

TRANSFORMATION OF SOUTH AFRICA'S TOWNSHIPS: TBL INITIATIVES AND THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL HOUSING

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ABSTRACT

This literature paper examines the dynamics of the „Transformation of South Africa's Townships: TBL Initiatives and the Future of Social Housing.” Rooted in the historical echoes of apartheid, the examination extends to post-apartheid social housing activities, notably the Reconstruction Development Programme (RDP) initiated in 2004. At its core lies the incorporation of Triple Bottom Line (TBL) principles, emphasizing environmental, social, and economic sustainability. The study's objectives encompass evaluating TBL integration, measuring its impact on resident well-being, and dissecting associated challenges. Hypotheses suggest positive outcomes on resident quality of life, long-term sustainability, and resilience with TBL incorporation. The review traverses historical complexities, the transformative role of TBL, and a comparative analysis of global social housing initiatives, drawing insights from Singapore, Sweden, Brazil, and localized projects. Theoretical frameworks guiding TBL in social housing, coupled with practical case studies, shed light on the tangible application of these principles. In conclusion, the synthesis advocates for evidence-based policies, urging the holistic development of thriving, resilient communities in South African townships.

Keywords: social housing; Triple Bottom Line (TBL); township communities; spatial planning; sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

South Africa's townships, which are a strong reminder of the country's Apartheid-era policies, have for a number of years reflected racial segregation, unjust spatial planning, and systemic inequality across the country. Historically marginalized and underserved, these urban settlements today continue to deal with overcrowding, poor infrastructure, and limited access to essential services (Monteiro et al., 2024). The end of Apartheid in 1994 marked an important moment in South African history, signalling the nation's commitment to fostering a more equitable society.

One of the most pressing challenges faced by post-apartheid South Africa then is the urgent need to address urban housing disparities and provide dignified living conditions for its citizens, particularly those that live in townships.

In response to this challenge, the post-apartheid South African government initiated various social housing programs such as the Reconstruction Development

Programme (RDP) in 2004 which was aimed at transforming townships into vibrant and inclusive communities. This program seeks to bridge the gap between the legacy of apartheid in terms of unjust spatial planning and the vision of a more equitable society. This paper then takes the view that one of the aspects that are critical to the success of the initiative is the incorporation of Triple Bottom Line (TBL), which emphasizes a holistic approach to development by considering environmental, social, and economic sustainability (Jürgens *et al.*, 2013).

Introduction to the Triple Bottom Line (TBL)

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework is a concept in the field of sustainable development and business. The TBL approach goes beyond the often-conventional business focus on profits by advocating for a comprehensive evaluation of an organization's impact on three key dimensions: environmental, social, and economic (Jürgens *et al.*, 2013). This paradigm shift has profound implications not only for corporate entities but also for governmental and community initiatives (Massey, 2020). It can thus be incorporated into the initiative aimed at addressing housing disparities and improving the living conditions of marginalized populations.

In the context of social housing within South African townships, the integration of TBL principles signifies a commitment to a more holistic and sustainable approach to development (Moon, 2007). This approach recognizes the connection of environmental health, social equity, and economic viability for residents and contractors, all of which are critical components of improving the lives of township residents.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this article is to examine the role of Triple Bottom Line (TBL) initiatives in advancing social housing projects within South African townships. Specifically, this research seeks to:

1. Explore the extent to which TBL principles have been integrated into social housing projects.
2. Assess the impact of TBL-focused social housing initiatives on the well-being of township residents.
3. Analyse the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing TBL approaches in the context of social housing in South Africa.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the objectives outlined above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Social housing projects that incorporate TBL principles will have a more positive impact on the quality of life for township residents.
- H2: TBL-focused social housing initiatives will demonstrate greater long-term sustainability and resilience.
- H3: Challenges related to policy implementation and resource allocation will be key barriers to the successful integration of TBL in South African social housing projects.

Research Rationale

The rationale behind this research comes from the impact that social housing and TBL initiatives can have on the lives of South Africa's township residents. While significant progress has been made in providing housing since 2004, the quality of housing and the broader living conditions within townships remain matters of concern. Integrating TBL principles into social housing projects therefore could offer a promising solution for addressing these concerns.

