

Report

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OPINION

National State of Disaster bares shortcomings of housing policy

BY CORRIE KRUGER

A DISASTER upon disaster within a perfect storm. The recent flooding in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) has highlighted the inherent shortcomings in the housing sector, which can no longer be ignored.

On April 18, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that the Cabinet had declared a National State of Disaster in response to the floods that devastated KZN, leaving at least 448 people dead, with several hundred still missing.

From early estimates, at least 14 000 homes have been damaged or destroyed. Infrastructure damage to water, electricity and sewage systems will amount to billions of rand.

An estimated 45 000 people are currently "displaced" and in need of food, water and shelter. ("Displaced" being an understatement for one of the most catastrophic experiences that a human being should ever endure.)

After the discovery of the Covid-19 corruption and theft, amounting to more than R7 billion, according to the Special Investigative Unit, people are extremely concerned that the billions allocated for the rebuilding will befall the same fate of looting, corruption and theft in a repeat of what we experienced during the coronavirus pandemic.

It is a real concern, added to by the fact that the construction industry itself is under siege by a construction mafia.

The seriousness of the problems are illustrated in a programme titled: "The Construction Mafia | Carte Blanche | M-Net" originally aired in February 2022.

The programme can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLlSHWR3SVU>.

In this programme, the Carte Blanche team spoke with various industry representatives. One such person was Webster Mfebe, the chief executive of the South African Forum of Civil Engineering Contractors, who has held the post since January 2013.

On the organisation's website, Mfebe is described as "a strategist and human rights activist, he strongly believes in infrastructure development with a human rights conscience."

Mfebe has expressed his dismay with the conduct of the "construction mafia," calling their behaviour criminal and requiring strong action to have it eradicated.

National African Federation for the Building Industry president, Aubrey Phalatshe, has also commented on how infrastructure projects have been disrupted countrywide by the "construction mafia," and he believes law enforcement must isolate the criminals from people who have legitimate concerns and issues they want addressed.

The National African Federation for the Building Industry currently has a total membership of 6 442 member companies.

Phalatshe shared how of his federation's members have been awarded a contract for training, and about 50 members of the "construction mafia" arrived to be trained on tender pricing, costing and estimating – but instead, they negated the training, demanding to be paid 30 percent of the value of the contract without doing any work for it.

The "30 percent" relates to the 30 percent small, medium, micro enterprises sub-contracting requirement in the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act.

That something needs to be done about this goes without question, but what? Adding to the hijacking of the

construction industry by unscrupulous, greedy contractors are other unique complexities of the South African context. These include, among others, historical spatial planning and a lack of access to traditional financial products.

According to the Consumer Credit Market Report of September 2021, the total number of mortgages was 1 686 000, representing a total value of R108 549 6042 000. This represents 52 percent of all credit extensions of the gross debtors' book. The average outstanding bond amounts to R643 829.21.

The model used by the General Household Survey 2020 estimates that the number of households increased from 11.2 million in 2002 to 17.4 million in 2020.

Gauteng had the largest number of households, followed by KZN, Western Cape, and the Eastern Cape. Northern Cape – the least populous province – also had the smallest number of households.

The total estimated population of South Africa as of 2020 was 59 437 000. From this, one can deduce that the average size per household is three to four people.

This might sound substantial, but in 2022, we still sit with a massive housing deficit, which, given the current unemployment rate and the continuing downward spiral of the economy, is set to deepen.

Other frustrations of the industry are in the social housing space, where red tape and over-regulation are killing development initiatives.

Land underpins all human activity and has very deep emotional, cultural, and political significance, which is why addressing the land issue in South Africa has always been fraught with tension.

The Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (Spluma) (No 16 of 2013) provides for a single land development process for the country and has been in operation since July 2015.

After a 10-year process, Spluma was finalised following a Constitutional Court ruling in the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality vs Gauteng Development Tribunal and others 2013.

The country has good intent and has several initiatives to address not only the current shortage but for preparing for smart and inclusive cities of the future.

Such research can, for example, be found within the South African Cities Network Research Areas, under the headings of the City Development Strategy, Inclusive-Cities, Productive Cities, Sustainable Cities; Resilient Cities, and Well-Governed Cities, prepares and publishes regular editions of work.

These publications provide thorough research on where to start looking at how to make South African cities better places in which to live, work and play.

Yet, we seem to forever find ourselves in a groundhog day-like holding pattern, doomed to rinse and repeat and like our roads, crumble into oblivion.

There is no magic pill or wand to wave to fix this overnight, but to rectify the current catastrophe that has beset KZN residents and even serve as a blueprint for the rest of the country.

It will take wisdom, application, and political will, together with co-operation and goodwill between various government departments, provincial structures, municipal authorities, and the private sector – honestly and with good intent.

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