

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**BY**

**THE MINISTER OF HOUSING,**

**SANKIE MTHEMBI-MAHANYELE**

**TO THE**

**ROUND-TABLE ON SUSTAINABLE AFRICAN CITIES**

WSSD, Crowne Plaza,

27 August 2002

---

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

---

Introduction .....	1
Urbanisation.....	1
Context.....	2
Sustainable Development and Human Settlements in Africa.....	2
Habitat Agenda.....	3
Sustainable Urban Form .....	4
Human Settlement Development: The South African Experience .....	6
New Policy Shifts.....	8
Specifically, interventions will focus on: .....	8
Conclusion.....	9

---

## ***Keynote address by the Minister of Housing, Sankie Mthembu-Mahanyele, to The Round-Table on Sustainable African Cities***

---

### ***Introduction***

I consider it an honour and privilege to present this keynote address to the Round-table on Sustainable African Cities - I do so with a deep sense of satisfaction. It is also an honour for me to co-host this auspicious event with my colleague, the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Ms Anna Tibaijuka, and cements a relationship, which has been initiated at the inaugural session of the World Urban Forum that was held Nairobi in May of this year.

As South Africa we are pleased that the WSSD is being hosted in one of the major cities on the African continent. The location of the Summit in the City of Johannesburg is a further amplification of the African Renaissance that propagates Africa as an equal partner in the Global economy. And, the New Partnership for Africa's Development is set to guide Africa in facing the combined threats of under-development, poverty, environmental degradation, ill health and disease, and conflicts over natural resources that could undermine the prospects for political stability and prosperity across the continent. This presents a window of opportunity that creates the urgency for achieving sustainable development.

Although the WSSD agenda is structured to include themes of poverty, environment and development, financing mechanisms, technology transfer, trade and the environment, sustainable urbanisation, energy, environmental health and land degradation, there is an acknowledgement in the type 1 outcomes of the WSSD that human settlements, and in particular our cities, provide the backdrop for so many of the actions that will affect people, the planet and prosperity.

### ***Urbanisation***

South Africa, along with the rest of Africa, is presently experiencing rapid growth and change. These dynamics are generating a considerable amount of debate around the developmental path that should be adopted in respect of economy, society, culture and the environment. Among the most influential dynamic of change is the rapid urbanisation of African cities.

Urbanisation in its simplest definition refers to the movement of people from one place of residence to another, and is used to explain the growth and development of urban areas and cities. As a phenomenon, urbanisation occurs at a range of levels in space, be it at a regional or inter-urban scale. Explanations for processes of urbanisation are linked to greater economic and income generating opportunities as well as greater access to services and amenities within urban areas. The analysis of urbanisation tends to focus on measuring the nature and extent of urban population migrations and the impacts of the respective movements, again both at a local and regional scale.

The physical manifestation of urbanisation is the development of large cities and the increased influence that these phenomena have on regions, nations, continents and the world in terms of nodes

of financial, technological, political and social powers, and the ability of these agglomerations to stimulate further growth. And because people move to cities to benefit from economic and other opportunities, urbanisation demands that cities become increasingly specialised and diversified in terms of providing its inhabitants with various needs. Hence, cities providing greater social and economic opportunity implicitly also are afforded greater influence in respect of economy, culture and society. It is critical for African cities to understand these phenomena in order to not only to begin to grapple with the mass exodus from rural to urban areas, but also to begin to establish themselves as players in regional and global economies.

### ***Context***

Between 2000 and 2025, the world's urban population is expected to double from 2.4 billion (in 1995) to 5 billion and that city-dwellers will rise from 47 per cent to over 61 per cent of the world's population. Most of this explosive growth will occur in the cities of the developing world. There will be a doubling of the overall urban population, between 2000 and 2025, in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Asia and in Africa - above all in Africa, where population is expected to grow by 5 % a year, doubling every 13 years. It is here, in the exploding cities of some of the poorest countries of the world, that the central challenge lies.

To this extent, South Africa is very close to being classified as an urbanised society. Of greater concern, however, is that the majority of this urbanisation is occurring among the poor of our society. The tendency of urbanisation shows increasing levels of poverty and unemployment - greater numbers of urban dwellers are struggling to satisfy basic needs.

