# The Challenge of Homelessness and its Implications to City Planning: A Case Study of Doornfontein, City of Johannesburg

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## Abstract

City of Johannesburg is the largest city and one of the fastest growing cities in South AfricaWith the development encircling a progressive community, Johannesburg has experienced a variety of spatial changes. In order to meet inner city spatial needs, spatial strategists in the city continue to search for new and innovative spatial tools. The city's housing problems are caused by unaffordable housing, unemployment and by existing policies that are ineffective. Despite this, the city has a comprehensive strategy to address homelessness, social integration and urban regeneration. The strategy, however, is hampered by factors such as the lack of financial backing and substandard implementation. This paper at finding sustainable tools that can be used to address the state of homelessness in the City of Johannesburg and South Africa urban areas. It followed a case study design to understand the underlying causes of homelessness in the city and the extract the meaning in the experiences of homeless individuals in Johannesburg. Data was collected via a series of interviews with the city's planning officials and the homeless individuals in the Doornfontein area. An analysis of policies aimed at addressing homelessness at both the national level and the local level (City of Johannesburg) was conducted to understand what are main hinderances in the implementation of strategies aimed at addressing homelessness.

## Keywords
Homelessness, Housing, Urban Policy, Doornfontein, City of Johannesburg

## 1. Introduction
In recent years, the number of homeless people has increased rapidly. Homelessness is not a new phenomenon, but it has become a major social problem in today's society. In urban areas, the homeless are visible to the masses but neglected by society's negative perceptions (Belcher and DeForge, 2012). Homelessness is precipitated by multiple factors, and it poses multi-dimensional challenges. Moreover, these challenges cut across the concept of sustainability. The level of the impact associated with the challenges contributes to increased durability, frequency of occurrence, and produces other forms of homelessness (Donley, 2008). In South Africa, particularly Johannesburg, the number of homeless individuals increase daily. This increase in homeless individuals gives rise to spatial and social concerns. Urban spaces get smaller as the number of destitute people increases. Governments, therefore, are left with no choice but to find employable solutions toward tackling this phenomenon. In South Africa's pursuit of urban sustainability, the issue of reducing the amount of homelessness in the country's cities is always at the forefront (Naidoo, 2010). Thus, to respond to the issue of homelessness, the government have come up with different tools, mostly in the form of policy and legislation to address the challenge of homelessness in the country. It has been noted by several scholars that the homelessness in urban areas is at its worst in the country (Cross & Seager, 2010; Du Toit, 2010; Sadiki & Steyn, 2021) and urban spaces lack the necessary accommodation and homelessness intervention strategies. There have been many factors that contributes to the homelessness challenge in the country, and these include migration; shortage in affordable housing; increasing unemployment; social and economic policies; and social disintegration (Cross & Seager, 2010). This paper starts by giving a brief background on the socio-economic challenges that South Africa face as result of the draconian system of apartheid, then it moves on to look at what other scholars have written on the issues of homelessness across the globe. It then focuses on the study area, which is the Doornfontein area in Johannesburg, it then moves on to discuss the methodology used to conduct this study which is the qualitative method by using interview and surveys. Lastly the paper will discuss the results that were obtained from conducting this study.

