

# ‘NEW TOWNS’ - THE S.M.A.R.T \*. ALTERNATIVE TO CITY SLUMS

## Lessons to be learned from Soweto to Cosmo City

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### **Abstract:**

The vital issues of land resettlement, tenure, hunger, poverty, housing, unemployment, crime, land re-settlement, commercial and emergent farming cannot be resolved in isolation. In consequence the Millennium Development Goals are unlikely to be reached economically or effectively with the current incoherent and obsolete assumptions regarding town and regional planning. For it has to be stated that the profession of ‘town planning’ has not progressed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in which standard references books are mostly concerned with the provision of services rather than on human social and economic considerations. They omit to take account of the many major human, social, technological and economic changes that have taken place in society, such as :

1. Rural-Urban migration and sprawl
2. Metropolitization
3. Ever-expanding city slums
4. The change from an industrial to an information era
5. The looming energy crisis
6. Land re-distribution and re-settlement
7. Crime, safety and security
8. African social life
9. Community and financial management

### **1. Rural-urban migration**

#### **The Dilemmas and Realities of Rural Sprawl**

The consequence of rural-urban migration and the unhindered growth of city slums has correspondingly led to the proliferation of isolated settlements comprising a few families attempting to survive without adequate means of physical, social or economic support. Moreover, the reliance on local timber and other natural resources:

- denudes both grasslands and forests
- reduces biodiversity
- reduces soil and its fertility
- loses indigenous flora and fauna

### **2.0. Metropolitization**

Undoubtedly, there is a world-wide move towards urbanisation. But there is a vast difference however, between urbanization and *metro-politization*. The fact is that all our towns are socially unmanageable by virtue of their size and bad planning and all the negative aspects of urban sprawl. The history of settlements in Africa has been the formation of ‘dormitory’ townships with little opportunities for local employment.

De-centralization is generally thought to be the opposite of centralization, whereas it is the consequence of appropriating all manufacturing, markets, people, taxation and investment funds at the centre first. This has

made all development planning and investment decisions subject to both political and economic, rather than human considerations.

To a great or lesser extent, all small towns are colonies of the metropolitan areas, relying on them for the majority of their goods and services, and increasingly on charity – but rarely for investments. In the opinion of Thomas Berry, author of the United Nations World Charter for Nature and the founder of Bioregionalism : “ *It is no longer tolerable to plunder one country or region to benefit another.* ”

[\*Sustainably Managed with Appropriate Resources and Technology ]

### **3.0. City slums**

The word ‘slum’, to describe unregulated informal settlements has fallen in disuse, no doubt to avoid giving offense to those who, driven by destitution have migrated from rural areas to the cities to look for work and security. The United Nations Habitat Council however, now speaks openly of the 962 million people located in ‘City Slums’ who have found themselves in a virtual prison of unemployment, hunger, poverty and crime. The image of city / urban life is therefore misleading because :

#### **3.1. Unemployment**

- The average 60% of unemployment in city slums will *never ever* become employed due to the change in the economic system from an industrial, to a more highly skilled information society.

#### **3.2. Unlimited suburban growth of metropolitan areas has meant :**

- less employment for both unskilled and semi-skilled persons.
- displaced and alienated youth
- reduced rateable income

#### **3.3. Migration from rural areas to cities of the best skills reduces :**

- opportunities for employment
- effective administration of social and economic services.
- educational facilities
- local economic growth through the export of people’s life savings.

#### **3.4. In both metropolitan and rural areas there is a lack of :**

- basic services of water, sanitation, energy, communication et al.
- housing

### **4.0. The looming energy crises**

#### **4.1. Cost of travel**

- Costs of vehicle, petrol and maintenance that takes up a large proportion the average person’s income

#### **4.2. . Water restrictions are inevitable**

- as currently being experienced in Cape Town

### **5.0. land re-distribution and re-settlement**

There is now general agreement that an economy cannot grow - indeed it will deteriorate when :

- a house is given to someone without a job, or is unable to afford its upkeep
- land is given without resources and appropriate training in agriculture.
- land, training and finance is available for produce for which there is no market.
- housing and agricultural subsidies are given without supporting structures.