### ***Sustainable Development and Human Settlements in Africa***

Notwithstanding the importance attached to urbanisation, limited interrogation is being done about how urban growth should be accommodated and managed to best meet the needs of cities' inhabitants. It must be acknowledged that cities outlive any single generation and hence, the decisions made by ourselves will profoundly affect the alternatives of future generations of city dwellers, thus the need for sustainable cities.

Contrary to popular belief, sustainable development in cities is not merely development that can be sustained, but rather the kind of development needs to be pursued in order to achieve the state of sustainability. It is not the goal, but the process of maintaining a dynamic balance between the demands of people and what is ecologically possible. Development is also not just seen in its narrow meaning of growth, expansion and acquiring knowledge, but as progress through improvement, evolution and the quest for wisdom. While the scope of the term is still evolving as it is co-opted by more and more disciplines and advocacy groups, it is generally agreed to place certain demands on human activity in the three systems central to development.

Firstly, the economic aspects of sustainable development require the development of an economic system that facilitates equitable access to resources and opportunities and the fair sharing of finite

ecologically productive space that enables sustainable livelihoods and establishes viable businesses and industries based on sound ethical principles. The focus is on creating prosperity for all, not just profits for a few, and to do this within the bounds of the ecologically possible and without infringing on basic human rights. Secondly, social aspects of sustainable development require that we enable the development of fair and just societies that foster positive human development and provide people with opportunities for self-actualisation and an acceptable quality of life. And thirdly, environmental aspects of sustainable development require that we find a balance between protecting the physical environment and its resources, and using these resources in a way that will allow the earth to continue supporting an acceptable quality of life for human beings.

It is highly unlikely that all of the sustainability principles can be upheld at all times, as they have conflicting requirements. Most of the time, decision-makers will have to make trade-offs and otherwise try to balance the different requirements to find a solution that is the optimum one for the greater good. These decisions need to be flexible and should be regularly reviewed against agreed-upon indicators, to keep the three systems in dynamic balance and ensure that one sphere is not developed at the expense of the others.

South Africa, for example, is in the process of extricating itself from a dispensation that saw the gross inequitable distribution of resources among its population. In attempting to redress these imbalances, South Africa is in a particularly difficult position as the interaction between competing agendas demand that these inequities are redressed in a manner that is acceptable to both rich and poor, to enable all to live within what is ecologically possible - striving toward sustainable urban settlements.

With Africa rapidly being propelled into the urban age, it is faced with challenges that are very different from those faced by other continents. But along with these challenges a huge range of opportunities also present themselves for the people living in Africa: greater freedom and more opportunities for development. The opportunities for improvement in the quality of their life will be great. Urban societies are more open, they give people more chances to build networks or join systems of division of labour, which will generate higher productivity and ultimately greater prosperity and wealth. In such high-density systems of interaction, each creative advance spills over into others: thus, policies can help encourage such virtuous circles of innovation-led growth.

### ***Habitat Agenda***

As I suggested previously, sustainable development often raises conflicting demands and conditions for the creation of settlements. These conditions are also different within varying economic, political, cultural and social contexts. It is therefore not possible to define a physical blueprint for sustainable human settlements. However, the Habitat Agenda does attempt to create a normative blueprint that could be applied as appropriate to the creation of settlements everywhere.

Since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, when the international community committed itself to sustainable development, and Agenda 21 was formulated as an international blueprint for

sustainable development, all sectors of society have been in the process of interpreting and pursuing sustainability and sustainable development within their specific contexts. The ability to meet most of our basic human needs relates in one way or another to the creation and performance of human settlements, and Chapter 7 of Agenda 21 saw the creation of sustainable human settlements as integral to the achievement of sustainable development.

To address the role of human settlements in sustainable development, a second international action plan, the Habitat Agenda, was prepared. The Habitat Agenda outlines a global approach to providing adequate shelter for all and developing sustainable human settlements and is the international consensus document describing the qualities and needs of sustainable human settlement development. It attempts to offer, within a framework of goals, principles and commitments, a positive vision of sustainable human settlements where all have adequate shelter, a healthy and safe environment, basic services, and productive and freely chosen employment.

