

# OVERCOMING INEQUALITIES IN FRACTURED CITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*Against a background of uncertain democratic consolidation, painful economic adjustment and the persistent social inequalities, the need for sustainable urban development has become the subject of a growing debate in South Africa. These scholarly concerns are coupled with the growing public and political concerns about poverty, inequality and social exclusion. This paper engages the conceptual debate on fragile cities and sustainable urban development. It traces the trends of urban development in South Africa including the attempts at policy reform in post-1994. In so doing, the paper addresses the question of how the inherited urban development framework has been influenced by the neo-classical model of urban development of the apartheid era. The paper concludes by positioning the urban development debate in terms of what needs to be done moving forward.*

**Keywords:** Sustainable Urban Development, Leadership, Elite, Poverty, Corona virus.

## INTRODUCTION

### The Reality of South African Cities

Ordinarily, cities are associated with opportunities and better promises. Cities continue to attract many people especially from rural areas, towns and villages. People flock to cities in search of greener pastures, the search for work and the need for improved standards of life (Sulemana & Nketiah-Amponsh, 2019). Today, more than two-thirds of the population in South Africa is based in urban areas, one of the highest proportions on the continent (Pieterse & Parnell, 2014). This reflects a long history of industrialisation and mining in the country. Nevertheless, be as it may, the reality in South Africa is that cities have been excluding the majority of people, especially blacks, from participating in the mainstream economy and from accessing opportunities (Todes & Turok, 2018). The apartheid exclusion and discrimination were based on race and led to the marginalisation of the majority of the population. The denial of economic opportunities to black people in the form of capital assets, skills and education, among others, has led to serious racial inequalities in terms of poverty, income and wealth. These inequalities manifested even in settlement patterns where white people lived in towns and cities with good suburban infrastructure while black people lived in townships and informal settlements with lack of physical infrastructure like roads, proper housing, water and sanitation facilities.

Against this background of apartheid urban planning, South Africa continues to reproduce inequitable forms of urban settlements. Informal settlements and housing continue to grow and mushroom everywhere. The end of institutional apartheid saw an influx of migrants from

townships, villages and neighbouring countries seeking better opportunities. South African cities contribute 55% to the national economy and estimates indicate that almost 78% of the population lives in cities and towns, both in urban and rural areas, with the nine Metro cities carrying almost half, 46% of the population (Davidson, 2016). Recently, a new phenomenon of urban land invasions by disgruntled members of the communities surrounding big cities, large and small towns, resulted into a proliferation of alternative forms of shelter particularly in townships and informal settlements. This puts into question the efficacy of government policies in influencing urbanisation and urban growth (Nxumalo, 2016). Two main ones are The White Paper (1998) on Local Government which calls for measures to address entrenched inequalities, spatial distortions and social divisions that are underlying development; and the National Development of South Africa chapter 8, which emphasises on transformation of human settlements through integrated urban planning in order to address spatial inequalities. Nevertheless, these policies have not featured prominently in the integrated development plans of cities and towns and have suffered from government inertia. Today, cities in South Africa are among the most unequal and divided in the world, exhibiting extreme social and spatial inequalities. This fragmented urban form has dire social, economic as well as environmental consequences.

Another urban challenge is a gross mismatch between housing and job opportunities in big cities (Todes & Turok, 2018). The scenario has led to the growth of high-density suburbs on the peripheries of big cities. This urban form reinforces inequalities through controlled street patterns, high levels of securitisation, gated office precincts and business parks, enclosed shopping malls, enclosed townhouse developments as well as up-market residential estates. This challenge is worsened by poor connectivity due to a generally dysfunctional public transport system in the country, especially access into upmarket areas. Educational and health facilities in these areas remain inaccessible. As a result, the inner city is under intense social pressure as the most accessible, but it suffers from decaying infrastructure (Maharaj, 2020), low levels of private sector investment, coupled with volatile social attitudes, including xenophobia. The issue of urbanisation remains contentious and has posed many dilemmas for the successive South African governments. The challenges confronting South African cities puts a question on the government's commitment of addressing the "politically sensitive" issue of spatial patterns in the country. This also underscores the need and support for pro-active policies to manage urbanisation trends.