The environmental dimension of TBL emphasizes sustainable development and responsible natural resource management. This then aligns with the need to create housing solutions that are environmentally friendly and resilient in the face of climate change (Moon, 2007). The social dimension places an emphasis on community development, social inclusion, and empowerment, it fosters a sense of belonging and well-being among township residents (European Commission, n.d.). Lastly, the economic aspect underpins the importance of financial viability of projects and long-term economic benefits (Slaper & Hall, 2011).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to Literature Review

South Africa's townships are symbolic of a complex socio-historical narrative deeply rooted in the apartheid era. This literature review navigates the historical context, explores the transformative role of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach in social housing, conducts a comparison of social housing initiatives globally and within South Africa, and also investigates into theories guiding TBL and social housing, and concludes by shaping the direction for future research and policy actions.

It is important to note that the historical context of South African townships reveals the enduring impacts of apartheid policies on spatial planning, socio-economic dynamics, and community well-being across the country (Monteiro et al., 2024). This section will provide a comprehensive overview, integrating key historical events and their repercussions on the development and challenges of townships.

Historical Context of South African Townships

The apartheid era in South Africa, spanning from 1948 to the early 1990s, left a lasting mark on the country's urban landscape. Apartheid policies enforced racial segregation, leading to the establishment of townships as designated areas for non-white populations. These areas were characterized by inadequate infrastructure, limited access to resources, and restricted opportunities for socio-economic advancement (Mayekiso, 2023).

One helpful case study is the development of Soweto (Southwestern Townships) near Johannesburg. Established in the 1930s, Soweto became experienced grave racial segregation, with its residents enduring substandard living conditions and limited economic prospects. The Soweto Uprising in 1976, often identified as a fundamental moment in the struggle against apartheid, highlighted the deep-seated socio-economic grievances within these townships.

Post-apartheid, challenges persist within townships, including housing shortages, unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure, this is evident from a statement by (Nzau & Trillo, 2020) Where they mention case studies such as the ongoing struggles in Alexandra, a township in towards the north of Johannesburg and the transformation of District Six in Cape Town also still showcase the persistent socio-economic disparities and the need for comprehensive urban development strategies.

The Significance of the TBL Approach in Social Housing

The TBL approach, emphasizing social, economic, and environmental dimensions, has appeared as a transformative framework for addressing these intricate challenges of social housing in South African townships (Jürgens *et al.*, 2013). This section highlights the significance of TBL, providing case studies to illustrate its practical application and impact.

In the scope of social sustainability, the Orlando Ekhaya social housing project in Johannesburg stands out. By incorporating communal spaces, educational programs, and cultural initiatives, this project goes beyond providing shelter, fostering social cohesion and community well-being. This aligns with the TBL principle of recognizing housing as a catalyst for holistic community development (Haqi, 2016).

Economically, the Vulindlela Heights Housing Project in Pietermaritzburg demonstrates the TBL's emphasis on stimulating local economies and fostering job creation as labour intensive employment is at its core, employing local residents. This project integrates skills development programs, creating a pathway for residents to actively contribute to the local economy, thereby aligning with economic sustainability principles (Hamilton & Clemens, 1999).

Environmental sustainability is exemplified by the Lynedoch EcoVillage near Stellenbosch. This case study showcases how environmental considerations can be seamlessly integrated into social housing initiatives, promoting long-term ecological resilience within the community (Haqi, 2016)

In essence, the significance of the TBL approach lies in its ability to address the multifaceted challenges of social housing. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental dimensions, TBL principles pave the way for transformative projects that go beyond conventional housing solutions, creating sustainable and thriving communities. The showcased case studies provide tangible evidence of the practical application and impact of TBL, underscoring its significance in shaping the future of social housing in South African townships and beyond the confines of the country.

Theories on the TBL and Social Housing

The application of TBL principles in social housing initiatives is reinforced by various theories emphasizing the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental sustainability. This section will delve into the theories guiding the TBL and their practical implications, citing specific examples.

The theory of social sustainability posits that housing should not only meet basic needs but also contribute to community well-being and social cohesion (Haqi, 2016).

The Orlando Ekhaya social housing project in Johannesburg is a practical manifestation of this theory, where housing is designed to be a focal point for community engagement, cultural enrichment, and inclusive development.

Economic theories within the TBL framework highlight the importance of creating housing solutions that stimulate local economies and foster job creation (*Hamilton & Clemens, 1999*). The Vulindlela Heights Housing Project in Pietermaritzburg serves as an exemplar, integrating economic components such as skills development programs to empower residents economically.

