

## **CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF DEMOCRACY IN MPUMALANGA: THE EVOLUTION OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS**

The Human Settlements story of Mpumalanga Province is not peculiar to South Africa's. Located in the eastern part of the country and classified as rural, the province has the population of 5.1 million, making it the sixth largest in country. The journey of transforming the province's housing outlook into sustainable human settlements is a testament to the resilience and determination of its people. Emerging from the yokes of apartheid-era laws to creating inclusive communities, the story of human settlements in Mpumalanga is one of progress, challenges, and hope.

Mpumalanga, the "Place of the Rising Sun," is a province characterised by natural beauty, cultural diversity, and economic potential. From the lush landscapes of the Lowveld to the rolling hills of the Highveld, the province's geographic diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for human settlements. Moreover, this diversity also means that human settlements must be carefully planned to accommodate varying environmental conditions and socio-economic realities.

In tandem with this aspect, there ought to be an appreciation of the legacy of apartheid-era laws continues to cast a long shadow on human settlements in Mpumalanga. The apartheid laws did not only designed the skewed spatial planning but also limited access to essential services, infrastructure, and economic opportunities for the majority of the population. This became the inherited reality of the democratic government since 1994. Therefore, the challenges transcends beyond providing adequate housing but also addressing the inequalities entrenched over decades.

In the early years of democracy as part of Reconstruction Development Programme (RDP) and Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) witnessed a massive construction of thousands of houses to dent the housing backlog in the province. For example, between 1994 and 2009 Mpumalanga province constructed 138 842 housing units. The 2009 broadened mandate meant that sustainable development requires more than just building houses; it involves creating communities where people can live, work, and thrive.

Over the past 30 years, Mpumalanga has made significant strides in transforming its human settlements. The province has developed integrated housing developments that provide not only homes but also essential services and economic opportunities. Initiatives such as the Breaking New Ground (BNG) policy have played a key role in this transformation, emphasizing the importance of creating inclusive and sustainable communities.

As a results, the province has seen a dramatic decline on the number of informal dwellings has decreased from 14, 0% in 1996 to 5, 8% in 2022. The access to sanitation accounts for 98, 3% of the households; whereas access to piped water accounts for 86.9% of the population throughout the province. The total of 56, 5% of the population has tenure, either fully or not fully paid. Through government's intervention, 26, 5% of Mpumalanga residents reside in government subsidised dwellings.

The journey from housing to human settlements is far from over. The past 30 years provides a strong foundation for the future. As Mpumalanga looks to the future, the focus is on building sustainable, resilient, and inclusive communities.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

| <b>PROGRAMME</b> | <b>MILESTONE</b> |
|------------------|------------------|
| Housing units    | 236 842          |
| Sites            | 60 662           |
| Title deeds      | 89 130           |
| Social amenities | 41               |
| CRUs             | 315              |
| Emergency        | 4844             |

## **MPUMALANGA SIGNATURE FEATS OVER THE 30 YEARS OF DEMOCRACY**

As South Africa celebrates 30 years of democracy, it is more than just an occasional event; it is a moment of deep reflection on the progress, successes, and challenges that have shaped our country. In Mpumalanga, the journey of human settlements over these three decades stands out as one of the province's most significant achievements. Among the province's standout interventions are the construction of 45-square-meter Breaking New Ground (BNG) units and the introduction of the Mpumalanga Beneficiary Allocation Policy, both of which have had transformative impacts.

While the national standard for BNG housing units is 40 square meters, Mpumalanga made a ground-breaking decision to provide larger, 45-square-meter homes without increasing the approved national cost to build government-subsidized houses. This innovative approach has been praised as both progressive and impactful. By doing so, the province has not only delivered more spacious homes but also ensured that they are safe, high-quality, and climate-resilient. Built with concrete maxi bricks, concrete roof tiles, ceilings, and protective concrete aprons, these homes are designed to withstand flooding and maintain their structural integrity.

What makes this achievement even more remarkable is the financial management behind it. Instead of relying solely on the Bureau for Economic Research (BER) inflation-based model, the province developed its own bill of quantities from a zero baseline. This approach has been successfully implemented for over a decade, with contractors continuing to deliver quality work while maintaining profitability. While shoddy work may still occur in isolated cases, Mpumalanga has largely accounted for structurally sound homes.

Another notable milestone is the implementation of the Mpumalanga Beneficiary Allocation Policy. In the past, the process of allocating housing was fraught with favouritism and a lack of transparency, often disadvantaging vulnerable groups. Complaints flooded Chapter 9 institutions, calling for greater fairness and accountability. In response, the province introduced a new policy designed to ensure that housing allocation is fair, transparent, and inclusive.

The policy introduced local Allocation Committees, consisting of senior municipal officials and representatives from the provincial Department of Human Settlements. This change allowed for the prioritization of vulnerable groups and eradicated many of the complaints associated with nepotism in housing allocation.

Mpumalanga's commitment to progressive, impactful human settlements has not only improved the lives of thousands of its residents but also set a benchmark for innovation and accountability in housing delivery. As the country celebrates 30 years of democracy, the province's efforts in this sector are a testament to how far we've come and a reminder of the work that still lies ahead in building inclusive, sustainable communities for all.

## **MPUMALANGA HUMAN SETTLEMENTS MASTERPLAN-A BLUE PRINT**

In the quest to fulfil its constitutional mandate to give adequate access to housing, Mpumalanga Province recorded varying successes over the three decades. One of the outstanding feats is the Mpumalanga Human Settlements Masterplan (HSMP) which stands as a beacon of progress and strategic compass which guides the province toward sustainable and inclusive development. Its significance is in the integrated approach to human settlements delivery which appreciates the fact that the provision of housing alone is insufficient for sustainable community development.

The adoption of the HSMP in 2021 lit the revolution in tackling Mpumalanga's spatial realities inherited as apartheid legacy of fragmented and unequal development. In doing that the Masterplan advocates for the development of well-located land to support urban growth and the upgrading of informal settlements. This approach saw an increase in the number of and focus on serviced sites in the last Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) 2019-24.

Flowing from this stance, over the period the province serviced nearly 18 200 sites under Integrated Residential Development Programme (IRDP) fifteen Priority Development Areas across the province. In addition, the province upgraded eleven informal settlements across the province, translating to over 11 000 sites serviced. As a result, this instrument is arguably the best performing as it reported an achievement of 99.8 percent.

The Masterplan also emphasizes the development of liveable neighbourhoods through significant investment in bulk infrastructure, public spaces, and community facilities. This is not just about building houses; it's about creating environments where people can thrive, with access to schools, healthcare, and economic opportunities. The successful completion of ten social economic facilities and continued implementation of Community Residential Units (CRUs) in Ehlanzeni District Municipality is testament to that. The implementation of eleven bulk infrastructure projects over the MTSF also ensures the provision of basic services such as water and sanitation in new developments, thus aligning with the broader goals of improving the quality of life for all residents.

In conclusion, the Mpumalanga Human Settlements Masterplan is a significant tool in the province's efforts to create sustainable, inclusive, and well-planned communities. As the country celebrates 30 years of democracy, this plan stands as a testament to the progress made and the future aspirations of a province committed to improving the lives of its people.