



Keynote Address by the UCLG President, Mr Mpho Parks Tau, at the Global Conference on Urban Transformation, Comparison and Value, Oxford University, England

'Towards an Inclusive Urbanism: Spatial, Economic & Digital'

18 April 2018

Programme director, and
Ladies and gentlemen:

Introduction

I wish to begin by thanking our gracious host, Prof Michael Keith, for his invitation to come to this international conference at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS). Also, allow me to extend my appreciation to Dr Andreza Aruska de Souza Santos and team, for working with our office back home in South Africa to organise efficiently our travel and accomodation logistics.

I have to say, I am humbled by the honour of giving a keynote at COMPAS, which not only conducts valuable high-quality research, but also facilitates platforms for seminal knowledge exchange across academic disciplines, methodological frameworks and ideological orientations.

As a longstanding policy practitioner, I treasure this opportunity to share my thoughts and experiences at this august conference - convened under the catholic theme, *The Good City: Urban Transformation, Comparison and Value*.

In the process of preparing my address for today, I came across an interesting article, published recently in *The Guardian* newspaper. The article by John Vidal had a rather powerful and existential heading - '*The 100 Million City: Is 21st Century Urbanisation Out of Control?*'. What I found equally interesting about this article was Vidal's thesis that: 'Projections suggest cities will swell at an astonishing pace – but whether that means our salvation or an eco-disaster is by no means certain'.

And so, this gathering is timely, and indeed opportune to all of us, coming from our respective geographic backgrounds and concerned as I am sure we are with modalities of a proverbial Good City.

I have titled my keynote address '*Towards an Inclusive Urbanism*' and hope to focus on three interrelated areas. Firstly, the critical reflections on the work we initiated during my tenure as an Executive Councillor and also as mayor of the City of Johannesburg. Secondly,

some background to the work of the South African national government in implementing an inclusive urbanism through some of our blueprint programmes. Thirdly, reflect briefly on some of the work undertaken by the UCLG in integrated urban transformation and promotion of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) and Habitat III.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Enabling Policy Framework - GDS & SPD 2040

When I assumed mayorship of the City of Johannesburg in circa 2011 to 2016 – in a city of almost 5 million people – my mandate was primarily guided by our country's Constitutional injunction to create a developmental local government. Linked to this, my mandate was informed by our moral obligation to advance a culture of human rights and extension of greater equity in provision of basic public amenities to residents living in one of Africa's most preeminent cities.

Of course, this legal injunction and moral duty would be implemented to both current inhabitants and the new entrants into a city experiencing phenomenal levels of urbanisation.

For us in the local government sphere, these obligations and commitments were crucial since their principal objective was largely to undo and deconstruct painful past mistakes whilst also planning for a better future. Needless to say, this inherited and painful past, which continues to shape our present realities, includes redressing the damage inflicted by precedent-setting legislation like the 1913 Land Act, the 1923 Native Urban Areas Act, and the 1957 Group Areas Act.

It meant giving effect to flagship programmes targetted at transitioning from apartheid spatial frameworks – based on exclusion – towards democratic governance – premised on inclusion. In this manner, the collective belief was that we would be moving in the direction of integrated transformation that recognises the human rights of all citizens and communities - irrespective of race, creed, geography or ideological orientation.

For us in the City, the model of advancing this vision, included wide-ranging consultations through workshops and charrettes in order to secure policy coalitions. Subsequent results emanating from these public engagements led to the Johannesburg Growth and Development Strategy (GDS), with, the Spatial Development Framework (SDF) 2040, serving as the land-use and capital investment toolkit to achieve our set vision.

These were our efforts to answer the question in Vidal's article, on how to confront what sometimes might seem an intractable set of challenges characterised, among others, by high levels of urbanisation, low economic growth, resource constraints and urban sprawl. This possibly is best captured by the underlying principles encapsulated in the GDS, which are the following:

- Eradicating poverty;
- Building a growing and inclusive economy;
- Building sustainable human settlements;
- Ensuring resource security and environmental sustainability;
- Achieving social inclusion through support - and enablement; and lastly
- Promoting good governance.

The GDS and SDF could in essence be characterised as compacts or covenants we signed with our residents to fashion an economic democracy, which firstly removes barriers of entry, particularly for the poor; secondly, deconcentrates economic activity and value-chains in an equitable mode; thirdly, seeks to empower disadvantaged communities through skills training and ensuring that we develop formal and informal learning mechanisms linked to the mainstream economy, and building an inclusive city.

Why were these two overriding strategies, which were open for further refinement, pursued, and what international resonance did they elicit?

As stated earlier, the spatial framework was to become one of the mechanisms through which we would then translate the vision and principles of the GDS into implementation.

As the former Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Dr Joan Clos, said at the launch of the SDF in 2016, “The SDF 2040 opens the path towards a new model of sustainable urbanization: a compact city, with high population densities around infrastructure nodes”. In fact, Dr Clos continued and stated that “the SDF sets the example of what planning an African city in the 21st century can be, and how the New Urban Agenda can be implemented in the future”.

