

South Africa's Pursuit of Sustainable Urban Development: a Reality or Rhetoric?

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1 ABSTRACT

The attainment of sustainable urban development is one of the biggest challenges that contemporary governments face across the world. Despite many governments adopting and pursuing sustainable development goals following their adoption in the past years, there is still a huge gap in the implementation of the sustainable development principles and the public declarations that these governments ratified. It has been observed that the implementation and efforts being exerted towards the achievement of the SDGs in most cities of the developing world do not reflect the promises that were made in the declarations. The aim of this paper is to assess South Africa's pursuit of sustainable urban development and make an attempt to determine the level of sincerity by the government and be able to conclude whether it is a reality or rhetoric. The paper looks at sustainable urban development practices and how sustainable urban development has evolved within the South African urban policy context. An analysis of the policies aimed at promoting long-term growth that influences sustainable urban development in the country was conducted. The results showed that in South Africa, there is widespread adoption and growing interest in sustainable urban development principles by government. However, with regards to implementation, particularly at city levels, sustainable development still needs concerted efforts and commitment to make it reality. In conclusion, the paper opines that there is need for political, economic, institutional and social commitments to support innovative strategies to enhance possibilities for sustainable urban development in South African cities.

Keywords: sustainability, urban development, urban policy, South Africa, sustainable development goals

2 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The planet is experiencing the most rapid urbanisation in history. Cities now house more than half of the world's population, and this figure is expected to rise to about 5 billion by 2030 (United Nations, 2018). This translates to around 70% of the population living in cities by the year 2030 (UN & World Bank, 2018). Most of this urbanisation would take place in Africa and Asia (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022), resulting in significant social, economic, and environmental changes posing a fundamental question as to whether the current urban structures can sustain the extent of such urban development. Subsequently, most governments across the world face huge challenges in their pursuit of sustainable urban development (Irurah, 2004; Goebel, 2007; Hoeflich de Duque, 2016). The term sustainable development seeks to address "the needs of the present without jeopardising future generations' ability to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Sustainable Development, 1987). For urban areas to achieve the sustainable development goals, they need to strive for a balance between the social, environmental and economic goals.

The ideal future, according to the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, is the one in which sustainable development goals are accomplished at all levels of spatial organisations (Lafferty & Eckerberg, 2013). Agenda 21 of the Summit paid particular attention to the topic of sustainable growth at an urban scale. The Global Forum on Cities and Sustainable Growth considered 50 city studies on sustainable development progress in 1994 (Grubb et al. 2019), then in 1996, Habitat II was used to track the progress that cities across the world had made towards achieving sustainability. Then several international organisations and governments made sustainable urban development a priority after the Rio+10 Earth Summit in 2002. In the year 2000, the millennial development goals were formulated to be achieved by 2015, then the sustainable development goals were adopted in 2015 to be achieved by 2030. Even after all this progress on the sustainable urban development concept, there is still less policy implementation happening in actual cities (Rydin, 2012). As one of the European Commission's Expert Group notes, "The difference between public statements and principles on the one side, and specific steps taken on the other, remains high in most cities". Thus, this paper aims at examining the scale of the difference between the rhetoric and reality of the sustainable urban development in South African cities. The paper will unpack the concept of sustainable urban development in a South African city's perspective and the progress made towards achieving Sustainable Urban Development

in South African Cities. The interpretation of SUD is first considered, as there are various meanings of the broad construct. Following this theoretical introduction, the advent of a sustainable development ideology within the South African government will be established, as well as the policy framework that frames efforts to put SUD's ethos into practice. The latter part of the paper will focus on how some of the policies in the country align to the SDG 11. Lastly the paper will conclude if South Africa's pursuit of sustainable urban development is a reality or rhetoric.

