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THE IMPACT OF ISLAND CITY IN THE POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA: FOCUS ON BANTUSTANS

Abstract. *The apartheid doctrine of racial segregation has been inextricably bound up with urbanization. The creation of so-called ‘Homelands’ or ‘Bantustans’ for the African majority population, was largely an attempt to constrain urbanization, with the notorious ‘pass laws’ controlling entry to the cities in a manner consistent with demands for labour. The South African cities were therefore subjected to unnatural growth patterns; brought through apartheid planning that legitimised exclusionary practices in cities and which created and maintained racial, social and class differences between people. More than two decades after the end of apartheid, urban settlement planning in a democratic South Africa has created secluded settlements with fragmented public services delivery. These settlements are isolated in any terms from mainstream city development and also reflect a mismatch to development trajectory of the country’s economy. From the very essence of this mismatch or misfit, sprouts the concept of an Island City. From the backdrop of apartheid city, this paper interrogates the perpetuation of spatial inequality in former Bantustan urban centres, which in this context continue existing as “islands”. The argument stems from a concerning challenge confronting the post-apartheid government to eradicate legacies associated with the apartheid regime.*

Keywords: *Apartheid City, Island City, Bantustans, townships, rent seeking, service delivery, post-apartheid.*

1. Introduction

The end of the apartheid regime has unleashed powerful transformative forces in South Africa. Thus, South Africa embarked on its ambitious democratic transition in 1994 and there was great anticipation that under the behest of a radical-democratic majority government, ways would be found to undo the paradigm of urban division—the apartheid city (Pieterse, 2009).

A number of progressive policies are in place to promote the provision of public housing, access to basic services, local economic development inputs and opportunities for popular participation, with hugely disappointing results. From the recent empirical studies on the spatial-economic situation of South Africa and its major metropolitan regions, the evidence is unambiguous: South African cities have remained profoundly divided, segregated and unequal despite over two decades of concerted government efforts to extend development opportunities to the urban poor (Charlton and Kihato, 2006), especially in the townships, in which most of them are former ‘Bantustans’.

It should be highlighted from the start that this paper does not seek to rewrite and discuss the history of apartheid city, but when it does, it is discussing the concept of an Island City from the backdrop of an Apartheid City. Instead, the thrust is to interrogate the perpetuation of spatial inequality in former Bantustan urban centres, now renowned as townships, which in this context continue existing as “islands”. The paper notes with concern the failure of the post-apartheid government to eradicate legacies associated with the apartheid regime. In this regards, Tohooyondou was rightfully chosen as one of the former Bantustan, which presents an important and uniquely powerful lens for examining these dynamic.

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The data used in this paper to assess the continued existence of apartheid legacies in former Bantustan area and failure of the post-apartheid government to eradicate these legacies, is drawn from two major sources – primary and secondary sources. The paper uses empirical data, which was acquired through household surveys, interviews with key informants and observations carried out in some Bantustans.

2. Framework of Analysis

In interpreting the position of the post-apartheid urban dynamics, the South African literature has often borrowed from the analytical frame of the apartheid city. At this juncture it is from the backdrop of an apartheid city model, that the concept of ‘island city’ is coined and discussed. Post-apartheid South Africa cities continue to be a deeply stratified space that is marked by hierarchical access to service delivery and general development (Motala and Pampallis, 2002), with the former Bantustans areas being at the worst end, as far as service delivery as concerned. The effects of apartheid remain tightly woven in the mosaic of black South African communities that it threatens to remain a serious challenge to the possibilities of creating an equitable society across the urban setting and country at large.

The effects of concentrated poverty include inferior basic service, enhanced vulnerability to risks including crime, disease and the drastic shock of fire, the limited reach of social networks, particularly in labour market access, and the impacts of negative peer pressures and lack of role models. This translate into poverty and inequality traps characterised by a lack of upward mobility which easily becomes inter-generational (Philips et al., 2014) or a vicious cycle of poverty. The spatial disadvantages of these places act as a stumbling block on economic opportunity for those who live there, with separations continuing to be a visible and material part of people’s experience of inequality in their day to day lives. This undermines a sense of social inclusion and equity.

The over-riding feature of South African urban setting is unsurprisingly economic. Economic inequality which precipitates into spatial divisions have grown dramatically over the past two decades and it is essential to understand the urban remaking of South Africa in this context. Ironically, some of the dynamics behind these economic and spatial disparities were compounded by home-grown redistributive social policies such as the government’s housing redistributive policy programme (Zack, 2008). The persistent construction of affordable housing on cheap but poor located land may have respond to short-term budget constraints affecting municipalities under pressure to deliver, but these decisions had longer-term social and economic costs in a range of ways. First, the establishment of housing settlement far from existing infrastructure has raised the upfront and ongoing costs of delivering basic service such as water, sanitation, electricity and roads. Secondly, the distance from the economic opportunities create upward wage pressure in the economy, the high cost of transport erode the reservation wage. Thirdly, the transport costs are often cited as constraint on work-seeking for unemployed people with limited incomes. Fourthly, the time spent travelling to work has social costs, raising stress and limiting time for recreation and parenting.

