Review

Socio-Economic Dynamics Inhibiting Inclusive Urban Economic Development: Implications for Sustainable Urban Development in South African Cities

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Abstract: Globally, the need for sustainable urban development has never been more urgent than it is now. This is because estimates indicate that more than half of the global population will be living in urban areas by 2050, with South Africa estimated at 80%. This paper focuses on socio-economic nuances that impede sustainable urban development, as well as the strategies that can accelerate sustainable and inclusive urban development in South Africa. Through a literature-review methodology, the analysis identified the following issues as impediments to sustainable urban development in South Africa: informality, lack of consultations with urban citizens, unresolved apartheid legacies, crime and insecurity, and migration intricacies in South Africa. The paper also establishes prospective strategies to accelerate sustainable urban development, such as working with informality and not against it, promoting inclusivity and access to resources, accelerating policy reforms, investing in rural towns, and investing in superior technology and innovation. These findings imply that there is a need to seek alternative development models and approaches, to address poverty, unemployment, and poor housing, aspects that negatively impact urban development planning and sustainable development. The paper recommends inclusive urban housing as a remedy to address the challenges of access, affordability, and the quality of housing facilities in urban areas.

Keywords: South Africa; sustainable development; sustainable urban development

1. Introduction

Globally, the aspiration for sustainable cities and communities is expressed in United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11, which focuses on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable [1]. These aspirations are important because the global urban population is growing speedily. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme [2] has estimated that 68% of the world's population will be living in cities by the year 2050, while the United Nations' 2023 *Sustainable Development Goals Report (Special Edition)* estimates the urban population at 70% in 2050 [3]. These statistics are a clear indication of urban growth, which demands holistic approaches to sustainable planning and development to achieve the set targets. Interestingly, the United Nations Habitat South Africa [4] reports that South Africa is one of the most urbanized countries in Africa, with an urban population estimated at 67% and a future projection of 80% by 2050. This is above the global average estimates of 68% and 70% in 2050 [2–4].

Therefore, urban planning and development are of paramount importance in South Africa to ensure social, economic, health, and environmental sustainability in the urban areas as well as rural towns. The need for deliberate transformative and sustainable urban planning and development in South Africa is informed by the ugly legacies of apartheid that still linger in the country, especially in the socio-economic and spatial development of rural and urban areas [5,6]. Consequently, there is growing fragmentation of rural and urban areas, causing a high rural–urban migration [4,7–10]. Urban areas across the globe continue to experience increasing pressure from the growing urban population and its

spinoffs, such as poverty, inequality, informal settlements, crime, and unemployment, to mention but a few. These shocks and disruptive events underscore the urgent need to think about urban sustainability by tackling underlying systemic and structural problems [11]. Moreover, a report by the Cities Network acknowledges that the government alone cannot solve these problems, because they are complex and entrenched; hence, inclusive innovative approaches are needed to find long-term and sustainable solutions.

Previous studies show that the challenges of urbanization in South Africa reflect the fundamental weaknesses of the country's economy, weaknesses which severely limit the capacity of the urban areas to accommodate and employ rural migrants [12–14]. Moreover, research on sustainable development and urban planning in Africa shows that countries are confronted with two critical challenges, which are rapid urbanization and the severe impact of climate change [15]. It further underscores that most African countries have not yet departed from the colonial urban planning systems in order to effectively respond to the needs of rapid urbanization and high population growth. The sluggish change or lack of change in urban planning systems has created and widened the gap between formal and informal settlements in many countries, such as South Africa [16–18]. The literature indicates that cities in Africa have doubled in number in the last three decades, from 3300 to 7600, accounting for a population of about 500 million people [19]. From these figures, it can be determined that Africa's cities are rapidly growing, and the impact on the economic, social, environmental, and political landscape in the future is profound. For instance, urbanization presents immense opportunities to accelerate progress towards the 2030 and 2063 development agendas for Africa, and South Africa in particular [19]. However, the inverse risk is proportional, due to the various economic, structural, and governance gaps.

