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Representatives from the National Department
Department's Agencies and Associations
Government Departments
Participating Stakeholders
All Officials
Ladies and gentlemen.

Introduction

Just like many countries - South Africa - has undergone different periods over the years.

The country's history of colonialism and apartheid which plagued communities has divided our country.

The rich geographic landscape, abundant minerals, impeccable tourist attractions and cultural diversity amongst others are a marvel on their own.

Despite all these endowments, the country is still enveloped by challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

The gap which exists in terms of living standards, skewed development and biased economic and material conditions continue to irritate society.

The majority of our people continue not to have basic services such as water, education, housing, jobs, land, medical care and education.

Some people have all they need while many have nothing at all. We are one of the most unequal countries in the world.

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, the country has moved a great deal at ensuring the delivery of services to its populace.

The elections on the 27th of April 1994 were a great victory for our struggle, a first step to rebuilding a new, democratic and prosperous country.

Beyond the elections, the country needed clear actions to develop programme of action to rebuild and develop the country – which is commonly referred to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

Political Imperatives

The RDP is a programme to mobilise all our people and all our resources to finally get rid of apartheid and build a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist future.

Drawn by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) led alliance in consultation with other key mass organisations, this inclusive approach aimed at putting people first.

We really condemn the behaviour we observed over the last few weeks at Vuwani, Limpopo in the name of dissatisfaction with redrawn municipal demarcations.

Contrary to what detractors claim, the RDP was not about promises but purposed on identifying the real problems and interventions thereof.

Freedom Charter

Distinguished guests, the Freedom Charter states that:

There shall be Houses, Security and Comfort!

“All people shall have the right to live where they choose, be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security”

Department's Mandate

The Department is mandated by the South African Constitution to provide adequate housing and integrated human settlements.

The Constitution (Section 26) stresses the significance of the Department in coordinating the development of sustainable integrated human settlements.

Given this marching orders, it is clear that the Department is therefore well positioned to facilitate coordinated planning towards the realisation of progressive development.

Paradigm Shift

As we are all aware that we have inherited a South Africa with the apartheid legacy of separate development which was enforced amongst others by the Group Areas Act that was passed in 1950.

After 1994 our first Minister of Housing in our democratic South Africa, Mr Joe Slovo endeavoured to reverse the legacy of homelessness so as to advantage previously disadvantaged black communities and paralysing the fallacious intentions of unjust laws.

Whilst government continued to deliver housing and ensuring that the needs of the majority of South Africans was now tackled, it did not address the need for integrated human settlements.

In 2009 President Jacob Zuma in his State of the Nation Address, renamed the Department from Housing to Human Settlements which came with a broadened mandate.

The advent of the new approach was not just a change of name, but broadening the Department's mandate to ensure the facilitation and development of integrated sustainable settlements whilst considering all the imperative facets to create decent livelihoods.

It is about ensuring that women, men, youth and children have equal access to basic services where they live. In Mpumalanga we are also talking about empowerment.

These basic services include access to potable water and adequate sanitation so that people can live in dignity and in an environment free from diseases.

White Paper Development

It has been 22 years since the country ushered in democracy and it must be said that a lot has improved.

The development and implementation of housing and human settlements reforms, legislative framework, policies and programmes require new thinking that will respond to the emerging challenges while addressing future needs.

In line with the country's futuristic planning blue-print, the National Development Plan (NDP) the Department is embarking on an extensive consultative process to craft policy directives to embrace the trajectory of integration and sustainability.

Our gathering here during this two days ought to take into account where the country comes from, current situation and what we – as a collective would want to shape the country's development.

As alluded earlier on, the legacy of apartheid and colonialism left marks on the South African landscape in the form of physical, social and racial separation and segregation.

Over the years, the Department evolved in relation to policy and delivery methodologies, but what brought about hope was the advent of the Breaking New Ground (BNG) approach.

The advent of this strategy intended to guide housing development and mainly promoting the achievement of a non-racial, integrated society through the development of integrated, sustainable human settlements and quality housing.

When one recollects at the morals of the Freedom Charter and as further emphasised by the Constitution, the BNG policy propelled the sector at moving towards realising humane ideals.

Current State of Human Settlements

It would have been optimistic to have assumed that with the dawn of the new democracy would have given birth to the immediate creation of new well located human settlements – but coordination continued to elude us.

Since the advent of democracy, government has been at the forefront to deal with a huge backlog of housing demand.

The over four million housing opportunities created and recorded are, but concerted efforts by this government to meet its obligation of providing housing to the needy.

Defeating that drive is that the delivery of housing opportunities within the scarce financial resources meant that the backlog continued to escalate.

Moreover, informal settlements continue to increase and mushroom where government has not prepared the ground.

Among other contextual realities in the country is the rapid rate of urbanisation, economic factors and high rate of unemployment.

Way Forward

Let me appreciate this opportunity and urge all of you to join forces at developing a provincial position on the provision of human settlements.

Programme Director, government has programmes to deliver on this requirement, but all stakeholders ought to assist in tackling development in our communities – but it remains our role as a Department to coordinate.

It is a common cry that resources are limited; but given the economic challenges in the world, huge demand for housing and high levels of unemployment – some innovation is needed.

Although the right to Housing is enshrined in the Constitution, the State should ensure progressive realisation of this right.

As the ruling ANC and this caring government, we remain steadfast at ensuring that development is for all.

Once again, I call upon all of you to assist the sector in achieving such a dream.

May I wish you fruitful engagements at this workshop and hope that you will collectively craft a grand position for the province - which will ultimately contribute towards the bigger picture.

I thank you.