



MINISTRY

**HUMAN SETTLEMENTS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

REMARKS

BY

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Programme Moderator

Fellow Panelists

Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning.

For those of us who work in Human Settlements, the future is never abstract. It is visible in where people live, how far they travel to work, whether their communities are safe, whether basic services function and whether children can reach schools and access other amenities.

Therefore, the theme of today's panel is so timely, albeit important. Reimagining governance, leadership and inclusive development is ultimately about closing the distance between the promise of our Constitution and the daily experience of our people.

I am honoured to join you at the 25th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Public Administration and Management. I congratulate SAAPAM and its partners on a quarter-century of bringing scholarship, professional practice, and public policy into conversation. That work matters because a capable developmental state depends on people who are willing to test ideas against evidence, learn from implementation and improve the institutions entrusted with public resources.

South Africa has made important progress since 1994 in extending access to housing and basic services and in building institutions founded on democratic values. Yet the pressures we face today are different in scale and complexity. Rapid urbanisation, persistent inequality, unemployment, climate risk, constrained public finances, infrastructure

backlogs and rising public expectations are converging. They require us to improve how we plan, how we decide and, above all, how we implement.

My central proposition today is simple: the future of South Africa will be determined by whether our institutions can convert policy, public resources, and public authority into visible improvements in people's lives.

GOVERNANCE MUST BE EXPERIENCED THROUGH OUTCOMES

Governance is often described through legislation, structures, policies, and compliance systems. These are necessary applications underpinning the existence of a functional polity, but they are not how citizens experience the state. A citizen experiences governance through a working tap, a safe road, a secure home, a reliable public transport route and a public servant who responds with competence and respect.

For government, this has an important implication. We cannot judge success only by the number of meetings held, plans approved, or budgets spent. We must judge it by the quality, location, durability and reach of what those processes produce.

A whole-of-government approach must therefore become a practical method of delivery. Plans must align across departments and spheres of government. Budgets must support the same spatial priorities. Bulk infrastructure must be sequenced with housing development. Land-use approvals, environmental processes, transport planning and social services must converge around the same places and timelines. Monitoring must identify delays early enough for leaders to intervene.

The lived reality of a household does not fit within one departmental mandate. A family in an informal settlement does not experience housing, water, sanitation, transport, safety, schooling, and employment as separate government functions. These are interconnected conditions of daily life. Government must organise delivery around that reality instead of expecting citizens to navigate institutional silos.

Effective governance also demands clean administration, ethical procurement, capable project management, accurate information, and clear accountability. Where these systems work, projects move, and communities gain confidence. Where they fail, costs rise, delivery stalls and trust is lost.

Public trust cannot be instructed into existence. It is earned when government communicates honestly, manages public resources responsibly, keeps its commitments and corrects failures. Trust is not separate from delivery; it is one of the conditions that makes delivery possible.

HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AS A TEST OF INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

Human settlements provide one of the clearest tests of whether development is inclusive. Section 26 of our Constitution recognises the right of everyone to have access to adequate housing. Giving practical effect to that right requires more than constructing a housing unit. It requires us to create sustainable communities in which people can live with dignity and gain access to opportunity.

A house without water, sanitation, energy, roads, transport, schools, healthcare, public spaces, and economic opportunity cannot, on its own, constitute a sustainable human settlement. The settlement must work as a place. It must be connected, safe, resilient, and capable of supporting family and community life.

This is particularly important because South Africa continues to carry the consequences burden of apartheid spatial planning. Too many low-income households remain far from employment, quality services and efficient transport. The cost is carried by families in money, time, and reduced opportunity.

Spatial transformation must therefore be central to our development programme. The 2024 White Paper on Human Settlements provides the policy foundation for the innovative shift we need to make.

We need well-located land, denser and mixed-use development, township revitalisation, inner-city regeneration and stronger links between housing and transport. The location of a housing opportunity is as important as the structure itself, because where people live affect what they can reach.

We must also respond to the diversity of housing need. Fully subsidised housing remains essential, but it must form part of a broader system that includes serviced sites, support for self-build initiatives, informal settlement upgrading, social housing, affordable rental accommodation, and First Home Finance. A responsive state must create more than one credible pathway to secure tenure and adequate shelter.

Our public entities are central to this work. The Housing Development Agency, an Entity of the Department of Human Settlement, helps the state assemble and develop well-located land. The Social Housing Regulatory Authority supports and regulates social housing. The National Housing Finance Corporation widens access to housing finance. The National Home Builders Registration Council protects housing consumers and promotes construction quality. The Property Practitioners Regulatory Authority and the Community Schemes Ombud Service strengthen transformation, regulation, and governance across the wider residential sector. These institutions must work as one delivery system, with clear mandates and shared outcomes.

The purpose is not simply to add houses to a landscape. It is to reshape that landscape so that more people live closer to work, services, and opportunity. Human settlements are not the endpoint of development. They are platforms from which people participate in development.

Notably, the recent Tafelberg Constitutional Court ruling was more pronounced relative to the question of spatial justice, the judgment affirmed that the right to adequate housing under section 26(1) and section 26(2) of the Constitution includes location of housing, meaning the government must actively provide affordable housing in well-located, opportunity-rich areas rather than pushing lower-income residents to the peripheries or outskirts of economic centres.

LEADERSHIP AND PUBLIC TRUST

Reimagining governance requires a corresponding change in leadership. Public leadership cannot be measured only by authority, seniority, or compliance. It must be measured by the quality of decisions, the integrity with which resources are managed and the results achieved for citizens.

The leaders South Africa needs must be ethical, competent, and willing to act. They must make decisions based on evidence, listen to communities, work across institutional boundaries, and confront poor performance. They must also create professional environments in which public servants are supported to do their work well and held accountable when they do not.

