drafting policy is easy, but implementation is a challenge. This is rooted in skills. Not understanding necessary processes as they are complex results in poor participation or standing in the way of progress...lack of skills for project management such as the Neighbourhood Development Grant, Inner City Development Grant, Urban Settlement Grant. Projects, therefore, tend to fail even when there is funding because skills are lacking.”

This aligns with findings by Kamara (2017), Meyer (2014) and Shannon (2018), emphasizing that effective local economic development requires role clarity, stakeholder collaboration, human capacity, and adequate funding. Although critical municipal posts are being filled, nepotism and corruption persist, undermining capacity-building efforts (Respondent D, 2022). This reflects early democracy challenges of corruption, poor financial management and weak implementation capacity in housing development (Bond, Tait 1997; Patel 2016; Sekoboto, Landman 2018).

Intergovernmental obstacles, including red tape, power dynamics, and political interference, further delay planning decisions. Power struggles within institutions complicate legislative implementation, as Respondent B (2022) observed: „If you are right yet politically incorrect, then you are wrong.” Political interference, compounded by inexperienced officials, limits planning efficiency and reinforces systemic challenges. Respondent G (2022) clearly stipulated this;

„And I’m not sure, but I suspect one can put up a flyer and say our professionals need more support. The health discipline supports doctors, but I don’t know if our professionals in practice are being supported. I have not, for one, seen them opposing political interference. The municipality’s general apathy is based on long-term politicians lambasting planning decisions. Perhaps administrative fatigue is connected to high-level disconnection. Energized Heads of Departments must be appointed to lead their departments out of this sinkhole. Municipal officials are reluctant to make decisions to perform optimally because they can’t crucify their paymasters, the politicians. This must change. Professional bodies must address the issue of political correctness, interference in planning and impinging professional practice...”

The study highlights the inclusion of Mangaung Townships in the Integrated Development Plan and Spatial Development Framework for land use and planning, the Extended Public Works Programme for community support, and the development of public rental housing through Community Residential Units (CRU). Other programs include the Bus Rapid Transit system for affordable transport and the Free State Township Economy Bill to boost local businesses. These initiatives address housing shortages, unemployment, poor transport, and unplanned development, promoting integrated housing and economic development. However, informal practices like unregulated home-based businesses and unauthorized housing renovations reveal regulatory incompatibilities with township realities. Tactical urbanism, driven by expensive land use applications and resident unawareness of regulations, often results in neighbourhood deterioration due to weak enforcement (Charman et al. 2020; Scheba, Turok 2019). Noting that municipalities sometimes control space to the detriment of development, Respondent B (2022) asserted that „Laws and rules are there to serve us. Those that are unfair are automatically contravened.” The question then becomes how MMM can support and capitalize on this clear community level linkage of housing and neighbourhood economy. Perhaps it should not just focus on controlling housing and economic development. Instead, its human settlements department should offer technical housing support to residents.

Stakeholder Challenges

Public participation, guided by the Constitution, the Municipal Systems Act, and the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), plays a critical role in identifying township development priorities. While the IDP is informed by annual community consultations, stakeholders criticized its superficial engagement and siloed governance, exacerbated by political interference and poor collaboration. „*The IDP informs us, we don't do things out of our heads. We do things that help communities*” (Respondent C, 2022). However, „*There is a lack of collaboration at all levels, there is a silo mentality, and especially within government departments, it seems people guard their jobs by refraining from collaboration*” (Respondent D 2022). Moreover, many councilors lack understanding of strategic processes, hindering effective policy implementation. For example: „*The IDP is not easy, it is complex. Thus, councilors distance themselves from the process as they do not understand it*” (Respondent B, 2022). Also „*there is no space for community leaders [in decision-making]*” (Respondent K, 2021). Thus, „*neighbourhood dilapidation and crime*” increase amid uncommunicated and misunderstood development needs (Respondent I 2021). While there are systems for community level support, there is a strong need for community inclusion in liaising with relevant stakeholders especially the government and private sector (Respondent I 2021).

