

Land earmarked for housing developments to be released in the second half of the year

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LAND earmarked for state-funded housing developments would probably be released in the second half of the year, Department of Human Settlements operations chief Neville Chainee said yesterday.

Estimates put SA's housing backlog at 2,1-million, affecting 12-million people.

Human Settlements Minister Tokyo Sexwale last year said the government intended to have dealt with it by 2030.

"The thorn in our side has been identifying suitable land," Mr Chainee told a building sector crisis summit called by Master Builders SA (MBSA).

There was a R22bn budget for state-funded housing settlements this year, he said.

In the past 18 months, President Jacob Zuma's government had adopted a performance-based approach to its work, Mr Chainee said.

Part of Mr Sexwale's performance agreement was to provide 40000 informal settlement households with secure tenure by 2014, 80000 units of affordable rental stock, and a national bulk infrastructure programme that would increase access to services.

SA has for several years been rocked by public protest, sometimes violent, over the lack of service delivery.

Construction sector players at the "summit" bemoaned the lack of information coming from the government on its proposed R850bn infrastructure spending plan for the three years to 2013.

Some said it appeared there was only R350bn available.

Mr Chainee said the department's land release programme would not involve auctions — something feared by some because of the potential to out-price the poor.

Twenty-seven municipalities would be given the power to accredit housing projects, and they would be measured on their plans, and the time it took for them to approve the plans.

The department had suspended the rights of some municipalities to do this, Mr Chainee said.

The department was discussing how to finance its plans with the Treasury, the National Housing Finance Corporation and other entities.

The corporation was hoping to "gain some traction" on this "in the next couple of months", Mr Chainee said.

He called on MBSA members to co-operate more with the government in providing low- cost housing, even during construction booms when the temptation to abandon low-cost provision for the top end of the market was strong.