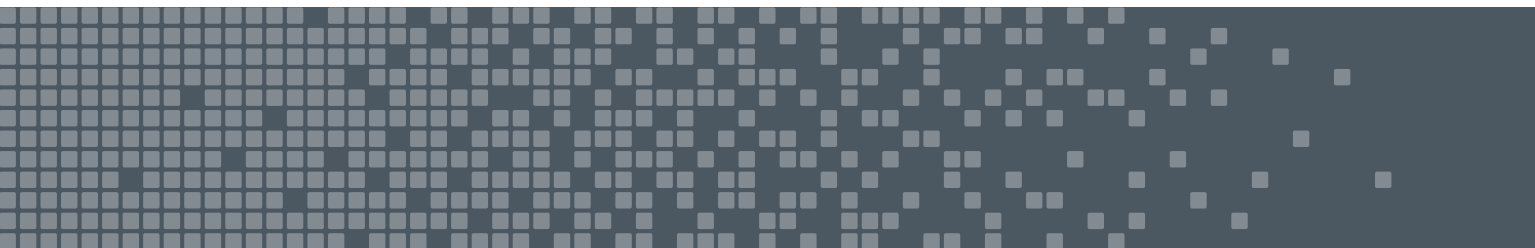


QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



JAN - MAR

Vol. 3

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— Over 20 Years of Generating —

Credible Urban Insights

Building a Network for South Africa's Cities

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#ACityTellsAStory

Editor's Note

Dear Stakeholder, Welcome to our Quarterly Newsletter



Nosipho Hlatshwayo
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“Collectively, these engagements reflect SACN's role as a trusted knowledge partner, linking policy, data, and practice.”



The third quarter has been marked by strong engagement in areas shaping the future of local government and urban development. SACN consistently ensures cities' voices are present, informed, and influential in national discussions through a series of high-level platforms.

At the SALGA Extended Executive Management Team Lekgotla, SACN contributed to reflections on sector performance and priorities for the remainder of the 2022–2027 cycle, using insights from the State of Cities Report to emphasise the importance of data-driven, forward-looking planning. This was complemented by participation in a multi-stakeholder roundtable during the WFLED delegation visit, where the role of cities in driving inclusive economic growth and fostering strong cross-sector partnerships was a focus.

SACN also brought city-level perspectives into a high-level executive discussion on the revised White Paper on Local Government Reform, engaging on critical issues such as municipal finance, infrastructure, and governance. Simultaneously, the launch of the Small Town Regeneration Strategy highlighted the importance of recognising the full urban–rural continuum, with SACN emphasising the need for more diverse development approaches.

Beyond policy and strategy, SACN's contributions extended into platforms that connect urban development with culture and practice. At the Creative Cities masterclass, the role of festivals in supporting local economies, tourism, and social cohesion was underscored, while engagement with the Knysna Municipality strategic session focused on strengthening planning, service delivery, and governance at a local level.

Collectively, these engagements reflect SACN's role as a trusted knowledge partner, linking policy, data, and practice.

They also reaffirm the importance of consistent representation in key decision-making spaces to ensure that South African cities remain central to a more integrated, inclusive, and future-oriented urban agenda.

Alongside external engagement, the SACN secretariat has continued work at pace. The Inclusive Cities Programme is progressing with the fourth season of Good Hood Stories. At the same time, the Innovative Cities Programme has officially begun its prospective segment, setting the stage for the upcoming SoCR VI report.

The Productive Cities Programme has focused on aligning skills development with labour market needs, while the Sustainable Cities Programme has continued through Cities' Lunchtime Chats and highlighted the Just Energy Transition Practitioners' Exchange hosted by SACN and GIZ-SAGEN.

The Well-governed Cities Programme has also advanced key initiatives, including the African Metropolitan Governance and Infrastructure Network and the application of Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation.

Lastly, we would also like to welcome Lindani Mtshali to the SACN. He joins the network as a Researcher.

