

## Housing for miners should provide jobs too

I fail to understand why it should take the deaths of 44 people - and a year of mourning for the lost loved-ones - to get someone to do something about housing in an area that should be awash with money.

 By [Paddy Hartdegen](#) 11 Sep 2013

But that is just one of the recent developments in the sad Marikana saga: for just ahead of the first anniversary of these slayings the Department of Human Settlements announced that it was putting R1,6-billion into upgrading the housing of 10 mining towns in the area this year and, for the next financial year a further R1,1-billion will be ploughed into this region.

Julie Bayat, the chief director for programming and project planning at the department told Parliament's portfolio committee on human settlements that the department "had been instructed" to improve the housing and living conditions in the four mining towns in the Bojanala district of North West province.

The towns are Marikana, Brits, Rustenburg and Moses Kotane.

The reasons for the deaths of the miners at Marikana are part of the on-going Farlam Commission of Inquiry and there has been much speculation and rumour about the events that unfolded on 16 August last year. I'm not going to explore any of these details until the commission's findings have been released.

### Slightly more affluent lifestyle

Whatever the reasons were, poor housing and squalid living conditions might have been quite high on the list of grumbles from miners who wanted more money, presumably to be able to enjoy a slightly more affluent lifestyle.

And that seems to be a common thread running throughout the housing problems that face South Africa right now: the demand for a more affluent and 'better' life than is being led by more than 14,8-million people in the country today.

The 2012 General Household Survey undertaken by Statistics South Africa shows that three out of every 10 households in South Africa rely on government grants as their only source of income. In the words of economist, Chris Hart, the government's social grant system is effectively the "soup kitchen for the country".

Almost 15-million people all wanting to enjoy a more affluent lifestyle, receive bigger grants, get better houses, live in more sustainable homes and have more nice things - all at the taxpayers' expense.

It's hardly a recipe for continued social upliftment or greater wealth creation: it's more likely a cauldron waiting to erupt in an explosion of unrest along the lines of the Arab Spring that unfolded in North Africa two years ago.

And it seems that the government's plan to upgrade the towns and communities of the Bojanala district underpins this: in essence the violence on the Marikana Koppie has been 'rewarded' with fundamental social improvements that may have contributed to the protests in the first place.

That's rather worrying because it won't be too long before other unemployed people rely on the government to feed and clothe them - at least in part anyway - may rebel in a similar way with random killings, mass public protests and rampaging mobs all demanding that something be done for them.

It's a bit like rewarding someone for having a violent tantrum.

## **Enablement**

I personally have no beef with the upgrading of housing in the Bojanala; I have no beef with the government wanting to do something to provide the bulk infrastructure that precedes any housing project and I certainly don't object to miners being paid what they are worth.

However, my concern is that any housing project should have - at its foundation - a component of enablement that provides employment opportunities and the option for local people to learn a skill while the housing work is being done.

Simply throwing a whole lot of money at the problem (and R2,7-billion over two years is a lot of money) and appointing private sector contractors who have tendered for the work does little or nothing for the community. Contractors move in, build houses and, like Bedouins, pack their camels and move along.

But it's jobs and skills that are needed alongside the houses for people to make their homes.

If international supply contracts must be underpinned by knowledge transfer and skills development then surely it stands to reason that local contracts - from a government department such as Human Settlements should be ruled by the same or similar principles.

Anyone will tell you that South Africa needs jobs; similarly they will insist that the private sector needs to do most of the development work on behalf of government. What seems to be missing is the insistence that opportunities - large scale opportunities - are created in return for the contract work being done on a project as large as the Bojanala housing project.

Surely that is a much wiser way to spend the money? Use it to get people productive and working within their own communities and get them off the social grant system so that there is even more money for upliftment.

## **ABOUT PADDY HARTDEGEN**

Paddy Hartdegen has been working as a journalist and writer for the past 40 years since his first article was published in the *Sunday Tribune* when he was just 16-years-old. He has written 13 books, edited a plethora of business-to-business publications and written for most of the major newspapers in South Africa.  
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