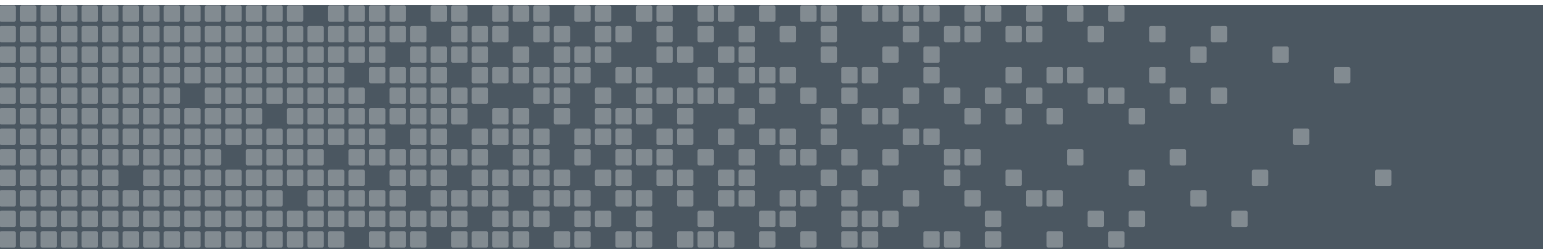


QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



OCT - DEC

Vol. 2

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— Over 20 Years of Generating —

Credible Urban Insights

Building a Network for South Africa's Cities

Every city has a story worth telling.

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#ACityTellsAStory

Editor's Note

Dear Stakeholder, Welcome to our Quarterly Newsletter



Nosipho Hlatshwayo
CEO

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“**SACN remains focused on supporting cities through practical knowledge, strong partnerships, and a commitment to inclusive and resilient urban futures.**”



Quarter two reminds us that building better cities requires sustained collaboration and practical innovation, grounded in the realities of people and places.

Our Inclusive Cities Programme assisted the Department of Human Settlements in developing South Africa's New Urban Agenda Country Report, showcasing our commitment to participatory urban policy. The report reflects contributions from government, civil society, and communities through workshops and public engagement. As it progresses through Cabinet for submission to UN-Habitat, it highlights how local practices inform global commitments.

The Innovative Cities team attended the ICT Summit, emphasising that digital infrastructure alone is insufficient. Cities require governance, skills, and adaptive systems to translate technology into improved decisions, services, and inclusive outcomes. The focus on flexibility, partnerships, and people-centred design is central to much of SACN's work.

On Productive Cities is advocating for a national framework for reporting on Public Employment Programmes to address the challenge of shifting from fragmented compliance-driven methods to a cohesive system that provides lasting social and economic value. The increased engagement from multiple stakeholders reflects a strong desire for evidence-based reform and shared learning.

Our Sustainable & Resilient Cities Programme hosted a session with SALGA at the Climate Summit in November, emphasising the need for better coordination, data, and support for municipalities on Climate Action Plans. The discussions were frank, technical, and solutions-oriented, essential for translating plans into impact.

The Well-Governed Cities Programme highlights our participation in the World Metropolitan Summit in Barcelona and insights from the Governance Oversight and

Learning Network (GOAL-N), along with learnings from the City of Joburg's PDIA pilot, was presented to the SPMO in December.

Alongside this work, momentum is building around the sixth edition of the State of South African Cities Report (SoCR VI), anchored in the theme of the Future-Focused City. Preparations are underway to convene an inclusive governance structure that brings together cities, national partners, researchers and practitioners, ensuring broad participation alongside strong quality control through structured reviews. Significant progress has been made in defining data requirements, with efforts focused on extending indicators across a 25-year timeline where possible.

New collaborations are also being forged to co-create research across key focus areas. Most notably, SoCR VI will introduce a forward-looking, prospective component, exploring possible urban futures through scenario modelling with expert partners, opening up new ways of thinking about risk, opportunity and long-term urban transformation.