The fallacy of simple land settlement being the basis for development was demonstrated after World War II when returning servicemen obtained two to five acres of land in the Boksburg / Benoni area, that resulted in a whole generation of ‘Poor Whites’ unable to sustain themselves or their properties, which in turn led to the famous Carnegie Report on the subject.

### **6.0. The change from an industrial to an information era**

The insistence by some economic planners on the need to increase industrial growth in order to boost the national economy and employment, is made with no reference to the reality that the world is steadily moving into a post-industrial era Essentially, what has changed in society internationally, and which can make S.M.A.R.T. villages and new Towns economically viable is the phenomenon of Information Technology that can bring into the rural areas all the advantages that previously were sought in cities. The economic viability and sustainability of New Towns is increased by Information technology and Communications [ICT

### **S.A.'s Water crisis**

Additionally, as retired Professor of Soil Science Giel Laker has indicated in a series of articles in the Farmers Weekly, the greatest potential for agriculture, employment and new settlements is in the Easter Cape in the region of the Mzimvubu river basin, which has by far the greatest surplus exploitable water runoff amounting to 30% of S.A.'s total. He points out the illogicality of ignoring this potential and the continuing migration into the water restrictive areas of the Western Cape, when a policy of creating new towns would help resolve the land resettlement, unemployment and food security issues.

### **PROPOSITION**

#### **THE RE-URBANISATION OF RURAL AREAS WITH 'NEW TOWNS' OF S.M.A.R.T. VILLAGES**

The objective is to re-populate rural areas with New Towns of collective villages that would effectively implement the proposed Sustainable Integrated Rural Development Strategy. A precedent was the post-World War II UK New Towns strategy. Historically, every social and town planner from Plato and Da Vinci to Doxiades have agreed that no town should be more than 50 000 people. Indeed none of the great cathedral towns of Europe were more than 35 000. The majority of European villages were and most are still in the region of 5 000 people. The 'village' is the most universal form of human settlement, whereas the metropolitan agglomerations of unlimited urban sprawl impact negatively on every aspect of society.

**SPECIAL NOTE :** The creation of these S.M.A.R.T. Villages has **no** relationship to past attempts to :

- Evacuate or relocate populations forcibly.
- Form 'dormitory towns' for city, town or farm labour pools.
- Romantic ideas of a 'country life'

#### **SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES and BENEFITS**

##### **A S.M.A.R.T. Village is positioned and intended :**

- to act as a magnet to people wishing to gain urban benefits in a rural setting.
- to accommodate orphans under house-parent care
- for those working on local farms who are within walking distance of their work,
- for attaining Food Security by family-managed small scale Eco-farms

##### **A S.M.A.R.T. Village is planned and managed by a Development Co-operative**

- in accordance with an African community spirit of
- involving the future residents from the start.
- utilizing street and block committees

##### **A S.M.A.R.T. Village means to the residents :**

- sharing the process of planning
- choosing neighbours
- deciding on size of sites
- improved safety and security.
- cost reductions of services and construction.
- recreation / sports grounds in every village

##### **A S.M.A.R.T. Village generates small businesses and employment with :**

- reintegration of work and residence.
- integration of agriculture and urban life.
- creation of businesses and services that serve the community.

##### **A S.M.A.R.T. Village has an Information Centre to assist in :**

- effective community management
- educational facilities
- for business and job creation,
- linking to national information sources and training institutions

##### **A S.M.A.R.T. Village has its own bank :**

- which is owned and managed by the community
- that holds individual savings to build up local capital reserves.
- that generates collateral for leveraging funds for investment

##### **A S.M.A.R.T. Village conserves both energy and water by :**

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- re-circulating domestic water and waste for agricultural use
- the application of alternative energy sources on an incremental basis.

