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The National Upgrading Support Programme is a programme of the National Department of Human Settlements

Informal settlement workshop – trends and profiles

The Housing Development Agency (HDA) along with its partners held a successful informal settlement workshop on 28 August 2013. Well over 110 delegates from nearly all the provinces attended, as well as many municipalities, national government, NGOs and built environment professionals. Maki Thellane, Senior Manager HDA and Illana Metzer from market research company Eighty20 presented human settlement and informal settlement trends. The data analysed was released by StatsSA and included the 2001 and 2011 censuses, 2007 community survey, income and expenditure surveys and general household surveys, and individual household data from Limpopo informal settlements collected by the HDA.

The human settlement picture

Melzer highlighted **the overall human settlements trends evident from the 2001 and 2011 census comparison.**

The average household size in South Africa is declining and single-headed households are on the increase and it was noted that the dramatic increase in the proportion of households that comprise one person is driving the trend in declining household sizes. There is also a notable trend in migration patterns with major new flows of migrants to the mining towns, with the North West replacing Gauteng and Western Cape as the major destination.

There is an increase in the number of households living in formal dwellings, primarily as a result of the units built under the government subsidy scheme, and overall access to services for all households in South Africa has improved. In 2011, 3.5 million more households were living in formal dwellings than in 2001 and there has also been a decline in 'traditional dwellings'.

There is also an indication of a move towards formal and informal rental accommodation. The percentage of households that rent their primary dwelling increased from 19% to 25% in all areas, while in urban areas it increased from 26% to 32%.

Informal settlement trends

"If you want to know what's happening in the human settlements arena, you should follow the squatters!" HDA CEO Taffy Adler told the workshop, "You need to monitor what they're doing, where they're settling and how they survive".

The definition of what constitutes an 'informal' settlement sparked much debate throughout the day and remains an issue that needs to be resolved if informal settlement data is to be relied upon to draw an accurate picture.



The panel made up of Monty Narsoo from the National Department of Human Settlements, Professor Osman from the University of Johannesburg, Mark Misselhorn from PPT and Diane Arvanitakis from SHIFT responded to the emerging trends and implications to policy, planning and practice. The important message from the panel members is that planning for upgrading is a complex process and requires a holistic and technocratic community driven approach with a balance of precinct planning. There is also a need to acknowledge informality and as policy makers and practitioners, we need to re-imagine informal settlements.



One of the most interesting findings relates to the steadying-off of growth in informal settlements, a notable increase in the number of families living in formal dwellings, and a considerable increase in the number of backyard dwellings.

According to the 2011 census, 41% of households living in shacks which are not in backyards claim to own their own dwellings – an increase from 37% in 2001.

“If you look at the top six district municipalities by number of households, they account for 41% of total households in South Africa,” explained Melzer. “But if you look at the municipalities with the highest proportion of households living in shacks not in backyards, we are seeing huge growth in municipalities such as Bojanala, Buffalo City and Siyanda.

“Government will have to look at these figures carefully and assess where it wants to have impact and apply resources.”

It was pointed out that the census data only provide totals and don't track individual households over time. “Aggregated data masks everything,” Illana from Eighty20 warned.

“As we find that informal settlements are decreasing and backyard shacks are increasing, we also find that more people want to rent homes rather than buy or own a home, especially in the mining towns. We will have to assess this change in demand and respond accordingly,” Thellane says

Comparing the Census data to detailed household level data

Thellane presented **the high level findings of the Limpopo surveys**. These surveys focused on household and settlement information and were administered by community-based enumerators using Android phones. In addition to completing the survey questionnaires, the enumerators also logged GPS coordinates and took photographs for each structure surveyed. These photos were used to check data anomalies.

The following local municipalities were surveyed: Smash Block – Thabazimbi; Ext 6 Jacaranda – Modimolle; Motetema – Elias

Motsoaledi; Mohlakaneng – Polokwane; Praktiseer Ext 2, Praktiseer Ext 3 and Tubatse A – Greater Tubatse Local Municipality.

Thellane explained that the Limpopo survey showed that settlements that are based near mining towns are more temporary compared to settlements within established townships not in mining areas; households in the latter seem to be set on staying irrespective of the informality of the area and inadequate services. She also reported that residents living in recognised settlements seem to feel more secure. “When asked if they own this home and whether they are looking to relocate, these residents told us, ‘No, this is my home.’ This demonstrates importance of security of tenure,” Maki said. In Praktiseer people are investing in their homes – many look like middle class suburban homes. How to get residents to approach their home as an asset is one of the big questions that needs to be explored. “We see this starting to happen in Praktiseer and Tubatse A,” Maki said. The fact that residents are investing in their homes does imply, however, that informal settlements cannot be defined by the status of the houses – tin shacks vs middle class suburban homes, for instance – contained within their borders. All this reveals the complexities in defining informal settlements and a need for a different approach.

Informal settlement data and trends highlight the following challenges

According to Thellane, **the workshop highlighted the challenges shared among role players involved in informal settlements**, including a lack of shared understanding of the nature of South African informal settlements. Addressing informal settlement upgrading in the context of the current policy and planning regime, which uses a one size fits all approach, is not possible on large scale. Finally, it was pointed out that it is difficult to address each individual municipal and provincial programme, as an updated provincial profile and status quo of informal settlements does not exist in most cases. There is also usually no consistency in key informal settlement data.

The data gathered through the HDA surveys, however, has helped us understand the settlements better, so that we can identify the key implications relating to practice, methodologies, planning and policy, namely:

- that the definition of informal settlements remains an issue.
- that rental is on the increase.
- that there has been a decrease in informal settlements and an increase in backyard shacks.
- that there has been an increase in small (one person) household size.
- that informal settlements are becoming more permanent and residents are feeling more secure.

To download the workshop trends and profile presentation, go to www.thehda.co.za/resources. There are various informal settlement publications to follow. Watch this space.

COMING UP

- **Islandla partnership-based incremental upgrading of informal settlements with support in Stellenbosch on 15 and 16 October.**



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