3 CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sustainable development is an issue that has attracted a considerable amount of academic interest since the publication of the Brundtland Report. With Agenda 21, it is an issue which has also found its way into the policy and action programmes in many countries across the world. The World Commission on Environment and Development popularised this concept in 1987. Their report defines sustainable development as a "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs." However, sustainable urban development implies a process by which sustainability can be attained, emphasising improvement, progress and positive change, incorporating both environmental and social dimensions. It can also be defined as 'the spatial manifestation of urban development processes that creates a built environment with norms, institutions and governance systems enabling individuals, households and societies to maximise their potential, optimise a vast range of services so that homes and dynamic neighbourhoods, cities and towns are planned, built, renewed and consolidated restraining adverse impacts on the environment while safeguarding the quality of life, needs and livelihood of its present and future populations' (UN-HABITAT, n.d). Whitehead (2009) asserts that since its inception, the term urban sustainability has been concerned with ensuring that cities are ecologically sustainable. He also asserts that urban sustainability is about addressing issues of social sustainability within cities, ensuring that the living and working conditions found in cities are tolerable (and particularly so for the most vulnerable in urban society). Habitat II emphasised that urban sustainability draws particular attention to the ways in which social, environmental, and economic processes interact within urban space.

Another prominent definition came from the Council of European Municipalities and Regions in 1996, which describes urban sustainability as "a creative, balance-seeking process extending in all areas of local-decision making. Sustainable development helps cities and towns to base standards of living on the carrying capacity of nature while seeking to achieve social justice, sustainable economies and environmental sustainability". According to Williams et al. (2000), urban form is sustainable if it allows the city to work within its natural and man-made carrying capacities, is user-friendly for its inhabitants, encourages social equality, and requires participatory decision-making. In a South African perspective, the National Development Plan (NDP) recognises that 'sustainable urban development requires not only sustaining economic growth and enhancing social security, but also ensuring that the natural resource base is not irreversibly exhausted or destroyed' (National Planning Commission (NPC), 2012). In reality, the agenda for sustainable urban development is almost endless. 'Each society, country, and generation will have to answer the question of what sustainability means and how it will be done in their own unique circumstances,' (NPC, 2012). Sustainability is a mechanism rather than a fixed or predetermined result, and local experience and practice provide valuable insights into addressing sustainability in different contexts. In addition, urban sustainability does not mean self-containment or separation from global systems, but rather the establishment of sustainable relationships between local and global levels.

Since the official adoption of the 2030 Agenda, some governments have been designing and adopting proactive urban policies aimed at promoting overall sustainability and addressing the unique challenges of cities as highlighted in the SDG 11. SDG 11 is concerned with making "cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.". To address the challenges of its own cities, the South African government developed policies to emphasise the country's national city agenda. Prior to 1994, national cities were shaped by government-influenced planning practices and legislation intended to implement apartheid policies. The implementation of apartheid's ideology as part of the plan meant that the cities of the country were characterised by sparse development, segregation, and strong racial and class divisions. The NDP was developed to address some of the challenges that the country had, mainly 'eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030' (NPC, 2012). Then the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) was introduced in 2013 which aimed at providing national, provincial and municipal spheres of government with

a framework relating to the establishment of policies and systems relating to planning and land use management. The 2016 Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) was designed to address the spatial injustices associated with apartheid and the heritage of national planning, with a particular emphasis on the need for sustainable urban development. In line with the SDG 11, it has introduced four broad strategic goals with nine policy instruments that set key priorities for the South African urban agenda. The paper will assess the extent to which the NDP, SPLUMA and the IUDF provides strategic goals and policy instruments for pursuing sustainable cities in South Africa.

4 STUDY AREA

The scope of this study focuses on South Africa. South Africa is located at the southernmost region of Africa. South Africa is bordered by Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Eswatini as shown on Figure 1 below. South Africa's urban challenges sometimes are considered as distinctive and separate to those of the rest of the continent because of the apartheid legacy of a fragmented and racially splintered urban landscape. Twenty-eight years after democratic transition many of the urban challenges facing South Africa still are tainted by the apartheid past. Nevertheless, the issues that face its cities increasingly exhibit a set of sustainability challenges that typify the problems of many other fast-growing African cities. South Africa is already among the most urbanised countries in Africa and has an urban population that is growing rapidly. Current estimates are that the proportion of the national population living in cities is 62 percent but expected to reach almost three-quarters (71.3 percent) by 2030 (IUDF, 2016). By 2050 the urban population is expected to increase by an additional 13.8 million residents (National Treasury, 2011). The current trend of rapid and unplanned urbanisation is fundamentally unsustainable. The country thus faces significant challenges in implementing its mandate in sustainable development due to the on-going issues with the management of resource consumption to meeting housing and infrastructure needs of the urban residents. The scope of this study focuses on South Africa's pursuit of sustainable urban development.