We hope you enjoy this edition and look forward to sharing the next one with you!

Best Regards,

Nosipho Hlatshwayo



Good Hood Stories Season 4 Coming Soon

We are excited to share progress on Season 4 of our Good Hood Stories project. Since 2020, this initiative has flipped the script on how we talk about South African cities—moving from challenges to celebrating collaborative, creative, and multi-sector partnerships that improve urban environments.

Thanks to our continued partnership with the Department of Human Settlements (DHS), Season 4 focuses on sustainable human settlements. Four outstanding projects have been selected from case studies submitted for the New Urban Agenda Country Report to be featured in two films:

Film 1: Reblocking Pilot Project in Phola Park Informal Settlement, Buffalo City Municipality by Afesis

This project tackles the complex issue of informal settlement upgrading through a unique partnership between the municipality and Afesis, a local NGO. Rather than relocating residents, the reblocking approach reorganises existing shack layouts to create safer, more accessible spaces. By aligning homes into blocks with shared walkways and communal areas, the project improves fire safety, allows basic services to reach households more easily, and fosters a stronger sense of community. It is a powerful example of co-production, where residents, civil society, and local government work side by side to achieve dignified, lasting change.





Film 2: Place-Making Strategies for Safe Neighbourhoods, Cape Town

This film brings together three smaller, citizen-led projects across Cape Town, each demonstrating how creative place-making can transform public safety and dignity:

- iThemba Walkway, Gugulethu: Led by the University of Cape Town in partnership with local residents, this initiative transformed a dark, dangerous pathway into a well-lit, walkable route with paving and community art. Residents now move through the area with greater safety and pride.
- PAINT: Creating Safe, Dignified Public Spaces in Tafelsig: Driven by local residents, this project turned neglected open land into vibrant, well-maintained spaces with beautiful, colourful murals that serve as safe gathering points for families and young people, reducing crime and strengthening social cohesion.
- LightUp, Khayelitsha: Spearheaded by the NGO, People's Environmental Planning (PEP), this innovative initiative installs solar-powered street lights in high-risk areas. By working directly with residents to identify dark spots, LightUp has dramatically improved night-time safety and extended economic activity into evening hours.

The on-site filming in Cape Town and Buffalo City took place in early February, and the final edits of both films have been completed. We are thrilled that our application to showcase the films at the World Urban Forum 13 (WUF13) in Baku has been successful, placing South African innovation on a global stage.

The Good Hood Stories are coming. Watch this space!





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Kick-starting the Future: SOCR VI Prospective Work Underway

The State of South African Cities Report VI (SOCR VI) has officially begun its prospective segment, shifting from reflecting on past years to actively shaping the future of South African cities. This transition was initiated through a Futures Inception Workshop hosted in collaboration with the Wits School of Governance on 27 February 2026.

The workshop introduced SACN and key stakeholders to the principles of foresight and futures thinking, moving beyond traditional planning approaches towards anticipatory governance. Rather than predicting a single future, the process explores multiple plausible futures, enabling cities to make more informed, resilient and forward-looking decisions today.

Framed against a backdrop of global megatrends and polycrises, including climate change, inequality, technological disruption and urbanisation pressures, the session highlighted the need for cities to move from reactive responses to proactive, future-oriented planning.

The workshop also outlined potential methodologies to guide this work, including scenario planning, environmental scanning, futures literacy labs and systems-based analysis. It laid the foundation for a co-designed futures programme that will inform the SOCR VI narrative, positioning South African cities to respond to change and actively shape inclusive, resilient, transformed urban futures.

This marks the beginning of an exciting journey as SACN, together with partners, embarks on embedding foresight into urban policy, planning and decision-making.





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Linking Skills Development with Labour Market Demands: A Call to Action for Policy Makers



South Africa continues to grapple with persistently high unemployment rates, a challenge underscored by the latest Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) results. In Q2 2025, the national unemployment rate stood at 33.2%, with women and youth disproportionately affected. While the Q4 2025 QLFS showed a slight decrease in the official unemployment rate, youth unemployment remained critical at 43.8% for those aged 15-34. These figures highlight a critical mismatch between the skills available in the workforce and the demands of a dynamic labour market, particularly in high-growth employment sectors.