Resource Challenges

Housing and local economic development require capital (Oranje, Voges 2014). According to Respondent H (2021), „*... [MMM] capital base is sourced from treasury, the equitable share and municipal rates and taxes.*” However, identified resource challenges include poor financial management, insufficient funding, and ineffective budget allocation, with service delivery undermined by a reliance on outdated infrastructure and unpaid municipal levies (estimated at ZAR 2 billion/~USD108 million). Respondent I (2021) emphasized that corrupt officials spent municipal funds for personal benefit, thereby hindering efficient implementation. Political instability further disrupts development efforts. Respondents noted that historical segregation in housing provision contributes to current inequities, with resources stretched thin across municipalities. Respondent B (2022) summarized this:

“The demography of our cities is highly dependent on the political history, wherein the traditional Bloemfontein city spent rates and taxes only on white residents. Now these have to be spread over the entire municipality, most [residents] of which are not contributing. Suburbs then suffer in terms of service delivery though they don't deserve it as their residents pay their rates and taxes. These are also not duly collected, and what is collected is not spent properly.”

Discussion

South African townships, previously faced with deliberate exclusion, and currently facing dire social challenges and weak economies, are ripe for local economic development (Scheba, Turok 2020). While several democratic strategies have been implemented for township economic development there is room for more, given unrelenting challenges that continue to undermine township livelihoods (Rogerson 2014). Policymakers, planners, human settlement practitioners, economists and other stakeholders must contemplate several considerations to steer housing driven LED in townships. Structural, individualistic or fatalistic foundations contribute to excessive levels of poverty in townships, yet this is but one of several challenges.

Insufficient government funding for infrastructure development and maintenance, lack of capacity to strategic implementation, inadequate supply of housing and other services and high unemployment levels subsequently deprive township dwellers the opportunity to fully participate and benefit from economic development, thus refuting the right amalgamated in the constitution and global treaties (Payne, et al. 2014, Pernegger & Godehart 2007; SACN 2014).

Considering findings of this study, the overarching issue seems to be a disconnect between municipal responsibilities and local needs. This is evident in regulations speaking of human settlements development (holistic view), yet the municipality (and province) are focused on building houses without much consideration of livelihoods. Legislation perceives human settlements as a long-term project, yet funding cycles are not coordinated with this development period. The capital budget runs for two to three years. Such budgets should consider demographic information like the number of households, income spread, gender, and household needs and identify areas of improvement and where subsidies are needed.

Townships closer to socio-economic opportunities still contain cheap, substandard housing due to affordability, reflecting neo-liberal contentions that citizens shall live according to what they can afford. This triggers a need for historical housing trends analysis to divulge spatial and housing imbalances and foster the meaningful provision of affordable and adequate housing simultaneous to vibrant economies. Through distinct knowledge of urban housing gaps and challenges, barriers to affordable urban housing can be eliminated, ensuring adequate housing and, ultimately, economic development for all. Moreover, other strategies including housing subsidies and social welfare can and have been adopted to meet township residents halfway in affording housing (Charlton, Meth 2017).

Relatedly, human settlements consider moving towards comprehensive development and not just housing development. The benefit here is that developing schools, clinics, houses, roads and public spaces presents economic benefits for neighbourhoods as extensively highlighted in the literature. Instead of spending only on housing development, municipalities should also consider sustaining residents' livelihoods. Though South Africa has relevant policy, there

are human settlements without sufficient social amenities, to the detriment of their local economy. A way forward could be to define a project area, determine the amount needed for developing the area comprehensively, and identify a community structure in place. A community trust is a good starting point because it is formal and legitimate. However, it may be a precarious effort and thus requires intense research, especially on best practices.

South Africa has notable social welfare systems availing various grants to the citizens. These answer to basic needs of township residents and commonly the only source of livelihood (SACN 2014). Albeit such opportunities, most townships are characterized by overcrowded and dilapidated accommodation, which ultimately have a negative effect on neighbourhood aesthetics, residents' physical and mental health, service delivery and economic opportunities (Marais, Cloete 2014; Payne, et al. 2014). Additionally, with limited income to spend on housing needs, residents resort to informal means of tenure like backyard housing and co-living (Pernegger, Godehart 2007; Turok, Borel-Saladin 2015). This practice presents an opportunity for township economic development since currently small-scale rental housing is gaining momentum in national debates (Turok et al. 2023). Given the country's historical background, security of tenure in townships is complex and obtaining proof of ownership is difficult. The government requires improved land registration systems to ease access to tenure information, which can facilitate the attraction of investors (Pienaar 2013).