The Island City concept emanated from the position of isolation and separation of these former Bantustans / townships from the mainstream urban development and in terms of relatively inadequate provision of basic services and other municipal services. In a bid to unravel the concept of Island City in the context of the present perpetual spatial inequalities, the paper uses the rent seeking school of thought.

2.1. Rent Seeking Theory

In Fischer’s terms, “rent-seeking is an activity, usually implying the expenditure of scarce resources, to cause and capture artificially-created (and usually politically contestable) rents as well as transfers which are not part of society’s intended income redistribution” (2007). “*Rent-seeking activity*” and “*rent-seeking behaviour*” are both treated as synonyms, and from the very

definition, it is refers to a negative conduct in its consequences for the public welfare traditionally.

Rent seeking is also common as a form of preferential treatment given to individuals, resulting in some individuals having advantages over others. This is so despite the presence of constitutional powers, policies & legislations that are put in place to guide service delivery. Bureaucratic inefficiency also curtail service delivery due to principal-agent problems, which are part of the control agenda by government managers. Since rent-seekers are often an integral part of an ailing economy and resist the adoption of reforms, understanding and anticipating rent-seeking behaviour is crucial for designing more adequate and effective policy reforms.

Public goods and services are fundamentals whose provision cannot generate adequate profit in order to attract private provision. The government therefore is seen as an instrument capable of providing such goods and services. This is simply because the conventional pricing system cannot provide adequate and affordable goods and services using the market standards. Hence, through voting, local politics becomes the ‘market place’ through which politicians respond to public demands in the form of promises which in many cases, they fail to deliver upon.

3. Insight into Apartheid South Africa 1950-1985

To most casual observers, apartheid era shaped the country’s peculiar forms of urbanism. With industrialization, the economy expanded, industry absorbed more and more black workers, but racial categories defined the primary social cleavages (Thompson, 2001). The apartheid system was predicated on the control of internal migration by black South Africans. While most black people had to travel long distances from their homelands to get to their places of work because of apartheid spatial patterns, the state did not provide safe, reliable, adequate and affordable means of transport (Tevera and Zinyama, 2002).

3.1. Bantustans or homelands in apartheid South Africa

During the 1960s this system maintained its stability partly through growth of the characteristic ‘townships’ of urban South Africa—where local authorities built much of the housing, or, just across Bantustan boundaries, the Bantu Trust as well as neighbouring white local authorities did the same. The government also removed African squatters from unauthorized camps near the cities, placing those who were employed in segregated townships, and sending the rest either to the Homelands or to farms where the white owners required their labour. The “surplus” Africans were expelled from the white rural areas, and, because they could not enter the towns, most were obliged to resettle in the Homelands, even if they had never been there before. In several cases, the government started new townships alongside existing urban complexes and treated them as parts of Homelands, as in Mdantsane in the Ciskei outside East London and Umlazi in KwaZulu outside Durban. In other cases, displaced people were congregated so densely in homelands, far from the existing urban complexes, that they formed new townships. In 1967, through the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, the government tried to herd into the Homelands nearly all Africans, except those whom white employers needed as labourers (Savage, 1984). The removals resulted in a great intensification of the overpopulation problem in the Homelands (Van Onselen, 1972).

The condition of the homelands continued to deteriorate. Consequently, the economic incentives for Africans to leave the Homelands grew more powerful than ever. The African people relied on wage labour in the great industrial complexes of the southern Transvaal and the Durban, Port Elizabeth, and Cape Town areas. Moreover, no foreign country recognized the sovereignty of the “independent” Homelands (Bantu, 1929).

In the cities outside the Homelands, the government transferred large numbers of Coloureds and Indians, as well as Africans, from land they had previously occupied to new segregated satellite townships. Under the Group Areas Act (1950) and its many subsequent amendments, the government divided urban areas into zones where members of one specified race alone could live

and work. In many cases, areas that had previously been occupied by Blacks were zoned for exclusive white occupation (Thompson, 2001).

