

# **NATIONAL INFORMAL SETTLEMENT UPGRADING SUMMIT**

**2 JULY 2013**

## **Keynote Address by Ms Zou Kota-Fredericks, Deputy Minister of Human Settlements**

Programme Director, the Honourable Mayor of Cape Town, councillors, community representatives and colleagues (NOTE: OTHER PROTOCOLS TO BE OBSERVED)

We meet at this National Summit today to consider our progress in addressing the challenge of upgrading informal settlements. To set the scene, please let me make some remarks on our efforts so far.

Through the national subsidy scheme we have housed around 11 million people since 1994. We have built over 3 million houses in that period, through an inter-governmental programme that involves national, provincial and local government. We have pioneered new forms of integrated development projects, produced new housing typologies and made an enormous difference to the lives of those families who now live in their own properties, receive services and have access to social and economic amenities.

We can congratulate ourselves on our achievements, but we must recognise the scale of the demographic and economic challenges that continue to hinder our objective of sustainable human settlements for all:

- Census 2011 results show that we have over 1.2 million households living in informal settlements, an increase of almost 20 per cent since 1996. And the highest concentrations of informal settlements lie in the metropolitan areas, particularly in Gauteng and Western Cape, which are also facing the largest migrations from poorer provinces.
- Demographic growth and migration is also driving the growth of informal settlements, which today number almost 2 700, compared to 300 in 1994.

- Despite steady increases in the housing subsidy, especially since 2004, actual delivery of houses has declined, largely as a result of building costs inflation, the difficulties of securing suitable well-located land, and rising land process.
- Our need for cheaper land to offset this erosion of subsidy value has meant we tend to locate our new housing projects at the edge of cities and townships, pushing the poor further away from employment opportunities and amenities.

Over the years, we have had to standardise our approach to producing housing for the poor on a mass scale. While this has produced a huge number of houses, it has also reduced our engagement with the poor to dealing with them as numbers of beneficiaries. This raises the crucial question of ‘who provides and who decides’, and how we put issues of greater involvement and accountability into practice. As government, we have both ‘provided’ and ‘decided’ on the nature and form of low-income housing. We were in danger of forgetting how to listen to the poor and work together with them in improving shelter and livelihoods. By so doing we risk neglecting a key human resource in our ambition to develop sustainable human settlements for all our people.

We are now changing our approach to allow for more flexibility, more creativity and more humanity in the way in which we work with communities around shelter. This means we need to become more flexible and creative in our responses to informal settlement upgrading, and more accommodating to the efforts of the poor to mobilise resources to plan, build and maintain the communities in which they live.

I can illustrate examples of this change in practice:

We have set the Outcome 8 Delivery Agreement target of providing 400 000 households in well-located informal settlements with basic services and secure tenure. We have directed that the planning and implementation of these projects should be carried out with the participation of the affected communities.

The National Development Plan— of which we shall hear more later today – calls for an expansion in our programme of informal settlement upgrading, and for municipalities to develop new planning instruments to regularise informal settlements, and recognise the validity of incremental forms of tenure.

We have targeted 45 municipalities as priorities in developing informal settlement upgrading programmes, and have agreed with the Presidency that the 1 800 informal settlements that they contain should all have detailed project plans – and that these plans should be produced through participatory processes. Our programme today showcases examples of what municipalities can achieve when they begin to embrace the incremental approach.

We have established the Mining Towns in Distress Programme to improve living conditions in informal settlements in the platinum and gold fields across the country.

And we also have set up the National Upgrading Support Programme to provide technical assistance and capacity building to assist this effort. We will see later today how much progress this programme is making.

Let me now turn to the question of our partnerships with communities.

John Turner, the famous proponent of participatory development planning, recognised the dangers of ignoring people in housing processes. In his 1972 book, *Freedom to Build*, he wrote the following:

*‘When dwellers control the major decisions and are free to make their own contributions in the design, construction, or management of their housing, both this process and the environment produced stimulate individual and social well-being. When people have no control over, or responsibility for key decisions in the housing process, on the other hand, dwelling environments may instead become a barrier to personal fulfilment and a burden on the economy’.*

These words have resonance in our country today. Communities are increasingly frustrated at their lack of ‘voice and choice’ in development processes. We know that when the poor are not involved in development decisions they will care less about their surroundings or even use their initiative to resist paying for their services. Community spirit is weakened, social capital declines and poverty increases.

Note that Turner talks about dwellers’ involvement in ‘design, construction or management’. He does not imply that we should step away from housing development and let the poor get on with it, as do-it-yourself homebuilders. For we still have a responsibility to provide shelter to the most vulnerable. Nor does he

mean that we stop building houses and simply and cynically provide sites-and-services. For the obligation to build your own house can penalise the poorest and be as repressive as not being allowed to do so.

Our new approach means we will build partnerships with communities, and to give them 'voice and choice' in the design and construction of settlements that build sustainable livelihoods and can fulfil their needs. National government has recognised that to unlock these capacities we must build a new practice of participatory planning, construction and management in sustainable human settlements. We will hear later today of examples where communities and NGOs are pioneering people-led approaches to upgrading. The structures of the state, but especially provinces and municipalities, must learn from these successful partnerships, build these lessons into our programmes and projects, and to take them to scale.

This is a time of opportunity for the way in which we tackle the upgrading of informal settlements. We are providing the capital resources, capacity building and technical support. We must now cement the partnerships with communities as the final element step in taking us forward together.

I am excited by this prospect, and with commitment and participation, I know we will succeed.

Thank you