## 2. Background
The homelessness issue in the country and in particular Johannesburg is attributed to the country's political past (De Beer & Vally, 2015). Gold in Johannesburg was discovered in 1886, the discovery sparked interest in different parts of the world. It also increased international migration as well as rural-urban migration. The different migrants formed an integral part of Johannesburg's society, like in most countries composed of different races, South Africa experienced racism and segregation. Racial and socio-economic divisions became a part of Johannesburg's history. Due to these divisions and transgressions toward the black population, most of the black communities were hindered. The black population could not climb financial ranks and they could not acquire appropriate housing. Moreover, black people were the ones who were affected the most (Chenwi, 2008). More than 70% of the population was black, confined to very limited land, given equal opportunity, and discriminated against in every way. South Africa's apartheid rule has contributed significantly to the country's homelessness problem. The apartheid mechanism forced people out of their former homes, destroyed slums, denied documentation to citizens, and encouraged racism. Black people were disadvantaged members of the community. They were taken from their homeland. They were then destroyed. The apartheid government claimed land to build settlements, mines and farmlands exclusively for whites. Many blacks became homeless. The situation improved when apartheid was abolished. Johannesburg and its suburbs are now home to Black professionals from different parts of Africa, Europe, and the U.S. Even though the black population have acquired political relief, they still had had a whole lot of challenges they faced in their new earned democracy. The struggle to find peace and unity in South Africa was a continuous battle that was going to take time especially after the centuries of mistrust, abuse, and discrimination. Majority of the population was still staying on the outskirts of the cities and this still the case today.

Throughout years, Johannesburg was the financial capital of South Africa, thus attracting economic migrants to the city. Johannesburg is a city with many opportunities to improve one's livelihood, including job opportunities, access to education, health care and services (Phosho & Gumbo, 2022). Many people come to this city in order to take advantage of these chances and build a prosperous future for themselves. Some of these people migrating from economically disadvantaged areas to economically favorable parts such as Johannesburg end up being homeless. It has been noted that both internal and external economic migrants have a high chance of ending up homeless due to lack or less opportunities in the City of Johannesburg.

## 3. Literature Review

In South Africa, the concept of homelessness has been studied in the context of policies, health, urban planning, social studies amongst others. Many of the studies conducted in these various fields show that there is an upward trajectory of homelessness in South Africa (De Beer & Vally, 2015; Roets et al., 2016:624). For this paper homelessness will be view from a social studies' perspective, where "homelessness can be seen through the concepts of culture, social structure, socialization, social interaction, organization, deviation, on the main components of society" (Smelser, 1994: 687). This section of the paper will focus on studies that have been done of the concept of homelessness. Somerville (1992) states that homelessness is multi-dimensional, and its meaning vary from context to context. This is particularly true in a South African perspective as it is mostly caused by socio-spatial displacement of people due to the country's apartheid policies and the ravaging poverty caused by socio-economic factors (Kok et al., 2010), in contrast to the developed countries where homelessness is mainly attributed to an individual's household and circumstances (Tipple & Speak, 2009). Homelessness is not only a matter having a roof over one's head. Homelessness can be defined as "the situation of an individual, family, or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect means and ability of acquiring it" (Gaetz et al., 2012). "Homelessness" is the visible manifestation of being without shelter (Naidoo, 2010). However, the nature and extent of socio-economic poverty in South Africa is not well defined by a broader definition, where a significant number of people have access to shelter, but the quality of these structures is judged to be insufficient. It leads to the concept of the homeless grouped under an umbrella (Naidoo, 2010). This broader definition of homelessness, which includes both lack and poor quality of shelter, has been used by many researchers in relation to South Africa. Most notably, Olufemi (1998), in her survey of inner-city Johannesburg, defines homelessness among other things as: [as well as] people living on the streets and sidewalks (chronically or temporarily homeless)". Elsewhere, he notes that several social and economic factors have "increased" the risk of homelessness: poverty, inability to pay rent, unemployment, family breakdown, physical abuse, lack of skills, partial or no education, and violence (Olufemi, 2002: 460). Aliber (2002) similarly describes the homeless as an 'amorphous category' among the poor, generally meaning hundreds of thousands of people living in informal squatter settlements. In describing the economic conditions of this segment of the poor, he notes that '[m]any are former farm workers… wage earners in urban areas who cannot afford decent housing there, and for whom the costs of commuting into and out of the city are a significant burden' (Aliber, 2002:12). Erasmus & Du Toit (2005), in an article on city government responses to homelessness, also describes the social and economic complexities associated with broader definitions of homelessness.