But, for us, an inclusive urbanism extended beyond, bricks and mortar, or wires and pipes, or even tracks and roads. Rather, it would be about ensuring that the urban system creates greater equity and justice, in particular to those historically disadvantaged and the most vulnerable in our society.

Some of the core flagship programmes we initiated, included the following: Corridors of Freedom, Jozi@Work, the Green and Blue Economy, and also building a Smart City.

Programme director,

With your permission, please allow me to explain briefly what these programmes entailed.

SPATIAL INCLUSION

1. *Corridors of Freedom*

One of the flagship programmes of our spatial framework which we initiated was titled the Corridors Freedom. As you may know, like most apartheid cities, Johannesburg is a city of stark contrasts, divided between islands of some of the highest standards of living and coupled with oceans of record-high poverty and inequality.

While these divisions may seem insurmountable, I, however, remain motivated that these manufactured superficial divisions offer another truth, and that is in the main, Johannesburg has untapped great potential and opportunities.

And so, in order to address this inherited inequality that is embedded in space and geography, we came up with what we called, appropriately, Corridors of Freedom, which sought to integrate the transport system by connecting citizens and communities together, linking them to nearby nodes so that they could access basic amenities and jobs close to where they reside.

The Corridors, which are anchored around our mass transit system, were also defined as the centres for intensive urban growth where we would significantly increase densities and

increase the intensity of land use. Through this, we sought to create a more compact urban form.

The Corridors were also seen as means to link the critical nodes in the city, and reverse the mono-functional nature of the city's morphology.

Quite obviously, in this democratisation of physical and virtual space, this reduced our citizens' travel times and meaningfully cut down their costs. Moreover, the lowering of infrastructure costs resulted in a sizeable positive return on investment.

The Corridors of Freedom were, and are, symbolised, in praxis, through the *Rea Vaya* bus-rapid-transit-system, which is, arguably the first of its kind on the African continent. Given our past racial history, this inclusive transportation system is noteworthy - since it partners local government with the predominantly black local taxi industry.

Without a doubt, the Corridors of Freedom programme is a model for a post-apartheid transportation system and highlights what can be achieved in rebuilding the political-economy of space for a 21st century City.

Linked to spatial redesign, the City of Johannesburg sought to respond to both the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution and unemployment, particularly the disproportionate levels of unemployment, which mostly affects the youth. In this regard, we launched programmes designed to promote democratic citizenship participation in self-empowerment programmes through, for example, the *Jozi@Work* programme.

Ladies and gentlemen,

ECONOMIC INCLUSION

2. *Jozi@Work*

The *Jozi@Work* programme was designed to create an opportunity for citizens and communities to partner with the City of Johannesburg to deliver municipal services in their own neighbourhoods. In addition, it was aimed at shifting the prevailing mind-set of seeking employment, instead of generating employment. That is, turning job-seekers into job-creators.

By the end of our term in 2016, we could confidently report that we had empowered, on average, over 1,000 cooperatives and community-based companies to co-deliver municipal services.

Of course, uppermost in our concerns was to focus on our youth by breaking down barriers for their participation in the mainstream economy. This we were able to achieve for a major segment of our population who needed access to opportunities, required basic work experience and a chance to start their own new micro-enterprises.

Given the fact that it is estimated that less than 15% of Johannesburg residents have a tertiary qualification, the abiding challenge we had to overcome was to encourage people to consider online qualifications so that, eventually, they could climb up the social mobility ladder.

Moreover, we had concluded a partnership with the University of Johannesburg and Microsoft to train one-million residents, most of them young people, on Microsoft office basics. By and large, this was made possible through our network of Massive Open Online Varsities which are transforming our libraries into free universities and vocational colleges, teaching what the job-market and our country needs. We were also in advanced stages of negotiations with the New York Public Library, which has arguably, one of the largest *e-book* resources on the planet.

Our partnership with Wits University also allowed us to establish the acclaimed Tshimologong precinct project, which is aimed at carving space for digital start-ups in a city where 50% of the population do not have regular access to the internet. This partnership also gave birth to a space for hosting the only IBM research and development facility on the African continent.

Friends and colleagues,

We cannot talk about sustainable urban development without mentioning the blue economy, in addition to the green economy. The Blue economy initiative we undertook in partnership with the Zero Emissions Research & Initiatives (ZERI), its operational philosophy sought "to evolve from a core business based on a core competence to a portfolio of businesses that generate multiple benefits for business, society, and puts nature back on its evolutionary and symbiotic path".

In short, it refers to, among others, employing smart and available innovations to solve complex problems.

3. *Blue Economy*

In the City of Johannesburg, the blue economy was one pillar of our Growth and Development Strategy because this alternative economy, offers avenues to the exploration and realisation of cutting-edge science that can sustainably address the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality (PUI)

In this pursuit, when we were running the City, we invested energy and resources into exploring blue economy opportunities in some 29 potential projects which were later presented to the national government. We made these major investments since we believed that, if harnessed to their maximal potential, blue economy opportunities – relying on, for example, recycling waste products – can be turned into usable products to speed up service delivery and engender small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs).