However, the Habitat Agenda provides such a diverse range of environmental, economic, social, political, demographic, institutional and cultural goals that most governments or international agencies can characterise some of what they do as contributing towards sustainable development. This includes goals whose achievement in one sector or location implies a move away from the achievement of sustainable development goals in another sector or location.

### ***Sustainable Urban Form***

It is commonly acknowledged that urban structure and form have a pivotal role to play in the sustainability of human settlements. Urban structure and form determine both quality of life and resource efficiency, and can be a key determinant of socio-economic equity, as illustrated by the consequences of South Africa's own apartheid city.

Current literature suggests that the most popular school of thought in respect of sustainable urban form is the Compact City, typically described as a dense and socially diverse city where economic and social activities overlap and where communities are focused around neighbourhoods. It is seen as growing around centres of social and commercial activity located at public transport nodes. These provide the focal points around which neighbourhoods develop. The Compact City is a network of these neighbourhoods, each with its own parks and public spaces and accommodating a diversity of overlapping private and public activities, leading to the formation of a polycentric city.

Central to the concept of the compact city are the principles of integration and densification. Integration seeks both absorption of functions (or mixed-use) and integration of the different classes of society. In theory, integration of functions such as residential, commercial, social services and public space would bring jobs and other opportunities closer to where people are live, thus reducing transportation needs. In practice this seldom happens if the second aspect of integration - socio-economic integration - is not present. This phenomenon is particularly common to most of South Africa's major cities and one that needs to be redressed in order for the apartheid city pattern to be broken down.

Densification combats urban sprawl and provides economies of scale for effective and affordable service delivery for certain types of services. It is an appropriate response in areas where high levels of services, such as waterborne sewage and full electrification, are provided at an affordable rate, and where there is an acceptable ratio between residential density (number of dwellings) and population density (people per square metre). However, if these conditions are not present, densification may actually be detrimental. It may be worth remembering why the dense city model was so categorically rejected in the last century and the concepts of Garden Cities and New Towns became so popular. The industrial cities of the 19th century suffered extremes of overcrowding, poverty and ill health, resulting in life expectancies of as little as 25 years. It was these very conditions that gave rise to the sanitary revolution that became the forerunner of the Brown Agenda. Today informal settlements are prime examples of areas of extremely high density, with the benefits of high density living, such as closer social contacts and larger support networks, but where inadequate service levels, overcrowding and proximity are creating serious health problems and increased fire risks.

To confound the planners even further is the fact that all over the world people who can afford it are deserting higher density urban environments for their inferior (according to sustainability criteria) suburban equivalent. There are two main reasons for this. Declining household size means that a given density of housing supports a declining number of people; and as people become wealthier, they require more space for themselves, their possessions and their activities. Higher density is therefore not a sure-fire recipe for sustainable urban form, and may not be an appropriate response in rural areas at all, where other factors such as extended family living and food security play a large role in the spatial requirements of the settlement.

It can therefore be argued that, instead of thinking of integration and densification as two absolutes, they should rather be based on the principles of diversity and choice. Diversity would allow for a range of opportunities for diverse groups of people. Integration would increase diversity and choice. Choice refers to the availability of different options to different people and this is also applicable in terms of densities. Some people may choose to stay closer to economic opportunities and will therefore have to be content with higher density living, due to increased land values and higher rents. They will, however, save on transportation costs. Others may choose to live on the urban periphery, where they can afford a larger plot and a house and supplement their incomes through home-based enterprises and subletting, as well as having room for subsistence living. Sustainable cities in Africa will therefore have to make provision for different income groups and different preferences, while ultimately striving towards more compact development. In South Africa, however, there is the specific need to retrench the apartheid city via conscious attempts to integrate various classes of society.

Moreover, a sustainable city is much more than what I have just outlined. A sustainable city is one that provides a quality living environment for all: where services and amenities are equitably distributed to all; where the mobilisation of all human resources are encouraged; where landscape

and built form are balanced and where buildings and infrastructures are safe and resource-efficient; where multi-functionality is encouraged; and where all people participate in public life and government.

How these dimensions are manifested in different settlements is entirely a function of local conditions, culture, levels of commitment and, most importantly, the basis on which decisions are made. Thus urban sustainability is a multi-dimensional problem that requires a systemic approach. The decision-making processes of a sustainable city would therefore also be different from traditional approaches. In practice this means a move from hierarchical and sectoral decision-making to a more holistic, integrated and participative approach.