Our team and leadership actively engage in national and international urban debates through research forums, governance networks, and discussions on culture, festivals, and the right to the city, highlighting that cities are social, cultural, and political spaces, not just systems and infrastructure.

As we enter the next quarter, SACN remains focused on supporting cities through practical knowledge, strong partnerships, and a commitment to inclusive and resilient urban futures.

Best Regards,

Nosipho Hlatshwayo



New Urban Agenda Country Report: Stakeholder Consultation Process

Since early 2025, SACN has been supporting the Department of Human Settlements (DHS) in developing the New Urban Agenda Country Report to track South Africa's implementation of the transformative commitments outlined in the New Urban Agenda (NUA).

The development of the NUA Country Report was grounded in a comprehensive stakeholder consultation process, ensuring an inclusive, transparent, and participatory approach. This process aligned with NUA guidelines, emphasising multi-level coordination, evidence-based engagement, and integration with national planning frameworks.

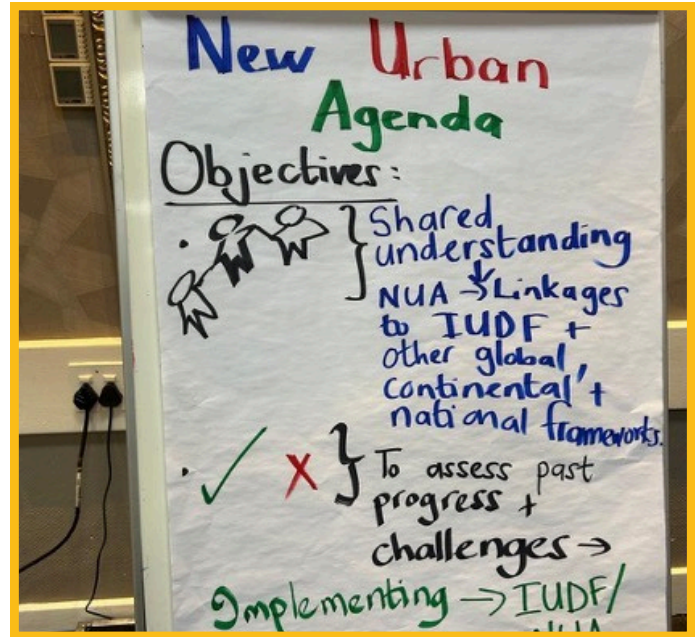
The consultation strategy was implemented through several key activities:

- **Participatory Workshops (March – July 2025):** A series of workshops engaged diverse stakeholders to gather input for the report. These sessions aimed to amplify varied perspectives, foster debate on urbanisation, assess conditions across all settlements, and collaboratively shape planning and implementation strategies.
- **Social Media Campaign (24 June – 21 July 2025):** This campaign broadened public outreach to identify and showcase local "good practice" projects. Selected projects illustrate how community-led actions are transforming South African towns and cities. They exemplify the value of decentralised engagement, inclusive representation of marginalised groups, participatory research, and the application of local and indigenous knowledge.
- **Related Consultations on Urban Development:** Parallel consultations in June and July 2025 focused on updating the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) Implementation Plan, building upon an initial partner meeting held on 1 November 2024.
- **National Urban Forum (NUF):** The stakeholder engagement period coincided with planning for the National Urban Forum (NUF). Due to South Africa hosting the G20 and U20 in 2025, the NUF was held earlier than usual on 21–22 August 2025. This forum succeeded the annual Urban Festival, following its inaugural edition on 9–11 October 2024.

Collectively, these efforts ensured the NUA Country Report was informed by a wide spectrum of insights and grounded in practical, locally-driven examples of urban development. The NUA Country Report has been drafted and is currently in the process of being submitted to Cabinet for approval, after which it will be officially submitted to UN-Habitat.