## 4. Study Area

The study focuses on the nexus between homelessness and social inclusion within the City of Johannesburg, specifically New Doornfontein located in Region F. New Doornfontein is in region F of the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality (CoJ), Gauteng province as shown on Figure 1 below. It forms part of the old central business district, and it is currently undergoing socioeconomic reform. This can be seen with newer business developments and institutional advancements in the city. From a city perspective, CoJ has an approximate population

of over 5.5 million 4 million with a population growth of 2.5% annually (CoJ Integrated Development Plan (IDP), (Stats SA, 2020).
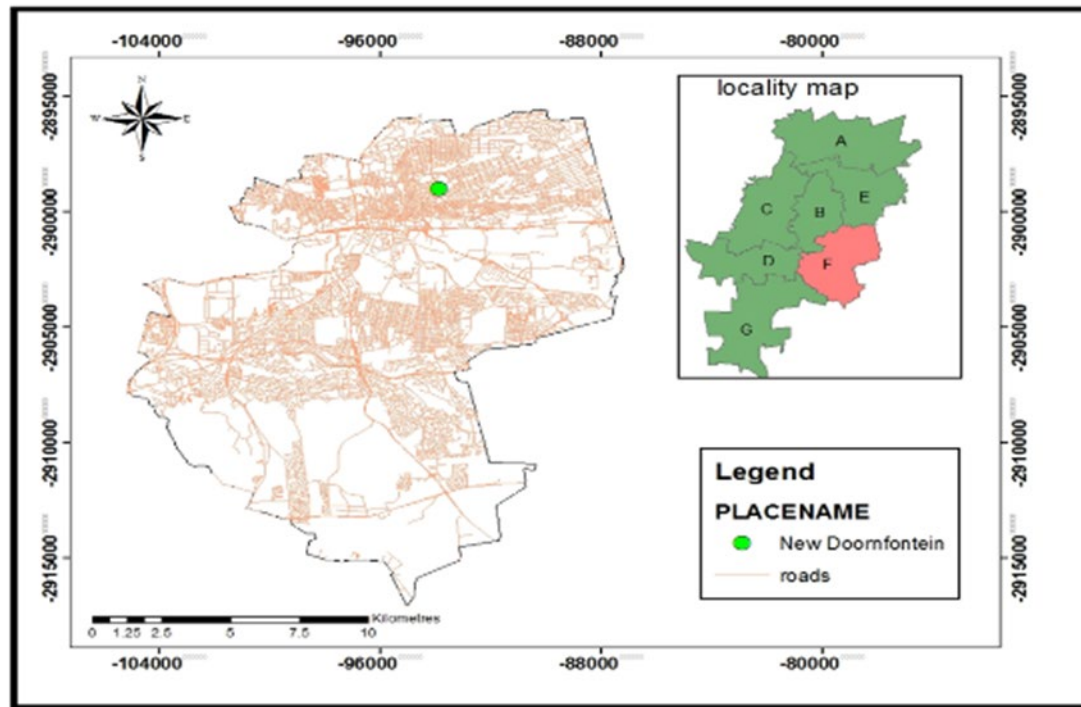


Figure 1: New Doornfontein Locality Map; Source: (Author's compilation, 2021)

This area includes central or downtown Johannesburg. This area is the site of the City of Gold's first mining camp, founded in the late 19th century (CoJ, 2018). Region F has a mix of high- and low-income residential areas and many older heavy industry nodes. In the 1980s and 90s, business investments moved to decentralized hubs, thus leaving region F and some parts of the CBD deteriorated, and urban corruption spread to the surrounding areas (CoJ, 2018).