Figure 1: Map of South Africa (Source: Ontheworldmap, 2019)

Since the introduction of democracy in 1994, South Africa has made a significant break with the past. Many long-term trends created by decades of colonialism, apartheid and inequality have been reversed by far-perceived politics, economics, and societal changes. While the country faces many urban sustainability

problems, it has put in place measures to improve its economy and increase fiscal spending to combat poverty. The revamping of public sector governance has been complemented by the introduction of new democratic institutions and processes. These changes have been accompanied by an increasing commitment to sustainable development.

5 METHODOLOGY

This paper used document analysis to collect information. A systematic technique for reviewing or evaluating documents, both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material, is known as document analysis. Document analysis, like other qualitative research methodologies, necessitates the examination and interpretation of data in order to extract meaning, gain insight, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The study reviewed relevant policies related to sustainable urban development across the country. The literature review was undertaken at a national level and the review focused on policies and frameworks for urban development within the country.

6 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY CONTEXT IN SOUTH AFRICA

When South Africa's first democratically elected government took office in May 1994, it inherited a planning system and legal framework that had been entwined in the economic aspirations and ideological ambitions of previous colonial and Apartheid regimes for more than 150 years. As the new government attempts to replace this structure, it is worth mentioning a few points about its history, features and functions. Planning legislation was first introduced in South Africa in the early 1930s (Oranje & Berrisford, 2016). This followed a long struggle by a small group of visionary planners, mainly architects, to overcome the strong real estate interests and protracted interstate disputes over the location of this legislation (Oranje & Berrisford, 2016). The system stipulated those orderly procedures were to be followed when (1) establishing new settlements and (2) allocating and modifying development rights to land. This was a far cry from the modernist, utopian ideals of many of its early proponents, which involved sweeping futuristic plans and targeted interventions for the common good (Oranje 1998). Prior to the 1990s, South African cities were characterised by planning practices heavily influenced by modernist planning principles characterised by one-way zoning and low-density suburban development (Van der Berg, 2017). Planning laws were drafted in line with apartheid policies, with the result that the design of cities and towns was based on racial discrimination and inequality (Van der Berg, 2017). The result was fragmented, low-density cities that required large-scale displacement of blacks and people of colour from impoverished and underserved areas of the townships to parts of the city or community where the main opportunities lie, higher-order economic and social institutions were located.

It is generally agreed that the apartheid planning system deliberately stifled the development of the majority of the country's population (Van der Berg, 2017). The apartheid was an authoritarian political system predominantly primarily based totally at the ideology of white supremacy or white nationalism which positioned laws which legalised discrimination in all regions of society, inclusive of housing, employment, and public transportation and accordingly suppressing the black majority. Conspicuously, many cities and towns in the country are still faced with the traces of the apartheid system of planning. Given the country's history it was heavily impacted by British legislation. The planning legislation was designed and propagated from the start to be used only in 'European/White zones' of towns and cities. This extensive and enforced planning system allowed for the orderly growth of towns and cities in 'White South Africa,' as well as the production and protection of property wealth in these places. Many of the planning laws and regulations during this time did not offer the legal framework required to prevent and manage the country's spatial governance issues, such as informal settlement regulation and inner-city township regeneration. South African cities are therefore still characterised by 'social, economic and spatial segregation, inadequate access to basic services, irresponsible resource use, and growing poverty and social exclusion' (Abrahams & Berrisford, 2012)