Consultation Process Timeline







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SACN at the ICT Summit: Advancing Smart, Data-Driven Cities

Rebecca Gatang'i, Programme Manager: Innovation at the South African Cities Network (SACN), was invited as both a panellist and session moderator at the ICT Summit, which marked its 20-year anniversary on 26–27 November 2025.

Panel Contribution: The Future of Data Centres

On Day One, Rebecca participated in the panel discussion titled “The Future of Data Centres in South Africa’s Metropolitan Cities.” She shared a cities-focused perspective on South Africa’s growing data centre market and challenged the audience to consider whether metropolitan governments are building the public-sector governance, skills and data ecosystems needed to fully leverage this digital infrastructure boom.

Drawing on SACN’s work with metros, she emphasised that data centres must evolve into “decision centres” – enabling evidence-based planning, real-time service optimisation, and smarter, more inclusive urban development.



Session Moderation: Building Smart Municipalities

On Day Two, Rebecca moderated the session “Building Smart Municipalities: Technology for Efficient and Responsive Governance.” The discussion brought together municipal leaders, development agencies and private-sector partners to explore:

- How technology can improve service delivery
- The importance of data governance and cybersecurity
- Institutional reforms needed for sustainable digital transformation
- The role of partnerships in closing capacity gaps



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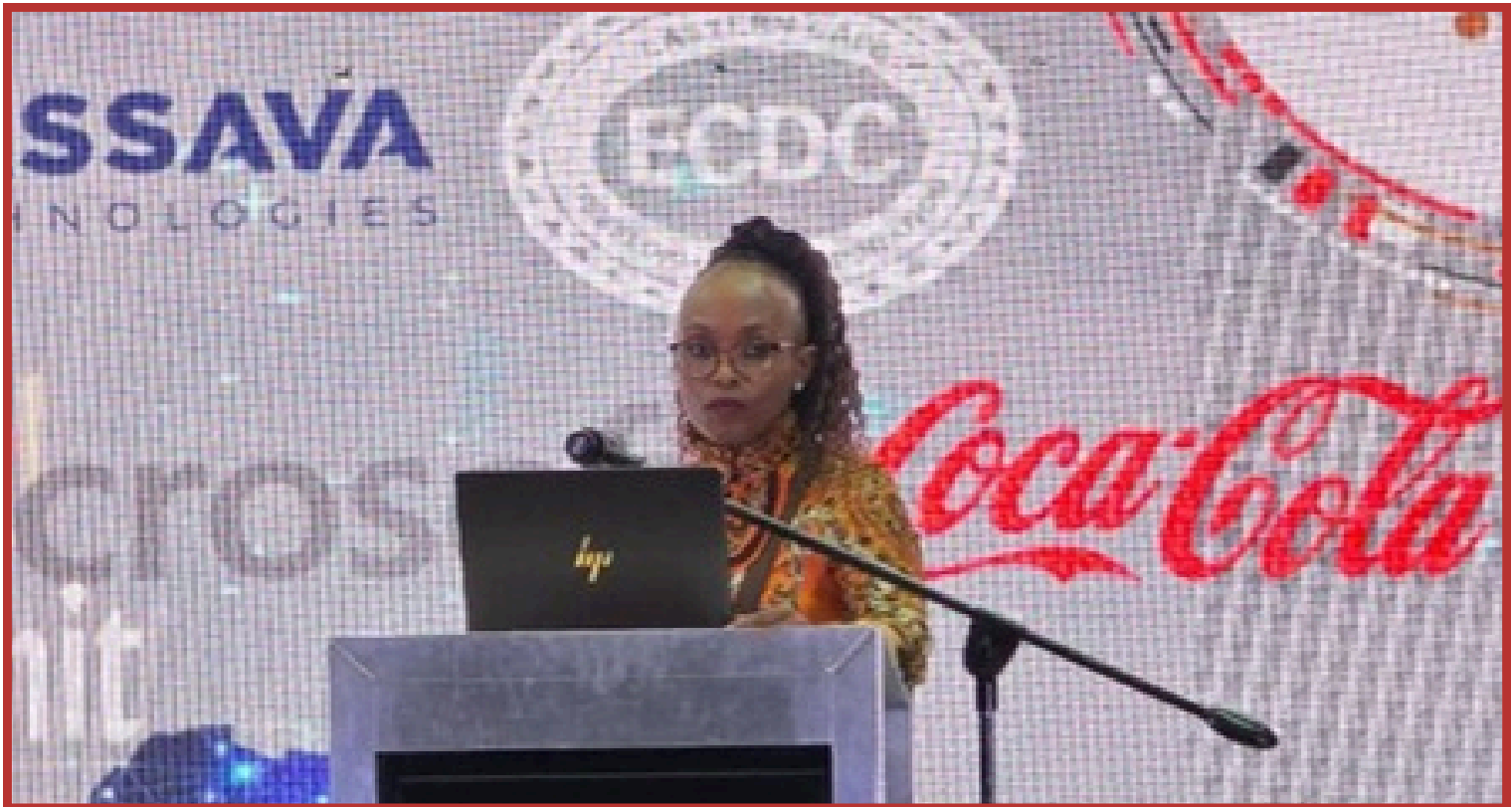
The session moved beyond buzzwords to focus on practical, grounded solutions that municipalities can implement to become more responsive and citizen-centred.