## 5. Methodology

As the research is exploratory in nature, it followed a case study design as it seeks to find answers as to what can be done to improve the challenges of homelessness. A case study design paves way for an in-depth study of the area of study. It is specific to the study area, or the cases explored and thus reduces and centralizes the scale of the study. The study focused on the New Doornfontein area in region F of City of Johannesburg. The sample size for this study was 30 individuals whereby 25 were homeless individuals who resided in the region F of the City of Johannesburg and 5 individuals were municipal officials who worked for the City of Johannesburg. For the respondents of the study, homeless people were selected at random. The officials and other stakeholders, however, were selected based on the case study research design, and thus the sampling method for them was purposive. Qualitative data collection methods were used for this study. Interviews were conducted with municipal officials and some homeless people in the study area of New Doornfontein. For the homeless individuals, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Observations and photographic surveys were also used as a method of data collection for the sturdy. Data was analyzed through content analysis and thematic analysis.

## 5. Results and Discussion
### 5.1 Biographic Analysis
The following is a biographic analysis of a total of 30 respondents who took part in the questionnaire survey (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic composition

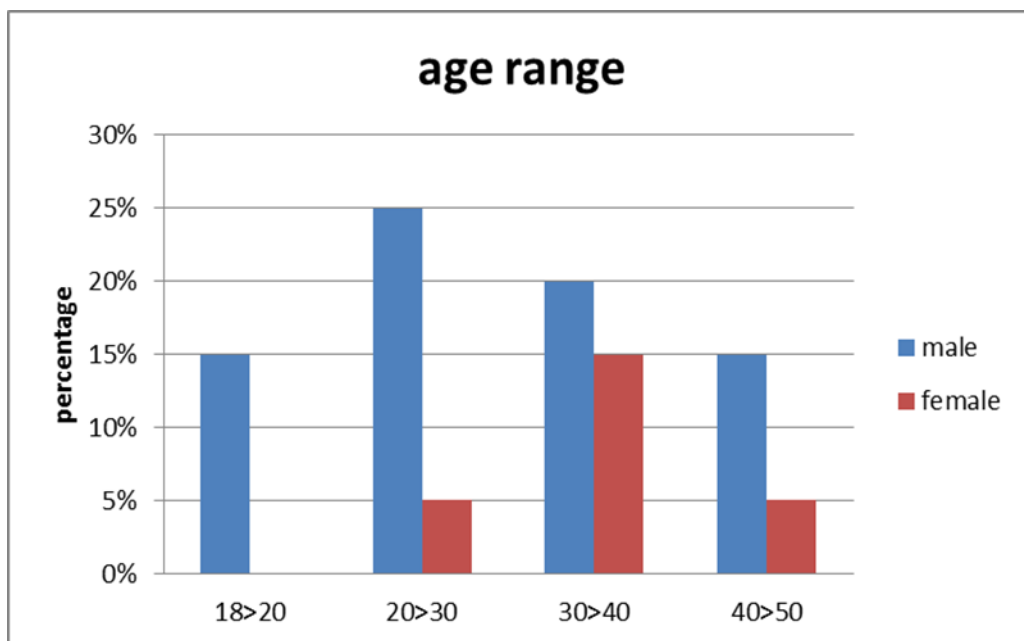| Demographics | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | Male | Female | %age (%) |
| 18>20 | 15% | 0 | 15% |
| 20>30 | 25% | 5% | 30% |
| 30>40 | 20% | 15% | 35% |
| 40>50 | 15% | 5% | 20% |
| Total | 0.75 | 0.25 | 100% |