The UN-Habitat [2] *World Cities Report* stresses building resilience for the success of cities, towns, and urban areas, and emphasises policies that protect and sustain all, leaving no one behind. It calls for green investment encouraging sustainable patterns of consumption and production; responsive and inclusive urban planning; the prioritization of public health; and innovation and technology for all. These focus areas underscore the significance of economic, social, and environmental investment for sustainable cities. According to Totaforti [20], the issues of sustainable urban development should not be mere analysis of the consequences of urban development in African cities, but also the development of new paradigms or the assessment of the adequacy of traditional development paradigms to understand the consequences that new urban dynamics have on quality of life for the residents of urban areas. Therefore, policymakers and urban development practitioners have very important roles in managing the nuances associated with urbanization and its impact on sustainable development. The importance of debates on urban sustainability and the approaches to achieving it cannot be overemphasized. This paper aims to identify socio-economic nuances that impede sustainable urban development in South Africa and suggest strategies that can accelerate sustainable urban development in South Africa. Therefore, the following are the two main questions which the paper seeks to answer: What are the socio-economic impediments to sustainable and inclusive urban development in South Africa? What strategies can accelerate sustainable and inclusive urban development in South Africa? To address these questions, a literature review which is qualitative in approach will be used to analyse relevant empirical and theoretical studies as well as technological reports from government departments and international organizations such as the United Nations. This review is important because rapid urbanization in South Africa is a concern for the government and urban developers. On the other hand, the current literature, for instance [5–8,13,17,18,20], focuses primarily on economic and spatial urban development, as well as factors for rapid urbanization in Africa, with little focus on the impediments to sustainable and inclusive urbanization. Thus, this paper contributes to the growing literature on sustainable development by bringing in aspects of inclusivity, from planning to implementing urban development plans and projects. The findings of the paper are significant to urban developers and planners in understanding the socio-economic dimensions likely to undermine their efforts towards achieving sustainable urban devel-

opment in South Africa. Highlighting the predominant impediments and new strategies can be useful in strategic resource allocation and determining policy directions towards sustainable and inclusive urban development.

2. Literature Review

An Overview of Economic and Urban Development in South Africa

The term *sustainable urban development* has been defined and conceptualized differently depending on the focus of the subject matter. For instance, according to Pisano, Lepuschitz, and Berger [21], urban sustainable development encompasses the practices and activities that relate to sustainable development within cities, such as the promotion of organic farmers, markets, access to sustainable mobility, reduction of power consumption, recycling, and waste prevention. It also encompasses processes of sustainable development such as being cognizant of the infrastructural needs of the cities, such as the provision of affordable housing for disadvantaged residents. Finally, it is about reflecting on the outcomes for cities given the use of a sustainable development perspective focusing on land management and consumption of water resources. Irrefutably, urban planning is key to sustainable development. Proper planning creates space to address critical infrastructure shortages, improve urban living, promote inclusive and resilient urban futures, and promote community involvement in planning decisions and actions [15].

According to UN-DESA [22], sustainable urban development should be premised on four pillars of sustainable development. The first pillar is social development, which comprises education and health, food and nutrition, green housing and buildings, water and sanitation, green public transportation, recreation areas, and community support. The second pillar is environmental protection, focusing on forests and soil management, waste and recycling management, energy efficiency, water management, air quality conservation, and adaptation and mitigation of climate change. The third pillar is economic development which focuses on green productive growth, creation of decent employment, production and distribution of renewable energy, and technology and innovation. The fourth pillar is effective urban governance, which entails decentralization and planning, reduction of inequalities, strengthening of civil and political rights, and support of local, national, regional, and global links. For cities to be considered sustainable, their input, throughput and output must be balanced within these pillars. Conceptually, inclusive urban development is an active engagement of all urban stakeholders in the inputs and outputs of all the pillars of sustainable development. The relationship between sustainable and inclusive development is based on the interconnectedness of economy and society, infrastructure and environment, leadership and strategy, and health and wellbeing [11]. Through this framework, the economy and the society foster socio-economic prosperity and promote social stability, safety, justice, and cohesiveness, which results in actively engaged communities. These infrastructure components facilitate the continuity of critical services and reliable access to amenities, while leadership provides for effective management and empowerment of urban stakeholders and the fostering of integrated planning. The health and well-being tenet focuses on meeting basic needs by supporting livelihoods through employment and health services [11]. Therefore, sustainable, and inclusive urban development is the practice of balancing all these components without disenfranchising any segment of the population in current and future development endeavours.

