In many ways, South Africa is a study in contrasts. Its housing can be as lavish as the most exclusive enclaves in San Francisco, and more challenged than favelas in Brazil. The country contains both the stunning natural beauty of the Cape of Good Hope and sprawling urban centers like Port Elizabeth. Suburbs of Port Elizabeth resemble housing in southern California—complete with stucco and palm trees. In September 2013, I had the opportunity to attend the Southern African Housing Foundation’s annual conference as part of a five-member NAHRO delegation led by then-Senior Vice President (current NAHRO President) Preston Prince and CEO Saul Ramirez. In my few days in South Africa and conversations that followed, I learned first-hand about housing challenges in South Africa and the work of public and private actors to address them. This article results from a series of dialogues with participants in the conference, my own experience and research.

NAHRO’s partnership with the Southern African Housing Foundation (SAHF) developed over the past decade as a result of the keen interest of professionals in South Africa’s housing industry and the initiative of leadership in both organizations. South Africans made an extraordinary effort to reach out to counterparts in
the U.S., in spite of the distance. The efforts of both SAHF’s Chief Executive Officer, John Hopkins and Lawrence Ramashamole of the Housing Association of East London (HAEL) have been instrumental in advancing SAHF’s relationship with NAHRO. Mr. Ramashamole’s groundbreaking work to bring the two organizations together earned him NAHRO’s prestigious John D. Lange International Award in 2004.

Like NAHRO, SAHF is a national membership organization that tries to bring together disparate groups to forge and pursue a common agenda. However, SAHF has assumed that challenge in a developing country nearly twice the size of Texas, with 48 million residents and 11 official languages. While affordable housing has a long history in South Africa as well, the industry here has less than 20 years of experience following the end of apartheid. The country’s housing industry is being led by a new generation of professionals, many of whom came of age in post-apartheid South Africa. They approach their work with an intense desire to address local housing challenges and learn from other countries. While there many differences, common challenges of affordable housing delivery and historic parallels with the U.S. on issues of race and equity have formed the basis for shared learning and a growing partnership between the two organizations.

South Africa’s Housing Crisis

While there are parallels between the housing situations of both nations, the scale of the affordable housing need in South African cities is unlike anything experienced in the United States. In the United States, lack of affordable housing is reflected in homelessness, crowded conditions in existing housing and increased percentage of household income required to cover housing costs. In South Africa, the housing crisis is massive and highly visible. Large “informal settlements” have formed on the
edges of cities. These are generally poorly constructed shacks that in many cases are built in areas not appropriate for housing — along highway rights-of-way, underneath power lines or in "backyards" behind existing housing units — and are often lacking even the very basic services of water, sewage and electricity.

Like the homeless population in the United States, current, reliable data on informal settlements in South Africa is elusive. Even so, official estimates reflect the magnitude of the problem. A 2012 report by South Africa's Housing Development Agency (HDA) estimates that nearly 1.4 million households live in informal settlements. More than 400,000 households live in "backyard shacks" behind existing dwelling units.¹ The HDA report documented informal settlements of varying sizes in every province in South Africa. Many people live in "squatter camps": collections of shacks lacking roads and utilities. For community development professionals in the United States, an analogy to the magnitude of the problem would be recovery from a natural disaster like Hurricane Katrina, that damaged 1.2 million housing units.² However, the crisis is unfolding in a country with a weaker economy and limited resources to respond.

South Africa's housing industry is in many ways defined by the recovery from apartheid, the system of racial segregation imposed by the white minority government through a series of laws beginning in 1948.³ Apartheid ended with an election in 1994 that gave Nelson Mandela the presidency and the adoption of a new constitution in 1996.

³ The term "apartheid" literally means "apartness" in the Afrikaans language. A goal of apartheid was to completely separate people of different races in every aspect of public and private life. In the 1950s, apartheid was enforced by a series of acts that legislated longstanding exclusionary practices. The brutality and scope of those laws is breathtaking. Key elements included the Population Registration Act, in which South Africans were categorized by race, the Group Areas Act, which divided the country into geographic areas set aside for use by separate racial categories and created a pass system for travel of black South Africans through the country. The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 segregated public and private facilities based on race. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 required separate (inadequate) public education for black children. Laws banned intermarriage and sexual contact between races (Sonnenborn, Liz. "The End of Apartheid in South Africa," (Infobase Publishing, 2010, pp. 47-48).
However, nearly 50 years of racial segregation, oppression and systematic disenfranchisement under apartheid created conditions that have been stubbornly resistant to change. Although cities are more diverse, apartheid-era townships remain racially segregated and isolated from jobs and economic opportunities in central cities, creating a situation now acknowledged as unsustainable. Characterized by rows of matchbox houses, they accommodated low-income workers serving the white minority.