According to Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda, integrated planning and sustainable development go hand in hand. Integrated planning is concerned with the overall behaviour of a regional system and its sub-systems, as linked together by fluxes of material and energy. The concept of integrated planning further implies that technical solutions are no longer the most important aspect in decision-making, but should be seen as only one part of the problem-solving process. At an urban level, integrated planning takes all the conditions and circumstances that will play a part in the successful outcome of the plan into account, and involves all the people or organisations who have a role to play or a contribution to make. It should generate "optimum" solutions that give the best overall performance for the environment and the socio-economic system, and enough flexibility to allow for changes to reflect changing conditions.

However, for integrated planning to be successful, it should be based on a good understanding of the make-up of the urban system, and then prioritise actions according to the dynamics of the system. Where integrated planning is based on strategic planning according to priorities identified early on in the public participation process, critical parts of the system can be left out of the equation, leading to unexpected problems further down the line, or even the collapse of the entire system. Basing decisions on current developmental priorities alone (focusing only on certain parts of the system), and ignoring the system's dynamics of settlements, can result in intuitive, feel-good decisions that provide short-term solutions, but undermine the long-term sustainability of these settlements.

### ***Human Settlement Development: The South African Experience***

Since 1994, South Africa's development has largely been guided by the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The RDP sought to redress the unsustainable legacy of Apartheid by reducing inequality through meeting the basic needs of all people, and emphasised the concept of people-driven development and encapsulated the values that the WSSD sought to ensure are taken up by all UN member states.

A key example of an RDP-linked delivery programme is the South African Housing Programme. Adequate housing is seen as an essential component of sustainable livelihoods, and is recognised through the inclusion of the right to access to housing in the South African Constitution. The



delivery of 1.3 million new housing units for the poor through the housing programme since 1994 is a notable achievement in the implementation of South Africa's housing policy - since the introduction of the housing programme, approximately 5 million people now have access to potable water, sanitation, shelter and secure tenure.

Of greater concern though is the spatial pattern of South African cities that is legacy of the previous dispensation. The apartheid system left South African settlements with a legacy of inequity reflected in low-density sprawl, fragmentation and separation. While sprawl manifests itself in upmarket estates for the wealthier classes, peripheral low cost residential areas and informal settlement, fragmentation refers to relatively discrete cells of development intersected by road systems; and separation occurred between land-uses, population and income groups. With hindsight, it is acknowledged that the spatial pattern that has arisen over the past 6 years is a largely unsustainable one, and one that more often than not entrenches the apartheid city form. These unsustainable development trends occurred largely due to the low cost of peripheral land, as compared to more centrally, well-located land. The effects of urban sprawl on the natural environment, and particularly that of unplanned informal settlements on marginal land, which negatively affect sensitive eco-systems, further contributed to unsustainable development.

Housing not only satisfies a basic need for shelter but also plays a critical role in economic development. A direct correlation exists between increased spending on housing and increased employment opportunities in the construction sector, where it is estimated that the housing programme supports 43 000 permanent jobs. The programme is thus making a significant contribution to the reduction of poverty that is key to sustainable development in the Southern African region.

In addressing the current dysfunctional urban form of many South African cities and in dealing with the housing and infrastructure backlogs manifested in informal settlements, cognisance must be taken of social forces currently shaping the housing environment and influencing the sustainability of South African cities. Central to this initiative is the concept of integration. Intensive public amenities and services need to be provided and exposed to all inhabitants of cities, to the extent that it should be possible for the urban poor to gain access to amenities that have been generated through the resources of the affluent. And, with increasing agglomeration, individuals stand to gain access to a broader range of facilities and amenities. To this end, it is important that the public sector is seen to be making concerted efforts in investing in the public domain, thereby creating the impetus for private sector investment.

Another concern relates to the lack of design input into the houses and the settlement layout. Densities of houses are generally low, although huge discrepancies exist in some cases between gross layout densities and occupational densities. In addition, there is little experimentation with new house forms or different housing typologies, as well as alternative building methods. To this end, the Department of Housing is currently interrogating alternative housing and settlement models that not only seeks to increase densities, but also does so in multi-functional living environments.

