



RDP Housing: Success or Failure?

1. Introduction

South Africa is still riddled with socio-economic inequalities that result in the majority of the population being at a major disadvantage in economic, social and many other aspects. Historically, the colonial and apartheid systems ensured that the white minority benefited from the country's resources, while the black majority received only marginal benefits. The income gap between the rich minority and the poor majority was, and remains, one of the biggest in the world. Cities and towns are still largely divided along racial lines, with the rich white minority owning more property and other resources than the majority black population. As a result, most black people are still forced to live in densely populated areas on the outskirts of cities and towns, with comparatively little access to basic infrastructure, resources and service delivery.

One of the areas in which this disparity is most obvious is housing. All over the country, thousands upon thousands of small, basic houses stand in uniform ranks outside every town and inside every township. These are RDP houses, and there are between two and three million of them. Depending on one's perspective, they represent either one of democratic South Africa's greatest achievements, or one of its worst disappointments.

2. Background

In 1994 the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was introduced by the ANC government as a means of redressing the imbalances of the past and re-directing economic development. The idea was to have an integrated, coherent socio-economic policy that would address problems brought about by the lack of

equitable development under apartheid. Its aim was to mobilise all who lived in South Africa, and the country's resources, towards the final eradication of the apartheid legacy and the building of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist future. Its focus was on major socio-economic issues such as poverty, unemployment, health, the provision of water and electricity, education, transport and – crucially – the construction of housing for the millions who, due to the legacy of apartheid, could not otherwise afford it.

3. The Six Basic Principles of the RDP

Linked together, six principles made up the political and economic philosophy underlining the RDP framework.

3.1. An integrated and sustainable programme

The RDP brought together strategies to harness resources in a coherent and purposeful effort that could be sustained into the future. These strategies were implemented at national, provincial and local levels by government, parastatals, and civil society organisations working within the framework of the RDP.

3.2. A people-driven process

The RDP sought to put people first, with focus on people's immediate needs and, in turn, relying on their energies and dedication to meet these needs. Because development doesn't involve passive citizens, but rather encourages the active involvement and participation of citizens, it would ensure that South Africans were able to shape their own future.

3.3. Peace and security for all

Promoting peace and security involved all citizens, and built on and expanded the National Peace Initiative.¹ To begin the reconstruction and development process, security forces that represented and reflected the racial and gender character of the country were established. These forces were required to be non-partisan and professional, to uphold the Constitution, and to respect human rights. The judicial system, too, underwent transformation to reflect society's racial and gender composition, and to provide fairness and equality for all before the law.

3.4. Nation-building

The socio-economic crises inherited by the democratic government in 1994 stemmed from the massive divisions and inequalities left behind by the apartheid regime; accordingly, it was necessary to ensure that this legacy was overcome by focusing on ways of employing public resources to build the nation as a whole. In addition, this 'nation-building' served as the basis on which to ensure that the country could take up an effective role within the world community. National sovereignty can only be achieved when a program is implemented that looks at and focuses on economic, political and social viability and self-reliance.¹

3.5. Linking reconstruction and development

In order to strengthen the economy, poverty would need to be eradicated. Thus, building the economy and developing the country needed to happen simultaneously, and the RDP guided the process. Success in linking reconstruction and development was essential if peace and security were to be achieved for all. To achieve this, the RDP needed to integrate growth, development, reconstruction and redistribution into a unified programme.

3.6. Democratisation of society

The first five principles of RDP depended on this final step. In order to redress the inequalities of the past, where the minority had almost complete control over everything, there was a need to begin to develop society, as well as the economy. Democratising the country was how development would be encouraged, as it would give everyone the opportunity to shape their own lives as well as to make a contribution towards the development

of the country. People affected by the social and economic inequalities of the apartheid system must be allowed to participate in decision-making processes. In this way, because democracy is an active process enabling everyone to contribute to reconstruction and development, it would begin to transform both the state and civil society.

With these ideals in mind, the government embarked on an ambitious social housing programme to build as many houses as possible to begin to realise not just economic development and inclusion of the poor, but also to realise the Constitution's demands for equality and dignity. Because of this history, the houses built became known as 'RDP houses', even though the RDP itself was very quickly replaced by what became known as GEAR (Growth, Employment, and Redistribution). Twenty years later, however, the question of RDP housing has become quite controversial.

4. Current Concerns about RDP Housing

4.1. Location of housing projects

Many areas surrounding houses built under the RDP programme lack proper infrastructure such as shopping centres, factories and other forms of business premises that can provide jobs to people who live in the area. Schools, clinics and local government institutions are also not easily accessible in some of the areas that RDP houses are built in. Clean running water, sanitation and the lack of electricity networks continue to be some of the biggest backlogs in some areas².