In a clear response to apartheid housing policies, the 1996 South African constitution includes a bill of rights that specifies access to housing as a right and provides legal protections against forced evictions and home demolitions. Households earning less than 3500 South African rand (about US $350) per month are now entitled to fully subsidized (free) housing. Housing professionals call these “RDP houses,” shorthand for the Reconstruction and Development Program instituted in 1994 by the government of Nelson Mandela. The affordable, or subsidized housing market serves households with incomes between $350-750 per month; higher-income households are served by the private market.

However, the new majority government has lacked the resources to fully deliver on that constitutional right. While ending a profound injustice, the removal of apartheid-era restrictions created an immediate housing crisis, as people who were previously restricted from doing so came to cities looking for employment and a better life. These new arrivals found cities lacking the housing, infrastructure or economic opportunities to support them. The result has been the proliferation of the large, informal settlements discussed previously. The impact has been compounded by the migration to cities that is taking place across Africa. We learned that owners of existing subsidized housing units frequently rent out shacks behind their homes to generate income. In Port Elizabeth, those shacks can generate 250-300 rand per month for the property owner. The practice is being driven, at least in part, by the huge unmet need for affordable housing here. Roger Matlock of the GM South Africa Foundation (GMSAF) described the housing challenge as “[M]assive. In Port Elizabeth, you would need to build 50 houses a day just to meet the demand.”

Roger Matlock, personal communication, October 1, 2013.

South African Housing Resources

Southern African Housing Foundation: www.sahf.org.za

GM South Africa Foundation: www.gmsouthafricafoundation.com

National Association of Social Housing Organisations (NASHO): www.nasho.org.za

Social Housing Regulatory Authority (SHRA): www.shra.org.za


5 Eligibility for free homes is defined under chapter 5.3.1 of the National Housing Policy and strategy of 1994. For more information visit http://www.info.gov.za/whitepapers/1994/housing.htm#5.3

PHOTO COURTESY HOUSING ASSOCIATION OF EAST LONDON

Wealth in South Africa: private estates in East London.
Examples of Current South African Affordable Housing Initiatives

NAHRO’s partnership with SAHF and the annual conference in Cape Town have created opportunities for ongoing dialogue with housing professionals in South Africa. Lawrence Ramashamole has been a key partner in that dialogue. Since 2007, he has been CEO of the Housing Association of East London (HAEL), a non-profit housing association located some 650 miles from Cape Town on South Africa’s Eastern Cape. Established in 1998, HAEL was established with the goal of improving housing conditions for low and middle-income families in East London. In discussing his job, Mr. Ramashamole sounds remarkably like the executive director of a public housing authority in the U.S. “Our primary role is a provider of affordable rental housing. We assist the government in providing a variety of tenure options from ownership to rental. If you can’t own, you rent. We try to create housing opportunities closer to employment.”

He goes on to explain that “in the past [under apartheid], black people couldn’t access decent housing in cities.” HAEL’s Belgravia Valley development is one response to that challenge. Financed in part through a subsidy provided by the Eastern Cape Provincial Department of Housing, the project is an effort to strategically increase the housing stock in East London while providing a range of housing options. In doing so, the project is intended to improve economic and racial integration of East London. Completed in two phases, in 1999 and 2001, the development provides a mix of 438 one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments for low-to moderate-income renters within the central business dis-
On satellite images of the city. One local stakeholder responding to the challenge is the General Motors South Africa (GMSA) Foundation. General Motors has more than 1,500 employees in Port Elizabeth, making it one of the city's largest employers. Roger Matlock has served as General Manager of the GMSA Foundation since 1995, helping stimulate innovative housing development in Port Elizabeth. Unlike a traditional grant maker, the GMSA Foundation implements innovative development projects directly instead of providing grant money. It focuses on poverty alleviation by way of education and housing. Mr. Matlock notes that "the goal is to change the way development is done in South Africa by creating model projects," then sharing information regarding development models and best practices to encourage replication. Like foundations in the United States, GMSA Foundation's budget is miniscule relative to the need. The foundation administers an annual budget of 10 million rand, or about U.S. $1 million. Of that, the majority supports education initiatives and only about $100,000 goes toward housing projects. The Foundation makes up for limited resources with impressive leverage. Mr. Matlock estimates that every dollar the foundation invests is leveraged 100 times. On a national level, that number increases to 2000 times through replication.

