

PRESS RELEASE

WESTERN CAPE INDUSTRY FORUM CALLS FOR LEGISLATED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO COMBAT CONSTRUCTION MAFIA

The property development and construction industry in the Western Cape is calling for policy implementation across all spheres of government that will ensure all development projects incorporate proactive community engagement from the time projects are deemed viable and hit the planning and design stage.

This comes in the wake of violent disruptions seen across the country on construction sites and often attributed to the construction mafia.

The call for reforms around community engagement and public participation in all tender and procurement policy related to the built environment is the main theme of a [position paper](#) prepared by the [Western Cape Property Development Forum \(WCPDF\)](#). This paper was released to the public on Thursday 9 March at an event hosted by [Concor Construction](#) on “Ensuring Constructive Community Engagement”, held at the [Conradie Park Precinct](#).

The WCPDF’s position paper is the result of a meeting held in December between project managers, urban designers/planners, non-profit organisations involved in affordable housing and construction, civil and structural engineers, property developers and the legal fraternity.

Speaking at the 9 March event, Concor’s Property Development Executive, Mark Shonrock, stressed that: “Ground-up community engagement has become crucial to the success of any development project in South Africa. It is also what formed the backbone of the Conradie Park Precinct project, and has enabled us to deliver on the development to date without disruption.”

Conradie Park – a 22-hectare mixed-use, mixed-income social housing development that will ultimately be home to 3 600 residents - is a partnership between Concor Construction and the Western Cape Government.

Says Deon van Zyl, Chairperson of the WCPDF its success is significant: “That there has been no disruption to date on this site is extremely noteworthy, given that the construction mafia has largely targeted public projects here in the Western Cape and indeed across the country.”

Commenting further on the WCPDF’s position paper, made public at the event, Van Zyl acknowledged that there were multiple prime factors at both public and private sector levels that had escalated discord on construction sites.

Noting that the country’s economic crisis, with a real 47% unemployment and the almost complete stagnation of government infrastructure procurement were the main factors at play, the paper also notes government’s inability to act on the violence from a SAPS and law enforcement involvement. It further notes private development’s reluctance among its more formal sector to share networks, leads and opportunities that would enable those hoping to enter the development field to do so.

A lack of commitment from government organisations, specifically involved in the built environment (such as the CIDB and the NHBRC) is also seeing the mandates of these organisations fail – specifically around the growth of new building contractor capacity and skills in informal areas – and especially in the relevant fields where these are most required.

Commenting on the challenges highlighted in the paper, Executive Director of [Master Builders Association Western Cape](#), Roekeya Bardien adds: “There are other issues also at play, such as the Expanded Public Works Programme [EPWP].

“Even its most recent review, the Department of Labour has recommended that the wages of labourers involved in EPWP projects be 45% the gazette minimum wage and 61% lower than Bargaining Council rates. How can we have anything other than discord on public sector construction sites when some are being paid significantly lower than others?”

Bardien also notes the need for the industry to recognize that activities on construction sites were: “...not just a contractor’s problem,” adding: “Contractors are usually the ones at the coal face when disruption occurs and are often not equipped with the skills to deal with the intense negotiation and facilitation required in such situations.

“The responsibility lies with the employer, who must take ownership of the community engagement process before the contractor even arrives on site. Contractors have accepted that they are part of the process, but they cannot be the driving force behind it and cannot be the face of it all.”

Zama Mgwatyu, Programme Manager at the [Development Action Group \(DAG\)](#) which also supports the WCPDF's position paper, notes the important role that Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) needed to play in all development processes. And, ideally, such CLOs should be appointed through as highly an open, participatory and democratic process as possible by the communities involve.

Explains Mgwatyu: "Stakeholder management can no longer be the tick-box experience it has been in the past. It should be ever-present, running parallel to a project at all times."

It was also of concern to Mgwatyu, that CLOs were traditionally not widely recognized by the professional built environment: "As it is, other built environment specialists on projects - such as engineers, architects and the like- come and go. They are only involved in certain stages. But the team on the ground liaising with the community needs to stay constant. How then does the industry start to recognise the value of these appointments and add them onto their professional teams from the start?"

The position paper also pays tribute to various organisations and companies that have already stepped up in recent years to ensure community engagement forms part and parcel of their projects from inception.

Says workgroup co-ordinator of the WCPDF's position paper and Rohloff Group Development Executive, Kabous Fouche: "Much of what we read about in the press is only about the disruptions and violence on site, but there are companies that have been highly proactive in the field of effective community engagement for years.

"We hope that some of the examples and ideas contained in the paper will be seen as strategies that can be adopted, and that legislation to incorporate the right kind of community engagement becomes embedded into all policy that deals with built environment projects – private or public."

-ENDS-

To view the WCPDF's position paper "Community Engagement and the Construction Mafia", please click [here](#).

For more information on the Western Cape Property Development Forum, please click [here](#).

For media enquires please email Carola Koblitz on media@wcpdf.org.za or WhatsApp 082 568 161.