4.2. Quality of houses

The quality of houses has been contentious for some time now. In 2013, the then Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela, presented Parliament with a report on low-cost housing problems. Her report included problems such as houses that didn't have foundations and homes built from materials that crumbled at the touch. Some houses' defects were so bad that they had to be demolished and rebuilt. In one year she received over 5 000 complaints about the quality of RDP housing. For example, residents complained of houses not having insulation and toilets,³ while the 'bucket system' was still being used in provinces such as the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Western Cape and Free State.

National government blamed the defects of houses built under the 'people's housing project' on the construction companies. To promote employment and people involvement under the RDP, this sometimes entailed contractors training house owners to build their own homes so as to teach them skills that could benefit them economically in the future. Government claimed that the construction companies hired to conduct the training and oversee the project did not train the home owners properly or at all, and this resulted in their houses having defects.⁴

4.3. Tenant maintenance

Some companies contracted to build RDP houses have told tenants that they have six months to report any defects and thereafter they will have to take care of maintenance themselves.⁵ Since many building faults take longer than six months to manifest themselves this amounts to a clear shirking of responsibility, and is probably unlawful. In any event, it is entirely unreasonable to expect poor people to carry the costs of repairing shoddy workmanship.

4.4. Illegal occupation of houses

There are numerous examples of people whose names appear on a waiting list finding that the house allocated to them has already been occupied. The process that needs to be followed to remove illegal occupiers is long and tedious. Finding out who the illegal occupiers are is not always easy as documents are often forged. The process can also be expensive and is thus not always followed or seen as a viable option.

4.5. Maladministration

During 2011/2012, approximately 10% of the complaints received by the Public Protector were about maladministration, often relating to waiting lists and irregular allocations. Adv Madonsela reported that government had lost billions of rands on corrupt construction companies and officials.

4.6. Title deeds

A title deed is needed to prove ownership of a house or property. In order for a deed to be transferred into the home owner's name, the assistance of a lawyer specialising in property transfers is needed.⁶ By April 2016, government had a backlog of almost 900 000 title deeds that

needed to be issued to RDP house owners. According to government, the main reason for the backlog was the failure of developers to complete the establishment of townships, which causes a delay in registering the new housing area and thus a delay in the issuing of the title deeds. (There is also a backlog in issuing title deeds pre-dating 1994. This is because of difficult cases that need to be resolved under the discount benefit scheme, in which some old township houses still need to be transferred to the new owners.)

4.7. The sale of RDP houses

Legally, RDP houses and the plots they are on cannot be sold or otherwise alienated within a period of eight years after the owner receives the house. There are, however, no punitive measures in place in the Housing Act for people who contravene this provision, and this makes it hard for the Department of Human Settlements to discipline people who put their RDP houses up for sale before the eight year period is over. But this is not necessarily a major problem: between 1994 and 2015, almost three million RDP houses were built and of those, only 3 411 have been sold by beneficiaries to private owners.⁷

5. The National Housing Rectification Programme

In response to the poor quality of so many RDP houses, the department of Human Settlements initiated a rectification programme with the aim of fixing defects in subsidised housing resulting from poor workmanship, or from construction that did not meet the technical requirements specified by the South African National Bureau of Standards and the National Home Builder Registration Council.

According to the Director General of the Human Settlements department, contractors who were responsible for poor workmanship were being prosecuted and the money paid to them was being recovered. He also noted that a special investigations unit had been set up to investigate the companies responsible for shoddy workmanship on RDP houses.⁸

In 2013, the Eastern Cape government planned to spend R500 million on a rectification programme to fix poor quality RDP houses. Of the 5 461 houses that needed to be fixed, more than 2 200 had major building defects, while more than 1 500 had minor

building defects. Between 2011 and 2014 the Eastern Cape government had spent about R 1 521 610 000 rectifying houses.⁹

(The amounts government spent on repairing RDP houses in other provinces are listed in the table in this endnote.¹⁰)

6. The Poor Fight Back

The Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA is based in informal settlements in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. Its main focus is to look after the rights of shack dwellers and to ensure that they receive basic local housing. It has also started representing backyard dwellers. The movement opposes land evictions and has taken municipalities like such as eThekweni (Durban) to court to defend people's right to remain on state-owned land within the municipality

Regarding RDP housing, Abahlali feels that the informal settlements they represent have been left out of the process. In a press release about their "Unfreedom day" they stated: "The RDP came and went and we remained impoverished..."

The effectiveness of RDP housing can thus be questioned, as movements such as this would not have to exist 23 years after the programme was introduced if it had been properly implemented. Indeed, membership of Abahlali baseMjondolo continues to grow in both the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal as informal settlements continue to expand in the two provinces.

