



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Ground-breaking report unpacks 9-step process to release municipal land for affordable housing in the heart of cities**

**Cape Town, 15 May 2024** – Today marks the launch of a landmark report by the Development Action Group (DAG) with the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the National Association of Social Housing Organisations (NASHO): "*Releasing Municipal Land for Affordable Housing – Documenting the Experiences of Cape Town, eThekweni, Johannesburg, and Tshwane*".

The launch event at the Cape Milner Hotel brings together a large and diverse group of almost 100 stakeholders to engage with the report's insights and recommendations. The participants include policy-makers, public officials, researchers, property professionals, activists, community representatives and members of the media.

The report unpacks the intricacies of releasing well-located public land for affordable housing by drawing on the experiences of Cape Town, eThekweni, Johannesburg, and Tshwane metropolitan municipalities. Through case studies and key findings, the research demystifies the complex legal and technical procedures involved in the disposal of municipal land. It also identifies ways of strengthening the system in order to ensure successful outcomes.

The report focuses on land because this has been a major obstacle to the delivery of affordable housing in the heart of cities: "We wanted to understand how municipalities were using their own surplus land to drive investment in social housing and redress Apartheid spatial planning, particularly within neighbourhoods that are out of reach for low-income and working-class families", said Helen Rourke, Programme Director at DAG.

The report shows that each city has unique circumstances and experiences, yet there are also important similarities in the procedures being followed and the challenges faced. Releasing land for affordable housing involves crossing a minefield of legal, financial, administrative, and political hurdles. Get it wrong or take too long and the land never gets developed.

The report provides crucial insights into ways of streamlining land release to improve viability and expedite affordable housing delivery. One recommendation is to design more robust administrative systems and explicit guidelines to simplify and standardise the approval process so that decisions can be fast-tracked and not made piecemeal. Another is to improve internal coordination and technical capabilities so that municipal departments assist each other in releasing land for housing.



Professor Turok, from the HSRC and University of the Free State highlighted the importance of cities establishing a conveyor belt of suitable land parcels. “An explicit land policy for affordable housing would explain the support that municipalities can offer, the discounts available for social housing to be feasible, and the conditions attached to subsidised land release to protect public assets into the future. This would create greater certainty and reduce the risk that projects get delayed, aborted or diverted to other purposes.”

The report shows that when land is properly packaged and prepared by municipalities in advance of disposal, there is far less chance of things going wrong. According to Alan Dinnie from Profica, when sites are made ‘shovel ready’ through feasibility studies and rezoning upfront, they are far more likely to be developed after they have been released. This requires authorities to invest in additional skills and know-how.

Compliance with municipal bylaws and state regulations governing asset disposals is a crucial step towards building trust between developers and public officials. While these rules and procedures are often onerous and time-consuming, cutting corners in the past has led to serious project delays and damaged relationships between developers and city authorities.

Professor Turok highlighted the need for innovation in community participation. Investing in constructive engagement will improve transparency and promote understanding. Given the material and symbolic value of land, engaging the local community is vital to respond to people’s needs and fears, to benefit from their knowledge, and to obtain their consent so as to avoid court disputes, delays and even physical disruption.

The four major metros are making progress in refining their land release procedures and building a pipeline after much trial and error. Participants at the launch appreciated the opportunity to learn from each other and to share their experiences with people from other spheres of government in the hope that releasing public land for social and affordable housing can be scaled up to bring about more just and inclusive cities.

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**About DAG, HSRC, and NASHO:**

- The Development Action Group (DAG) is a leading non-profit organisation that is dedicated to promoting sustainable development and social justice in South Africa.
- The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) is South Africa's statutory research agency, conducting research that generates critical insights for a diverse and inclusive society.



- The National Association of Social Housing Organisations (NASHO) is a network of social housing practitioners committed to promoting access to affordable housing for all South Africans.

**Note to Editors:**

For additional insights, the report summary and detailed findings are available upon request.