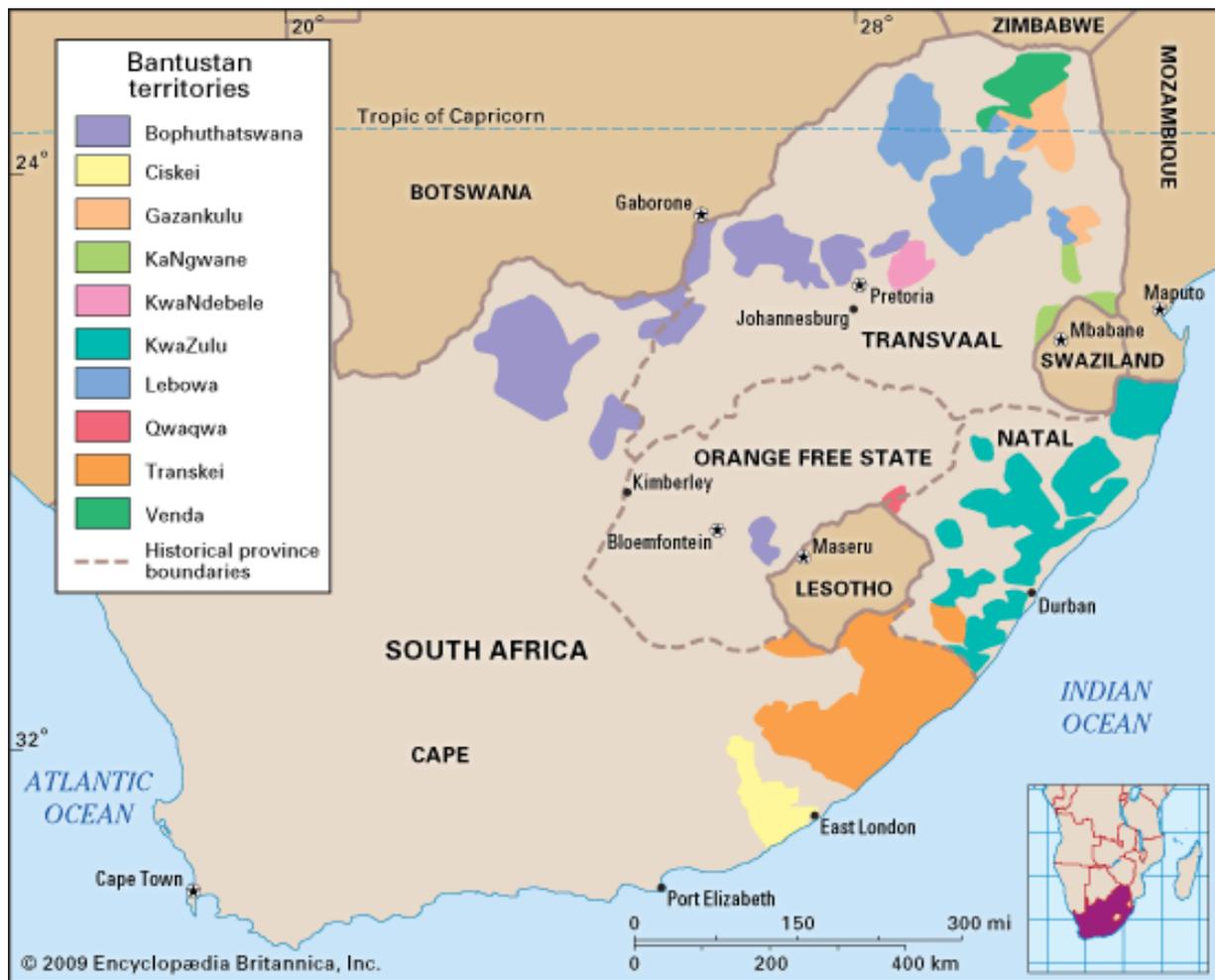


Figure 1. Showing Bantustan territories (also known as black homelands or black states) in South Africa during the apartheid era. Source: Google image

3.2. The Apartheid City South Africa

The Apartheid City was created as a response to the urban crises of the 1940s. In order to protect and enhance the interests of its white constituency the National Party government drew on past policies of racial segregation and spatial management to restructure and entrench more deeply the racial city form. The processes of African urbanisation were blocked and racial groups channelled into clearly defined spatial zones within the city or, in the case of illegal entrants, forced to return to their rural homesteads or relocated into resettlement camps in the homelands, often after periods of forced prison labour on white farms (Hindson, 1996).

According to Hindson (1996), the concentration of socio-economic resources in the white suburbs and expelling of black city dwellers to the marginal and poorly resourced urban periphery produced a particular racial and class map of the city by the early 1970s. The accelerating processes of rapid urbanisation and class differentiation from the 1980s frayed the tight fabric of the apartheid city and spilled over its constraining boundaries. New social and economic forces in urban life emerged as Africans began to struggle for access to the core areas of the city or for increased resources to make urban life on the metropolitan margins more tolerable.

It became clear that the problems of the black residential areas, the need for housing, resources, infrastructure, better communications and other resources could not be solved by

development plans and processes which restricted themselves to the black areas alone. What was needed, and is still needed, was reconstruction of the whole city. It is only through a restructuring of the apartheid city as a whole that a durable and large scale solution could be worked out to deal with conflict in the black residential areas.