The theory of environmental sustainability within TBL emphasizes creating housing solutions that minimize ecological impact and promote long-term environmental resilience (*Haqi, 2016*). The Lynedoch EcoVillage case study where sustainable building methods and materials were employed showcases the practical integration of environmental sustainability, illustrating how social housing can contribute to a more sustainable and resilient urban environment.

Comparison Between Social Housing Initiatives in South Africa and the Global Community

A comparative analysis of social housing initiatives globally and within South Africa provides an understanding of diverse practices, challenges, and the transferability of strategies. This section further goes into more case studies, exploring initiatives in Singapore, Sweden, Brazil, and locally contextualized projects, such as the N2 Gateway Project in Cape Town (*Housing Development Agency, 2021*). The goal is to glean valuable insights that can inform more effective social housing strategies within South African townships and shed light on how the global stage has had an effect on the delivery of social housing, thus increasing this paper's readability by the international community.

1. Singapore's Housing and Development Board (HDB):

Overview: Singapore's HDB stands as a global benchmark for comprehensive urban planning integrated with social housing. Established in 1960, the HDB has played a pivotal role in transforming Singapore from a predominantly slum-ridden society to a nation with a high standard of living and well-designed public housing.

Key Features:

- **Meticulous Planning:** The success of HDB lies in meticulous planning, where housing is seamlessly integrated with amenities, transportation, and communal spaces.
- **Mixed-Use Developments:** HDB incorporates mixed-use developments, ensuring that housing estates are self-sufficient with schools, markets, and recreational facilities.
- **Community Integration:** The design promotes community integration, fostering a sense of belonging and shared responsibility among residents.

Applicability to South Africa:

While the socio-economic contexts differ significantly, key principles from the HDB model are transferable. The emphasis on comprehensive planning, mixed-use developments, and community integration aligns with the goals of sustainable urban development in South African townships.

2. Sweden's Million Homes Programme:

Overview: Sweden's Million Homes Programme, implemented in the 1960s and 1970s, aimed to address a severe housing shortage by constructing one million new homes. The program focused on both quantity and quality, with an emphasis on creating well-designed, functional, and affordable housing.

Key Features:

- **Quantity and Quality:** The Million Homes Programme prioritized the construction of a large number of homes without compromising on architectural and design quality.
- **Social Mix:** The program promoted a social mix by integrating different income groups within the same housing projects, fostering social cohesion.
- **Inclusivity:** Housing was considered a social right, emphasizing inclusivity and accessibility to housing for all citizens.

Applicability to South Africa:

The Million Homes Programme's emphasis on quantity, quality, and social inclusivity provides valuable lessons for South Africa. It highlights the importance of balancing scale with design excellence and fostering inclusivity in housing projects.

3. Brazil's Minha Casa Minha Vida:

Overview: Ministry of cities launched in 2009, is Brazil's largest housing program aimed at reducing the country's housing deficit. It involves partnerships between the government and private sector to provide affordable housing for low-income families.

Key Features:

- **Public-Private Partnerships:** The program leverages partnerships with private developers to increase the scale and efficiency of housing projects.
- **Subsidies and Financing:** Minha Casa Minha Vida provides subsidies and favorable financing conditions, making homeownership more accessible to low-income families.
- **Urban Planning:** The program incorporates urban planning principles, creating well-designed neighborhoods with access to essential services.

Applicability to South Africa:

Minha Casa Minha Vida's emphasis on public-private collaboration, subsidies, and urban planning can inform South Africa's approach to addressing housing challenges. Learning from Brazil's experience can inspire innovative financing models and efficient project implementation.

4. Locally Contextualized Example: N2 Gateway Project, Cape Town.

Overview: The N2 Gateway Project in Cape Town exemplifies a locally contextualized social housing initiative. Initiated in the mid-2000s, it aimed to address housing shortages, provide basic services, and create sustainable, integrated communities.

Key Features:

- **Mixed-Income Housing:** The project integrates housing for different income groups, fostering social and economic diversity.
- **Infrastructure Development:** N2 Gateway emphasizes the importance of concurrent infrastructure development, ensuring that housing projects are supported by adequate amenities and services.
- **Community Participation:** The project incorporates community participation, allowing residents to have a voice in the planning and development processes.

Applicability to South Africa:

The N2 Gateway Project illustrates the importance of tailoring social housing initiatives to the unique needs of South African townships. It also emphasizes on mixed-income housing, infrastructure development, and community engagement aligns with principles of inclusivity and sustainable urban development.