The GMSA Foundation is also undertaking Port Elizabeth's first mixed-income, mixed-race and mixed-tenure (ownership and rental) development, Walmer Link. The development is an intentional effort to reverse apartheid-era trends by providing racially and economically integrated housing with access to employment and amenities. As an integrated housing development, Walmer Link makes a powerful statement with its location: the project is built on municipal land formerly leased to the adjacent country club. It is also convenient to employment and shopping. Like HAEL’s Belgravia Valley development, GMSA's Walmer Link is an effort to respond to South Africa's enormous demand for affordable housing to serve the “gap” market—households that have incomes too high to quali-
A key challenge for South Africa’s housing industry is creating greater opportunity for training and professional development. Dr. Kedibone Phago, who teaches at the University of Limpopo in South Africa, notes "It is very rare to find a black professor, [and] still rarer to find a black Ph.D. We haven’t had housing degrees in South Africa." To remedy this, he is working with the National Department of Human Settlements and the World Bank Institute to develop a degree program focused on the upgrading of informal settlements. Like many of his South African colleagues, he has attended conferences in the U.S., Australia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom in search of housing models that he can apply in South Africa.

**Advancing the Partnership**

Given common challenges and strong interest in an ongoing partnership, the dialogue between the Southern African Housing Foundation and NAHRO is certain to continue. In the near term, that may take the form of exchanges or on-line dialogues. Over the long term, SAHF’s CEO John Hopkins has expressed interest in developing internship programs for housing professionals in both countries to gain direct experience. SAHF is also looking for international training models that could be applied in South Africa. Given our experience in training U.S. housing professionals and NAHRO’s professional exchange program developed with the United Kingdom, NAHRO has models to offer.

NAHRO members interested in learning more about housing in South Africa are invited to visit the web sites highlighted in the box on page 9. Members will have an opportunity to meet South African housing professionals in person in October 2014, when SAHF sends a delegation to NAHRO’s National Conference and Exhibition in Baltimore, Md. More than professional exchanges, NAHRO’s relationship with SAHF offers rich opportunities to gain the insight of housing professionals in another country and in the process, learn from their approaches to similar challenges.

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The NAHRO-INTA International Summit: a Milestone in Partnership

BY JOHN PAPAGNI

The National Conference and Exhibition in Cleveland, Ohio in October 2013 was the occasion of the first joint conference between NAHRO and the International Urban Development Association (INTA). Titled the “International Summit on Housing and Urban Regeneration,” the conference brought together U.S., Canadian, Chinese, Dutch, French and Swedish practitioners for a series of dialogues over the three-day workshop.

The dialogue was enhanced by technical visits organized by housing and community development organizations leading revitalization efforts in Cleveland. The visits highlighted efforts of local organizations to improve human services, housing, and education, and promote community economic development. Conference participants used the opportunity to learn about domestic and international housing and community development models from Malmo, Sweden; Lyon, France; the Netherlands; Austin, Tex.; and Cleveland, Ohio.

NAHRO’s partnership with INTA provides NAHRO’s national network of housing and community development professionals with access to a global network of nearly 6,000 members in 100 countries. INTA’s international exchanges and activities include an Annual World Urban Development Congress, conferences and seminars, the World Urban Development Council, prospective roundtables, brainstorm sessions, study visits and advisory panels. INTA exchanges integrate physical, social and cultural aspects of urban policy with a focus on equitable urban development.

The dialogue that took place in Cleveland will continue through ongoing exchanges, roundtables and dialogues organized by both organizations. The workshops were also part of INTA’s Communities of Competence, an on-line forum for focused dialogue and exchange on a range of housing and community development topics identified by members. To learn more about the Cleveland Summit, including papers and presentations, visit: www.cleveland2013.inta-aivn.org

A History of the NAHRO-INTA Partnership

The Cleveland Summit was a milestone in NAHRO’s more than 20-year partnership with INTA. It is a relationship that dates to 1985, when NAHRO member Kerron Barnes attended the INTA Congress in Glasgow / Belfast. The relationship continued at INTA’s first U.S. conference in San Francisco in 1987. The bond was formalized with a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations, executed in 1993. Both organizations agreed to exchange memberships and publications as well as offer free and discounted registrations at each other’s annual conferences. Over the years, NAHRO members have made over 30 appearances at INTA Congresses – most recently in San Sebastian, Spain in 2010, in Grenoble / Lyon in 2011 and in Paris in 2012. The INTA-NAHRO MOU was renewed on November 1, 2011 in The Hague with the signatures of Michel Sudarskis, Secretary General of INTA and Saul Ramirez Jr., NAHRO CEO.

INTA was organized in 1976 in Paris as the International New Town Association at a time when large-scale urban development projects were conceived to promote economic growth. A founding principle of INTA was the importance of international exchanges among urban development actors to inform strategies for those projects. Now known as the International Urban Development Association (but retaining the acronym, INTA), the organization operates out of offices in Paris, France.

To learn more about INTA visit: www.inta-aivn.org/en