## **Aim**

a) The aim of the study is to investigate factors that lead to social and economic exclusion of urban migrants and their implications on sustainable development.

## **Objectives**

a) An evaluation of the current neo-classical model of urban development that is informing the development of cities and towns in South Africa

b) To propose an urban development framework that is inclusive and sustainable and enhances the livelihood opportunities of city/town residents in South African cities.

## Significance of the study

The paper will be of great value to the city planners, the policy makers, NGOs, the business sector and the international community. It will shed light on appropriate policy options and interventions for a responsive pattern of urban development that will create institutions and city level strategies to transform the unsustainable spatial nature of urbanisation in the Eastern Cape cities. Just like the National Development Plan of South Africa, this paper advocates for a 2030 where South Africa should no longer have poverty traps in rural areas and townships; workers isolated on the periphery of cities and controlled by slumlords and crime; sterile suburbs controlled by high walls and electric fences; poor households spending 30% of their time, energy and money on daily commuting; exclusive enclaves for the rich and fearful migrant communities in confined spaces.

## Fractured Cities

It is important to note that a fractured city reflects the divided nature of a city and its surroundings (Syna, 2020). In many instances, it creates an “*Us and Them*” urban dichotomy instead of a national community. Kruijt, (2007) asserts that by nature, the notion of fractured cities raises questions about issues of injustices and lack of accountability, organised and disintegrated, formal and informal, ruled and unruled, as well as separated and linked at the same time. In South Africa, cities have become more highly fractured along economic and racial lines. The segregation trends have led to the neighbourhoods of the same region being isolated from one another and not having the “*Bridging Social Capital*” that would allow these neighbourhoods to function as a coherent region. Traditional social cleavages have become wider and more intense which in essence echoes the set of problems emerging in South Africa. The costs of urban fragmentation entrench inequality based on problems related to service delivery over sprawled-out areas, increased cost of transport and time over long distances for the poor and increased carbon emissions and air pollution from vehicles.

Terreblanche view (2015), is that the fractured nature of cities in South Africa suggests that white elitism, white corporatism as well as the creation of black elitism is continuing since 1994. This has been a major factor that has led to growing inequalities over the past 25 years. Precisely, the fragility of South African cities is a transgenerational process characterised by informalisation and exclusion of the economically deprived, in particular, in metropolitan areas (Gunter & Massey, 2020). This has been for many years nourished by the continued migration of people from the former homeland areas. Today, the social and economic exclusion has become an urban phenomenon reflecting the heterogenous nature of the urban class structure (Horn, 2019). This urban crisis has led to conflicting interests in terms of socio-economic advancement and democratic consolidation. In essence, the very notion of fragile city raises questions as to who benefits from the current trajectory of urban development and the allocation of scarce public capital. Likewise, the fractured nature of cities has serious ramifications in terms of building social equity and economic strength in cities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Framework

The paper is guided by the neoclassical model of urban development and the sustainable urban development framework. The neoclassical model of urban development is outlined below:

#### **Neo-classical model of urban development**

There is an engrained assumption in the mainstream development theory that urbanisation is a product and manifestation of the transition to modernity (Lee, 2018). According to the logics of this model, contemporary urban transformation is but just an expression and outcome of the process of neo-liberalisation (Heeg, 2019). Accordingly, neoliberalism borrowed much from the assumptions of neoclassical economics (Spotton, 2019). For the purposes of this study, neoliberalism is defined as “*A political ideology that advocates private property, the privatisation of social resources, the flexibilisation of regulatory frameworks that might hinder free market values, and the supposed withdrawal of state intervention*” (Harvey, 2008). Neoliberalism and neo-liberalisation have been the subject of increasing interest in urban studies. The neoclassical theories or models of urbanisation in the Global South, particularly South Africa, face a dual contradiction on the basis that on one hand, this form of urbanisation creates new avenues for economic development via agglomeration economies, positive externalities and knowledge spill-overs. On the other hand, the neoclassical model of urbanisation is responsible for social and economic inequities as well as conflicts, along with accelerated ecological degradation. In the case of South Africa, the resource-intensive development model of city planning inherited from apartheid governance has helped to uphold and to increase the economic and social exclusion of the majority of black people from the cities and towns. It has maintained forms of market discrimination in access to land, capital, employment and products and non-market forms of discrimination in terms of the provision of social services and access to public institutions. These forms of exclusion have led to inefficiencies in service delivery and in the national economy. Therefore, in order to establish effective ways to address the contemporary urban challenges, it is imperative to question the neoclassical interpretation of urbanisation in the Global South, particularly in South Africa. Without unpacking the underlying socioeconomic forces behind urban vulnerabilities within the contemporary model of urban development, it will be very difficult if not impossible to come up with sustainable solutions to the challenges confronting cities today.

