

ALEXANDRA URBAN RENEWAL:- THE ALL-EMBRACING TOWNSHIP REJUVENATION PROGRAMME

1. Introduction and Background

About the Alexandra Township

The township of Alexandra is one of the densely populated black communities of South Africa rich in township culture embracing cultural diversity. This township is located about 12km (about 7.5 miles) north-east of the Johannesburg city centre and 3km (less than 2 miles) from up market suburbs of Kelvin, Wendywood and Sandton, the financial heart of Johannesburg. It borders the industrial areas of Wynberg, and is very close to the Limbro Business Park, where large parts of the city's high-tech and service sector are based. It is also very near to Bruma Commercial Park and one of the hype shopping centres of Eastgate Shopping Centre. This township amongst the others has been the first stops for rural blacks entering the city in search for jobs, and being neighbours with the semi-industrial suburbs of Kew and Wynberg. Some 170 000 (2001 Census: 166 968) people live in this community, in an area of approximately two square kilometres.

Alexandra extends over an area of 800 hectares (or 7.6 square kilometres) and it is divided by the Jukskei River. Two of the main feeder roads into Johannesburg, N3 and M1 pass through Alexandra. However, the opportunity to link Alexandra with commercial and industrial areas for some time has been low. Socially, Alexandra can be subdivided into three parts, with striking differences; Old Alexandra (west of the Jukskei River) being the poorest and most densely populated area, where housing is mainly in informal dwellings and hostels. The East Bank east of the Jukskei River, an area redeveloped in the 1980's and now occupied by the middle-class community of Alex. This part constitutes less than 5% of Alexandra. Finally, the Far East Bank now called Tsutsumani developed as an athletes' village to accommodate the 1999 7th All-Africa Games sports athletes. Tsutsumani consists of 1 700 freestanding, semi-detached and simplex units. These are now occupied by local people who have been on the housing waiting list and qualify in terms of government enlisted housing subsidy qualification criteria.

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After the advent of a democratic government and the repeal of restrictive apartheid laws after 1994 the population of Alexandra increased dramatically. People from rural areas in South Africa and neighbouring countries searching for employment and economic opportunities around the urban cities of Gauteng province flocked into Alexandra, dramatically overloading an infrastructure already under strain. Congestion in informal settlements, hostels and along the banks of the Jukskei River made living conditions stressful, unhealthy and dangerous. What became detrimental in the township of Alex is the general feeling of squalor and desperate poverty witnessed in the polluted streets, overcrowded households, and high level of unemployment in the area. The initial township has very few open, green spaces and aside from a few scattered trees, very little vegetation.

Originally, the infrastructure in Alexandra was designed for a population of 70 000 people, and the influx of people over the years has caused the population to balloon to an estimated 350 000, all living within a geographic area of 1,6km². These cramped conditions led to social, environmental and health problems. With a growing rate of unemployment the local living conditions deteriorated and crime increased. As space became scarce, shacks were built over sewer lines and manholes, resulting in blockages and rivulets of sewerage water flowed freely in the narrow lanes and streets.

Key challenges prevalent in Alexandra

- Lack of investment coupled by inadequate planning making Alex a desperately poor township
- Shortage of space and lack of public parks leading children playing in the streets
- Shack constructed on the banks of Jukskei River with its water is used for daily consumption
- Overcrowding and diffusion of informal housing have created an intense pressure on services.
- Most shacks are not connected to the electricity grid with inhabitants resorting to tapping the main power lines.
- Access to piped water into households coupled by uneven distribution of water

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infrastructure

- Access to tarred roads obstructed by the uncontrolled expanding of shacks.
- Access to private toilet facilities and regular refuse collection. These factors contribute heavily to the unhealthy living conditions

2. Description of the Project**Alexandra Renewal Project**

The Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP), a joint urban regeneration project between all three tiers of government, the private sector, NGO's and community-based organizations is part of the South African government's Integrated Sustainable Rural Development and Urban Renewal Programme announced by President Thabo Mbeki to Parliament in his State of the Nation Address 2001. It involves the revitalization of strategic urban localities through refurbishing of infrastructure, Local Economic Development projects and social integration. This would be a key component of the Government's approach to addressing urbanisation and housing challenges in South Africa and would include the integrated development of the whole area addressing economic, social and physical challenges simultaneously. The ARP is charged with upgrading the living conditions and human development potential pertinent in Alexandra. There are 96 active projects of which work is happening with more focus on housing and infrastructure development, local economic development, urban management, environmental management and development of human skills.

For decades the area had no storm water drainage, resulting in potholes and dongas opening up. Water to homes was provided by communal taps, one tap serving several households. It has several cemeteries, now full, and 25 schools. Several clinics serve the community, with numerous large informal as well as formal retail sector (spaza shops) shops and telephone kiosks supplying basic goods and services. Here one finds hostels of five or six storeys and brightly-painted blocks of flats. In other parts on a minimal scale there are ordinary suburban streets and houses with the usual high walls and pretty pavement gardens that characterise South African suburbs.

