

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY : MODULE F

ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL FACILITY CONSIDERATIONS

(A) ENVIRONMENTAL

1. National Initiatives:

The National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) established principles for decision-making on matters affecting the environment. NEMA requires all national and provincial departments that carry out functions that may affect the environment, to prepare an Environmental Implementation Plan (EIP) to monitor and review their implementation.

The National Department of Housing therefore prepared their 'First Edition EIP' (2000). The Department acknowledges that the environment within which a house is situated is as important as the house itself in satisfying the needs of the occupants, as environmental issues are inherently linked with quality of life. The Department is also responsible for advancing the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in South Africa and the key initiative in this regard has been the publication of the Urban Development Framework (UDF). It emphasises the importance of cities and towns in meeting the needs for shelter, economic and social development in a way that minimises impact on the environment.

2. The impact of the National Housing Programme on the environment:

The Housing Programme is the single largest public investment in land development, one of the major contributors to the growth of human settlements in South Africa, but it contributes to the inefficient use of energy and water resources and to the pollution of the environment through the provision of inappropriate services.

The major portion of housing provided through the programme has been on the basis of a single household per erf. Current housing projects tend to locate on the urban periphery and thus perpetuates urban sprawl. This relatively low-density urban expansion has happened notwithstanding policies for the densification of cities. Densification and urban infill need to be more actively encouraged to make well situated state land available for low-cost housing development. The National Department of Housing is in the process of introducing a new procurement regime for the selection of land and projects.

Informal settlements also have a major impact on the environment, because they are not subjected to proper planning, evaluation and environmental impact assessment, their negative impacts on the environment are usually significantly more than formal housing development. Many areas suffer from overcrowding and a resulting severe depletion of natural resources, which render them increasingly unsustainable. More attention should be given to releasing suitable land for low cost housing development.

Solutions to the reduction of the impact of the housing programme on the environment lie in a range of policies, programmes, the political will, the administrative and financial capacity to implement them. Taking into account the limited resources and large housing backlog it is clear that the Department will not be able to solve the environmental challenges in settlements in the short term, however, by giving more attention to environmental issues, the housing programme could make a difference.

3. Provincial Environmental Guidelines:

The following environmental guidelines for settlement in the Province was proposed:

- Environmental issues are important to urban settlement over the entire Province and a proposed settlements will have to be subjected to some degree of environmental evaluations
- Larger scale urban settlements will have to avoid the dryer inland areas. They should generally be located closer to the coast, between Saldanha and George/ Mossel Bay.
- Urban settlement in the coastal areas to the east of George will require special attention since it represents a fast urbanising areas as well an area with sensitive environmental features.
- The approval of housing projects in rural areas must be considered with utmost caution, carefully evaluated in terms of their sustainability and the possible effects of their development on an already over-stressed natural environment.

The Bioregional Planning Framework for the Western Cape Province, 'Towards the application of Bioregional planning principles and the implementation of UNESCO's Biosphere Reserve Programme in land-use planning within the framework of Act 7 of 1999', proposes that local authorities define bioregions in their areas of jurisdiction. A plan, subdividing the Province into 29 broad conceptual bioregions was prepared. Its purpose is to provide authorities with a framework for more detailed bioregional delimitation. Such detailed delimitation will make out a fundamental part of the local authority Integrated Development Framework planning process. The Bioregional Planning Framework for the Western Cape Province will impact on the location of subsidised housing once it has been applied at a local level, new housing will only be allowed within the Sub-Category D areas.

4. Local Level Environmental Guidelines:

The following natural physical and biological features of a site need consideration in the land identification process for low income housing: slope, ground surface and sub-surface conditions, soil type, drainage and hydrology, potential pollution of ground and surface water, climate: maximise human comfort, prevailing winds, sensitive natural environments, protect areas of high conservation value, sites that can be re-vegetated and access to natural resources.