Rebecca concluded her engagement with the Choluteca Bridge analogy, cautioning against building impressive but rigid digital infrastructure that fails to adapt to changing realities. She urged cities to invest in flexible, human-centred systems that evolve with communities and respond to real urban challenges.

“The future will belong not to the strongest, but to the most adaptable.”

SACN's Continued Commitment

SACN remains committed to strengthening peer learning, data-driven decision-making and innovation across South Africa's cities. Through strategic partnerships, SACN continues to support metros in building smarter, more inclusive and more resilient urban systems.





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SACN Champions the Development of the National Framework for Reporting on Public Employment Programmes

The SACN's Productive Cities Programme is championing the development of a national framework for reporting on Public Employment Programmes (PEPs). The objective of this initiative is to address gaps in how PEPs are designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated, with downstream effects on intended outcomes and impacts. South Africa has multiple state-driven employment programmes that operate in parallel, premised on creating temporary work and providing much-needed skilling and training to facilitate entry into economic participation, but are often critiqued for not reliably translating public spending into durable social and economic value. Despite significant public investment, South Africa's public employment programmes remain fragmented, compliance-driven, and loosely connected to service delivery systems and labour market pathways. This limits their ability to generate sustained social and economic value. The challenge is to transform the public employment sector into a coherent system that delivers work opportunities and enables mobility into decent long-term employment. A cohesive, qualitative Report that synthesises lessons and approaches and highlights successes is intended to dispel some of the critiques and to provide a knowledge base for evidence-driven practice among key implementing spheres and agencies of government.



This initiative, primarily aimed at supporting our cities, is facilitated by the strategic support of the SACN's EPWP Reference Group. To this end, the SACN has engaged in a multi-stakeholder consultative process to develop the national framework for reporting across PEPs. This process aims to assess the feasibility and potential value of a national framework that covers all PEPs in a single report. The stakeholders include, but are not limited to, cities, DPWI, Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES), Community Works Programme (CWP), Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI), Social Employment Fund (SEF), Youth Employment Service (YES), among others.

It is hoped that when developed and enjoying national support, the framework for reporting on PEPs will lead to a public employment sector better aligned to sector needs, multiple programmes that operate through a shared delivery logic, sequenced work opportunities that enable participants to move along intentional exit pathways and PEP interventions that demonstrably provide long-term socio-economic value and impact. For the SACN, the proposed national framework for reporting on PEPs will enable cross-leveraging of capacities and resources among key implementors to achieve greater convergence, sustainability, and continuity of the knowledge agenda on PEPs.