The South African Cities Network will, through an upcoming knowledge product, highlight evidence and case studies showing how this crucial linkage can be strengthened. It advocates an ecosystem approach in which government, academia, the private sector, NGOs, and communities collaborate to align skills development with labour-market needs. The study identifies several successful strategies, exemplified by initiatives such as the Hazyview Digital Learning Campus, the NBI's Installation, Repair and Maintenance (IRM) Initiative, and the Johannesburg Development Agency or JDA-led Tshepiso Non-Motorised Transport Facilities project.

These cases reveal common threads for success:

- Fostering collaborative environments that connect learning with working, ensuring talent retention and sustainable economic growth.
- Engaging diverse stakeholders for multi-sectoral collaboration, including communities, the private sector, non-profits, and government, to pool expertise, resources, and networks.
- Utilising public infrastructure projects and procurement processes to drive job creation, support local SMMEs, and provide targeted skills development, especially for youth and previously disadvantaged groups.

Lessons for Cities and Practitioners

As key drivers of local economic development, cities play a pivotal role in addressing the skills-job mismatch. The insights from the study offer some actionable recommendations:

- **Develop Local Ecosystems:** Municipalities should proactively identify local strengths, analyse industries with comparative advantages, and foster partnerships to provide targeted, demand-led training programs.
- **Strengthen Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships:** Formalising collaborations through Local Economic Development (LED) forums and sector clusters can facilitate collective action and resource sharing.

The challenge of unemployment and skills shortages in South Africa is complex. Still, the path forward is clear: a deliberate collaborative effort to align skills development with the actual demands of the labour market.

Sustainable & Resilient Cities



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Powering the Just Energy Transition: Municipal Capacity Takes Centre Stage



Municipal capacity took centre stage at the Just Energy Transition Practitioners' Exchange held in Sandton on 18 March 2026. Hosted by the South African Cities Network (SACN) in partnership with the GIZ-South African-German Energy Programme (SAGEN), the gathering brought together energy practitioners to strengthen local government's role in South Africa's energy transition.

Panellists from NTCSA, Sustainable Energy Africa and GENCO highlighted persistent skills gaps facing municipalities, stressing that electricity market reform and energy policy ambitions will only succeed if matched by strong local implementation. Discussions emphasised the need for targeted technical and institutional capacity to deliver inclusive, resilient energy solutions.

The exchange also showcased practical progress, including SACN's free online Just Energy Transition short course delivered through the National School of Government. With 59 officials completing the programme and 13 receiving certificates, the initiative signals growing momentum to equip municipalities to access finance and deliver a just transition on the ground.



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Cities' Lunchtime Chats: The Urban Nexus

The South African Cities Network (SACN) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) hosted two chats, one in partnership with C40 Cities, the City of Johannesburg, and the UK International Development on 17 February 2026 and another chat on 23 March 2026 in partnership with the National Business Initiative (NBI)

If you missed out, you can watch it on our YouTube Channel by clicking below:

**CITIES' LUNCHTIME CHATS:
THE URBAN NEXUS EDITION**

**INTEGRATED APPROACHES TO AFRICAN URBAN
WASTE MANAGEMENT**

Learnings from organic waste diversion at two distinct scales:
community-led initiatives (Tshwane) and a city-wide approach (Joburg)

18 Feb
12:30 - 14:00

Chat No. 17

South African CitiesNetwork | SALGA | Joburg | City of TSHWANE | C40 CITIES | UK International Development



**CITIES' LUNCHTIME CHATS:
THE URBAN NEXUS EDITION**

**WASTE EDUCATION, BEHAVIOUR CHANGE
AND LOCAL CLIMATE RESILIENCE**

23 Mar
12:30 - 14:00

Chat No. 18
[REGISTER HERE](#)

South African CitiesNetwork | SALGA | NBI30 | National Business Initiative





African Metropolitan Governance and Infrastructure Network

Work continues on the African Metropolitan Governance and Infrastructure Network (AGaIN), a collaborative initiative coordinated by the South African Cities Network (SACN) and the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO), in partnership with the Àrea Metropolitana de Barcelona (AMB).