The development of ARP over time has fundamentally transformed the physical,

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economic and social environment of Alexandra. This became the first ambitious urban renewal strategy programme to be implemented since the unveiling of the Urban Development Strategy in 1995. The revitalization of Alex Township became a long awaited result to the failing society which for a long time has lived on the environmentally poor conditions as basic services have collapsed by unplanned population over the infrastructure.

The Alexandra Renewal Programme kick-started with financial capital of R1, 3 billion spread over seven years to revitalize the township of Alexandra. At the inception of ARP the Greater Alexandra township had roughly 90 000 housing structures including old Alexandra and the relatively new areas like the East Bank, the Far East Bank, Marlboro Industrial, Wynberg, Kew and Marlboro Gardens. Out of these housing structures 6 000 were old bonded houses, 500 were new houses, 52 000 were backyard structures, 1 800 were hostel rooms, 1 490 were flats, 19 000 were public space shacks, 5 000 were factory sub-divisions, and 4 000 were formal units on the East Bank.

The programme has eleven functional areas broadly divided into four primary categories - Housing Developments, Urban Services, Social Infrastructure and Local Economic Development. Each functional area has a list of projects targeted at provision of sustainable livelihoods. The functional areas are education, engineering, environment, health, heritage, housing, local economic development, local government capacity building, safety and security, sport and recreation, and welfare.

The dual intention is:

- To create integrated and functional settlements.
- To rehabilitate dysfunctional urban areas with economic and social development.

The Project is tasked with the following:

- Upgrading existing housing environments.
- Creating additional affordable housing opportunities
- Substantially reducing levels of unemployment.

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- Creating a healthy and clean living environment.
- Reducing levels of crime and violence.
- Providing urban services at an affordable and sustainable level.
- Creating additional affordable housing opportunities.
- De-densification of households to appropriate land.

Water and sanitation had to be fixed and provided, recuperating untarred roads, installation of street lighting, developing a rainwater drainage and sewerage system, rehabilitation of previously single sex hostels into family units, provision of health services, rehabilitation of other related social amenities like provision of police station, maintenance of school buildings, provision of houses on well located land and closer to amenities, land use management as most of the home owners had free hold lease title deeds.

3. Main Partners

Alexandra Renewal Programme has enlisted the cooperation and partnerships of all three spheres of government as well as the private sector. The ARP championed by the Gauteng Department of Housing was to deal with a myriad of issues. This would be not only a housing development initiative but rather an urban renewal project aimed at the provision of sustainable and habitable human settlements targeted at social, economic, physical and institutional transformation for the delivery of integrated communities. As it was first of its kind, all government departments had to be involved.

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List of partners	Contact Person	Address	Level of participation and contribution
Gauteng Provincial Government (Department of Housing & Local Government)	Mr. Mongezi Mnyani Chief Operations Officer Mongezi.Mnyani@gauteng.gov.za	Bank of Lisbon Building 37 Sauer Street Cnr. Marshall, Marshalltown, Johannesburg www.housing.gpg.gov.za	Programme champion under the auspices of the Gauteng Department of Housing
Greater Alexandra Development Forum	Linda Memela Secretary lindamemela@webmail.co.za	Pentad Building 55 Andries Street, Wynberg Johannesburg	Representing civil society and communities involved in or living in Alexandra and surrounding areas by providing a platform to build partnership and corporation amongst all sectors of the community striving for unison for the common good of the residents of Greater Alexandra
City of Johannesburg	Neels Letter Director lizetl@joburg.org.za	Pentad Building 55 Andries Street, Wynberg Johannesburg www.alexandra.co.za	Technical champion of the programme
National Government (Department of Corporative Governance & Traditional Affairs)	Sibongile Malebye Marketing and Communication Director sibongilem@dplg.gov.za	www.thedplg.gov.za/urp	Provide integrated and holistic support for the effective implementation of the Urban Renewal Programme supporting development and poverty eradication initiatives
Alexandra Chamber of Commerce	Raymond Sibanda Secretary raymondsibanda@alexcoc.org.za	Alexsan Kopano Centre, Suite F9 Cnr. 12 th Ave, Cnr. Selbourne, Alexandra www.alexcoc.org.za	Initiated the building of a state-of-the-art shopping centre
The Business Place	Dumisani Hlatshwayo Branch Manager alex@tbp.co.za	Alexsan Kopano Centre Cnr. 12 th Ave, Cnr. Selbourne, Alexandra www.thebusinessplace.co.za	A network of walk-in centre for entrepreneurs linking clients to business opportunities and providing skills and entrepreneurial training

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4. Impact

The ARP has experienced far-reaching success factors including reduced unemployment rate for people employed through the Expanded Public Works Programme, government's skills development initiative aimed at providing poverty and income relief through temporary and permanent work in the long run for the unemployed promoting economic growth and building sustainable communities. The long-term sustainability of the township depends on increasing household incomes and reducing unemployment. The successful implementation of ARP has improved the living conditions and human development potential within Alexandra. People who previously lived on the flood lines have access to descent and habitable shelter in the form of new housing development initiatives and refurbished hostels which have been converted into family units.