### **Sustainable Urban Development Framework**

Today, urbanisation is happening at a phenomenal rate than ever before and the UN-Habitat, (2019) has indicated that more than half of the world population now lives in cities. Despite the fact that cities are the economic growth powerhouses and catalysts for innovation and inclusion, they can also exacerbate inequalities. Many urban residents today lack proper housing, water, sanitation and energy. Many others have no security to land, cannot access affordable, adequate homes, jobs and health care, among other necessities of life. For instance, the state funded housing programmes continue to be located at the margins of cities with poor health, transport and education infrastructure. These areas have no tax base and are not able to attract private investment, thus continuing to marginalise the urban poor and reinforce apartheid inequalities. Moreover, the current electricity crisis is compounding the problems of

unemployment and hunger as small and micro enterprises at the periphery of urban areas are failing to survive. In terms of transport, vehicles account for 35% of energy consumption in cities and are responsible for 38% of emissions (Davidson, 2016).

This is in addition to the fragmented nature of transport and the long distances travelled between the centre and periphery of the cities and towns. On the sanitation front, there are areas that still use the bucket system in South African cities. The flush toilet system is expensive and is mainly found in areas where consumers are able to demand and pay for them. This is in addition to the scarcity of water that has lately been characterised by numerous service delivery protests in many townships, informal settlements and small towns. This is most concerning in these days of the Coronavirus pandemic that is escalating in the country. In addition, hunger has become an enduring problem in South African cities. More than half of the population of cities is exposed to hunger. Figures show that 32% are in hunger while 36% do experience hunger (Davidson, 2016).

These challenges undermine the sustainability of cities in adopting the sustainability framework. The importance of the sustainability framework lies in the fact that it challenges the conventional models of urban development. This is premised on the fact that the orthodox urbanisation frameworks have relied on models that are unsustainable (Romero-Lankao, et al., 2016). In environmental terms, these conventional urbanisation models engender low-density suburbanisation. This is steered largely by private interests. Socially, the urbanisation model produces multidimensional forms of inequality, social exclusion and deprivation, which generally create spatial inequalities and fractured cities, usually characterised by slum areas alongside gated and walled communities (UN-Habitat, 2016). In South Africa, the resource-intensive urbanisation model that is pursued at all state planning levels has entrenched, and is perpetuating the race and class based socioeconomic inequalities and fragmentation in cities and towns. Its characteristics of social and economic exclusion have undermined policy efforts at integrated development planning for social equity and sustainable urban development

The notion of sustainable urban development refers to a process in which sustainability of cities can be achieved. Ideally, this puts strong emphasis on the improvement, positive change and progress incorporating both social and environmental aspects. The development trends in cities provide enough evidence as to why sustainability transitions of urban spaces are critically needed in terms of ecological integrity, social justice and economic development. The sustainable urban development framework becomes very useful insofar as it provides substantial insights on what needs to be done to achieve sustainable cities and to overcome inequalities in fractured cities. The following section will provide the guiding principles of sustainable urban development framework and how urban neighbourhoods can be transformed, and navigate those spaces towards sustainability.

## **Principles of Sustainable Urban Development**

### **Human-environment integrity**

John et al. (2019) identified human environment integrity as one of the principles of urban development. This principle supports the creation of integrated urban ecological systems that support and protect the life support functions of existing ecosystems. It also speaks to the development of cities in sync with local conditions and settings, harmonisation of development with the given historical background, landscape, economic situation, social significance and political factors. It emphasises the enhancement of the positive effects of urban environments on their surroundings and the reduction of negative impacts (Elliot, 2012).