Since the end of the apartheid political era, South Africa has, through policy and development programmes, endeavoured to correct the past injustices believed to be detrimental to urban development. In 1997, for instance, the South African Department of Housing launched the Urban Development Framework, a policy which underscored the potential of urbanization in economic and social progress, and the improvement of quality of life for many South Africans [23]. The Framework ushered in a momentous period in urban development in the country because the policies of the colonial and apartheid eras denied most South Africans urban opportunities, and the associated policies and legislative Acts made urban planning dysfunctional and unsustainable [23]. South Africa further

embarked on various transformative socio-economic plans, which included Reconstruction and Development (RDP); Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR); the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP); the Urban Renewal Programme (URP); the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA); the New Growth Path; the National Development Plan (NDP); the Nine Point Plan; the Fourteen Point Plan; the New Dawn; the Growth Renewal and Sustainability Plan; the Economic Recovery and Reconstruction Plan; the District Development Model and attendant master plans; and Just Energy Transition. Recently, the cabinet also adopted the Integrated Urban Development Framework and the National Spatial Development Framework [24]. The series of these programmes and policy frameworks over the years indicate the efforts made by the government to achieve socio-economic goals such as employment, the lessening of inequality, economic growth, and inclusive urban development. However, moving from one policy to another is indicative of a struggle to 'get it right' as a country as to economic and urban development. Perhaps this points to the failure of leadership and governance in the implementation of policies or indicates that the programmes being implemented are not sustainable.

Nonetheless, South Africa's vision for sustainable urban development, as well as guidelines and programmes to achieve this vision, are outlined in the Integrated Urban Development Framework. The vision for the Integrated Urban Development Framework is to have liveable, safe, resource-efficient cities and towns that are socially integrated, economically inclusive, and globally competitive, where residents actively participate in urban life [25]. The Integrated Urban Development Framework seeks to transform and restructure South Africa's urban spaces and foster a shared understanding across government and society. This shared understanding is important in facilitating best practices for managing urbanization and achieving the goals of economic development, job creation, and improved quality of living [25]. The Framework encompasses four strategic goals, which are inclusion and access, inclusive growth, effective governance, and spatial integration. This is also aligned with South Africa's National Development Plan, which focuses on nine key areas, namely, creating jobs, expanding infrastructure, transitioning to a low-carbon economy, transforming urban and rural communities, improving education and training, ensuring quality healthcare, building a capable state, combating corruption, and improving accountability, and consolidating social cohesion [26]. Nonetheless, the question remains whether South Africa has attained sustainable urban planning and development. Far from it. The urban conditions in the country seem to be deteriorating with increasing housing challenges, informal settlements, and congestion in cities [4]. These compounding challenges negatively affect the quality of life and exert pressure on infrastructural facilities, as well as natural resources such as water, clean air, and land space [4].

However, recent studies in South Africa report goodwill endeavours from social investors and planners aiming to make South African urban life sustainable by promoting social inclusion, economic growth, and environmental sustainability by seeking new ways to solve the historical and underlying urban challenges [24,27]. This is brought about through collaborations and partnerships of professionals and practitioners in various sectors, such as health, the economy, safety and security, and human rights, to design, develop and implement urban models that make the cities and towns more liveable, equitable, and sustainable [11]. Well-planned urbanization plays a pivotal role in reducing rural poverty, improving food security, and creating opportunities for rural and urban transformation [28]. Therefore, the success of urban areas has direct and indirect positive impacts on both rural and urban areas.

