

Alhassan Ziblim - The Dynamics Of Informal Settlements Upgrading In South Africa: Legislative And Policy Context, Problems, Tensions, And Contradictions

August, 2013. Approximately 1.2 million households in South Africa currently live in informal settlements, under very precarious conditions, which pose serious threat to their health, safety, and security. Actual figures are likely higher than reported. Access to adequate housing remains a big challenge in South Africa, notwithstanding continuous efforts since 1994, to deliver affordable housing to the poor, through various national housing subsidy schemes. Against this backdrop, the government introduced groundbreaking housing policy reforms in 2004, which included a programme devoted to the upgrading of informal settlements. The new initiative, crowned as the “Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme” (UISP), had the objective to “eradicate” all informal settlements by 2014.

After almost a decade of implementation, and practically less than a year to its initial “slum eradication” deadline of 2014, this study sets out to explore the policy dynamics, and implementation of the UISP, through the lens of good governance. It seeks to identify and flesh out the problems and challenges of the programme, in order to inform policy learning. The study draws relevant information from books, journal articles, national policy documents, publications and news reports, as well as internet sources. In general, while the findings pinpoint the existence of comprehensive national legislative and policy frameworks in support of the slum upgrading initiative, the evidence suggest that, the goal of slum eradication is still farfetched, due to several problems and challenges. Indeed, there is an apparent gap between the policy rhetoric, and the reality of implementation, characterised by notable inconsistencies, tensions, and problems.

These problems and challenges have so far hindered the programme’s ability to

make realistic improvements in the lives of slum dwellers. In effect, the report identifies the following telling governance challenges to be in need of urgent attention by policy makers:

- Failure by municipalities to adhere to the basic principles of structured *in situ* upgrading as opposed to total redevelopment of slums; the
- The nominal or lack of community involvement and choice in decisions of slums upgrading;
- The lack of capacity and material resource shortages, that leads sometimes to delays in project implementation.

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