**A S.M.A.R.T. Village protects the environment through :**

- creating a surrounding effective 'green belt' and releasing it for agriculture
- the reinstatement of the environment with forest and grassland reserves:
- all residents becoming equal owners and shareholders in their surroundings..
- creating 'Future Forests' of indigenous trees for cropping and domestic use

**S.M.A.R.T. VILLAGE PLANNING AND DESIGN**

The essential principles of a S.M.A.R.T. Village gained an Award from the 1995 UNIBOU 'Concept to Construction' Competition with 42 planning and design advantages that includes those positive social aspects of African society, such as the culture of extended families, the financial factors of Stokvels, the formation of street and block committees, and especially planning for Kombi taxis. In this context, Cosmo City represents a great loss of opportunity in making it a genuine New Town, with all the following attributes

**1. Site Planning**

- The new city is planned on the principle of a number of villages, each having its own identity, access and egress points, management, financing, construction and development provisions.
- The Village is planned around a common public space that contains all former zoned and separate areas designated for schools, clinics, business, churches et al, and being combined into one central space, leads to a greater economy in site space usage.
- This space is also planned *with* the residents, through their representatives elected by each cluster and block committee that provide an immediate network of communication.
- A New Town has a defined City centre / Mall with all municipal facilities

**2. Housing layouts**

- Residents can decide the density of their own cluster and size of their own site during the planning process
- Planning is based on the principles of township 'struggle' organisation using 'Street' Committees' and 'Block Committees that starts from the smallest unit comprising
  - A Cluster of 6, 8, 10 or 12 sites
  - Six such clusters that make up a block committee.
  - Between eight and ten blocks constitute a village.
  - Three Village make up a contiguous Secondary school
  - The 'cluster' principle follows the examples of the higher level housing development of the Northern suburbs – see following items on. 5. Safety & Security and 8. Dignity and aesthetics

**3. Services.**

The growth of city slums can only increase the demand for, and costs of providing future services, which will inevitably be demanded from the authorities and have been estimated to cost is *three times* that of a new town development. Moreover, conventionally services have mostly been planned and installed mid-block. The consequence being that the entire length of services have to be installed from the outset, which increases establishment costs and interest payments on capital until the houses are built and payments for the services are made. By contrast, village services are provided in three phases :

1. Main lines.
2. To each Village, as it is constructed and
3. Cluster connections, when housing is completed.

In the cluster format, all services are located in the road servitudes., therefore :

- Initial capital establishment costs are substantially reduced to the municipality, developer and beneficiaries.
- Easy access is made for incremental installation and ease of future maintenance,

- The potential in job creation is for residents' to engage in the installation of infrastructural services for their own cul de sac, in the context of the People's Housing Process [PHP].

#### **4. Transportation.**

- The town has a clear hierarchy of transport distribution path for all forms of traffic.
- A major arterial highway links all villages to each other and to the main commercial center.
- Alongside this major traffic artery are bicycle paths that increases access to them and the mobility and safety of all travelers, cyclists and pedestrians.
- Each village has a loop road that provides access for medium density public transport and kombi taxis, which reduces their routes, stopping places and residential impact.
- The clear differential transport routes means a substantial reduction in the specification and cost of tarmac and the less cost of minor gravel roads to cul-de-sacs.
- Costs of storm water provision and the effects of flooding are reduced.

#### **5. Safety and Security**

The new village planning satisfies the conditions for improved safety and security as set out in the CSIR / BOUTEK "*Designing Safer Places*" in terms of [a] local management, [b] surveillance, [c] territoriality and ownership, [d] open spaces, [e] land usage, [f] signage, [g] pedestrian movement, [h] transport intersections, [i] playgrounds, [j] position of taxi-ranks, [k] shopping centres [l] informal trading, [m] emergency contact points, [n] maintenance

#### **6. Pedestrian Safety**

- Pedestrian safety is assured as there is no high level traffic through the domestic area.
- Residents and students only have to cross the one traffic loop road from their home to school and all community amenities.