Globally, despite the benefits associated with urbanization, there are myriad challenges; some are common across the board, while others are unique to specific contexts. Looking at the South African context, the South African Cities Network [11] reported that the global financial and economic crisis, water shortages due to climate change, and the health and socio-economic devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic are the current challenges facing urban development. The report also revealed public unrest, violence,

and crime to be daunting challenges in South African cities. The unprecedented rate of crime results in looting and destruction of businesses and property, hence pushing away investors seeking to grow the economy. Perhaps, these social ills are attributable to what Cobbinah [15] notes as the widening inequalities within cities, unemployment, infrastructure deficits, concentration of vulnerable populations in vulnerable locations, and slum growth in South Africa. South Africa, like many other countries in Africa, suffers from the informality of activities in cities, such as informal economic activities and informal land occupation. Research shows that in some towns in South Africa, land ownership is brokered by traditional leadership and indigenous, or tribal, leaders [15]. Therefore, informality is a key feature of South Africa's urban areas [15,20]. The interrelationships of these challenges seem to undermine the efforts made by urban planners and developers towards achieving sustainable and inclusive urban development.

Moreover, Adam and Postma [24] highlight challenges to urban development and sustainability in South Africa, such as a lack of implementation of planning policies; and a lack of collaboration between other urban professionals and urban planners, such as the South African Council for Planners (Sacplan), in the transformation of urban planning; and lack of good governance. With these challenges aboard, it is difficult to develop and implement a transformative urban policy premised on sustainability-inclined pillars of social justice, environmental stewardship, and economic inclusion. Consequently, this affects the well-being of individuals and communities, and, ultimately, urban planning and development [29].

Irrefutably, the rapid urbanization in South Africa has both positive and negative outcomes. As to the positive aspects, urbanization is a catalyst for economic growth, skills transfer and knowledge sharing, improved quality of life, and enhanced access to services. On the contrary, urbanization is bedevilled by inequality, congestion, insecurity, the tearing-down of social fabric, and poverty, to mention but a few. These aspects are arguably impediments to attaining sustainable urban development in South Africa, hence the need for innovative, sustainable, and inclusive approaches in planning and developing urban areas in the future.

3. Materials and Methods

To understand the multifaceted dimensions of sustainable urban development, different research approaches, such as quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, should be used [30–32]. This paper adopted a literature review, a sub-method of qualitative research, to enumerate the nuances that impede and accelerate sustainable and inclusive urban development in South Africa. The literature search did not yield publications on the impediments to sustainable urban development in South Africa; hence, this paper seeks to address this gap. However, there is a plethora of literature on sustainable development and urban planning and development, and this provides adequate information to conduct an analysis to inform discussions working towards a meaningful conclusion on the subject. This analysis is significant to urban development practitioners such as urban planners, policymakers, and urban law-enforcement authorities, as well as social service personnel.

To ensure credible, valid, and sufficient-quality findings, the researchers followed the six steps of conducting a review analysis which were proposed by Templier and Paré [33]. They proposed that a credible and reliable review must have clear research questions or objectives; correspondingly, the two questions in this paper ask the following: What are the impediments to sustainable and inclusive economic urban development in South Africa? What strategies can accelerate sustainable and inclusive economic urban development in South Africa? The second step entails searching for the extant literature from various credible sources. This paper utilized journal articles, United Nations reports on urbanization and sustainable development, and South African urban planning reports and policy briefs to answer the questions above. The search for the appropriate materials was conducted using a combination of words and statements, such as social investment, South Africa, sustainable urban development, challenges of urbanization, urban planning,

urban development, and sustainable development. The third step entails screening the materials for inclusion in the analysis. The following databases were consulted: ProQuest, Science Direct, CABINET, EBSCOHOSTD, Scopus, and Google Scholar. However, due to its accessibility, Google Scholar was used to search for journal articles that were screened using the following criteria: studies not exceeding ten years since publication; having been published in the English language; focusing on sustainable urban development, inclusive economy, and urbanization; and focusing within the South African context. South Africa was chosen because of its higher rate of urbanization relative to the rest of the continent, with projections placing it above the global average by 2050 [3,4].

