

The big threat to Informal Settlements and precarious livelihoods during COVID-19

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More than 50% of people who do not have houses in Merafong city live in informal settlements. This is viewed as a step towards getting a house. There are a few professional people such as teachers, nurses etc who can afford to buy houses for themselves, but choose to live in the informal settlement. However, most of the people living in the informal settlement are contract workers, casual workers, or unemployed.

The inhabitants of the informal settlements experience discrimination, and marginalisation, as well as extreme disadvantages of a lack of basic services, poor governance, limited access to land and property, precarious livelihoods and poverty. Further, because they live in very crowded, under/unserved areas, they are highly vulnerable to the spread of the coronavirus. “No one from the department of health or municipality is raising awareness in this area. They only visit the informal areas during election time. COVID-19 is real and it kills,” said a woman who wanted to remain anonymous.

“People who are living in informal settlements are being represented by people who are not living in informal settlements because people that come from informal settlements do not want to play an active role. They fear for their lives, because they are not safe, because of the conditions that they are living under,” she said.

“Most informal settlements do not even have a yard, and the security of everyone is being compromised by these conditions. The areas are very dense. During rainy days you see floods, because there are no storm water drainage system in our streets. It’s a playground for COVID-19,” she said.

“Living in a crowded home may affect a child’s wellbeing in a variety of ways. The lack of a comfortable, quiet space can lead children to have difficulties studying and reading, affecting their school performance. And it is difficult to practice social distancing, because of overcrowding of families,” she added.

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