

In the face of climate change and global warming, housing developers should prioritize sustainable shared living arrangements in community schemes developments

The world we live in is undergoing major ecological changes that will affect the future of humanity in terms of human settlements, harmonious and shared living. As the globe warms up there is a trend of new weather patterns that never existed as far as we can remember especially in our (South African) part of the world.

According to the department of Environmental Affairs research data on (fact sheet on climate change adaptation) "It is estimated that the total cost of weather-related disasters between 2000 and 2009 was approximately R 9.2 billion...". The document further states that "**Floods:** In March 2003 and April 2005 the Western Cape experienced floods, because of cut off lows, which resulted in up to R 260 million in damages; **Fires:** Between 2007 and 2008 KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga experienced fires that resulted in significant loss of revenue, estimated at R 4,3 billion. **Storm surge:** In 2007 and 2008 the damage to coastal property and infrastructure was estimated at R 1 billion. In the Western Cape, losses of up to R 12.5 million were experienced between 2003 and 2007. The cost estimates for this year's Qheberha and Durban floods disasters are still being determined, but last Year's Eastern Cape disaster costs are at about R4.5 billion, with the estimated cost for *human settlements stands at R420 million, for all the recoveries.*

Housing developers play a crucial role in addressing climate change by adopting sustainable practices and designing energy-efficient buildings. Here are some key aspects of their involvement:

- **Sustainable Materials**:** Developers can choose eco-friendly materials that reduce carbon footprints, such as recycled steel, bamboo, and sustainably sourced wood.
- **Energy Efficiency**:** Incorporating energy-efficient technologies, such as LED lighting, high-efficiency HVAC systems, and proper insulation, can significantly reduce energy consumption in homes.
- **Renewable Energy**:** Integrating renewable energy sources, like solar panels and wind turbines, can help homes generate their own electricity and decrease reliance on fossil fuels.
- **Green Certifications**:** Many developers seek certifications like LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) to ensure their projects meet high environmental standards.
- **Water Management**:** Implementing efficient water management systems, such as rainwater harvesting and drought-resistant landscaping, helps conserve water resources.
- **Sustainable Urban Planning**:** Developers can contribute to sustainable communities by creating walkable neighborhoods, promoting public transportation, and preserving green spaces.
- **Resilience Planning**:** Designing homes to withstand extreme weather events (like floods and heatwaves) is critical in a changing climate.
- **Community Engagement**:** Involving communities in the planning process can ensure that developments meet local needs and prioritize sustainability.

By implementing these strategies, housing developers can significantly impact mitigating climate change and promoting sustainable living.

Sustainable Urban Planning becomes a key aspect that shared living can contribute positively to climate change. These as indicated above relates to developers creating walkable neighborhoods, promoting public transportation, and preserving green spaces.

This urban evolution has spurred a surge in residential property developments that emphasize shared living among citizens hailing from diverse regions, both within the country, across the continent, and globally. The favourable climate in the country leads to relatively lower cost of living, and a culturally vibrant atmosphere has attracted a diverse population. As a result, there has been significant growth in mixed-income housing, where high-earning and low-income individuals share common amenities, residing in similar residential estates and gated communities.

Living in such shared communities, residents are protected by various pieces of legislation that makes it easy for them to regulate each parties' conduct as well as find alternative and cheaper dispute resolution



Ms Kedibone Phetla

Acting Chief Ombud: Community Schemes Ombudsman Services

mechanisms should conflicts and dispute occur. Such disputes occur a lot as residents must share many common amenities and equally contribute to costs associated with reconstruction of those common areas should they be impacted by natural disasters caused by climate change. It is for this reason that there exists a legislation in the form of Community Schemes Ombud Service Act (CSOS Act) and Sectional Titles Schemes Management Act (STSM Act).

Amongst the first requirements by housing developers is that they have to register a community scheme with the Community Schemes Ombud Service (CSOS before they register with the deeds office.. The scheme is then required by the legislation that is articulated in the CSOS Act and STSM Act to ensure that they have set up a clear constitution, governance framework and compliance in such a manner that all residents in the scheme live harmoniously and their constitutional rights are protected.

Amongst the key tasks and responsibilities of the scheme is to ensure that they set up rules and regulations that are not just constitutionally compliant, but will keep residents' properties safe, clean, environmentally sustainable and have proper insurance coverage should the scheme be impacted by natural disasters because of climate change.

Schemes are mandated to hold annual general meetings to report to residents on the utilization of levies and funds for property maintenance, safety, and other essential activities, including oversight of managing agents responsible for property upkeep. Today, the responsibilities of property developers extend beyond mere scheme registration; they must anticipate and mitigate environmental risks that have become integral to daily life. This includes establishing adequate maintenance reserves to foster sustainable development practices.

Conclusion: It is imperative for property developers to adopt a proactive stance in addressing environmental challenges and ensure robust financial planning to support sustainable development initiatives. By fulfilling governance obligations and preparing for environmental contingencies, developers can contribute to resilient and thriving communities in the face of ongoing environmental changes.

Article Written by:

Ms Kedibone Phetla

Acting Chief Ombud: Community Schemes Ombudsman Services

Note: CSOS will be hosting an Indaba in Polokwane, Limpopo Province on 12th & 13th September 2024