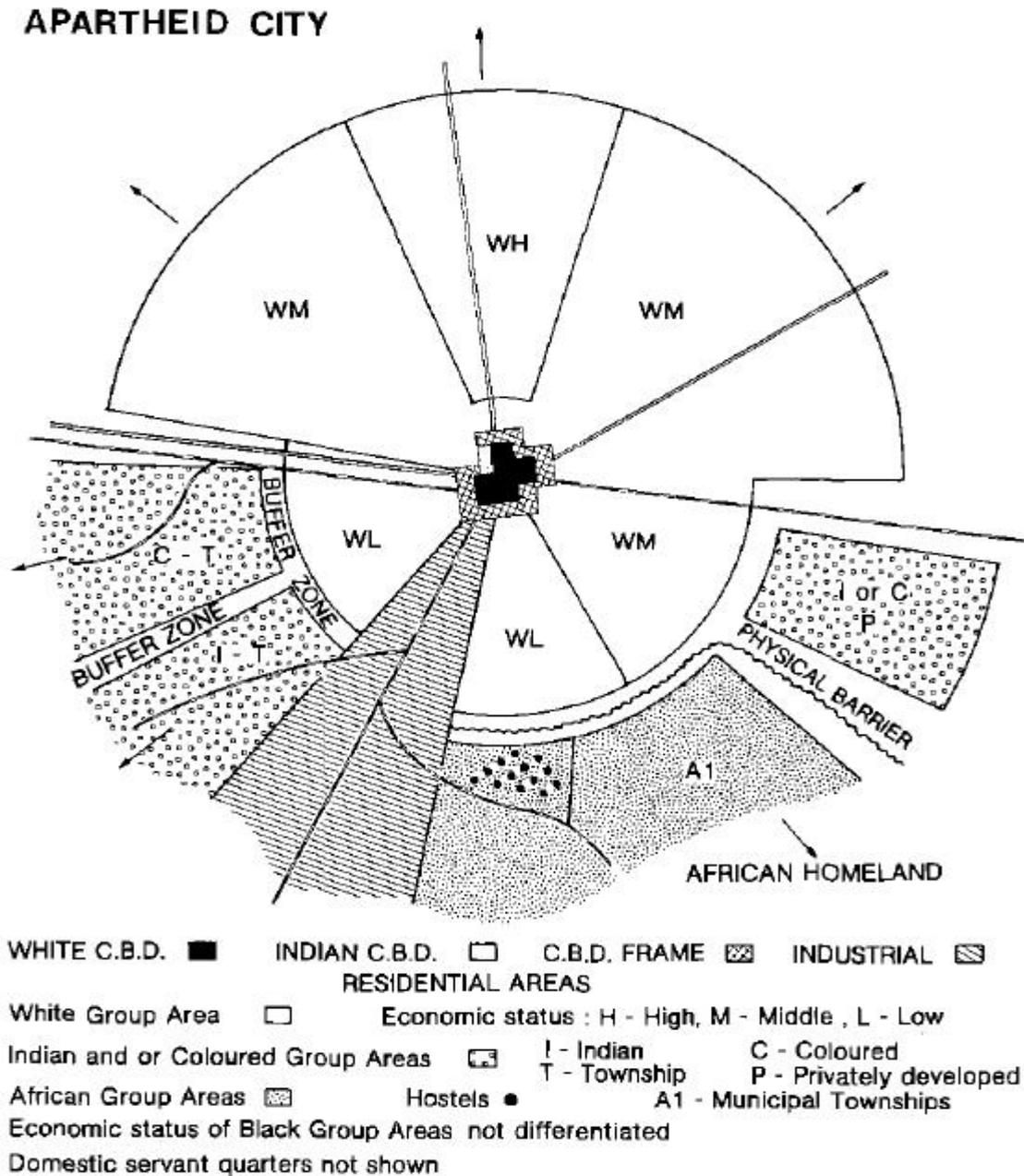


Figure 2. Showing Apartheid City model. Source: Google image

3.3. Service Delivery in the Apartheid City for the Majority.

Service Delivery in the Apartheid City, just like some cases today, was a tale of two cities. The White population lived in substantial houses or apartments in segregated suburbs, with black servants. The state provided them with excellent public services: schools and hospitals; parks and playing fields; buses and trains; roads, water, electricity, telephones, drainage, and sewerage. On the other side, public services for Blacks were characteristically inadequate or non-existent. In the Homelands, women walked miles every day to fetch water and firewood; in the towns, people crowded into single-sex compounds, leaky houses, or improvised shacks. Schools, hospitals, and public transport for Blacks were sharply inferior. Electricity, running water, public telephones,

sewage systems, parks, and playing fields were rare in not almost an impossible luxury (Cox and Hemson, 2008). The uneven distribution of human and financial resources was, on the one hand, reflected in a high concentration of resources and services in urban areas, where there were well functional municipal and health services, and on the other side of the fence, in an under provision of services in rural and pre-urban areas and informal settlements.

With regards to education, under the Bantu Education Act (1953) the central government thus assumed control of public African education and substantial differences in the quality of education were seen. White children had excellent school buildings and equipment; black children, distinctly inferior facilities and scant regards was paid to them (Thompson, 2001). Health wise, White South African had a low infant mortality rate and a long life expectancy. A large portion of the medical budget was consumed by white patients.

The veracity of the matter is that service delivery was a challenge during the Apartheid regime especially in homelands where black people resided and this was supported by the constitution. It was most unfortunate that their voices and dissatisfaction about poor service delivery fell on deaf ears. The hope for the majority was that the collapse of apartheid will bring a new dispensation in which everyone enjoys full rights and privileges in the same country.

3.4. The Post-Apartheid South Africa from 1994 – Present

On 27 April 1994 the country held its first democratic election and for the first time in history all South Africans stood tall and proud as equal citizens in a common home. The victors were African National Congress (ANC), party. Enshrined in their 1994 National Elections manifesto, was a promise to a “better life for all” as opposed to a ‘better life for some’ and the principles of the manifesto, were solidly grounded on the Freedom Charter (Suttner, 2006). Precisely, that was the birth of a ‘Rainbow Nation’, ushering with it hopes of a new era of racial, ethnical and political tolerance in South Africa (Klaaren and Ramji, 2001).