Sustainable & Resilient Cities



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SACN Advances Technical Leadership in Municipal Climate Action at SA Climate Summit



The South African Cities Network (SACN) played a central facilitation and knowledge-broker role during SALGA's side event on Municipal Climate Action Plans at the 2025 South Africa Climate Summit. The session focused on strengthening the technical implementation of Climate Action Plans (CAPs) in line with the Climate Change Act, with SACN leading the panel discussion to surface practical lessons, system gaps, and coordination needs across local government.

The City of Johannesburg highlighted CAP development and review processes, reinforcing the value of robust data systems and cross-departmental integration. During the SACN-facilitated panel, district and local municipalities shared technical progress and constraints: Ehlanzeni outlined risk-based planning aligned with the Act; Mopani reflected on CAP integration into IDPs and sector plans; Mogale City demonstrated innovation through green infrastructure and renewable energy pilots; and Thabo Mofutsanyana identified key capacity and finance gaps requiring external support.

National alignment was clarified by DFFE, which outlined statutory CAP requirements, compliance timelines, and available technical support. ICLEI contributed insights on international localisation mechanisms, emphasising opportunities for municipalities to leverage global platforms for climate finance and peer learning.

SACN's facilitation ensured structured knowledge exchange, cross-municipal learning, and a strong focus on systems strengthening—positioning municipalities to accelerate technically credible, evidence-driven climate action.



Sustainable & Resilient Cities



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Cities' Lunchtime Chats: The Urban Nexus

The South African Cities Network (SACN) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), in partnership with C40 Cities, the City of Johannesburg, and the UK International Development, hosted a 4-part chat series on the electrification of informal settlements, running from 3 September 2025 to 15 October 2025.

If you missed out on this series, you can watch them on our YouTube Channel by clicking below:

CITIES' LUNCHTIME CHATS: THE URBAN NEXUS EDITION

CITY OF JOBURG ENERGY ACCESS/ELECTRIFICATION FOR INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS CASE STUDY
Joburg microgrid case study, lessons learned, and how other cities can implement

3 Sep
12:30 - 14:00

Chat No. 12

Speakers

Nocky Letuka Lipheko
Project Leader: Micro-Grid Electrification
Grid Reliability & Expansion
City Power Johannesburg

Nomeco Dlamini
Urban Planner
Sticky Situations

South African CitiesNetwork | SALGA | Joburg | C40 CITIES | UK International Development



CITIES' LUNCHTIME CHATS: THE URBAN NEXUS EDITION

SOURCES OF FUNDING FOR INFORMAL SETTLEMENT ELECTRIFICATION
Available sources of funding and grants for SA Cities

17 Sep
12:30 - 14:00

Chat No. 13

Speakers

Bongani Nhlabathi
Director
Department of Minerals
& Energy

Elaine Cheung
Adviser for Capacity Building and Team
Lead for Strategic Communication
South African-German Energy
Programme -
GIZ

South African CitiesNetwork | SALGA | Joburg | C40 CITIES | UK International Development



CITIES' LUNCHTIME CHATS: THE URBAN NEXUS EDITION

ELECTRIFICATION OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS FINANCING MODELLING TOOL
Demonstrate the newly developed informal settlement electrification financing modelling tool, co-designed with the City of Johannesburg's energy team, that helps municipalities assess and plan for informal settlement energy interventions.

1 Oct
12:30 - 14:00

Chat No. 14

Speakers

Reshmi Wolvers
Expert Analyst Social Impact
GreenCape

Penelope Mosana
Stakeholder Relations Officer
City Power Johannesburg

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CITIES' LUNCHTIME CHATS: THE URBAN NEXUS EDITION

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CO-CREATION FOR INFORMAL SETTLEMENT ELECTRIFICATION
Sharing community engagement best practises and lessons learned from the City of Joburg and GreenCape

15 Oct
12:30 - 14:00

Chat No. 15

Speakers

Reshmi Wolvers
Expert Analyst Social Impact
GreenCape

Penelope Mosana
Stakeholder Relations Officer
City Power Johannesburg

South African CitiesNetwork | SALGA | Joburg | C40 CITIES | UK International Development





World Metropolitan Summit in Barcelona, 14-17 Oct 2025

This quarter work has continued 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).

