

Saleem Ali - Alleviating Energy Poverty in South Africa's Slums



Photo: Saleem H. Ali - The energy landscape of Khayelitsha.

The sweeping slums of Khayelitsha outside Cape Town are a stark reminder of the endemic inequality that continues to haunt South Africa almost twenty years since the end of apartheid. Here we find around half a million people living in a sea of shacks that are often associated with urban blight across the developing world.

Yet, the sight of these shelters made of corrugated steel and wood in an informal settlement should not necessarily evoke fatalism about this land. The typical South African shack is a versatile piece of simple engineering that only costs around \$400 to buy and meets the basic needs of shelter for its residents.

Nevertheless, the government recognizes the need for providing more stable housing through its Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which has provided around 3 million homes to South Africans since the end of apartheid. Those living in the shacks on less than an inflation-adjusted amount per month are entitled to apply for RDP housing, though the waiting period can be as much as 10 years. Unlike high-rise low-income housing in China, the demand in South Africa is to have a small tract of land and a hut as the residence. Human ingenuity and resilience beams through through many residents in these areas as they traverse their life journeys from shacks to RDP huts.

Read more: <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com>