A call for proposals for a review paper on African metropolitan governance was issued in February, and the winning bidder has commenced work.

Planning is underway for the network's first in-person meeting, which will take place across three days in Joburg in June, with attendees from across the region.

The intended outcome of the workshop is an advocacy agenda for African metropolitan governance to be presented at global forums, which reflects engagement by participants with the metropolitan governance review paper, and the initial agenda document that was presented at the World Metropolitan Summit in Barcelona in October by SACN CEO Nosipho Hlatshwayo and the Executive Director of GCRO Rashid Seedat.



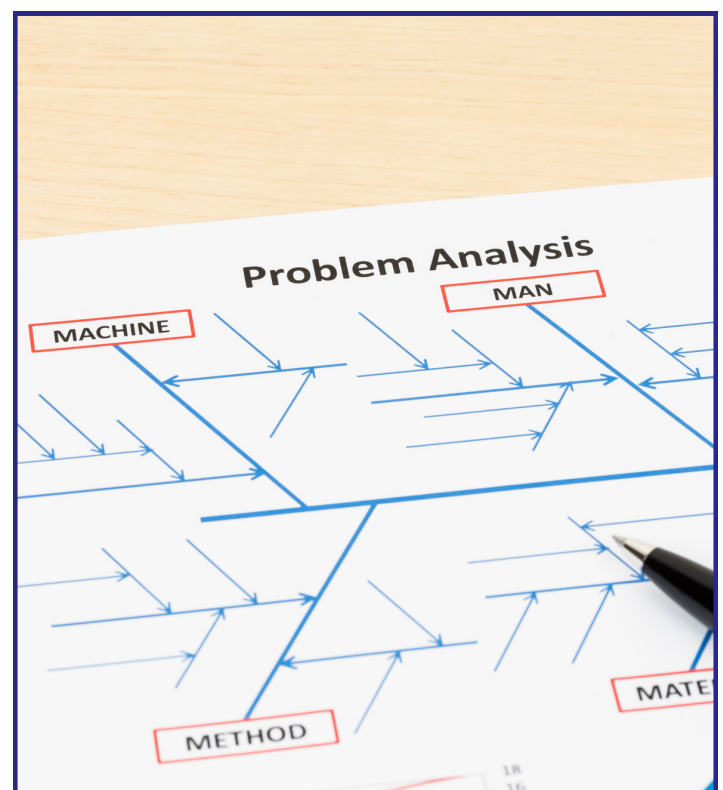
Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)

This quarter, engagements with participating cities have continued to firm up dates for PDIA workshops and the problems they will focus on. The City of Tshwane Environment and Agriculture Directorate has requested that SACN conduct a PDIA workshop on the problem of backyard waste collection, which will take place on 8 April.

In Nelson Mandela Bay, the nominated problem selected was vandalism of municipal assets, and the workshop was scheduled for 23 March; however, this has had to be moved to April.

In Ekurhuleni, the knowledge management team has identified the problem of solid sanitation in informal settlements, but we still need to agree on the workshop date for Q4.

In Joburg, the PDIA workshop that the Special Projects Management Office (SPMO) in the Office of the COO had requested SACN to hold in March will hopefully take place in April.



SACN Appoints Researcher



The SACN is excited to welcome Mr Lindani Mtshali to our team as a researcher. He specialises in policy-focused urban research on sustainability, resilience, governance, and inclusive development, aiming to provide evidence-based solutions to urban challenges in South African cities.