Figure 2. Graphical age presentation

The Figure 2 above illustrates age and gender information taken from homeless people within the study area (Sobantu, 2020) in the New Doornfontein area. The graph portrays the age range of homeless people in the study area. 15% of the males are teenagers and 0% of females are homeless. It illustrates that 25% of the males and 5% of females are aged 20 to 30 years old. 20% of the male and 15% of females are aged 30 years old to 40 years old. Only 15% of the males and 5% of the females are aged 40 years old to 50 years old. The results indicate that there is a larger group of men than women in this study area. The results found that 75% of the homeless are men, while the remaining 25% are women.
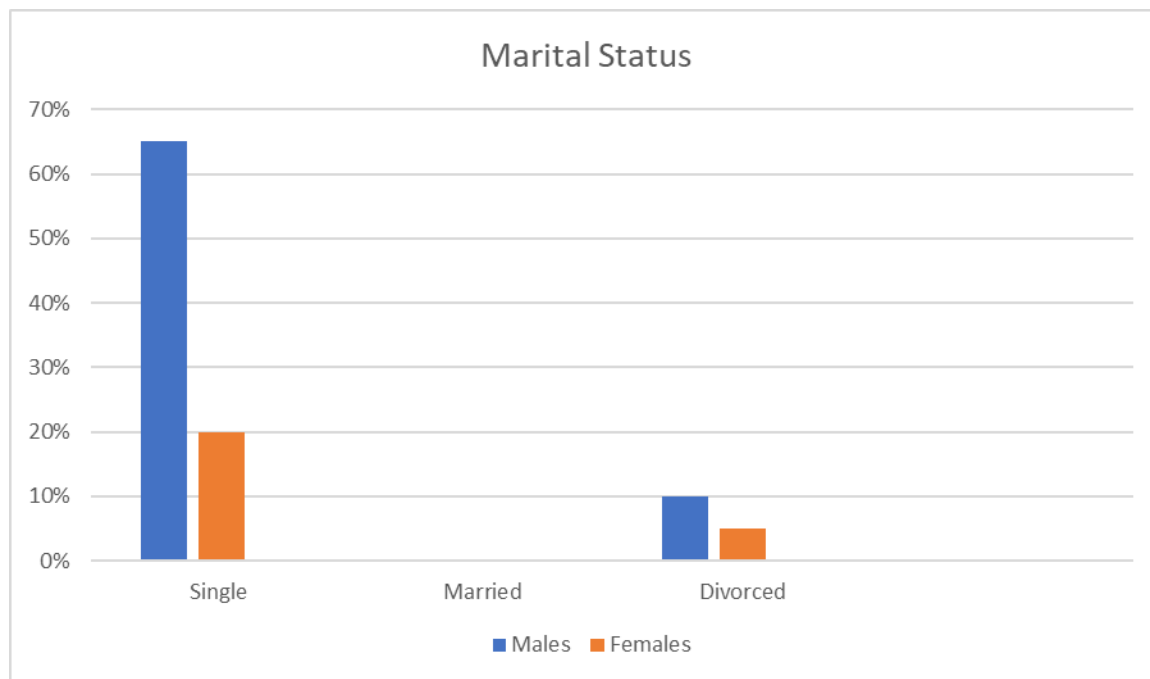
Figure 3. Marital status composition