There were significant changes in the planning law after the country gained democracy. While there were many unknowns in the early days of the new regime, one certainty was that the pre-1994 differentiated planning system had to be replaced with a "one equal planning system for everyone". there was little clarity on the specifics of this new system. Should there be a single national planning act, or a single national act that works in tandem with nine provincial acts, or just nine provincial acts? It was thought that this would be rectified as part of the ongoing Constitution-writing process, but it was not to be. A further step had to be

taken and the planning issue had to be addressed by planning policies which meant that a South African spatial planning system had to be created. Such a planning system had to take into consideration the following basic components (1) ensuring participation by all stakeholders in all planning issues; (2) an open, inclusive, and just decision-making process using easily available information; (3) recognition of religion and culture when making planning decisions (4) raising awareness of the environmental issues; and (5) the importance of property and human settlements. The starting point for many of these components was addressed in the Bill of Rights as well as the Constitution of the Republic. These two documents provided a framework for the drafting policies for the planning systems. There were several policies and programmes that were drafted nationally, and the notable ones included the NDP, SPLUMA, IUDF and the newly drafted National Spatial Development Framework (NSDF). At the national sphere, and despite policymaking attempts from 1994 to the present day, the South African government's 'willingness to remove the watermarks of exclusion, inequity and fragmentation leftover by apartheid have not been adequately consolidated or implemented' (Everatt & Ebrahim, 2020). It has been argued that most of these policies and programmes "have failed to achieve measurable progress and have not impinged on social exclusion and poor racial and cultural integration, so that the South African city remains an unjust and inequitable living environment" (SACN, 2016; Van der Berg, 2017).

The NDP was introduced in the country to address mainly challenges that the country has been facing. It is important to highlight that 'South Africa's NDP was finalised before the Agenda 2030 was adopted' (Fourie, 2018). The NPC released its Diagnostic Report in June 2011, summarising the country's achievements and deficiencies since the democratic transition in 1994. (National Planning Commission, 2011a). This served as the foundation for the NDP, which was passed in September 2012. (National Planning Commission, 2011b). The NDP focuses on nine areas: (i) creating jobs, (ii) expanding infrastructure, (iii) transitioning to a low carbon economy, (iv) transforming urban and rural communities, (v) improving education and training, (vi) ensuring quality healthcare, (vii) building a capable state, (viii) combating corruption and improving accountability, and (ix) consolidating social cohesion (National Planning Commission, 2011). It hopes to achieve these goals by 2030. There are links between the NDP and the Agenda 2030 goals, however some of these goals seems to contradict each other (Fourie, 2018). The contradiction between the NDP and the Agenda 2030 is mainly seen on the main focus of the NDP, its explicit focus on rural development (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, n.d) which contradicts the goal 11 of the Sustainable Development Agenda. The implementation of the NDP, is mainly through the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), and as Fourie (2018) noted, none of the outcomes of the current MTSF prioritises the development of cities. Thus, this impacts South Africa's pursuit of Sustainable Urban Development.

SPLUMA became the first policy framework to guide the planning system in the country. The SPLUMA went into effect in 2015, making the pursuit of spatial justice a fundamental tenet for all ensuing development choices. SPLUMA's goal was to amend laws and policies governing land use and spatial development that were "based on racial inequity, segregation, and unsustainable settlement patterns" (SPLUMA, 2013). In order to promote spatial planning fairness, SPLUMA especially redresses historical spatial and regulatory inequalities that were brought about by racially discriminatory legislation. SPLUMA provided a framework for the country's overall land use management and spatial planning. With SPLUMA, South Africa promotes a unified, effective system for land use management and spatial planning that promotes social and economic inclusion.

Notably, for more than two decades, the country had been without a cohesive national urban policy as SPLUMA did not specifically focus on urban development. Then IUDF was created as a result of the lack of an explicit focus on the urban context and the government's ongoing efforts to create a policy that corrects the nation's apartheid planning past and ensures the sustainability of the country's cities. The IUDF, which was established in 2014 and received council approval in April 2016, aims to promote a common understanding among the government and the general public about how to manage urbanisation and achieve the objectives of economic development, job creation, and improved living conditions for South Africans from all socioeconomic backgrounds (IUDF, 2016). The IUDF seeks to direct the creation of inclusive, robust, and liveable urban settlements while specifically addressing the special circumstances and difficulties that South Africa's cities and towns face (IUDF, 2016). The goals and guiding principles specified in the IUDF must be considered and adhered to by all current and future policies and legislative frameworks that may have an impact on urban space in South Africa. The IUDF emphasises the necessity of sustainable

urban development in the country's towns and cities and notably draws inspiration from SDG 11. It introduces nine policy levers and four overarching strategic goals that define the primary policy priorities for South Africa's urban agenda.