Team News & Events

SACN Participated at the University of Pretoria NextGen Open Day

The South African Cities Network (SACN) participated in the NextGen Open Day hosted by the University of Pretoria's Faculties of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology (EBIT) and Natural and Agricultural Sciences (NAS). The Open Day took place on 7 March 2026.

This year's theme, NextGen, celebrates the power of collaboration among engineers, scientists, IT specialists, and built-environment practitioners to shape a sustainable future. At a time when human activity threatens the planet's delicate balance, these disciplines are working hand in hand to develop solutions that safeguard our shared tomorrow.

SACN's participation in the NextGen Open Day enhances its visibility among future professionals and positions the organisation as a key player in shaping sustainable cities. It creates opportunities to build relationships with the University of Pretoria for research collaboration and knowledge exchange, while reinforcing SACN's role as a connector between academia, government, and technical experts.

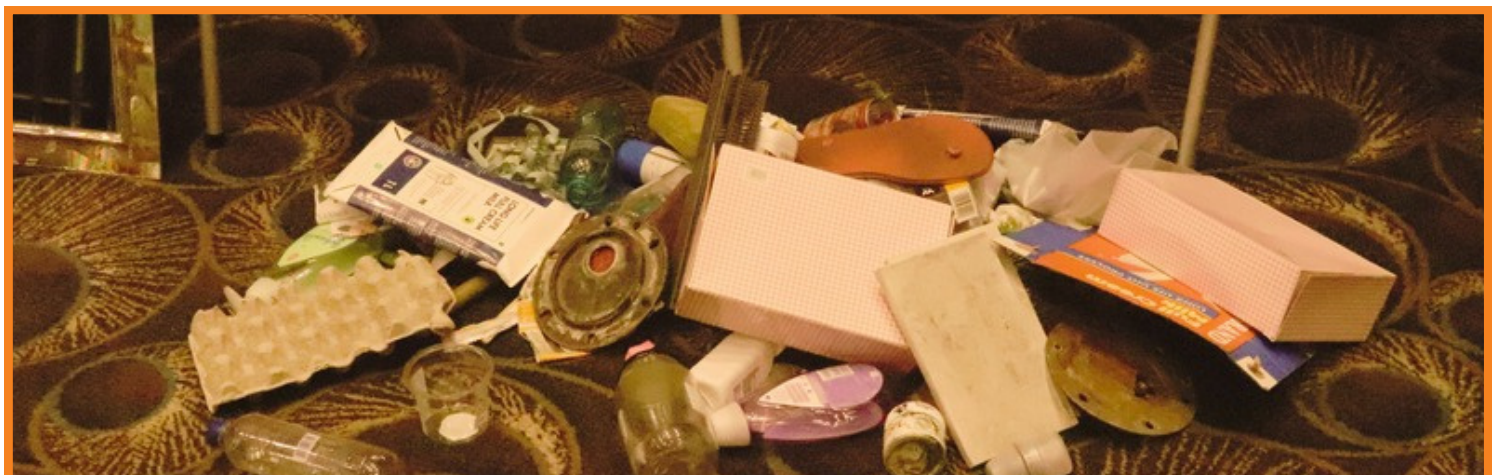


Team News & Events

Public Employment Programmes: Unlocking Work in the Waste Economy - Workshop

The Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES) and the South African Cities Network (SACN) hosted a workshop on March 25-26 in Ekurhuleni. The workshop focused on peer learning in waste management and public employment programs to foster sustainable livelihoods. The paper "SA Employment Opportunities in the Waste Sector – A Practitioner Perspective" highlights job creation through technical training, micro-enterprise support, and sustainable financing.

Participants shared insights on waste management projects funded by public employment programs, examining factors that contributed to their success or failure. They discussed strategies for creating jobs with social, economic, and environmental benefits, while exploring collaboration opportunities amidst limited resources. The workshop underscored the potential of combining public employment programs and waste management to promote inclusive grassroots development in South Africa.





As our loyal readers of our
Quarterly Newsletter, we would
love your feedback!
Please [click here](#).



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