#### **7. Zoning by 'class'**

- The new Town is not zoned 'High', Middle and 'Low' class zones, for each Village contains its own levels, that in terms of an extended family cluster or a group of like-minded individuals,
- Planning also contains arrangements for rental accommodation

#### **8. Aesthetics and Dignity**

The negative effects of conventional "low-cost housing" on the value of adjacent properties has to be acknowledged. That this is interpreted as a 'racial' issue and is identified as the 'Nimby' Syndrome is unfortunate and hampers the key consideration of how this condition can be improved effectively and economically through aesthetic design. By emulating the example of the up-market housing developments each unit in a housing cluster has a connecting front façade. The benefits are :

- Perimeter walling providing protection children and animals, property and assets including vehicles, building materials etc..
- Providing an aesthetic impression of the finished development from the very first
- Providing dignity and opportunities for individual decoration and a collective identity.
- House building starts from the street inwards on an incrementally affordable basis.

#### **9. Environment**

- Each village management takes 'ownership' of the both the internal and adjacent open spaces which enables them to have the opportunity for showing environmental concern
- Friendly competition between villages for the upkeep and appearance of the open space which borders all along the main highway for residents and visitors to appreciate.
- Waste management is carried out by each cluster having a collection facility
- Small scale agriculture areas surrounding the village can provide its own food security

#### **10. Information**

- A Community Information Centre is to have a data base of information on each village.
- All applicants for a site enter their skills, abilities, hobbies and interests on the data-base to provide them with potential opportunities for employment and community help.

- Additional ICT / Internet facilities can provide a personal and business service to all residents, with area Wi-fi connectivity a coming reality.

### **11. Commercial interests**

- Each village would have its own convenience stores within easy walking distance for all residents.
- The size of a New Town justifies a central Mall and market under cover.

### **12. Citizen's Income**

By a resident purchasing their housing site, they effectively purchase a share in all commercial and agricultural sites in their Village, they also become a shareholder / owner of all the accompanying commercial, farming and even public sector land, which interested parties may lease or rent on conditions agreed to by the community management. At the year-end, profits are then distributed to all village citizens.

### **13. Community Economics**

It has to be stated at the outset that the only way to obviate poverty is to create wealth for it to be re-distributed. There will always be arguments over the redistribution of wealth, which is basically what politics is all about. What is lacking is an understanding of some fundamental principles of what constitutes wealth, how it is created and how it flows through society in the form of money. As the commercial life-blood of society, money must circulate like blood throughout the system. It must not be constricted, otherwise the life-system will fail. Nor must this life-blood be allowed to flow out continuously.

A community that allows its wealth to flow out in materials and money will likewise suffer a hemorrhage of its energy and die. Even worse – these emigrants take with them their life savings and spend it on a squatter shack – unreliably estimated to cost between R3 000 to R10 000. The consequent economic imposition on cities is immense in their having to provide extra housing and basic services.

The phenomenon of 'Dead Capital' has been put forward by the Peruvian Economist Hernando de Soto. Estimates of 'Dead capital' existing in government departments and agencies have been put at R3 billion – not including that of social welfare. The same is true of the many sources of funding for small business development. The Land Bank, in their 2000 Report, also recorded a loss of R24,6 million to 'emergent farmers', and the 2004 Annual report of one major insurance company records R5 billion of funds not invested in the economy.

### **14. Village Banking and Housing Finance**

The formation of a Village Bank by the remote rural Kgautswane community in the Limpopo Province has accumulated their 'Dead capital' in the form of residents life savings to a total exceeding R1 million, that is placed on fixed deposit with commercial 'Link bank', on which collateral individuals have been able to obtain 820 loans –from external sources – thereby not following the risks inherent in most savings and credit institutions of lending out their member's savings.

A Village Bank, is significantly wholly *owned* and managed by the residents as shareholder / members, who thereby take responsibility for generating and dispensing their own and public funds including :

- Management of housing and agricultural subsidies.
- Facilities for savings and loans for small businesses.
- Generating own Development Funds for their Village

The regular savings of the villagers also provides a financial institution with a credit rating to enable them to access additional funding to be added to the subsidy.

### **Loans for training and local enterprises**

Once a Village Bank and its collateral base has been established, an agreed proportion of funds could be 'deposited' from the multiple SETAs, to which villagers could apply for loans. These would be repaid in accordance with a prepared business plan made out in co-operation with the Village Bank management, the villagers themselves who can choose who should be the recipients of such loans or grants.

