

Capetonians need to develop mutualism

On the 13 of January 2012, the Finance Portfolio Committee had a workshop on the rates and the debt collection policy. The committee engaged with senior managers who gave a plain interpretation of what was happening with regards to the issue of debt collection and its challenges.

What became apparent from this interaction, was that Cape Town requires 400 000 dwellings to overcome the housing backlog. On the other hand, there are many citizens who are able, but unwilling to pay for services. This attitude stems from a historical culture of non-payment and entitlement. Those who may be alarmed at the housing backlog should read "The Chain Gang" by David Bloomberg. In his book he narrates the inadequacy of local housing for the working class dating back to the 1920's.

Politicians who make absurd campaign promises during elections without understanding budgetary constraints are not helping either. A way around the promises is to increase the cost on those who traditionally pay while continuing to subsidise those who are unable or unwilling to pay. The problem with this approach is the reality that most people prefer not to pay. Consequently, the city has implemented a program whereby trained personnel are sent to assess citizens and determine if they can afford the services provided. This includes an overview of the interior decorations as well as the satellite television status.

According to officials, non-payment among the unskilled citizens remains high even though 158 567 properties which have municipal valuations under R200 000 are considered indigent and do not pay rates. Also, 18 622 rates rebate applications have been approved for pensioners and those with disabilities. In November 2011, more than R68 million was written off by Council as bad debt.

Likewise, according to the September 2011 edition of the Financial Mail, the unemployment statistic will continue to increase through 2012. The national treasury discussion paper released in February 2011, states that South Africa's employment ratio is 4 out of 10. Business regularly highlights the shortage of skills, exacerbating the notion that the unskilled will remain unemployed.

In sharp contrast to this negativity, on a recent visit to the new Green Point Park I met the genial Ethiopian security guard. Later, I paid a Congolese attendant for parking when I visited the municipal swimming pool in Long Street where another Congolese security was on duty. What arises from this observation is the veracity that non-Capetonians are employed by tenderers that are contracted to the City of Cape Town. To some degree, the city cannot dictate who a tenderer should employ as we are all, like Maslow's dog, classically conditioned to hire the cheapest labour.

However, if this strategy continuous as a general business practices in Cape Town, how are unskilled locals supposed to find work? Also, if this recruitment strategy is a consequence of the work ethic of Capetonians, then, as a society we have a serious problem. If employers favour cheaper immigrant labour, then they should consider the impact this will have on demographic patterns and related issues. For example, should the unskilled economic immigrant acquire citizenship, are they not entitled to subsidized housing, free education and health care? Who will pay for this?

After the workshop a fellow DA Councillor mentioned that he had hired a Zimbabwean nanny as his working wife, became frustrated with the local nannies that regularly arrived late. Although each

situation has its merits, if the unskilled citizen cannot afford services because of unemployment, the city will eventually subsidise them. With less income the city will be unable to build the required dwellings thus setting the scene for future land invasions like the Rondebosch common. Already the 10 055 councillors in South Africa want the government to provide insurance to cover themselves and their properties against action from "disgruntled communities". The SA Local Govt. Association made this request in a letter to the Minister of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, recently.

Thus, ignoring unskilled locals may have short term financial gain for business but in the longer term Capetonians still need to accommodate its own less fortunate. In conclusion, advocating for the employment of locals first, does not necessarily make one xenophobic, after all "charity begins at home".

Cllr Yagyah Adams

Cape Muslim Congress