Some of the blue economy initiatives we launched, partly to deal with food insecurity affecting many of our people, included the Johannesburg bread programme using fruit trimmings to replace flour in, say, bread since it was cheaper and a healthier alternative. We established programmes dealing with micro-mushroom farms - linking them to cooperatives. These also included low-flush toilet innovations, converting organic waste to bio-energy and harvesting gas for fuel and energy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Which theoretical paradigm, underlined in the title of my keynote address, informed some of our decisions? Why is this rather utopian paradigm favoured in a period where it looks like

Thatcherite-Reaganite economic ideology is making a comeback, debatably, in France under President Macron and in the United States under President Trump?

It is not by coincidence I am delivering this keynote address at the TS Eliot Theatre. One of the things this Nobel laureate is renowned for, is his counsel to endeavour to dream big; as he said: “Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go”.

New Urban Agenda and Habitat III

These flagship programmes mentioned above – namely, the Corridors of Freedom, Jozi@Work and Blue Economy– are targetted at inclusive urbanism and centred on decentralisation or localisation of administration, finances and operations.

For us in South Africa, inclusive urbanism matters since it speaks to the following factors;

Firstly, inclusive urbanism acknowledges the centrality of cities and towns in shaping the fortunes of people and the supportive ecosystems. Secondly, inclusive urbanism underscores the centrality of cities in provision of fundamental human rights of all citizens irrespective of class, race, creed, geography and ideology. Thirdly, inclusive urbanism is synonymous with green urbanism which highlights the positive and negative effects of our carbon footprint on the supportive environment.

I emphasise human rights in echo of the elemental ‘right to the city’ argument elaborated upon by David Harvey when he says, “the right to the city is not merely a right of access to what already exist, but a right to change it after our heart’s desire...to remake ourselves by creating a qualitatively different kind of urban sociality”.

Hence, these fundamental human rights to the City of Johannesburg, for us, implied these 5 rights;

- 1) the right to developmental service delivery whereby citizens hold us accountable and become active participants in the delivery of service;
- 2) the right to a spatially integrated and united city where in time, hopefully, we will eliminate the need for private motor-vehicles and encourage cycling lanes and pedestrian walkways;
- 3) the right to a liveable city where people have access to good quality of life, since, to quote Harvey once again, “the question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be”;
- 4) the right to inclusive economic growth by creating economic opportunities; and
- 5) the right to remake ourselves based on the understanding that the citizens engage not only on the basis of their needs but also on the basis of their capabilities (in the mould of Amartya Sen’s argument)

Friends and colleagues,

It is my reasonable estimation that these programmes, viewed as a whole, gave practical and long-term effect to the localisation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) which we all agreed to in Quito Ecuador.

In line with imperatives set out in achieving NUA, South Africa’s national urban policy is encapsulated in what is called the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) vision, which calls for “resource-efficient cities and towns that are economically inclusive and globally competitive”.

The IUDF is explicitly aligned to the global developmental agenda whereby cities are granted a greater role in driving economic growth, promoting social cohesion and qualitatively effecting spatial transformation.

Which two examples give expression to NUA's implementation in South Africa?

First, the decentralisation of housing and human settlement functions is a key lever for NUA's implementation. Second, the principle of cooperative governance provides a central tent of how we engage and jointly solve problems.

To this extent, our work at the High-Level Panel to Assess and Enhance the Effectiveness of the UN-Habitat was underlined by the admission that cities and towns are indeed catalysts for shared economic growth, political stability, social inclusion and sustainable development.

The High-Level Panel was an important forum to give, arguably, greater representational voice at the United Nations for our constituencies in local government and civil society, and also in mainstreaming urbanisation across the UN system.

This mainstreaming is important since the complexity of our world sometimes defies our most elaborate plans and forecasts. In fact, one of the key messages that emerged from Habitat III and NUA, acknowledge that "a significant percentage of urbanization occurs spontaneously without urban planning, and therefore misses the opportunity to contribute substantively to improve prosperity and development".

Programme director,

Conclusions

At the risk of being accused of being an outdated leftist, my belief in inclusive urbanism is, I believe, adequately responsive to the direction of how the world is moving, that is, a world demanding greater cooperation, instead of protectionism, acknowledgement of complexity, rather than one-dimensional thinking.

Given that the rate of super-urbanisation looks set to challenge many of our old assumptions, acceptance of the incalculable role cities and local government fulfill will prove crucial, since it is in cities and towns where the rubber meets the road in terms of, say, service delivery. Furthermore, inclusive urbanism enables innovation, facilitates economic opportunities and growth.

Given pressures of time, I did not speak about the obvious gap between cities of the Global North and Global South, where financial instruments differ and access to financing sources is stark.

At the UCLG, this question has become essential in our discussions and in planning to deal with, for example, capacitating cities in the developing world to access debt capital markets and grant funding. As we search for solutions to the challenges confronting our fast growing cities, and seeking to reap the rewards of the twin demographic dividends of urbanisation and youth, we have to match these with developing fiscal and financing solutions - starting with local tax and revenue sources, coupled with grant funding and access to capital markets.

With these few words, I look forward to engaging further with you on the idea and practice of a Good City.

I thank you.