The issue of existing political instability which placed the municipality under national administration emerged frequently during interviews. However, respondents were reluctant to delve deeper into the topic, though they indicated that it also affected service delivery and hindered efficient institutional functioning. Additionally, resources were spread too thin, and there was a need for improved municipal management. There were growing instances of leaking water pipes in townships for extended periods without municipal reaction after constant community reports. *"Residents respond to this through guerrilla urbanism and capabilities approach"* (Respondent F 2022). This means a surge of civil society in taking municipal responsibilities during service delivery challenges. Scholars like Bah et al. 2018; Selebalo, Webster 2017; debate the principle of infrastructure and services in adequate housing, and how municipal neglect of these lead to neighbourhood decay to the detriment of vibrant neighbourhood economies. One of the best ways a municipality can improve an area investment appeal is to maintain clean surroundings and functionality of services which appears to be a major challenge in Mangaung. Proper services including water, sanitation, waste management, regularly maintained roads and stormwater drainage plus well-kept properties are crucial to attracting investors in townships. Thus, townships in Mangaung could benefit from a balance of top-down and bottom-up urban renewal by combining infrastructure, services and housing investments with fostering entrepreneurship, social capital and tailored economic activities.

Table 2: Policy recommendations
Közpolitikai ajánlások

| <i>Specific Targets</i> | <i>Key Action Areas</i> |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Institutional Barriers | <p>Roll out institutional mechanisms for building and strengthening municipal capacity for developing and implementing valuable regulations.</p> <p>Conduct monitoring and evaluation of initiatives, ensure cost-effectiveness and eradicate corruption.</p> <p>Ensure a good place by supplying and maintaining infrastructure and services, which play a crucial role in the potential of housing adequacy and the economic success.</p> |
| Stakeholder Challenges | <p>Promote public participation by creating platforms for robust collaboration between government, businesses, civil society.</p> <p>Establish e-planning mechanisms to encourage flexible and broader coverage of stakeholders.</p> <p>Mobilize mutual information and resource sharing, decision-making transparency.</p> |
| Resource Deficiencies | <p>Mobilize funding for housing and business incentives.</p> <p>Create community land trusts.</p> |
| Housing and Economic Development | <p>Conduct research on innovative housing and township economies solutions.</p> |
| Support/Enablers | <p>Develop township-specific regulations that endorse inclusivity, support local businesses, and promote township economies.</p> <p>Enhance coherence between policy and local needs.</p> |

Source: Authors' construction

Some affluent residents reside in townships, yet most relocate to suburbs along with their economic influence (Jürgens, Donaldson 2012). Ways to keep such residents to contribute towards vibrant local economies should be considered. On the forefront can be effectively involving them in development initiatives by granting decision making responsibilities. Additionally, the tourism market is growing in townships and can be nurtured to contribute towards sustainable local economies. However, there is need for research determining how this market can be operated and grown for the benefit of residents, especially in terms of housing opportunities such as lodges and Airbnb. Lastly, 'green living' is still generally unfamiliar in townships, allowing introduction of green urbanism during future housing and LED initiatives (Jürgens, Donaldson 2012). These are issues for local government, urban practitioners and relevant stakeholders to ponder in planning for LED in townships. Specific recommendations are listed in Table 2, These are geared towards enhancing resource allocation, creating jobs, supporting local business and ensuring sustainable, inclusive economic development aligned with local housing needs.

Conclusion

To sum up, adequate housing stimulates local economies by attracting investments and skilled labour while creating opportunities for unskilled labour. Housing shortages impede growth by increasing congestion, straining infrastructure, raising business costs, and exacerbating skill deficits. Without integrating housing development into broader economic strategies, exclusion, congestion, and concentrated poverty persist (Mokoena 2019). This calls for an understanding of challenges faced by policy makers and implementers to effectively link housing and economic development. The South African local government is constitutionally obliged to facilitate housing and economic development. Despite efforts to house the urban poor, progress in developing sustainable township economies has been limited. The study highlights that in South Africa, the local government grapples with significant challenges in achieving adequate housing and fostering economic development in townships due to institutional incompetencies, resource deficiencies and inadequate public participation. Key obstacles including ambiguous regulations, bureaucratic inefficiencies, political interference, and poor governance hinder effective alignment of housing and economic development, particularly in deprived neighbourhoods needing revitalization. Additionally, mistrust in the municipality and insufficient regulatory support for township businesses exacerbate weak economic landscape. The findings emphasize the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration and role clarity, aligning with broader research that highlights the importance of adequate housing for healthy urban economies, labour market access, and improved livelihoods. Overcoming these barriers require comprehensive reforms, improved service delivery, community engagement, capacity building, and strategic planning.

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