### **15. Subsidies**

All attempts to manage subsidies through a succession of National Provincial and Local authorities, developers, contractors or individuals have not been successful. The single most important source of funds for new businesses in the United States has been a mortgage on the potential entrepreneur's house. Property ownership, as with any sense of ownership provides a base for accountability, protection and preservation, which in turn leads to greater respect for each other's property rights, the obviation of crime and social unrest. But With the creation of a village bank, the

Housing Board could deposit the entire amount of the requisite subsidies at the outset. [ 500 subsidies x R30 000 = R15 million.] The interest on this amount would benefit the community in providing funds for establishment of the village management and the village bank itself.

**16. S.M.A.R.T. Land collective and co-operative ownership offers opportunities for :**

Reverse urban-rural migration enables families and local farm workers to attain

- the full social, economic and cultural advantages of an urban life,
- Local Food Security
- Commercial niche / export produce

**17. Pioneering spirit.**

Affluent people in overcrowded cities are reluctant to leave their comfort zones to contribute to the wealth and welfare of their own and lack the pioneering spirit that led many Europeans to leave *their* comfort zones and take their skills, energy, experience and personal finance to start a new life in the remote rural areas of the world. A S.M.A.R.T. Village therefore, offers opportunities for regenerating the pioneering spirit and attracting a reverse migration from crime-ridden urban areas to a new rural reality of healthy social and economic living.

**18. Reintegrating Residence and Work.**

The greatest need is for the creation of jobs in rural areas. A S.M.A.R.T. Village provides the format and the market for establishing relevant commercial enterprises and services that directly serve their community. The continual call is for the creation of small businesses economy. But reality is according to the National Productivity Institute [NPI ] that 80-90% of all small businesses fail. A primary reason can be that small business is seen as small trading – that is not essentially productive and wealth creating – just a redistribution back to the suppliers in a grossly over-traded business environment.

By contrast in a S.M.A.R.T. Village :

- Each residential cluster has the potential for becoming a business unit, in that any one or more people with a service or skill can form a unit for local manufacture or trading. Thereby the principle of combining residence with occupation is reinstated.
- They may further combine their resources to build their own shop to display their products or service, the returns from which can finance future housing extensions, services and facilities.
- This cluster principle also offers the community an opening for the international trend away from centralized macro-factories to a decentralization of sub-assembly units whereby parts are delivered for assembly to each cluster, who assemble them to be passed on the next cluster for the next sequence of assembly.
- All residents can be occupied / employed in community-based economic activity – all within walking distance of their home. Thereby the principle of re-integrating residence and work is established.

**CONCLUSION:**

The acceptance by people of the concept of ‘village planning’ is questioned by certain planners. Yet in reality the history of human settlements throughout history has been the natural formation of villages in both the most developed and un developed nations – and in the same approximate sizes of 5040 citizens, as outlined in Book Five of the Dialogues of Plato.

**9.0. S.M.A.R.T. VILLAGE COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT**

In the first instance, the system of block and street committees, provide a local management system can give a representative voice and for all communications between residents, local authorities and any arising negotiations, conflict resolution, service payments community policing.

But central to all development and especially a S.M.A.R.T. Village is the need is to give representation to Civil Society and its many organizations, with their local knowledge and skills, which have always been under-estimated. This is provided for in the formation of :

<b>A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATIVE</b>	- for building	<b>Social Capital</b>
<b>A COMMUNITY INFORMATION CO-OPERATIVE</b>	- for building	<b>Human Capital</b>
<b>A FINANCIAL CO-OPERATIVE [MICRO-BANK]</b>	-for building	<b>Financial Capital</b>

### **Implementation and Training**

This structure is formed as a result of a special INTEGRATED COMMUNITY BUILDING PROGRAMME offered by the UNISA Centre for African Renaissance Studies. This programme originated from the wish of communities to become more self-reliant in the management of their own development, individually, socially, economically, and culturally. Each module has been checked by representatives of the communities of Orange Farm, Winterveld, Etwatwa and Mofolo and specifically by the rural community of Kgautswane for its relevance to the reconstruction and development of community life. This has made it a truly local product and the community's own solution to the establishment of a model for a legitimate community development structure that is most suited to the building of an effective civil society.

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