- 7,000 families have been relocated from the banks of Jukskei River and its banks grassed and cleaned up.
- Upgrading of existing housing has improved the housing situation including among others the development of new housing; transfer of publicly owned housing stock; redevelopment of the hostels; and relocation of informal dwellings.
- Social compact initiatives targeted at the building and refurbishing of schools, upgrading of road network and improvement of health and social services points.
- Building safe and secure environment with improved policing and community involvement; and finally building civic pride compounded in respect and appreciation for Alex's heritage.
- Urban greening strategy as an integrated approach to the environmental improvement plans aimed at the development of parks and recreation areas involving planting, care and management of vegetation for the reason that in the past these areas were disadvantaged in terms of planning for parks, tree planting, monitoring and cleaning of water (including the Jukskei River), upgrading of water and sewage systems. This has had a considerable application in the development of better urban livelihoods and environments resulting into

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climate improvement and beautification, flood control, air pollution reduction, renovation of waste land, recreation including parks and sports grounds, income generation for local economic development and environmental education

- London Road, notorious as a hi-jacking spot had informal dwellings crowding its sidewalks and encroaching onto the road itself, resulting in many road accidents. Through a process of community consultation, shack dwellers volunteered for relocation and London Road (now renamed Vincent Tshabalala Drive) has now been widened and upgraded. A new bridge on this primary access road to Alexandra has been built across the Jukskei River.
- In addition, a school, a library, a business support centre, parks and a clinic, among other achievements, have been completed.

Residential localities which had fallen into decay have been revitalized, new clinics have improved levels of primary healthcare in Alex, more than 46 000 hygienic refuse bins have been distributed throughout Alexandra, and refuse collection by Piki-tup has improved dramatically and 72% of Alex residents now have access to water and sanitation with 88% of residents now with safe access to electricity-this in a place once known as "Dark City". The Pan Africa Shopping Centre, a fully integrated shopping mall and taxi facility located was officially opened by President Jacob Zuma on Sunday, 24 May 2009. Community engagement and participation through the multiparty Alexandra Development Forum has created a platform for participation.

5. Sustainability

Township residents have found employment on the ARP-related construction sites while others have established small businesses in the area. A unit within the ARP, the Local Economic Development Unit, is tasked with creating a sound and stable economic environment in Alex. ARP has been able to attract funding not only from the provincial government, but the national government and private sector. Above the rest the ARP operated within the following legislated framework:

- **National Housing Code** outlines the fundamental principles, guidelines and procedures that govern housing policy in South Africa namely: partnership and

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the people-centred development, skills transfer and economic empowerment, choice, quality, innovation and affordability.

- **Breaking New Ground: A Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Sustainable Human Settlements** which is a government's plan of action for the development of sustainable human settlements over the next five years, embracing the People's Contract as the basis for delivery. The document has been prepared in three parts:
- **Gauteng Growth and Development Strategy** seeks to achieve a shared vision, amongst all sectors of our society, for the achievement of our goal of improving the quality of life for all our citizens. It reinforces the principle of integrated, holistic, sustainable and participatory development as a critical pillar in addressing poverty and unemployment
- **Gauteng Spatial Development Perspective** serves as a common platform for planning where stakeholders in the province agree on a common understanding of the nature and function of the provincial space economy.
- **Gauteng Global City Region Strategy** providing a framework to facilitate the alignment of provincial and local growth and development strategies, to ensure synergies between their investment and tourism strategies and to align city development strategies and Integrated Development Plans.
- **National Framework for Local Economic Development** aimed at stimulating and developing sustainable local economies

6. Transferability and upscaling

The best practices and lessons learned in the Alexandra Renewal Project are being replicated in the other two Urban Renewal Projects of Bekkersdal and Evaton townships. These are the other old townships of Gauteng which have suffered neglect due to the changing urban and economic patterns of these communities. In these projects the Department has adopted community development forums as the best approach to involve the community not only as beneficiaries but participants in project planning and implementation ensuring that local communities benefit from economic and business opportunities generated and existing in their own communities, ploughing

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back to local peoples.

7. Innovation

Typical projects undertaken through this programme including schools refurbishment, roads construction, construction of skills and development centre for local people has created a long lasting legacy.

8. Recognition of the Initiative

Census 2001

www.alexandra.co.za

www.housing.gpg.gov.za

www.joburg.org

www.thedplg.gov.za/urp

Alex News; June 11-24, 2009

Built; 1st November 2008

Daily Sun; Thursday 30th April 2009

Rapport; Sunday, 8th February 2009

SA Builder; 1st November 2008

Sunday Weekend Argus; Sunday, 8th February 2009

The Citizen; Thursday, 4th September 2008