An African metropolitan governance advocacy agenda was developed from information gathered during a two-day online meeting of the network in September. It was presented at the World Metropolitan Summit in Barcelona on 14-17 October 2025 by the SACN CEO Nosipho Hlatshwayo and the Executive Director of GCRO Rashid Seedat.





White Paper on Local Government Review

The Programme Manager has been invited to be on the reference group for the Finance and Governance workstream of the White Paper on Local Government Review, convened by COGTA.

Four meetings have been held at which research papers were presented:

- Revenue and fiscal capacity (26 November)
- Affordability and the Local Government Equitable Share (27 November)
- Expenditure inefficiencies (1 December)
- Infrastructure and innovative financing (3 December)



Governance Oversight and Learning Network (GOAL-N)

The past three learning events of the Governance Oversight and Learning Network (GOAL-N) have been focused on the particular needs of a very important oversight body in metro Councils, the Municipal Public Accounts Committees, which is tasked with resolving Unauthorised Irregular Fruitless and Wasteful Expenditure (UIFWE). The GOAL-N members - researchers providing support to Section 79 Committees in metro Councils – have resolved to approach key stakeholders, National Treasury and the Auditor-General, to have a workshop on managing UIFWE. This will be pursued in early 2026.

Meanwhile on 2 December a GOAL-N learning exchange event on the independence of the internal audit function in metros was held with Council committee researchers from Joburg, Ekurhuleni, Tshwane and Mangaung.





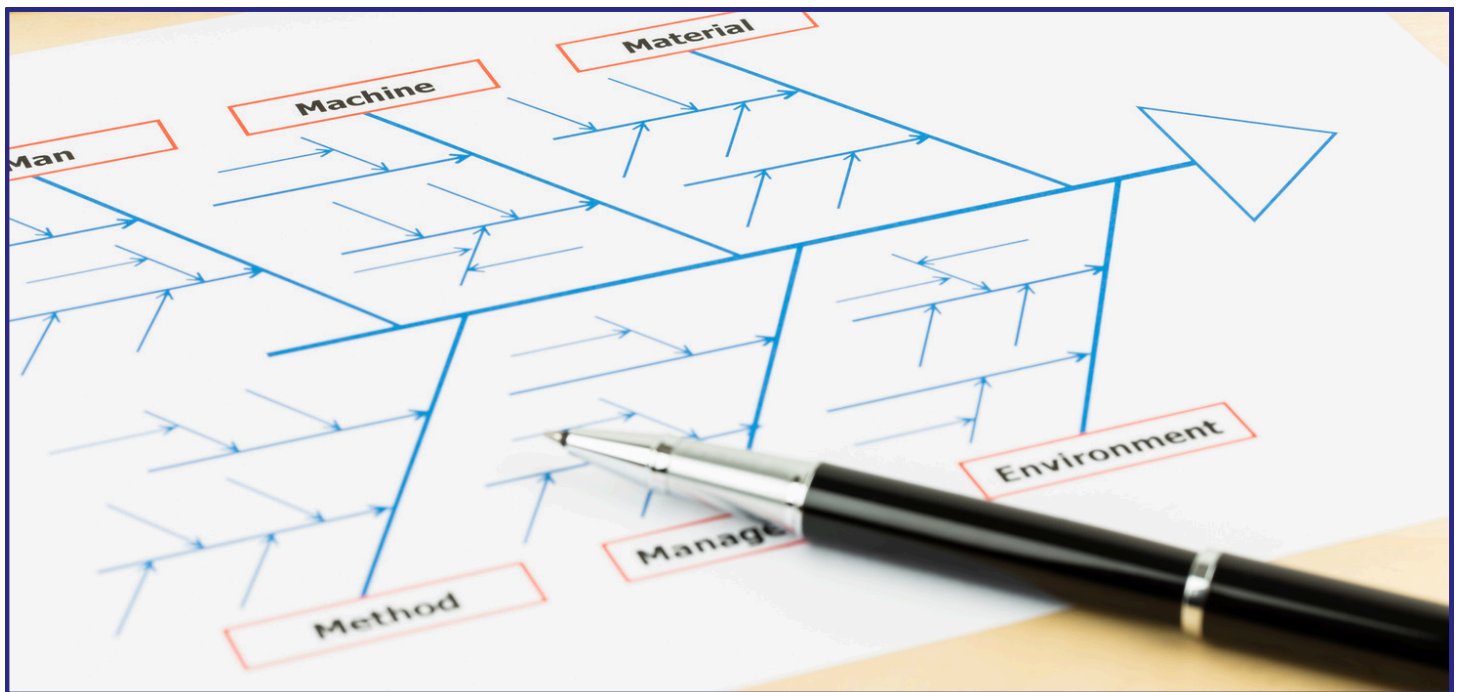
Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)