## **Human Well-being**

The principle of human wellbeing is concerned with ensuring that people enjoy a decent life and have enough access to opportunities as well as resources for their improvement. Luederitz et al. (2013) emphasised this point when they reflected on sustainability as an important development approach in smart growth, new urbanism and ecological city. This principle of human wellbeing has an orientation towards the tackling of social exclusion and ensuring that positive social relationships are promoted through the integration of marginalised stakeholders. It also bespeaks the development of self-sufficient as well as walkable mix-use neighbourhoods, upgrading of public places, reinvigoration of the local economy, and the promotion of sustainable business opportunities.

## **Intra and Intergenerational Equity**

The principle of intra and intergenerational equity seeks to ensure social inclusion through the design of urban policies that cater for mixed-income and affordable housing as well as the consideration of the needs of the disabled and the elderly (John et al., 2019). This also entails the need to consider demographic changes and the needs of future residents as well as the avoidance of urban gentrification. Most importantly, this principle speaks to the development of contiguous, well-connected and compact neighbourhoods around nodes of varying sizes and the avoidance of urban sprawl (Yigitcanlar & Teriman, 2015).

## **Resource Maintenance and Efficiency**

Yigitcanlar & Teriman (2015) explain a city as the most dramatic manifestation of human activities on the environment. Thus, the issue of sustainability evokes the need to strike a balance between human activities and the environment. In fact, it is about the need to understand energy better, material and nutrient flows of cities, as well as the reduction of overall consumption and ensuring efficient resource use. More so, this principle caters for a comprehensive water management system and ecologically responsible and resilient energy systems (Alqahtany, Resgui and Li, 2013). Generally, this principle is all about the improvement of the consumption patterns and living standards. In the same manner, it is about the construction and disposal of the built environment in order to prevent leakage effects.

## **Democratic Governance**

The principle of democratic governance is all about empowering people to ensure their participation in the relevant issues of the city and their neighbourhood (John et al., 2019). This calls for the integration of administration, customary and market efforts, as well as personal decision-making practices. Moreover, democratic governance is about enabling all stakeholders to develop an understanding of environmental characteristics so as to enhance transparency and their ability to make better and informed deliberations.

## **Precaution and Adaptation**

According to John et al. (2019), the principle of precaution and adaptation in relation to sustainable urban development speaks to the development of resilient urban spaces and ensuring iterative and adaptive processes. Elliot (2012) argues that the nature of sustainable development

must be explored in the context of changing ideas and practices within development thinking and environmentalism. Thus, this principle acknowledges constant changes in order to maintain functionality and adjust responses to both external and internal processes. Therefore, in questioning “what sustainable development is, what it should be, and how sustainable development policies and mechanisms are being reconsidered,” this principle considers the interconnectedness of climate, energy, social justice, poverty and economy (Elliot, 2012). It is also important in the context of this principle to encourage city dwellers as change incubators and convey sustainability to the broader city environment reinforcing the ongoing development.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper used document analysis. Document analysis is a qualitative way of reanalysing existing data collected and analysed by somebody for other purposes (Rubin & Babbie, 2016; Chivanga, 2016). The difference between document analysis and primary data analysis is that document analysis uses existing data. Document analysis, just like primary data analysis, has systematic procedures which need to be taken into consideration when analysing data. For example, after reading multiple documents, the researcher should be able to find out whether the documents have same conclusions or not, thereby critically analysing the reasons for the different conclusions if there is any so as to come up with meaningful results.

In this paper, document analysis was guided by the following objectives, namely, 1) To investigate the factors that lead to social and economic exclusion of urban migrants 2) To evaluate the implications of exclusion on sustainable development in South Africa. 3) To evaluate the current neo-classical model of urban development that is informing the development of cities and towns in South Africa. The guiding questions of the paper were: 1) What led to the social and economic exclusion of urban migrants? 2) What were the implications of sustainable development? 3) How is the current neo-classical model of urban development informing the development of cities and towns in South Africa?