Over two decades after the collapse of the oppressive apartheid system, over 70% of Africans, totalling nearly half the population of the city, remain in urban townships that are poorly serviced, economically disarticulated and plagued by high levels of unemployment and crime. The vast majority of township residents do not have the resources to leave what are, in effect, ghettos. Because of their peripheral location, most of these areas have few prospects of being productively integrated into the city’s future growth patterns. The persistence of these racialized areas is a testament to the profound, durable and compounded spatial inequalities bequeathed by apartheid. Yet for all their durability, even these areas are experiencing some change. Most notably, local state investments in infrastructure and services have started to make a measurable difference to the built environment (Schensul, 2009).

Nonetheless, the calamity today is the high expectation of a speedy delivery of services for a better life for those that have waited far too long for equitable living conditions. This expectation may have led to the increasing outcries from communities either where the pace of delivery of services has not marched their expected outcome or communities where there is still a general feeling of relative and unacceptable inequity in access to basic services despite the claims of accelerated service delivery by the concerned authorities. Consequently, the rise of social movements and protest actions could be noted as one of the common phenomena of post-apartheid South Africa (Alexander, 2010). Those that are excluded do not see much of a difference between the current political dispensation and the previous one. This argument creates a loophole for the credence of the current governance system from citizens' point of view who consider themselves ignored by the government (Hart, 2008).

4. Former Bantustans and Service Delivery: Focus on Thohoyondou

Thohoyandou is a town in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, which is the administrative centre of Vhembe District Municipality and is under Thulamela Local Municipality. It is also known for being the former capital of the Bantustan of Venda. It is situated in the south of

Vhembe District, on the main road between Louis Trichardt and the Kruger National Park. Thohoyandou's economic base depends on the surrounding farming communities, with banana plantations, subtropical fruit, tobacco and maize lands. Thohoyandou is surrounded by numerous rural settlements situated on the outskirts of the built-up area, such as Ngovhela, Vondwe, Phiphidi, Muledane, Shayandima, Makwarela, and Maniini (Selepe, 2017).

Today, Thohoyandou is the second largest town in Venda after Makhado (Louis Trichardt), situated 79 km from Makhado and 53 km from Dzanani. It is one of the fastest growing towns in Limpopo but just a mere service centre accommodating various government departments. The Venda communities was dominated by the European influence as far as the 1960s, it is in the 1980s, when various government buildings, hospitals and a University were built in the main district of Thohoyandou (Wilson, 1999).

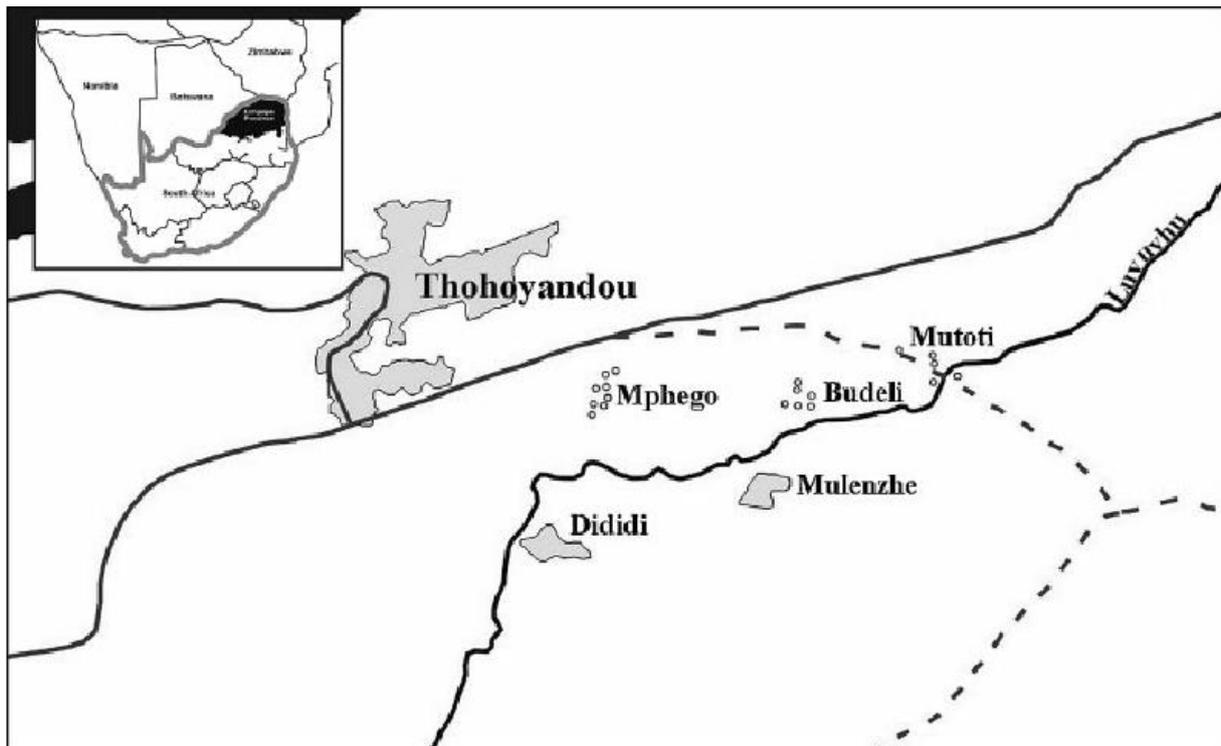


Figure 3. Showing the position of Thohoyandou and the surrounding Venda villages in relation to the South African Map. Source: L'Abbé and Steyn, 2007

4.1. Housing Typology per Urban Area

Many households rely on traditional housing. Mainly built of use of wood, thatch and mud or sun-baked bricks.