7 SOUTH AFRICA'S PURSUIT OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The IUDF, a strategic response to South Africa's rising urbanisation trends, aims to foster government and social knowledge of the measures required to manage urbanisation in order to create resilient, inclusive, liveable, and sustainable cities for the country. By addressing the apartheid and planning legacy of racial segregation, poverty, and exclusion from social and economic possibilities, the IUDF seeks to assure the spatial transformation of the nation's cities. The IUDF offers four overarching strategic aims for achieving this end: governance; inclusion and access; growth; and spatial integration. In addition, the IUDF lists nine policy levers. The strategic goals guide the policy levers, which identify important policy priorities for accomplishing the desired spatial transformation of South Africa's cities.

The first policy lever of the IUDF is 'Integrated Spatial Planning' which emphasises the importance of urban design and administration in creating compact cities in the country. It highlights the importance of promoting coherent development through the proper allocation of land and resources to build sustainable communities. This policy lever addresses the target 11.3 of the SDG. The implementation of this policy lever has been faced with the lack of intergovernmental alignment and co-ordination of the spatial planning processes. There are still some challenges with the alignment and a clear definition of the roles in the three government spheres. The second policy lever is 'integrated transport mobility' which is one of the vital components of the country's economic infrastructural investments. This is vital because it promotes an efficient urban form which in turn assists with social and economic development and the strengthening of the rural-urban linkages. This policy lever also identifies that there must be proper and informed transport planning which takes into account all forms of transportation in the country. This lever pays attention to the target 11.2 which aims to 'provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport'. Integrated sustainable human settlements is the third policy lever. This policy lever is aimed at redressing the prevailing apartheid geographies, restructuring cities and creating more sustainable human settlements in the country. This also focuses on introducing policies aimed at addressing the challenges of the growing slums in the country due to shortage of affordable housing options in the city. This links with target 11.1 which emphasises the access to adequate and affordable housing in cities.

The fourth policy lever of the IUDF is the 'Integrated Urban Infrastructure'. This lever suggests that infrastructure needs to provide for universal access, more inclusive economic growth and support of efficient and equitable urban forms. The infrastructure needs to promote the rural-urban linkages through transportation and communication infrastructures. By providing the rural-urban linkages, this addresses the objective 11.a. According to the fifth policy lever, maintaining a compact urban form and sustainable land use depends on sustainable urbanisation practices and land-use management. Although the policy lever has a broad scope, it concentrates on the spatial transformation of South Africa's cities, and addresses land tenure security, in a nutshell, it suggests that planning legislation and policies should incorporate mechanisms that encourage public participation in the planning processes. Thus, the policy lever briefly matches target 11.3.

The sixth policy lever focuses on economic development. This policy lever highlights the importance of creating more job opportunities and an environment that attracts investors to invest in the country. The policy attempts to address the unemployment that is on the rise in the country by promoting an equitable economic development and this is to be implemented through technological innovation, focusing on spatial transformation and development, and investing in the social capital and public services. The seventh policy lever is the 'Empowered active communities' which aims at promoting a quality urban life for citizens and cultural diversity within cities as South Africa is made up of several cultures. Bringing these together would promote active citizenship which in turn would help making South Africa work. This would relate to the targets 11.3 and 11.4 by promoting participation and safeguarding the country's cultural heritage respectively. The eighth policy lever acknowledges the critical part that efficient urban governance plays in maintaining overall sustainability in cities. It emphasises the need for city governance to maintain healthy relationships with other spheres of governments in order to fulfil their developmental and growth mandates. This policy lever does not specifically address any SDG 11 target, but its main takeaway may also be

relevant to reaching those targets. Lastly, the ninth policy lever is the ‘Sustainable Finances’ which emphasises the importance of having sustainable financial management because if the cities have well managed revenue and expenditure, then they are able to expand their financial resources which allow them to ‘meet expenditure demands, and to access capital markets, allowing them to achieve greater scale and efficiency when investing in infrastructure’ (IUDF, 2016). This policy lever as well does not address any of the targets of goal 11, but it is equally important in achieving a sustainable urban development.

