SERO Launches Two Research Publications

Today the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI) releases two research reports. These reports highlight the failure of the Johannesburg municipality to pursue just, humane and inclusive regeneration policies in its inner city.

The first of SERI’s two reports – Evictions and Alternative Accommodation in South Africa: An Analysis of the Jurisprudence and Implications for Local Government – responds to the fact that neither property owners nor municipalities have fully come to terms with the significant paradigm shift in the law relating to eviction and urban regeneration. Despite years of litigation and a host of progressive court judgments, which have substantially contributed to the constitutional right of access to adequate housing, municipalities like the City of Johannesburg are still failing to fulfill their duties in relation to evictions and the provision of alternative accommodation. The report identifies the range of legal principles governing the rights, duties and obligations of the various parties involved in eviction proceedings, particularly local government.

The second SERI report – Minding the Gap: An Analysis of the Supply of and Demand for Low-Income Rental Accommodation in Inner City Johannesburg – shows that, there are few formal housing options available to low-income and poor inner city residents. The private rental market does not supply anything that is affordable. Although there are a few institutions providing social housing at lower rentals, these institutions are extremely oversubscribed. According to the 2011 Census, almost half the households – consisting of approximately 122 000 people – living in the inner city earn less than R3 200 per month. These households – characterised by car guards, domestic workers, gardeners, cleaners, taxi drivers, informal traders, security guards, painters etc - can afford rent of R900 or less per month. The report concludes that there is almost no rental housing available to people in this income bracket. This means that large numbers of poor people have to live in squalid slum-like conditions for want of anything better.

However, the City’s urban regeneration policies actively promote the eviction of poor people from urban slums, assuming that alternative housing options exist. “Minding the Gap” shows that this is a false assumption, and that the City is simply not acting to provide viable alternatives to slum conditions for the urban poor. The City can do better. The report shows that, using a fraction of its budget surplus, the City could, in the next few years, eliminate the inner city housing crisis. The City just has to want to do it.

According to Stuart Wilson, executive director of SERI, “Both of the reports SERI releases today highlight the City of Johannesburg’s ongoing disregard for the urban poor. For many years now, the City has simply refused to respond the needs of its poorest citizens in a humane manner. It prefers eviction to the provision of housing and “clean sweeps” to the facilitation of small-scale economic activity, such as informal trading. A truly “World Class” city would work in partnership with the poor. But this municipality seems content to exclude them. That has to change.”

- Both reports and summaries are available at http://www.seri-sa.org/index.php/research-7/research-reports

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