Moreover, articles that used quantitative, qualitative, and literature-review methods were included. The inclusion of multiple methods and materials provides confidence that the analysis is based on rich, verifiable, and reliable information. In addition to the peer-reviewed articles, credible organizations' reports, such as those from the United Nations and South African government departments were used, as they provide the latest statistics and policy-based data on sustainable urban planning and development. This exercise culminated in the fourth step, namely, assessing the quality of the studies to be included in the review. From this assessment, a sample of 61 studies ($n = 61$) was selected, comprising $n = 35$ journal articles, $n = 7$ United Nations technical reports, and $n = 19$ Department and agency reports and working papers. The fifth and sixth steps include extracting and analysing data. Figure 1 illustrates the research design undertaken in executing this review. This being a narrative review, the analysis focused on the interpretation of prior findings, without seeking generalization [34]. The motivation for adopting this approach was the inspiration it gives to the researchers to gather information from various sources, hence adding to the identification of gaps and the suggestion of possible questions [33]. The information relating to the research questions in this paper was collated, summarised, and presented thematically for further discussion. The findings are presented in a two-fold manner. First, it addresses the issues that impede sustainable urban and economic development, and second, the strategies to accelerate sustainable urban development in South Africa.
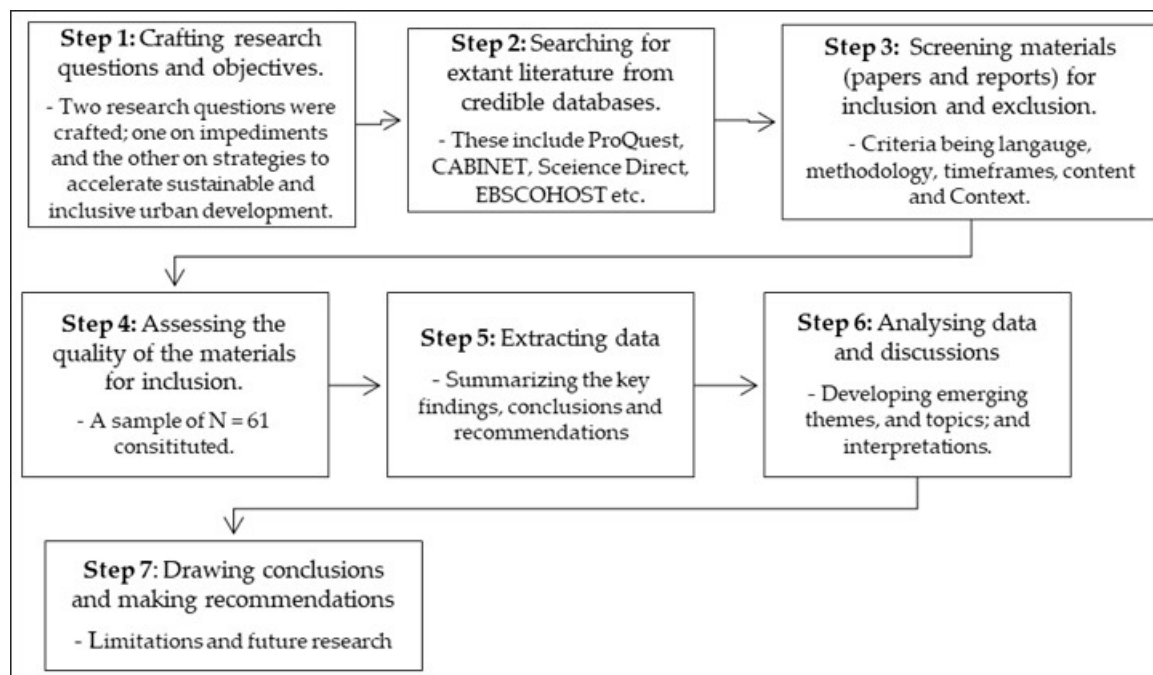

Figure 1. Research design flow chart. Source: Authors' compilation from Templier and Paré [33], outlining six steps of conducting a literature review.