Source: (Research's Survey Results, 2013)

76% of the people use their own resources to build houses e.g. from remittances, borrowing from friends, personal loans and loans sharks.

4.2. Water Sources per Urban Area

Infrastructure for water not well developed. Public and communal water points are common. For those with water taps in the yard, some do have direct water access in their houses. Some depend on shallow water wells within their areas.

The quality of water is also poor with 46% arguing that it's not safe for drinking since it smells. Only 18% have direct tap water in their yards, while 26% use public tap, which are placed for the whole community to use.

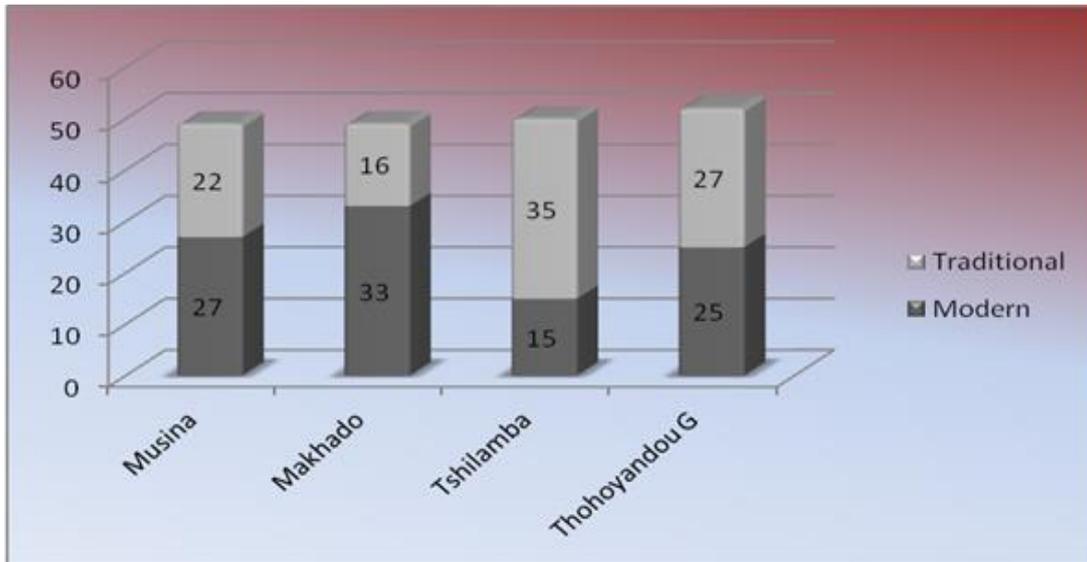


Figure 4. Statistics of housing typology in Urban Areas.
Source: Researcher's Survey Results, 2013

