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Understanding informal settlements in South Africa: the waterworks informal settlement profile and responses

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2019-10

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/29055

Nkoane, Adelaide Mahlatse. (2019). Understanding informal settlements in South Africa :the waterworks informal settlement profile and responses, University of the Witwatersrand, https://hdl.handle.net/10539/29055

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the proliferation of informal settlements in South Africa is significant because they have been a feature of our landscape for many years and will continue to be in the future in spite of the attention given to the issue of housing by the government through various housing delivery interventions. Studies have indicated that informal settlements provide shelter for a large number of people who are the poor urban dwellers. There are gaps in literature that demonstrate the distinction between informal settlements within the South African context, despite years of research conducted on informal settlements.

The differentiation of informal settlements contests the homogeneity of informal settlements that fall into groupings and sub-categories that require targeted interventions specific to their contexts. The Housing Development Agency (HDA, 2012) "is mandated to assist organs of State with the upgrading of informal settlements". One of its key activities is to profile informal settlements, particularly in mining towns, in order to understand the data "relating to the number of informal settlements, profile of residents, length of stay, aspirations, income groups, education status" (HDA, 2012:12).

Using this set of distinctions, this research aimed to understand the characteristics, dynamics and nature of the Waterworks informal settlement and where it lies within the bigger narrative of informal settlements. It therefore investigated the settlement's demographics, history, the reason for its existence, how it is understood by its residents, how it is understood in relation to scholarly articles and how it could be understood through government plans.

Key words: Housing backlog, Differentiation of informal settlements, Informal settlements groupings and typologies.