

South Africa: National Urban Policies and City Profiles for Johannesburg and Cape Town

Written by University of the Witwatersrand and Human Sciences Research Council



Type

Executive Summary

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Cover photo: City Business District, Johannesburg, South Africa

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Executive Summary

Two-thirds of South Africa's population live in urban areas. This is one of the highest proportions in Africa, reflecting the long history of mining and industrialisation. The pace of urban growth has fallen in recent years, which makes it more manageable. Urbanisation has always been highly contentious and posed dilemmas for successive governments. During much of the 20th Century, it resulted in draconian controls on people's movements and forced removals in pursuit of racial domination and segregation (apartheid). A widening economic gap between urban and rural areas was one of the outcomes, creating pent-up migratory pressures. A fragmented urban form was another effect, with damaging psycho-social, economic and environmental consequences. Fractured cities create poverty traps on the periphery, favour road-based private transport, and undermine agglomeration economies. Today, SA cities are among the most unequal and visibly divided in the world, with some of the most affluent and liveable neighbourhoods alongside some of the most squalid, unhealthy and dangerous. Continuing anti-urban sentiment across government and society has also obliged many people to live in informal settlements and backyard shacks, and to retain a foothold in both urban and rural locations, thereby living a double life of circular migration.

The post-1994 democratic government has been committed to universal human rights and redistributive social policies. However, spatial patterns have not received much overt attention because territorial issues are politically sensitive and complicated to address. There has been no support for a national spatial strategy and no pro-active policy to anticipate and prepare for urbanisation. This neutral stance has avoided the serious social damage of the past, but little has been done to help migrants escape poverty and hardship, or to reverse the legacy of racial segregation and dispossession. Most land is in private ownership (except in tribal/traditional areas) and transactions occur predominantly through the market. The spatial planning framework is essentially reactive and exerts limited influence over public and private investment decisions. Land-use planning powers are control-oriented, rather than geared to making things happen through positive action, e.g. through making serviced land available for affordable housing. Parallel planning systems exist for housing, transport, infrastructure, health, education, the environment and industrial development. Additional complications stem from the overlapping mandates for national, provincial and local spheres of government.

Consequently, the inequitable form of urban settlements has been reproduced rather than reshaped. Informal housing continues to grow in inhospitable locations as population growth outpaces formal house-building. A relatively passive policy in relation to the urban land market has meant limited provision of low cost housing in good locations. Much formal housing reproduces the old style dormitory townships. In addition, the government has not promoted economic development in cities and investment in their infrastructure as vigorously as in many other countries. The situation is beginning to change as urban challenges and opportunities move up the national agenda. The cabinet approved an Integrated Urban Development Framework in 2016, although it has had little influence as yet. Meanwhile, a spike in urban land invasions by disgruntled communities in many cities and towns during 2018 has forced the state to review the way it deals with land reform and redistribution. A constitutional amendment to permit expropriation without compensation is currently being considered by the ruling party.

The post-apartheid government inherited extreme inequalities in education as well as in income and wealth. The education system is a shared responsibility of national and provincial (regional) government, with policy mainly determined nationally and implemented by the provinces. National government is also responsible for regulating the private education system. The state invests more in education than in comparable countries and achieves reasonable levels of school enrolment. However, the quality of educational outcomes is generally very poor and inequalities

are extremely high. A small group performs well but the vast majority perform very badly. The inequalities are shaped by class, race and location. Put simply, the former white suburbs tend to have good schools and good outcomes, while the townships and rural areas have poor schools and poor outcomes. Many of the provinces struggle with poor administrative capacity and mismanagement of resources. Many of the cities suffer from resource allocation lagging behind population growth.

The health system is also a shared responsibility of national and provincial government, with policy determined in a complex manner at national and provincial levels, opening space for some local sphere activity. Implementation is mainly the responsibility of provinces. In addition, municipalities are responsible for selected non-clinical services, such as environmental health and sanitation. Some of the bigger metros, such as Johannesburg and Cape Town are also responsible for primary healthcare and emergency services. National government is responsible for regulating the sizeable private healthcare system, which mainly serves affluent households and communities. Funding in the public system tends to flow from national to provincial and municipal levels. Many of the cities suffer from resource allocation lagging behind population growth. The public health system is under enormous pressure with the growing burden of disease, including HIV and Aids, TB and non-communicable diseases. Health inequalities are extremely large. The private health system plays a bigger part in the cities than elsewhere but is still only serves a fraction of the population.

Johannesburg is South Africa's largest and fastest-growing city, with high levels of domestic and foreign in-migration. It is marked by extreme social and spatial inequalities. The spatial mismatch between housing and job opportunities is a serious challenge, with the largest and highest density townships located on the urban periphery. The urban form reinforces these inequalities through high levels of securitisation, controlled street patterns, enclosed shopping malls, gated office precincts and business parks, and enclosed townhouse developments and up-market residential estates. Poor connectivity worsens the problem because of traffic congestion and a dysfunctional public transport system. The inner city is under intense social pressure as the most accessible location in the metropolitan area, but suffers from decaying infrastructure, old buildings and low levels of private sector investment, coupled with volatile social attitudes including xenophobia.

Cape Town is South Africa's second most populous city after Johannesburg. It is also marked by extreme social and spatial inequalities, and is probably the least transformed city in the country since 1994. This is partly because of the topography and physical form of the city, with affluent suburbs surrounding Table Mountain and adjoining the coast, while low income communities are generally confined to the low-lying Cape Flats. Areas in and around the central city have benefited from its unique location and proximity to a cluster of diverse service industries and amenities, including financial and business services, tourism and leisure, high order government functions and higher education. The areas of strongest population growth include the coloured and black African townships on the Cape Flats, along with a range of informal settlements dispersed around different parts of the city. These neighbourhoods suffer from inaccessibility to jobs, inadequate infrastructure, high crime, poor liveability and poor quality education, healthcare and social services. Local authorities in Cape Town and Johannesburg have made many plans to create more compact, sustainable and integrated cities, but they have had little impact on structural problems of chronic poverty and socio-spatial inequality.



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SHLC aims to strengthen capacity to address urban, health and education challenges in fast growing cities across Africa and Asia. SHLC is an international consortium of nine research partners, as follows: University of Glasgow, Human Sciences Research Council, Khulna University, Nankai University, National Institute of Urban Affairs, University of the Philippines Diliman, University of Rwanda and the University of Witwatersrand.

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