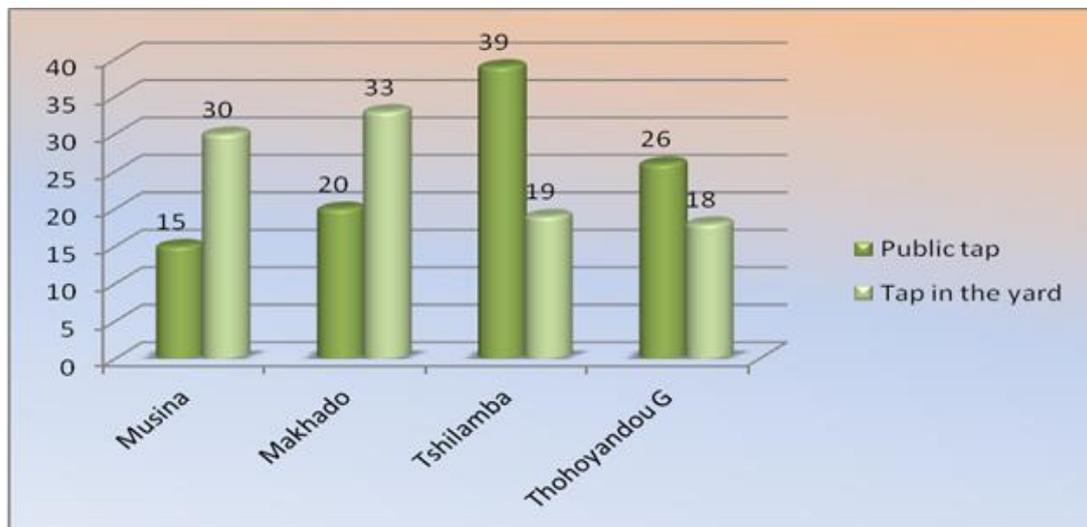


Figure 5. Water sources per urban area

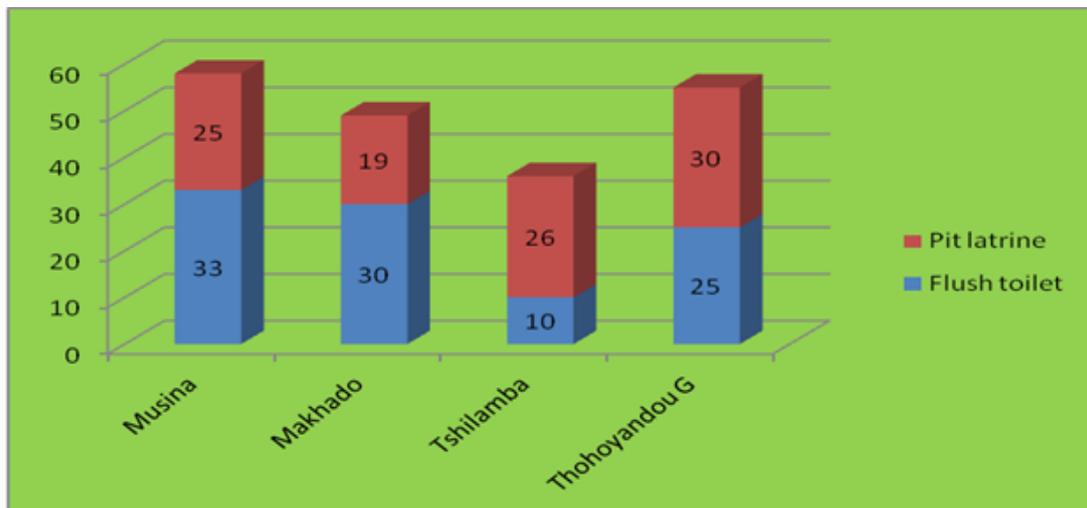


Figure 6. Graphical presentation of sanitation types in urban areas.
Source: Researcher's Survey Results, 2013

4.3. Type of Sanitation in Urban Areas

Given poor water supply, most people rely on pit latrines. Only the few with direct water access in their houses have flush toilets. There is sizable section of the population that has no access to proper sanitation.

4.4. Service delivery rating

Most people are not happy with the level of service delivery, though the level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction differs. They have no hope that their services will improve in the near future. Most of them harbour negative attitude towards the government, which emanates from a feeling of being betrayed by politicians who raised peoples’ expectation for better services, which never materialised over a very long period of waiting.

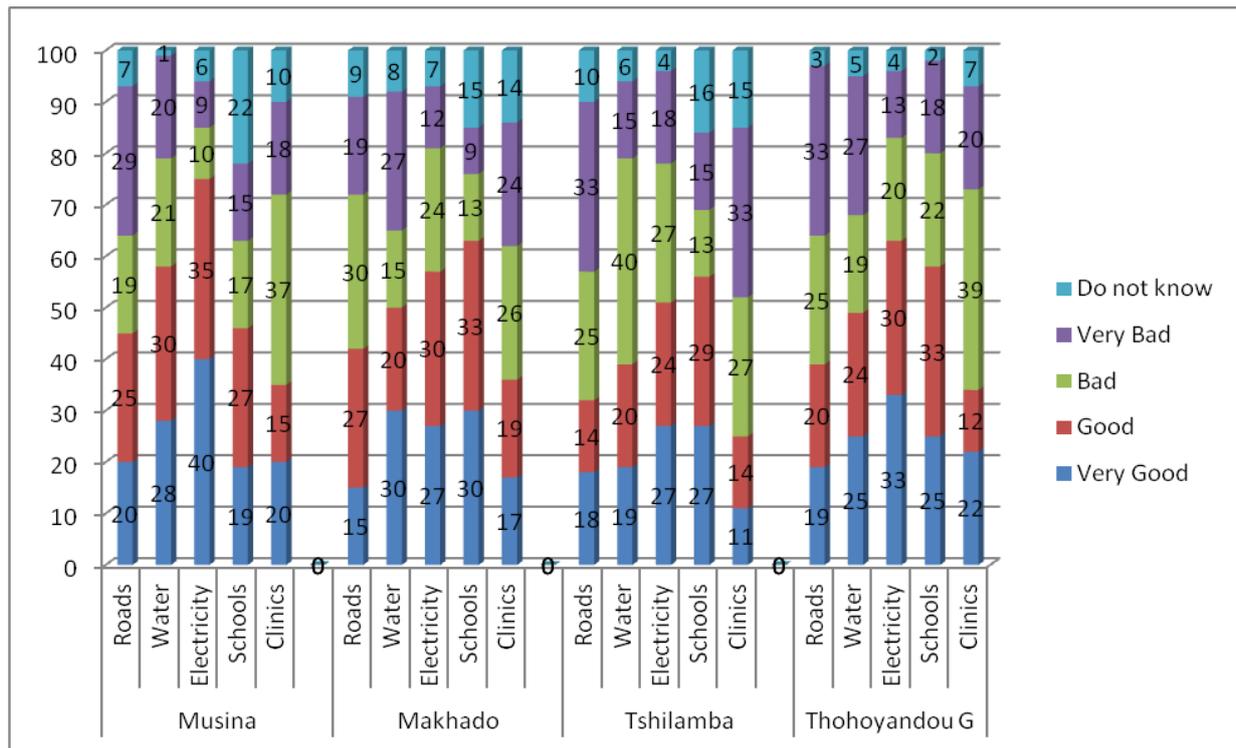


Figure 7: Graphical presentation of service Delivery satisfactory rating.
Source: Researcher’s Survey Results, 2013

5. Discussion

The poor economic base with no opportunities for employment has resulted in poor income levels due to lack of job opportunities for the people who stay in Thohoyandou. With low income base, paying for municipal services become an uphill task residents. In this case, lack of water is a manifestation of poverty and has serious consequences for the livelihood of communities. As a multiplier effect, poor drinking water and poor sanitation lead to major outbreaks of waterborne diseases, which are prevalent in most former Bantustans communities.