Ethical leadership is especially important when resources are scarce. Every delayed project, inflated cost or avoidable defect diverts resources from a family or community waiting for a service. Accountability is therefore not an administrative burden. It protects the public purpose of government.

Accordingly, Section 195(1)(a) of the Constitution dictates that a high standard of professional ethics be promoted and maintained.

Leadership also requires honesty about implementation. When a programme is not working, our responsibility is not to defend the process. It is to establish why it is failing, correct the weakness and report openly on the result. Institutions improve when they can learn without lowering standards or avoiding accountability.

As Professor Busani Ngcaweni indicated during the recent engagement of the Professionals Forum, an ethical state is not one without challenges. It is a state whose institutions are committed to public purpose/value, capable of using resources effectively, responsive to citizens and oriented towards development.

This is where the professionalisation of public administration becomes decisive. Stable institutions need skilled officials, credible systems, institutional memory, and appointments based on competence. Political leadership must set direction and uphold accountability, while a professional public service provides continuity and converts policy into consistent delivery.

INTEGRATED DELIVERY ACROSS THE THREE SPHERES

Housing is a concurrent national and provincial function, while sustainable human settlements depend on all three spheres of government. National government provides policy direction, fiscal frameworks, regulation and sector oversight. Provinces plan and implement housing programmes. Municipalities determine land use, provide bulk, and connect infrastructure and sustain settlements through local services.

When one part of this chain is weak or late, the whole project is affected. A housing project cannot succeed without suitable land, bulk capacity, approvals, roads, and social amenities. The lesson is clear: coordination cannot begin after construction starts. It must begin when priorities are selected, and budgets are prepared.

We should organise planning around places and people, not only around institutional programmes. Area-based planning allows us to bring public investment together in a defined space, identify dependencies and assign responsibility. It also gives communities a clearer basis on which to assess what has been promised, what has been funded and what has been delivered.

Integrated delivery further requires sustained attention to infrastructure maintenance. New development cannot compensate for existing systems that are allowed to deteriorate. Responsible government must build, operate, and maintain. The quality of a settlement depends as much on the reliability of its services over time as on the day a project is handed over.

INNOVATION AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

The scale of housing needs, together with fiscal and environmental pressures, requires innovation. To this end, we have introduced Innovative Building Technologies (IBTs) in the sector to help us deliver housing faster, better and at scale.

Innovation, however, must solve a real delivery problem. It must be supported by appropriate standards, certification, quality assurance and consumer protection. A new technology is useful only when it is safe, durable, affordable and accepted by the people who will live with it.

Innovation must also extend to financing and participation. Blended finance, partnerships with the private sector and development finance institutions , community-led approaches and stronger support for incremental building can widen access to housing opportunities. At the same time, our investments should build local capability by supporting small enterprises, artisans, manufacturers and women and young people entering the sector.

Climate resilience must be built into this work. Settlements must be planned with water security, heat, flooding, fire risk and energy efficiency in mind.

The recent World Urban Forum held in Baku, Azerbaijan, which I had the pleasure to attend and lead our delegation, culminated in a Call to Action. Key outcomes from the Call to Action include: expanding finance for affordable housing, including by pioneering new ways to calculate and manage risk, target subsidies, expand access to credit, and blend finance; strengthening multilevel and participatory governance; making homes climate resilient; and treating housing as a human right.

INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

According to the latest Statistics SA Household Survey, 12.2% of South African households live in informal dwellings. The number of informal settlements that have been formalised and provided with permanent infrastructure remains low. While there has been some progress in this area, a lot still needs to be done.

Human settlements have a critical role in determining whether communities are vulnerable to climate change or capable of adapting to it. The challenge is not simply to build more houses, but to create safe, connected, serviced and environmentally sustainable communities. Recent research shows that informal settlements are experiencing interconnected risks from flooding, heat, drought and fire, while inadequate infrastructure and socio-economic inequality increase their vulnerability.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

No institution can meet these challenges alone. Government must provide leadership and safeguard the public interest, but delivery also requires the capability of communities, the private sector, academia, professional bodies and civil society.

Partnership must mean more than periodic consultation. It requires shared planning, clear responsibilities, transparent decisions, and mutual accountability. Communities bring knowledge of place and lived experience. Business brings investment, technical capacity, and implementation capability. Universities and research institutions provide evidence and independent analysis. Professional bodies strengthen standards, ethics and competence.

SAAPAM has an important role in this national effort. Public administration scholarship must remain connected to the practical problems of implementation. Research should help us understand why projects stall, how institutions can coordinate more effectively, which

interventions produce durable outcomes and how public servants can be better equipped for the work they are expected to perform.

The department, together with its implementing agencies, must collaborate with key partners in the human settlements value chain to respond to ongoing challenges and improve service delivery.

CONCLUSION

Ladies and gentlemen, reimagining the future of South Africa does not require us to discard every institution or policy we have built. It requires us to make our institutions work together, uphold the standards of public service and focus relentlessly on the outcomes citizens experience.

For the human settlements sector, that means five practical commitments. We must plan and budget around places rather than institutional silos. We must release and develop well-located land and offer a wider range of housing pathways. We must strengthen professional capability and accountability across the delivery chain. We must use evidence and technology to identify delays and improve decisions. And we must build genuine partnerships with communities and the organisations represented at this conference.

The future will not be secured by the number of strategies we publish. It will be secured by the quality of the communities we build, the opportunities those communities create and the confidence citizens can place in the institutions that serve them.

Let us use this conference to connect ideas to implementation. Let us build institutions that are ethical, capable and responsive. Let us plan human settlements that reverse exclusion and bring people closer to opportunity. And let us lead with the discipline required to turn constitutional promise into lived reality.

I thank you.