In August 2009, the Department of Human Settlements (DHS or Department) held three key meetings (briefings) before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA or Committee) in Parliament, addressing issues on housing in South Africa. The first meeting focused on the N2 Gateway Project Special Audit Report (5 August 2009); the second was on the National Housing Code 2009 and Farm Residence Housing Programme (19 August 2009); and the third discussed social rental housing benefits (26 August 2009). Below is a summary of some of the issues raised in the meetings.

N2 Gateway Project Special Audit Report
Following an earlier meeting between the DHS and the Committee, this meeting sought to track progress on the N2 Gateway Project and its challenges. The DHS admitted that the project was introduced before a housing policy was in place and that a coherent business plan was developed only during the course of the project’s implementation. The DHS reported that, although there was national funding for the project, funding contribution is also expected from the province.

The Committee asked whether surveys were done to determine who the ultimate beneficiaries of the project would be. The DHS clarified that the Joe Slovo phase (without specifying if it is Phase 1, 2 or 3) had been set aside for social housing, specifically rental housing. It was suggested that the Department should think about creating a national policy on beneficiaries. The Committee also raised concerns about the adequacy of community participation in the project. The DHS pointed out that communities change their leaders frequently, which makes it difficult to establish durable consensus on issues.

National Housing Code 2009 and Farm Residence Housing Programme
The DHS briefed the Committee on the new Housing Code that is currently being drafted by the Department pursuant to section 4 of the Housing Act No 107 of 1997. The first aspect of the briefing dealt with the background and policy context, while the second dealt with the technical guidelines and the details of the Code.

The Department also reported on the Farm Residence Housing Programme, which aims to provide a housing solution to poor farmers who reside on commercial farms. This programme is a collaborative effort between the Government and the Farm Workers Unions. The Committee sought clarity on who would buy the land from commercial farmers, the feasibility of the entire programme and the relationship between the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform and the DHS.

Social rental housing benefits
The Committee was also briefed by the Social Housing Foundation on social rental housing, its supply and demand, utilities and municipal charges,
backyard and informal rentals, and evictions. The Foundation presented a report on these issues produced in 2008, which compared the cost of social rental housing (SRH) and the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The report concluded that neither of them could be chosen to apply across the board, as each is effective in different circumstances. SRH is well suited to densification, but is not an option for the very poor, as it costs about R1 500 per month. It was highlighted that those occupying RDP houses do not see them as an asset, because the houses are not marketable for resale, there are restrictions on resale within a certain time, and the house owners cannot afford the maintenance. This is exacerbated by the poor quality of the houses.

This summary was prepared by Rebecca Amollo, doctoral researcher in the Socio-Economic Rights Project.

The minutes of the meetings can be accessed at:


On 04 November 2009, the Department of Human Settlements briefed Parliament’s Portfolio Committee on Human Settlements on the Beneficiary List Review Plan and the progress in the implementation of the Joe Slovo judgment. The minutes of the meeting and the progress report can be accessed at http://www.pmg.org.za/report/20091104-department-human-settlements-reviewed-plan-beneficiary-list-progress-