The following socio-economic, infrastructural and cultural factors must also be taken into account: using existing structures and services, proximity to jobs, shops and markets, access to community, health and educational facilities, access to public transport, proximity to sites of cultural, historic and religious significance, identify suitable land close to bulk services, proximity to sources of pollution land use and landscape character and integration with existing residential areas. Community wellbeing and empowerment can be promoted in the housing process through environmental education, the raising of environmental awareness and the sharing of knowledge and experience.

Housing projects are currently subject to the requirements of existing urban development legislation and procedures, including Environmental Impact Assessments as required in terms of the regulations of the Environmental Conservation Act (Act no. 73 of 1989). EIA regulations have, however, imposed delays and additional costs for low-cost housing development.

In response to the need for environmentally sound low cost housing, the National Department of Housing established an inter-departmental Task Team, responsible for promoting and developing national policy on environmentally sound and efficient low cost housing initiatives and encouraging environmentally sound practices in the housing sector. Water and energy efficiency, the use of renewable resources and the planting of trees in low cost housing projects need to be promoted. Pilot projects on eco-housing, eco-settlements and 'green houses', which have low energy and resource demands, need investigation. The possibility of turning sewage into grey water for use in cisterns and gardens and low water use devices should be promoted.

(B) SOCIAL FACILITY AVAILABILITY

The spatial distribution of social facilities in the Western Cape reveals that services tend to be inferior in small towns in the arid region of the Province where distances are great and resources low, as well as in the Southern Cape. This generalised profile conceals significant inequities within urban areas, particularly within informal settlements in the Cape Metropolitan Area and larger provincial towns.

1. Education facilities:

The following issues relating to education facilities were identified:

- Financial support for education has been reduced;
- Closure of schools in rural areas;
- Transport subsidies cease to exist since the closure of these schools, poor communities such as farm labourers cannot afford to pay transport fees for their children;
- There is a discrepancy between established and less established areas;
- There is insufficient management of educational buildings; and
- The quantitative standards are not realistic and do not serve the correct purpose in determining locational trends and capacities.

2. Health facilities:

Health care facilities are inequitably distributed across the Western Cape and concentrated mainly in the more developed parts of the Western Cape, particularly the CMA. The following issues relating to health facilities were identified:

- The rationalisation of hospitals includes merging, downsizing and redistribution of components to lower levels of service delivery;
- Primary health facilities will have to accommodate more people and improve the quality of care despite limited resources and the policy of free health care to children under the age of six;
- New housing developments in the rural areas are likely to be served by mobile clinics only; and
- The responsibility for primary health care services is divided between local authorities and provincial government and there is substantial fragmentation with inefficiencies and duplication throughout these services.

3. Welfare services:

The majority of welfare facilities are located in the CMA and the more developed towns, this has a major influence on decisions to settle in urban areas. The following issues relating to the provision of welfare facilities were identified:

- A lack of funding is a problem in the provision of welfare services due to a reduction in subsidies; and
- Many state subsidised welfare facilities, serving those with special needs, face cutbacks or closure.

4. Sports facilities:

The presence of sports facilities is not an important prerequisite for the provision of housing, but it can enhance the integration of new settlements. Facility provision in the Western Cape is, however, skewed towards larger towns and wealthier sub-regions. The rural areas generally lack facilities and within towns and cities, facilities are located in the wealthier parts.

Facilities should be planned for locations that are accessible to the broader population. Access to public transport is an essential aspect of the location of sports facilities at all scales.

5. Provision of facilities in new housing areas:

There is no direct link between the Department of Housing and the Departments responsible for the provision of social facilities regarding the provision of facilities in planned new housing developments. It is the responsibility of the developer to distribute the development proposal to a list of interested and affected parties, which includes the provincial departments responsible for the provision of social facilities. The Departments responsible for social facilities at local authority level inform the Provincial Departments of new developments and areas of need in their areas. Based on the number of units proposed in the housing development, and the proximity of existing facilities in the area, the Departments will do calculations to determine the possible future needs for social facilities and will then request that sites be identified and reserved for social facility use. As people move into the new development and the need for the facilities arise, the relevant Departments will include the provision of new facilities into their respective budgets. These decisions are based on management discretion. New facilities are often planned in a way that allows for incremental growth of its size and the type of services provided.