Limitations

This paper focuses on issues that impede sustainable urban development, and the strategies to accelerate sustainable and inclusive economic urban development in South Africa. The findings of this study are limited to the South African context, and therefore they cannot be statistically generalized to the entire African region. However, the findings are indicative of the common impediments towards sustainable urban development in Africa and the world at large. The second limitation of the study is that the paper did not focus on testing the relationships between various factors to determine their impacts on sustainable and urban economic development. This provides an opportunity for larger-scale research on the interactions and relationships between these nuances.

4. Results

4.1. Nuances That Impede Sustainable Urban Development in South Africa

4.1.1. Informal Settlements and Businesses

Previous studies, such as those of Totaforti [20] and Cobbinah [15], portray African cities as being highly characterised by an informality which reflects the socio-economic and cultural contexts of African communities. However, urban planning and development have not fully acknowledged the importance of this informality in the development paradigm. Consequently, informality has been treated like a crime, resulting in frequent demolitions and evictions, as well as being used as bacon for political mileage [15]. These studies argue that informality is not a problem, but the lack of the capacity of urban planners to work with informality is instead the main problem. For instance, a study by Cindy [35] revealed that metropolitan municipalities in South Africa are experiencing a lack of adequate infrastructure, 'mushrooming of informal settlements', and a lack of effective urban planning strategies to address the increase in rural–urban migration. The population growth and varying cultural aspects in the cities are putting tremendous strain and pressure on the availability of utilities and resources [36]; hence, the majority result in seeking alternatives and establishing ad hoc plans to fend for themselves. The growing phenomenon of informal settlements and businesses indicates urban poverty, unemployment, and stark inequalities. Consequently, informality is associated with various social ills including crime, violence, and low standards of living [35,37]. The South African government needs to proactively adopt urban planning and development strategies that promote inclusivity, both socially and economically.

4.1.2. Lack of Consultations and Engagement with the Urban Citizens

The success of sustainable urban planning and development is premised on various factors, including active consultation with all stakeholders. However, in South Africa, there is limited involvement or no involvement of citizens in consultations regarding urban planning and development [15]. Consequently, this has created a situation in which many urban citizens do not know much about planning requirements, which has resulted in unsustainable practices in urban areas. This lack, as well as a failure to consult widely, is blurred by colonial elitism and thus ignores inputs from the people most affected by the urban development spinoffs, such as the poor slum dwellers. It is for this reason that Cobbinah [15] argues that unless urban citizens are holistically engaged and encouraged to appreciate the value of urban planning, the concept and purpose of sustainable urban development will continue to be a mirage in African countries and cities. Therefore, it is not until urban planning and development in Africa, and South Africa specifically, is reconstructed to focus on cultural matters and practices rather than implementing colonial ideologies, that sustainable urban development can be realized.

4.1.3. Unresolved Apartheid Legacies

Historically, South Africa has had an ugly political legacy of apartheid that touches all aspects of development, including spatial planning. The apartheid policies on Bantustans and forced removals led to spatial challenges such as spatial injustice, spatial unsustainabil-

ity, lack of spatial quality, spatial inefficiencies, and a lack of spatial resilience [38]. Various factors perpetuated the apartheid spatial patterns, including continued segregation of urban settlements, unequal income levels and access to services, unsustainable infrastructure networks, consumption patterns, existing markets, and land use [18,30,39,40]. Moreover, previous studies show that the existing inequalities in South Africa are predominantly based on a racial division, with the White minority being the affluent and the Black majority being impoverished and living in squalor conditions in urban areas [5,38]. The impact of spatial segregation in South Africa is glaring and negatively influences the sustainability of urban planning and development, especially in Black-dominated areas.

4.1.4. Violence, Crime, and Insecurity

Due to the widespread poverty and inequality in urban areas, many young people are pushed into looking for alternative strategies for sustaining their livelihoods. This has resulted in violence and organized crime in urban areas in South Africa [37,41,42]. These studies indicate that cities with social, economic, and spatial inequalities are more likely to have high crime rates. These criminal activities range from petty theft to armed and organized crime, drug trafficking, terrorism, and xenophobic attacks [41,42]. According to UN-Habitat [43], insecurity and violence are attributed to a wide range of social, economic, and psychological problems at the individual, community, and country levels. It also highlights the fact that insecurity and violence have paved the way for widespread fear among urban dwellers, leading to a deterioration in the amount of foreign direct investment, a decrease in productivity, an increase in the number of private security agencies, and an uneven distribution of public services [43,44].

