

iol Opinion & Analysis



The Kennedy Road informal settlement west of Durban is one of the townships earmarked for "de-densification". Picture: Doctor Ngcobo/African News Agency (ANA)

OPINION: Covid-19 has worsened predicament the poor face daily in their lives

By Sibusiso Mthembu May 25, 2020

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The litmus test of containing and suppressing the spread of the coronavirus pandemic will be whether South Africans carve out a strong sense of solidary consciousness to work around a set of common goals to advance the interests of the nation rather than individual comforts that throw the nation into disarray.

The destructive coronavirus is a pandemic on an epic scale and therefore needs everyone to put their shoulders to the wheel. Understandably, each sector in the country has its own biases towards a set of goals to achieve.

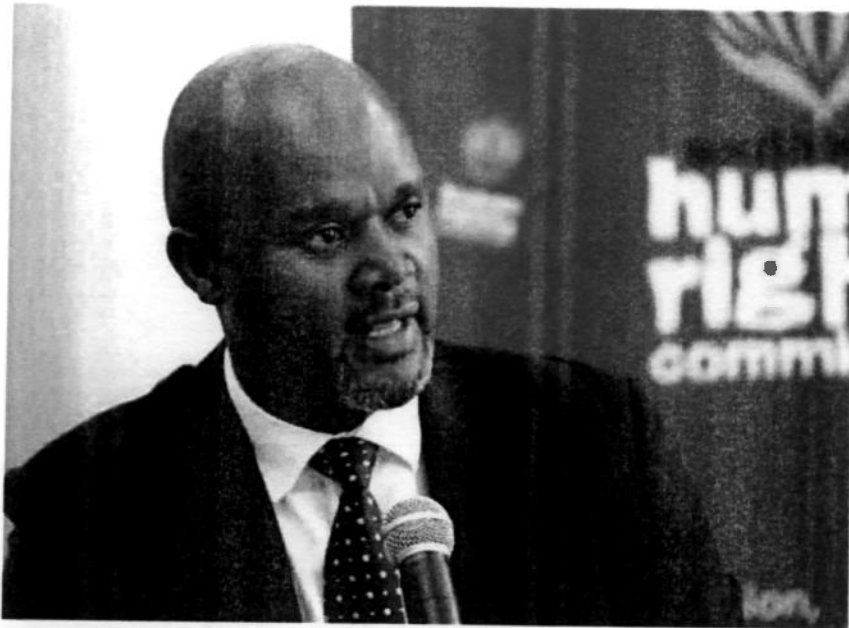
However, during this time they are expected to have more than just their own targeted goals. They should carry an added responsibility of slowing the spread of Covid-19, end the silo-approach and not be torn apart by predispositions. To be in this crisis sets the tone for us to have a logical programme aimed at the national good of ending the rising tide of the deadly virus.

This is certainly not the time for us to pull in different directions and squabble but rather to pull together the resources at our disposal to ensure that South Africans, especially the vulnerable, are not bearing the brunt of the virus.

The one thing that the virus has clearly exposed is the reality of an unequal society we live in.

Faced with the challenge of sheer survival, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the predicament the poor face daily in their lives. Thus, this is a group that feels most profoundly the sharp end of the virus more than any other.

Our moral rectitude, therefore, compels us not to abdicate our responsibility towards the needy.



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Rather it must nudge us to help them to live with dignity during this hour of need for help. South Africa is a society that is renowned for being wired to care and not to turn a blind eye to the plight of many who need help.

The Department of Water and Sanitation is one of the government departments leading the charge to make sure the virus is prevented from having a feeding frenzy by providing access to water to poor and densely populated areas.

Access to safe water supply and making water available to densely-populated areas profoundly affect the daily lives of poor people and support rural livelihoods. Through the supply of water and sanitisers to communities, we will meaningfully contribute to saving lives during Covid-19 and ensure equity and poverty reduction take place.

Food parcels that are co-operatively distributed countrywide by the Department of Social Development and different sectors are testimony that South Africans are teaming up to avoid the prospect of the vulnerable being condemned to poverty and disease.

The spontaneous generosity we continue to see daily is living proof that the country will not implode, choked by the coronavirus and poverty. The unity of communities and business will reverse its destructive course. It must inspire us to continue to generate coherent responses to our challenges to make South Africa a country with a common destiny.

Mthembu is head of the Department of Water and Sanitation in Gauteng.

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