This quarter, outreach to share and encourage uptake of the PDIA method has continued with SACN participating cities. A concept note has been shared with cities for a one-day workshop during which participants complete the first two most important steps of the PDIA method: establishing a common understanding of a problem they are trying to solve and developing a fishbone diagram showing the causes and sub-causes of the problem.

At a meeting with Shanaaz Majiet of the City of Tshwane Executive Leadership and Management Academy, she agreed to hold an in-person workshop in late January or early February 2026 and, in the meantime, would canvass the city's Executive Management Team to decide on a problem to focus on.

Practitioners in Nelson Mandela Bay have been contacted through the assistance of Sheona Claasen, Assistant Director Policy and Research and have been requested to secure a date and canvass colleagues on a problem to focus on. In the City of Ekurhuleni, the knowledge management team is considering our proposal at the request of Tsholofelo Koopedi, Head of Strategy and Corporate Planning Department.

The learnings from the City of Joburg PDIA pilot and the PDIA method were presented to the Special Projects Management Office (SPMO) in the City of Joburg in December. The Programme Manager was accompanied by the Executive Manager, Programmes, and two City of Joburg employees who spoke about their experience learning PDIA and applying it in their work. The Group Head SPMO Tyrin Naidoo has requested SACN to facilitate a PDIA workshop for the SPMO in March 2026.



Team News & Events

Inaugural World Cities Colloquium, 31 Oct 2025

The South African Cities Network (SACN) partnered with the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) School of Construction Economics and Management in hosting the inaugural World Cities Day Colloquium on 31 October 2025. The Colloquium brought together scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to explore strategies for building sustainable, inclusive, and resilient cities across South Africa and the African continent. The inaugural 2025 edition focused on revitalising South African cities through research-informed policy, innovation in housing and infrastructure, and multi-sector partnerships that promote equitable urban regeneration.



Team News & Events

South African Cultural Observatory (SACO) 5th International Conference, 4-5 Nov 2025



At the South African Cultural Observatory (SACO) 5th International Conference held at the DHL Stadium in Cape Town from 4-5 November 2025, our CEO, Ms Nosipho Hlatshwayo, delivered a powerful presentation exploring the deep relationship between festivals and urban life, showing how festivals are not just cultural events, but political, economic, and spatial forces that shape our cities.

She highlighted how festivals influence civic identity, create platforms for public discourse, enable placemaking, and stimulate local economies. At the same time, she unpacked the tensions that arise such as exclusion, congestion, gentrification, and the “right to the city” calling for more conscious, community-centred festival planning and policy.

Nosipho emphasised that when curated intentionally, festivals can become catalysts for inclusive urban regeneration, social cohesion, and heritage-driven development.

Her message was clear: cities must recognise the socio-political power of festivals and design them in ways that uplift communities, protect public space, and bridge divides.



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



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