In South Africa we have learnt that partnerships in housing and human settlement development is key to enhancing sustainability. The transformation of local government and a new emphasis on the developmental and governance role of local government in South Africa contributes toward development that not only meets the needs of communities but also places local authorities in greater control with regard to issues of governance in their areas of jurisdiction.

Further, in focussing on the involvement of communities to build their own homes through the People's Housing Process, significant gains are made in both the size and quality of construction of subsidised houses. The PHP also enhances sustainability by instilling a sense of ownership and pride in achievement via owner building.

Access to credit for the poor continues to remain a challenge in developing countries. In South Africa the success of the Rural Housing Loan Fund in providing in excess of 37 000 small loans to poor households in rural areas, demonstrates that the market can be developed if appropriate methodologies, systems and financial products are made available. Further, the introduction of the Community Reinvestment Bill to promote the participation of financial institutions in the lower end of the housing finance market is also aimed at encouraging the development of a secondary market in the low cost housing sector.

### ***New Policy Shifts***

The South African Government is on the verge of entering a new phase of its housing programme and seeks to address many of the shortcomings in sustainability that have been highlighted in this paper. The major shifts in policy and programme focus are: firstly, a shift in focus from the provision purely of shelter to building habitable and sustainable settlements and communities; and secondly, a shift in emphasis on the number of units delivered towards the quality of the new housing stock and living environments.

To achieve the above, 4 strategic policy thrusts have been identified. The first deals with the urbanisation of poverty and seeks to provide assets to end-users rather than the previous conceptualisation of "Government hand-out". The second thrust focuses institution building in the acknowledgement that the provision of housing is not the sole domain of public sector agencies. Thirdly, there is the need to optimise resource use by making human settlements more effective and efficient. Related is the rationalisation and alignment of public resources in order to ensure economic, societal and environmental sustainability. And finally, there is the need to establish, enhance and consolidate partnerships between government, civil society and the public sector.

### ***Specifically, interventions will focus on:***

- a) Integrated development;
- b) A demand driven housing programme shifting away from the current supply driven approach;

- c) Consumer protection measures through the introduction of a warranty on subsidised low cost housing products;
- d) A medium density-housing programme to develop housing on land well located to support public transport systems and to provide access to economic and social opportunities;
- e) New housing legislation and financial mechanisms to promote the development and good governance of rental housing stock in order to support the medium density housing and urban integration initiatives;
- f) The introduction of measures to bring the financial sector back into the lower income housing credit market; and
- g) Introducing a rapid land release programme nationally to address the immediate needs arising from rapid urbanisation pressures particularly (but not exclusively) in the metropolitan areas and to facilitate further upgrading on an incremental basis.

Finally, this paper on sustainable cities in Africa would be incomplete without mention being made of NEPAD. NEPAD covers considerable spheres ranging from the fight against poverty and the development of agriculture and industry to regional economic integration, protection of the environment and the promotion of peace, democracy and human rights. Yes, while NEPAD may be silent on the issues of human settlements per se, it goes without saying that settlements, and in particular cities are deeply affected by the initiative. For example, the free movement of commodities and people within the region has a direct bearing on urbanisation and consequently maintaining sustainable balance of our urban settlements. It, therefore, becomes critical that African cities gear themselves to assume a new role of catalyst for economic growth, over-and-above the historic functions that need to be resuscitated.

## ***Conclusion***

Today African cities stand at a cross-roads. It is generally accepted that they perform poorly with regard to the functions to which they have been charged, such as the creation of access to services, amenities and economic opportunities. And, the situation is likely to deteriorate even further in the face of increasing urbanisation, which, in turn, will negatively impact on the socio-economic, political and environmental environment. To this end, we should continue to strive to create sustainable human settlements: settlements that enable us to live in a manner that supports the state of sustainability and the principles of sustainable development, and that have institutional, social and economic systems that will ensure their continued existence while constantly taking cognisance of the natural environment within which we are located.

Thank you.

Enquiries: Anton Arendse at 012 421 1613, 082 926 9210, E-mail: [anton@housepta.pwv.gov.za](mailto:anton@housepta.pwv.gov.za)

Issued by Ministry of Housing