8 SOUTH AFRICA’S PURSUIT OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT: A REALITY OR RHETORIC?

The IUDF clearly intends to promote sustainable urban development in South African cities using strategic goals and policy levers. This framework aims at promoting environmental, social and economic sustainability alongside good governance in the country’s cities. Its overall strategic objectives are geared towards achieving access to opportunities; promoting growth in order to harness urban dynamism for an inclusive, sustainable economic growth and development; to promote spatial transformation in order to forge new spatial forms in terms of the country’s human settlement, transport infrastructure and planning and economic and social development; and to promote good governance to enable the state and its citizens to work together to make South Africa work and achieve a social integration (IUDF, 2016). As highlighted in the argument above, seven of the nine policy levers in the IUDF are aligned with the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 11. Only two of the policy levers are not aligned with the SDG 11 targets but these two are equally important in achieving urban sustainability. Given that at least seven policy levers deal with issues connected to these targets, four specific SDG 11 targets have received more emphasis in the IUDF.

The SDG 11 targets for the protection of cultural and natural heritage, lowering the per-person environmental impact of cities, and offering financial and technical support and assistance to least developed nations for building sustainably and resiliently all appear to be unaddressed by the IUDF. Instead, the IUDF focuses on issues related to urban sustainability that may not always be immediately addressed by SDG 11 targets. The significance of efficient urban governance and sustainable finances is among these issues. These issues are important since the successful implementation and mobilisation of the SDG 11 targets depend on a wide range of budgetary, legal, and policy supporting institutions, governance procedures, and processes.

Along with the aforementioned, it is noteworthy to highlight that the IUDF acknowledges urban safety as a fundamental human right and a public good. The IUDF emphasises that urban safety is a necessary condition for fully achieving the IUDF’s intended outcomes, such as spatial transformation, integrated and sustainable human settlements, economic development, job creation, and active citizenship, even though it does not include a specific policy lever for urban safety. According to the IUDF, each of the nine policy levers can be used to address challenges related to urban safety. The IUDF regards urban safety as a prerequisite for city sustainability. By ensuring that safety problems in the usage of public transportation are addressed, the IUDF singled out policy lever two as important in enhancing urban safety.

In light of the aforementioned facts, it is asserted that South Africa’s IUDF is in line with the standards set forth by SDG 11 for the pursuit of the sustainable urban development. One may argue that the IUDF offers a useful illustration of a national policy tool that aims to promote sustainability in a way that is consistent with SDG 11’s expectations, while also taking localised urban development issues and context into account. The SDG 11 targets that may be most useful for tackling sustainability-related issues in the urban setting of South Africa are highlighted by the IUDF. Therefore, it is argued that in terms of policy, South Africa is well-informed about SDG 11 and offers a customised strategy for pursuing urban sustainability in South Africa cities. The IUDF also identifies and specifies key aspects of the sustainable city that are significant to the goal of urban sustainability generally and in the South African context in particular but are not directly addressed by SDG 11. However, sustainable urban development implementation in South Africa is very much a work in progress. Widespread implementation of the precepts of sustainable urban development, remains a long-term objective rather than a current reality. The successful implementation of sustainable urban development will require a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches that embrace the principle of subsidiarity, whereby action is taken at the lowest feasible level (SACN, 2016). In South Africa, municipalities are the ones responsible for the implementation of the policies, however, some of these local municipality still face challenges, such as the lack of coordination of the spatial planning processes with an insufficient use of intergovernmental relations. Thus, to extend current levels of implementation of the

sustainable urban development principles will require sensitivity to locally embedded meanings of the concept, and construction of initiatives that address the broad concerns of sustainable urban development within local context.

9 PROPOSALS THAT SOUTH AFRICAN CITIES CAN IMPLEMENT TO ACHIEVE URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

South Africa performs well with regards to the institutional, legal and policy requirements for Sustainable Development Goals, however, Croese, Wright & Primo (2019) notes that there has been little coordinated and consistent guidance on the implementation of the SDGs from the government. Policies and frameworks that are drafted, they are mostly not practical in terms of the implementation, thus the government needs to come up with more practically implementable strategies to implement SDGs in the country. Some of the strategies that can be implemented with joint effort between the public and private sector.