Firstly, accredited and relevant articles, textbooks, education websites and policy documents were selected and reviewed. The results from different articles, books and policy documents were analysed. The aim was to investigate factors that lead to social and economic exclusion of urban migrants and their implications on sustainable development with the aim of contributing to the body of knowledge on the ways of overcoming inequalities in fractured cities. The review of the literature focused on the current situation of South African cities, the status of South African cities during apartheid, a review of fractured cities and the current model of urban development that is informing the development of cities and towns in South Africa. After a critical analysis of documents, ways of promoting inclusive and sustainable livelihood in cities were suggested. Snow bowl technique was used to link the researcher to related articles through using references from relevant documents. This was done to have a deeper understanding of the study. Key words, namely, “*Fractured Cities*”, post-apartheid urbanisation” “*Inequalities in Cities*”, sustainable development and neoliberalism were searched in articles, policy documents and book chapters and relevant documents were selected purposively. Irrelevant documents were excluded. The abstracts from documents were used for inclusion and exclusion criteria. Documents with relevant abstracts were downloaded and the abstracts which were found to be irrelevant to inequalities in fractured cities were excluded. After screening the abstracts about 20 relevant documents were found to be relevant to the study and they were reviewed.

## CONCLUSION

Discrimination based on race, and to a lesser extent class, is still a problem in South African cities. Its pervasive effects in terms of market and non-market discrimination despite the removal of institutionalised apartheid, have maintained inequalities. They have managed to undermine policy interventions aimed at addressing spatial, economic and social fragmentation. The intensive resource-based approach to planning has worked to encourage and to uphold a tripartite alliance between white wealth, the new and politically connected black middle class and the professional elite. The implications are that government policies have failed to address fragmentation between urban space, city and town dwellers and the needs of the environment such that there is a creation of linkages between the city/town and residents. City and town residents at the periphery such as in the townships, informal settlements and deteriorated inner city areas remain locked out of social and economic opportunities accruing to city/town development. The fragmentation reinforces inequalities in access to land and gainful employment, and leads to low levels of human capital development, poor quality of social services and makes such city/town dwellers politically invisible and voiceless. This calls for targeted intervention measures that will correct the root causes of inequalities and fragmentation and to position South African cities/towns to benefit from the predicted increased immigration by 2030.

In summation, this paper has provided conceptual clarity on the concept of fragile cities and sustainable urban development. It has proceeded to discuss how “*Neo-liberalism*” has come to describe the contemporary urban conditions. The paper has also shown how the neoliberal orientation of government policies are falling short in terms of solving the class and social divides that characterise cities in South Africa since the colonial times. A brief historiography of urban development in South Africa has been provided spanning from the apartheid urban planning in the colonial times to the post-1994 era when inequitable forms of urban settlements continue to be reproduced owing to the neoliberal orientation of government policies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Addressing the Root Causes Rather than the Symptoms.**

If inequalities are to be reduced in a meaningful and sustainable manner, there is need to strengthen the cities to undertake a sustained process of spatial transformation to create inclusive cities. This will include adoption of an urbanisation model that addresses core issues of social and economic fragmentation and promotes equality and opportunity for all citizens, including access to services, rule of law, income and employment. Being an inclusive city involves deliberate effort of eliminating discriminatory exclusion, actively intervening in creating more equitable markets, services and spaces as well as guaranteeing human rights including social, economic and political processes and aspiration for equitable development that enable wellbeing and a good quality of life ( Kasper et.al., 2017).

Moreover, the development of improved strategies anchored on the integration of social and economic needs of the people, environment and space needs in cities and towns is a crucial factor. Steps should include increasing and promoting political participation for the marginalised groups and individuals to use the urban space to voice their concerns on government accountability, social services and land tenure. The focus should be on sustainability of cities, which promotes economic and social empowerment in human capital investment and political

and environmental safety. Clearly, the building of inclusive, productive and sustainable cities in South Africa will take a committed political leadership that will address the prevailing social alienation, injustice and economic deterioration. This will take targeted acts of capacity building in the public service on integrated development planning with a social dimension focus.

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