Even though they do not have a set idea as to how social housing problems can be solved, members of such organisations do know their rights and they are determined to ensure that they are met. Marches and protests are regularly organised and carried out to make their voices heard. Charges are laid against illegal evictors, and councillors are frequently monitored to ensure that they look after the poor and needy.

Other organisations, such as the Mandela Park Backyarders in Khayelitsha and the South African Alliance of Community Organisations, which support and are affiliated to NGOs representing

slum/shack dwellers, are also in the process of trying to gain access to RDP housing legally. They too are trying to ensure that RDP housing is granted to citizens who are in desperate need of shelter.

7. Conclusion: The Future of RDP Housing

Should the RDP housing project continue? Or should it be changed or scrapped? Given the many challenges associated with it, especially quality issues and the fact that there are still hundreds of thousands of people on housing waiting lists, it is tempting to suggest that it should be brought to an end and replaced with something better. However, it must not be forgotten that around 3 million houses¹¹ have been built in the last 23 years. That means that around 14 million people now live in a house they previously did not have. It also means that over 14 million previously disadvantaged South Africans are no longer living in the harsh conditions of informal settlements. Though the RDP has many flaws and challenges, we cannot ignore the fact that it has achieved an enormous amount, especially if we take into account that electrification and the provision of clean water have also been part of the programme.

On the other hand, the history of RDP housing also reveals worrying levels of corruption and mismanagement in state social services; for this reason, social movements and service delivery protests by poor people are on the rise. And even though millions of these houses have been built, the housing crisis still does not seem to have been solved. The integration of the allocated housing areas into the local economy has generally not taken place, and the tendency of housing projects to perpetuate apartheid spatial planning is still seen. This amounts to a failure of integrated development as envisioned by the RDP, where people and government should work together, instead of the government imposing its own vision on the people. Perhaps, therefore, a rethink is needed.

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¹ The Reconstruction and development programme.

<https://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv02039/04lv02103/05lv02120/06lv02126.htm>

² Infrastructure Development: The Reconstruction and Development Programme.

<http://www.etu.org.za/toolbox/docs/government/infrastructure.html#rdp>

³ Madonsela exposes horrors of RDP homes: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/madonsela-exposes-horrors-of-rdp-homes-1474516>

⁴ South African Government: Failed Reconstruction and Development Programme housing projects are under housing rectification programme. <http://www.gov.za/failed-reconstruction-and-development-programme-rdp-housing-projects-are-under-housing-rectification>

⁵ National Housing Rectification Programme: briefing by National Department of Human settlements.

<https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/14832/>

⁶ Title Deeds: Proof of property ownership <https://www.westerncape.gov.za/service/title-deeds-proof-property-ownership>

⁷ Mail and Guardian: Govt seeks to discipline those selling RDP houses. <https://mg.co.za/article/2015-06-08-govt-seeks-to-discipline-those-selling-rdp-houses>

⁸ South African Government: Failed Reconstruction and Development Plan housing projects are under housing rectification programme. <http://www.gov.za/failed-reconstruction-and-development-programme-rdp-housing-projects-are-under-housing-rectification>

⁹ Dispatch Live: R500m to fix shoddy RDP homes <http://www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/2013/08/12/r500m-to-fix-shoddy-rdp-homes/>

Government spending on badly built houses: 2011/2012 - 2013/2014

Province	RDP houses built	Spending on fixing badly built houses
Eastern Cape	39 228	R 1 521 610 000.00
Free State	21 467	R 121 870 000.00
Gauteng	66 093	R 137 690 000.00
Kwazulu-Natal	77 210	R 206 000 000.00
Limpopo	28 708	R 7 620 000.00
Mpumalanga	23 399	R 12 090 000.00
North West	40 119	R 12 170 000.00
Northern Cape	8 967	R 68 820 000.00
Western Cape	36 434	R 42 080 000.00
TOTALS	341 625	R 2 129 950 000.00

¹⁰

The reason for the Eastern Cape having to spend more on its rectification programme, according to a media statement on national government's website, is that many houses were so badly built that they had to be demolished and rebuilt from scratch. The statement also blames the poor build quality on the housing contractors, and claims that that the contractors did not train their employees properly according to the 'Peoples Housing Programme'. Other reasons for the large amount spent on the rectification programme in the Eastern Cape include: houses being too small for people to live in; shoddy workmanship; and slow progress due to non-availability of materials in and around small towns. The Eastern Cape government has conducted an investigation into these issues and hopes to rectify them within the next few years.

<http://www.gov.za/failed-reconstruction-and-development-programme-rdp-housing-projects-are-under-housing-rectification>

<https://consumersurveys.co.za/the-good-bad-and-ugly-of-rdp-housing-since-1994/>

¹¹ South African Government News agency : <http://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/over-26mil-houses-built-1994>

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