To achieve target 11.1 of the SDGs, there is a need to upgrade the informal settlements in the country. Due to the many people moving to urban areas for greener pastures, the country has about 2 600 informal settlements that supports 1.4 million households (StatsSA, 2016). The conditions in these informal settlements are mostly poor, dangerous and uncomfortable. There is often no sanitation or plumbing, no running water and no electricity and high crime rates. The objective of upgrading informal settlements should be to improve the quality of life of people living in informal settlements through a range of interventions including (but not limited to) improving access to land, security of tenure on a continuum of rights and provision of basic services and social infrastructure, promotion of economic opportunities, financing and additional housing options. Through this upgrading of informal settlements, the country can achieve the creation of integrated, vibrant, resilient and liveable communities. There are already some of strategies that are being implemented across the country to upgrade informal settlements such as Informal Settlement Support Programme (ISSP) in the Western Cape, Alexandra Renewal Project in Gauteng amongst others. However, progress has slowed in recent years and the government is unable to meet housing demand. Government needs to invest more on the informal settlements upgrading projects if they are to meet the demand for housing and ensuring safer access to housing opportunities as enshrined in South African Constitution.

It is believed that in order to create productive, inclusive and liveable cities, planning and land-use management practices must actively integrate infrastructure investment, public transport and human settlements. As noted by many scholars, South Africa's spatial patterns consist of human settlements that are located far away from urban centres which requires long commuting hours to access opportunities and services. A comprehensive and efficient transportation infrastructure is necessary for the growth of cities and regions, as well as for the functioning of economies. Transport networks may enhance productivity and enhance a population's quality of life when they are properly planned. Thus, this would benefit the many residents who live on the peri-urban areas.

There is also a need to improve the level and rate of service delivery in the country. In the context of local government, service delivery refers to the provision of municipal products, benefits, activities, and satisfactions that are deemed public, with the goal of enhancing local jurisdictions' quality of life (Reddy, 2016). Poor governance, poor spatial planning, a lack of social infrastructure, and significant service backlogs have all been identified as barriers to poverty reduction and economic growth in South African cities (Govender & Reddy, 2012:71) and this calls for the need to implement strategies to improve the country's service delivery. Every municipality in the country must create the structures and procedures that will serve as the framework for deliberation, involvement, formulation of policies, and delivery of services under its jurisdiction. Government is increasingly lacking the power structures and procedures needed to address issues affecting individuals, communities, and public servants alike (Ndevu & Muller, 2017). initiatives to meet the community's needs for services to be developed by the local government in collaboration with key stakeholders such as organized labour, business associations, ordinary citizens, and other interested parties (Ndevu & Muller, 2017).

Another strategy that can be implemented to achieve SDG targets is the reverse of the inefficient and exclusionary spatial investment patterns. This can be done through 'spatial rebalancing' which aims to reduce unemployment in poorer areas and narrow the wealth difference across regions (Todes & Turok, 2018). Spatial rebalancing as highlighted by Todes and Turok (2018) involves steering direct investments

and jobs from the affluent regions to the poor regions. To attract investments in these areas would require improved infrastructure and incentives to attract businesses to the poor regions. Corridor development to bridge the gap between urban centres and the peri-urban areas in which most of the country's urban population resides. The concept of a development corridor has been viewed as a crucial tool for urban sustainability and spatial planning (Brand & Geyer, 2017).

10 CONCLUSION

Achieving urban sustainability depends on partnerships between stakeholders, from government, the private sector, civil society, academic and research intuitions, and international agencies. This paper aimed at assessing South Africa's pursuit of sustainable urban development by looking at how sustainable urban development has evolved within the South African urban policy context and its implementation whether it is a current reality or rhetoric. The paper looked at the alignment of the country's policies to the targets of Goal 11 of the SDGs and notes that there is widespread adoption and growing interest in sustainable urban development principles by government. The IUDF In particular, draws aspiration from SDG 11 and it establishes the framework for policy changes aimed at making urban areas more "liveable, safe, resource-efficient cities and towns that are socially integrated, economically inclusive, and globally competitive, where residents actively participate in urban life." However, with regards to implemenation, particularly at city levels, sustainable development still needs concerted efforts and commitment to make it reality. In conclusion, the paper opines that there is a need for political, economic, institutional and social commitments to support innovative strategies to enhance possibilities for sustainable urban development in South African cities.

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