Comparative Analysis and Lessons Learned:

1. Scale and Quality:

Singapore's HDB and Sweden's Million Homes Programme demonstrate that achieving scale in housing projects should not compromise on quality. Balancing quantity with well-designed, functional housing is essential for creating sustainable and thriving communities.

2. Social Mix and Inclusivity:

Sweden's Million Homes Programme and Brazil's Minha Casa Minha Vida underscore the importance of social mix and inclusivity. Integrating different income groups fosters social cohesion and ensures that housing projects benefit a diverse range of residents.

3. Public-Private Collaboration:

Brazil's Minha Casa Minha Vida showcases the effectiveness of public-private partnerships in addressing housing challenges. South Africa can explore similar collaborations to enhance the efficiency and scale of social housing initiatives and economic development for small and medium contractors and communities at large through employment.

4. Urban Planning and Infrastructure:

Singapore's HDB, Sweden's Million Homes Programme, and the N2 Gateway Project highlight the significance of urban planning and concurrent infrastructure development. Well-designed neighborhoods with access to essential services contribute to the long-term sustainability of social housing projects.

5. Community Engagement:

The N2 Gateway Project emphasizes the importance of community participation. Involving residents in the planning and decision-making processes ensures that social housing initiatives are aligned with the specific needs and aspirations of the community.

DISCUSSION

The literature review on the „Transformation of South Africa's Townships: TBL Initiatives and the Future of Social Housing” offers a comprehensive exploration, grounding the discussion in empirical case studies and theoretical frameworks. The examination of the historical context reveals the lasting impact of apartheid policies on South African townships. *Bvuma & Marnewick* (2020) analysis of the spatial legacy of apartheid and *Monama et al.* (2022) insights into spatial planning intricacies provide empirical foundations for understanding the challenges that persist within these communities.

The application of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach in social housing again arises as a transformative paradigm. Through empirical evidence from international case studies, such as the HDP and the Minha Casa Minha Vida , the literature points out the tangible benefits of adopting a holistic perspective. These initiatives demonstrate measurable improvements in social cohesion, economic opportunities, and environmentally sustainable practices, validating the efficacy of the TBL framework.

Global comparisons introduce a scientific lens, drawing lessons from well-documented international housing initiatives. Singapore's Housing and Development Board (HDB), analyzed in studies like *Hall & Viden*, (2005) exploration of Sweden's Million Homes Programme, and insights from Brazil's Minha Casa Minha Vida, all provide rigorous empirical evidence. These studies offer detailed outcomes, shedding light on the successes and challenges of diverse housing models.

The theoretical foundations of the TBL approach are scrutinized in this study. Theoretical frameworks governing social sustainability, economic stimulation, and environmental resilience are illustrated, integrating scholarly discussions from *Haqi* (2016) and *Hamilton & Clemens* (1999). These frameworks, when applied to practical cases like the Orlando Ekhaya social housing project and the Lynedoch EcoVillage, reveal the scientific basis for understanding and measuring the impact of TBL principles on housing initiatives.

Finally, the synthesis of historical insights, global perspectives, theoretical frameworks, and empirical case studies enriches the scientific discourse on urban development within South African townships. The empirical evidence provided by these studies goes beyond subjective observations, but also contributes to a more rigorous understanding of the challenges and opportunities. The literature review not only sets the stage for future research but also underscores the importance of evidence-based policy development in fostering sustainable, inclusive, and resilient communities within South African townships and the globe at large.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has unravelled the historical complexities of South African townships, scrutinized the transformative potential of the TBL approach in social housing, conducted a comparative analysis of global social housing initiatives, and explored theories guiding TBL and social housing. Integrating case studies has provided practical insights into the application and impact of these principles.

The historical context, marked by the legacy of apartheid, underscores the enduring socio-economic challenges within South African townships. The significance of the TBL approach in social housing signifies a paradigm shift, recognizing housing as a multifaceted instrument for community well-being and sustainable development.

Comparative studies with global social housing initiatives, incorporating case studies from Singapore, Sweden, Brazil, and locally contextualized projects, emphasize the importance of cross-cultural learning and adaptation in shaping successful social housing models. These case studies offer a rich repository of strategies and lessons that can inform policies tailored to the unique challenges of South African townships.

Theoretical foundations within the TBL framework, including social sustainability, economic stimulation, and environmental resilience, highlight the need for a holistic and integrated approach to social housing. Practical case studies such as Orlando Ekhaya, Vulindlela Heights, and Lynedoch EcoVillage demonstrate the tangible manifestation of these theories, providing a roadmap for creating sustainable and resilient urban environments.

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