None of the participants were found to be married. However, some have been married before. The study found that 65% of the males are single and 20% of females are single, thus up to 85% of the homeless group being single. 15% of the respondents have been divorced (10% men and 5% women). An African male respondent within the age group 40-50 years shared that: "*I got divorced and my uncle took almost everything I owned, then eventually I took everything. That is why I am here today*". This has been observed to be one of the reasons which have caused homelessness. Social entanglements such as marriage and various relationships have had an impact on the lives of homeless people (Figure 3).
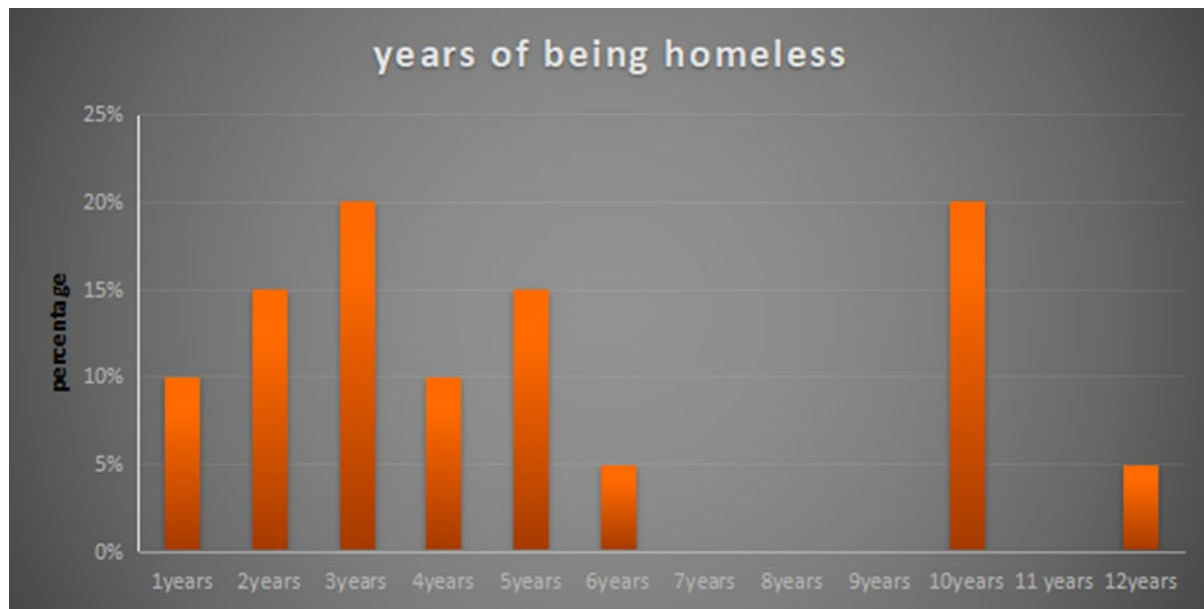
Figure 4. Duration of being homeless

The results above show the duration spent in a state of homelessness (Figure 4). The demographics are comprised of young and old people, Black, White, and other races. The number of years spent on homelessness differ. The graph indicates that 10% of the respondents have been homeless for one year, 15% of the respondents have been homeless for 2 years. 20% of the respondents have been homeless for 3 years and 10 % have been homeless for 4 years. 15% of the respondents have been homeless for 5 years and 5% for 6 years. The graph further shows that 20% of the respondents have been homeless for 10 years and only 5% of the respondents have been homeless for 12 years.

Social well-being plays a role in the number of years that one spends on the streets. Individuals such as those who have spent more than a decade on the streets (12 years and above) lose their identity. This has happened to some as they have lost connection with their families and other loved ones.

## 5.2 Policies tackling homelessness

In the National Housing Policy, there are no sections that are focused specifically on homelessness. Currently, homelessness is confronted through various policy interventions e.g (RDP housing, and Breaking New Ground) The street homeless, however, are unaccountably excluded by the local authority for housing on the defined priority groups list. Registering for social housing requires documents for which the majority of the street homeless do not have. Preference is, therefore, given to people who are registered for government housing schemes.

Finnemore and Van der Merwe (1996) deliberated that despite the growing numbers of people getting social housing, it is an unrealistic option for street people to reach for the same heights, due to the exclusionary grounds that filter them out from acquiring their property. Adler (1994) maintained that it is important to acknowledge government efforts in providing housing to the homeless because before the democratic dispensation the housing delivery processes to the homeless has been discriminative and marginal in nature.

Although the South African government has managed to aid people through social housing which was greatly pushed by the RDP policy and the BNG policy among other policies. Ground level and Municipal panning level finds it difficult to deliver housing to the bulk of South Africans, much speculation about what inhibits the delivery process gyrates around corruption, the mismanagement of funds, lack of planning, policy, and urban management.

These factors precipitate actions such as land speculation and land grabbing where the majority of homeless individuals invade the land and build homes on them. According to Marutlule (2021), the formation of informal settlements and other forms of illegal land occupations are due to administrative confusion, institutional restructuring, and the absence of clear policy. As such, the housing backlog continues to be a social problem. Currently, the social housing backlog is 2.1 million (Marutlule, 2021). The backlog indicates the number of people in need of housing, however, it is unclear how many of the people are homeless.

