



Press Release

Conference on

Opportunities in a Falling Market

Has the recession created any opportunities for the poor at the low end of the urban land market?

On the 28th and 29th of October 2009, Urban LandMark, a Pretoria-based think tank on urban land issues and how they impact on the poor, will be hosting a conference at Bytes Conference Centre in Midrand.

The conference will be attended by a range of stakeholders involved in the functioning of the urban land market, including government and municipal officials, NGOs, academics, and developers.

A diversity of speakers are presenting at the conference, with Mr Sithole Mbanga, CEO of the South African Cities Network, giving the keynote address, while Professor Paul Syagga from the University of Nairobi will make a presentation on the recession and its effect on Africa. In addition, a range of experts, including Ms Durkje Gilfillan (ex-Land Claims Commissioner), Neville Chaine (Manager: Housing Development Agency) and Erwin Rode (CEO: Rode & Associates), will participate in various panels over the two days. The panel discussions include land market trends, expropriation and tenure issues. For a full list of speakers please refer to the online programme <http://www.urbanlandmark.org.za/conference/programme.php>

How can the falling land prices contribute to poverty alleviation and the integration of poorer segments of society into the city? The current recession presents an opportunity to Government, the private sector and to communities, but this opportunity to secure access seems to have been ignored. Poorer people looking for land in cities to live and trade on find it difficult to compete in the market, whether assisted by the state or not. The state needs to secure opportunities for all urban residents to have a stake in the urban economy.

Stephen Berrisford, Urban LandMark policy consultant, sees the conference as an ideal opportunity to address the opportunities offered by falling land prices. "For the past decade, steeply rising land prices have been touted as the primary obstacle to poor South Africans establishing a foothold on the urban property ladder. Now the prices are dropping. The 'high prices' explanation falls flat," Berrisford comments. "What are we doing to change our government policies and strategies to take advantage of this dramatic turnaround in the market? This conference looks at what we need to do better and differently, so that in five or ten years' time when we look back we don't say 'if only'".

Urban LandMark Programme Director, Mark Napier, believes that this is a very timely discussion to be having. "Unless the political will to integrate cities in Africa is backed by real engagement between the public and private sectors, there is little hope that we will be able to harness the power of the market to build more inclusive cities" said Napier. "Government has a duty to manage land in the public interest for the good of all, but developers and other private sector entrepreneurs take the risks and have the visions

which actually get built. We should be finding ways for both sectors to work with civil society to build more integrated cities using the opportunities which the current economic situation offers to us. This is the issue we are taking on in this conference.”

Over one hundred delegates have signed up to attend the conference, representing many of the stakeholder groups who need to engage with these issues.

The Urban Land Markets Programme, or “Urban LandMark” is a think tank dedicated to making urban land markets work better for poor people. We aim to influence policies and practice in southern Africa by investigating and promoting sustainable ways to access affordable urban land. Secure access to land and participation in the market are key building blocks for poverty alleviation and wealth creation. The state, civil society and the private sector need to each devote themselves to achieving urban inclusion and integration if sustainable cities and towns are to emerge in what is recognised as the fastest urbanising region in the world. Addressing land and property issues is at the heart of achieving a better urban future.

Urban LandMark was established in 2006 with core funding from the UK’s Department for International Development.

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