

NO HOUSES SO MORE SHACKS

Shack dwellers are on the rise as the housing problem continues, reports Nomkhosi Miya



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In South Africa there is a growing number of shack dwellers that live in bad conditions. People are exposed to different kinds of diseases and uncontrollable fires which put their lives in danger on a daily basis. It is unfortunate that this is still our South African bad story to tell about 22 years into democracy.

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

The issue of housing is one of the biggest challenges our country has

been facing since the ruling party came to power in 1994. There is still a large number of people who are shack dwellers because they cannot afford decent houses.

These people live under terrible conditions, without access to basic services such as clean water and sanitation. This is contrary to what the Constitution of this country stipulates regarding housing.

The Bill of Rights says every South African citizen has a right to have access to adequate housing and

the state must take reasonable measures to ensure the realisation of this right. But the question remains why are there still so many shacks in our country? Shack dwellers are put in waiting lists for many years. Areas such as Germiston in Durban, Cato Minor in Durban and Khayelitsha in Cape Town are still bombarded by shacks.

SEEKING BETTER LIVES

According to the chairperson of Abahlali baseMjondolo, S'bu Zikode,

the country is full of shacks "because of poverty and unemployed South African citizens. Shack dwellers are mostly people who come from the rural areas and relocate to the cities to seek better lives. Many of them cannot afford to pay rent. Therefore they end up settling in the shacks."

GOVERNMENT UNDER ATTACK

S'bu says that the government should learn to deal with the rise of shacks and not see them as an embarrassment because it is the government that fails to allocate the new housing developments to the deserving people.

He argues that, the new housing developments are built in far away areas where there are no economic developments. Shack dwellers will not move to the deserted areas. They also want to be closer to shopping centres, firms and transport.

DANGEROUS PLACE

"Politicians and officials who are responsible for housing policy in South Africa give the impression that shack dwellers take first priority, but in reality they are put in waiting lists for many years," Sbu exclaims.

Former Minister of Human Settlements Tokyo Sexwale, who claimed to be a former shack dweller himself, spent a night in shack in Diepsloot, north-west of Johannesburg in 2009.

He reportedly said he wanted to experience what the shack dwellers of Diepsloot lived like on daily basis. He spent time with the shack dwellers to convince them to move to a nearby settlement in Adelaide because their shacks were built on top of a dangerous water pipeline.

It seems his experiment was in vain. It didn't decrease the number of shack dwellers nor did it assist shack dwellers to receive RDP houses.

RDP HOUSES FOR THE ELITE

The RDP housing programme was introduced to provide decent houses for people who couldn't afford to buy their own houses.



Over the years it is evident that not many benefitted from that housing system. People find the RDP houses as insult. There were complaints about the poor quality of the houses. Some had problems with the broken ceilings and cracked walls. Others still find themselves in waiting lists while their RDP houses are sold.

National spokesperson for Human Settlement Tuso Zibula says, "People need to understand that the upgrading informal settlements is a process. It is a challenging but there are plans to improve the lives of the

people living in shacks. Issues of sanitation have been attended to."

Tuso adds that community members who know about people who illegally occupy RDP houses should report the matter to the police.

WHO QUALIFIES FOR FREE HOUSING

Minister of Human Settlement, Lindiwe Sisulu, was quoted in 2014 in Durban as saying that no under 40s will receive free houses from the government. She also said that she doesn't know of a country which gives free houses to younger people.

But S'bu is concerned. "The ruling party has been isolating deserving citizens from receiving houses ever since they took over," he says.

"This age proposal didn't come as a surprise. Local councillors who are members of the ruling party give houses to other members of the ruling party. This should be stopped. Communities remain homeless regardless of their situations or age."

Studies show that the government and its stakeholders have committed themselves to delivering 1.5 millions housing opportunities by 2019. **M**

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