### 5.3 Intervention to Address Homelessness in the City of Johannesburg
### 5.3.1 Creation of more jobs

Better paying and more secure jobs are necessary if Johannesburg going to effectively combat poverty and homelessness. People have a chance to leave homelessness if they have access to sufficient employment possibilities. Promoting transitional jobs, subsidized positions, career programs, and social enterprises with built-in social assistance for persons facing significant impediments to employment could accomplish this.

### 5.3.2 Better Housing and Housing Systems

There is a necessity for housing that offers low-income people safety, reasonable rent, and respectable living circumstances. Many shelters accommodate a sizable number of people who work full-time but are unable to pay for basic costs like rent, leaving them in a state of homelessness. Dealing with homelessness should focus on finding people permanent housing. The number of homeless people can be drastically decreased by offering permanent housing aid, ending the cycle and preventing recurrence.

The city can also introduce housing system systems such as Permanent Supportive Housing, Rapid Rehousing and Shared Housing programmes. The *Permanent Supportive Housing* programme is mainly intended to provide a long-term solution to the problem of homelessness. For the most vulnerable members of the community who are experiencing chronic homelessness, the service provides long-term rental assistance in affordable housing, social services (including health care), and individualized case management. As participants reintegrate into society, the program develops a long-term solution to homelessness by offering tools that foster independent living skills.

*Rapid Rehousing* programme assist with reducing the amount of time a household is homeless is the aim of quick rehousing. This approach decreases the detrimental impacts of prolonged exposure to living without a home by shortening the amount of time families are homeless. This strategy links households to long-term stability through supportive community services and permanent housing, preventing them from temporarily returning to the streets. The main objectives of this strategies is to help homeless individuals and families with finding housing, helping with rent and moving expenses, and providing individualized community resources to promote a family's stability.

The *Shared Housing* programme involve two or more people using the same house and sharing the cost of rent and other amenities. It is a quick solution for people leaving shelters. This service lessens isolation with assistance from others who have experienced homelessness and offers affordable and flexible accommodation with like-minded people. It also offers a comprehensive housing solution to maximize the utilization of vacant homes.

Johannesburg could adopt a "housing first approach," which would provide in-home services to aid people in stabilizing and maintaining their housing or provide financial assistance for private housing. The state should create and put into effect laws to increase the housing options available to the homeless. It should also make sure that homeless shelters do not discharge clients who do not have a viable housing plan, such as by attempting to reunite them with their family

## 6. Conclusion

Homelessness continues to plague the city of Johannesburg, and the strategies that are in place to tackle it are tools that are compatible with some political objectives. When carefully analyzed, the extent to which inner city planning will change depends on the infrastructure, allocation of housing, the demographics in the city and population growth. Although homelessness strategies are there to curb the increasing numbers of homeless people, it is still questionable as to whether or not the issue will be resolved. To achieve utmost efficiency, contemporary city planners and policy makers should develop strategies that incorporate infrastructure and proper management. The South African government has done its best to fight against homelessness, nevertheless, there is still much to be done. The policies have been used as regulatory bodies that assess what works and what does not. This enables the government to evaluate the effect of different policy changes and establish a district that will provide support and push additional change.

South African city planners should aim to accomplish both objectives. Moreover, the government should continue to seek new solutions to make service delivery significantly easier and executable. The polices are always different from normal economic empowerment policies, and the fiscal often vary from the ones that regulate the economy. Be that as it may be, the government must also use the current policies to develop and explore new policy choices. Being able to develop these policies will enable the government to prevent policy clashes and integrate a more formidable framework for tackling homelessness. So far, the government has managed to tackle homelessness through current policy objectives. This has been achieved through the provision of social housing and having various regulatory bodies that provide aid to the different demographics of homelessness. Even though there has been substantial changes and progress in the housing delivery process, the journey towards reducing the rising number of homeless people is long. The population keeps on rising, and the socio-economic requirements keep on changing, therefore requiring a constant

change in executable policies. These constant social changes constantly remind the South African government of the effort that is required to fully tackle this issue.

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