Corruption and nepotism can influence service delivery. If the municipality offers tender to people who do not qualify, poor services will be provided. The employment of people without proper skills because they are relatives of employers is also conducive to poor service delivery. Qualified people should be placed in relevant positions for efficient service delivery. Corruption and nepotism fall under rent seeking activities or behaviours as a form of preferential treatment given to individuals, resulting in some individuals having advantages over others not on the basis of merit and competence.

The government has been the sole provider with less participation from the private sector and households. Recently, the government has put in place initiatives such as the Municipal Service

Partnerships (MSPs) in order to enhance services delivery. These services assist the municipality in addressing backlogs. The Thulamela municipality has also outsourced certain services to private organizations such as water boards for efficient service delivery. Contracting out services also influences public participation because communities get jobs, when tenders are issued. Contracting out also reduces administrative costs. This means administrators can then concentrate on other management issues. Maintenance and staff costs can also be reduced because their duties are shifted to contractors. This has and will ease the lack of funding at municipal level which in essence is dependent on government. On lack of funding, service delivery is being funded by Vhembe District Municipality. In order to meet the National target, the National and Provincial government need to intervene.

Lack of capacity to provide services since some professionals (such as engineers) are not willing to stay in rural environments like former Bantustans, hence this precipitate into poor service delivery because the available staff has too much to handle and leaves some important tasks unattended. The lack of capacity is also caused by residents' default of payments for a service which makes it difficult for municipal to provide services adequately as the money used for developments is derived from payment of services. Service backlogs, therefore, cannot be met because of restricted budgets.

The right to adequate housing enshrined in Constitution Act 108 of 1996 and states that everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing and the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realization of this right. The main challenges are backlog of RDP houses and poor quality houses.

The overall impression on water and sanitation is that the municipality is addressing the backlog of sanitation as it has allocated a reasonable number of water taps and toilets. The maintenance of existing infrastructure is important to avoid remedial maintenance as it exposes communities to unhealthy situations. Many people expressed levels of dissatisfaction with service delivery and they maintain that the municipality can do more in the provision of water and sanitation. This dissatisfaction has in many times culminated into sporadic service delivery protests around the country, particularly in the former Bantustans. In some cases these service delivery protest become very violent. Communities feel that politicians are using them to get votes by making vain promises before elections.

6. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

A new political dispensation of a democratic South Africa brought greater hopes for the majority in the country. People anticipated that ways would be found to undo the paradigm of urban division created by the apartheid regime. Numerous progressive policies were adopted to this cause, with main focus on addressing the challenges in the former Bantustans areas. Nonetheless, it became clear that, this transition was not a panacea in itself as evidence pointed out the continuation of spatial and socio-economic inequality. In other terms, the post-apartheid South Africa has inherited the apartheid legacy.

Like many other former Bantustans in South Africa, Tohooyandou, has backlog challenges in housing, water and sanitation service provision, amongst other services. The constraints envisaged is lack of funds to ensure that there is service provision. The lack of funding is being exacerbated by issues of corruption and rent seeking behaviours. Despite the backlog within the municipality, achievements can also be identified. These include the provision of running tap water, toilets and housing among others.

Former Bantustans will remain "poor island cities" unless concerted effort is done to improve the status quo. This would require:

Political will on the part of the leadership to deal with conspicuous challenges such as corruption. Nepotism and corrupt tendencies in offering tenders should be avoided because it causes affects the quality of services, which might lead to violent protests.

Change people's attitude to participate in service delivery as opposed to being mere passive recipients. Public participation must be given priority because municipalities have been created in order to serve the public. People know their rights and may revolt if they are neglected. Given a chance to participate in decision-making, they become cooperative and support the activities of the municipality. Non – participation by users has been singled out as a major cause of project failure.

New growth point strategies are required in order to invest in former Bantustans so that they can also become drivers of development. The main objective of these growth points is to ensure that services are delivered in a way that is sustainable, equitable, efficient, effective and affordable, and consistent with the principles of service delivery.

Privatization can be an option for sustainable service delivery. However, as a former Bantustan, Thohoyandou is mostly comprised of poor communities who cannot afford to pay for privatized services. Consequently, development in the municipal water and sanitation services is also hindered by non-payment of service bills.

Unsafe water and poor sanitation expose the lives of people to risk factors which might lead to poor health. Proper health and hygiene education should be given to communities, especially those who use water from public taps, or maybe from boreholes and unpurified water sources. Safe drinking water and sanitation is of crucial importance to the preservation of human health.

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