

SA needs youth home-building plan

By  Berry Everitt

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The latest available figures from StatsSA show that there are about 3.3-million South Africans aged 15 to 24 who are not currently in education, training or employment, and about 3.9-million South Africans aged 25 to 34 who are unemployed.



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These numbers represent a vast amount of energy, education and skill that is going to waste instead of being put to use to help grow our economy, and we all know that high youth unemployment is a time-bomb for any country in terms of crime and civil unrest.

At the same time, the majority of sources agree that SA's housing backlog is still well over 2-million units and growing at the rate of about 178,000 units a year. And according to the Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM), it would take about R400bn annually to fix this problem over the next few years, while the annual budget of the Department of Human Settlements is only around R32bn currently.

In fact, the DHS itself estimates that the 25 "catalytic" housing projects it is currently overseeing will deliver less than 500,000 subsidised and partly-subsidised homes by 2020.

Simultaneous solution

So, South Africa needs homes and its young people need employment that will ultimately enable them to buy their own homes instead of depending on the State for subsidised accommodation. Surely we can find a simultaneous solution to these problems?

My suggestion is a high-profile and well-funded national work programme or community service programme specifically for housing construction that will provide young people with training and the opportunity to gain practical work experience while also helping to alleviate the country's huge housing backlog.

President Ramaphosa has spoken recently of the preparations that are going ahead for a National Jobs Summit, during which government, business, labour and civil society are expected to find innovative and rapid ways to create jobs on a massive scale.

In short, they are expected to make our "New Dawn" as successful as President Roosevelt's "New Deal" - the plan which pulled the US out of the Great Depression. And I believe one of the quickest and easiest ways to reach that objective would be to create a national housing task team authorised to cut through red tape and hierarchy and mobilise whatever public and private resources it needs (such as land, services, training facilities and materials) for a concentrated five-year home building programme.

Skills development

This would enable young people in SA not only to build homes and help to uplift poor communities but also to gain the practical, business and leadership skills they need to be employed or self-employed in those communities in the future.

The potential benefits of such a plan are indicated by the results of a recent study done by the National Association of Home Builders in the US, which revealed that 69 permanent jobs are created for every 100 single-family homes that are built in a given area, in addition to the 394 job opportunities that are created during construction.

The new homes also have the potential to generate an ongoing R13m a year in taxes and revenues for the local municipality and some R62m a year for local businesses, and one can just imagine the boost such results would give our morale as a country, as well as our economy.

ABOUT BERRY EVERITT

Berry Everitt is the CEO of the Chas Everitt International property group, which is one of the top five estate agency companies in South Africa and widely recognised for its innovative marketing methods, its technological leadership - and its absolute dedication to achieving exceptional customer service. Everitt is the youngest son of the group's founders, Charles and Tilla Everitt, and has been involved in the business since it was established in 1988.

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