4.1.5. Migration and Immigration Issues in South Africa

South Africa is a choice destination for thousands of African and Asian immigrants [45–48]. South Africa benefits immensely from immigrants, who contribute their skills in various sectors, such as business, medicine, mining, and education, among others [49]. However, this phenomenon has increased the number of urban residents in South African cities such as Johannesburg, putting more pressure on available amenities and services. Additionally, South Africa continues to experience high levels of economic inequalities, with major towns attaining a state of affluence, while the rural and peri-urban areas show a stark state of impoverishment [38]. Thus, the economic growth in the cities and the poor living conditions in the rural areas have led to increasing rural–urban migration [50,51]. Consequently, this results in a housing crisis in urban areas, which further causes challenges of land grabbing, illegal occupations, and an increase in informal settlements [52–54]. The struggle for limited resources has been attributed to occasional waves of xenophobic violence in South African cities, which usually result in the destruction of personal and public property [41,42,55]. Moreover, internal migrations within the country, such as those associated with schooling, have implications for urban development. For instance, the Gauteng Province receives hundreds of thousands of international and local migrants every year, adding pressure on social amenities such as schools. To address these inadequacies, proposals have been made to the government to expand and establish more social amenities to accommodate migrants in the cities [56]. Therefore, the burgeoning number of city residents is overwhelming the cities' current capabilities in many aspects, hence calling for restructuring and planning for sustainable urban development in South Africa.

4.2. Strategies to Accelerate Sustainable Urban Development

4.2.1. Working with Informality and Not against It

South African cities, like those of other African countries, are characterized by informal businesses and informal settlements [15,19,57]. These informalities present various challenges to urban planners and developers. However, since the economy of the country is not adequate for the provision of decent jobs for every urban resident, there have been suggestions for supporting the informal economy in its efforts to progressively transition

and integrate into the mainstream economy. Therefore, urban planning and development practitioners should work with the informal sector and not against it, aiming to address inequalities, lack of skills, and unemployment, as well as improve local resilience [53,58]. Recognizing the usefulness and drivers of informality through urban planning can inform sustainable urbanization in the future. The United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development [59] 'principle four' aspires to achieve sustainable development through urban economic growth and development that enables but does not destroy informal livelihoods. It recommends economic development strategies to provide multiple avenues through which informal workers and entrepreneurs can expand their businesses, increase their productivity, and climb up the economic ladder [59].

Interestingly, the current global trends in urban development are shifting towards smart cities [57,58]. However, there are concerns that such shifts, if not well-designed and coordinated, are likely to exacerbate the gaps between formality and informality in urban areas. For instance, South African cities are characterized by socio-economic inequalities, unreliable public transport systems, and governance failures, among other challenges [60,61]. Therefore, there is a need for the effective implementation of smart urban technologies to address these existing inequalities and harmonize the spatial exclusion of urban space [58]. Accordingly, Bandauko and Arku argue that the adoption of smart-city ideas in Africa must be rooted in contextual realities and properly designed to create urban spaces that are sustainable and inclusive [58]. For instance, a study by Loewenson, Mhlanga, Gotto, Chayikosa, Goma, and Walyaro [62] reported potential gains in urban development attained by focusing on low-income communities; links between social, economic, and ecological benefits; and investment in women and young people, as well as urban biodiversity. This implies that the entire value chain of urban development, whether within formal or informal dimensions, must be considered to optimize planning, enable economic growth, and improve the sustainability of the required resources. This prompts the planners to 'think inside, outside, and around the box' to decriminalize some aspects of informalities, such as those with economic value, and use them as a baseline principle for planning, improving, and building inclusive cities with sustainable economic development.

4.2.2. Promote Inclusivity and Access to Services and Resources

As alluded to earlier in this paper, South Africa is still nursing the impacts of the apartheid regime. During the apartheid era, most of the citizens were excluded from the mainstream economy and denied their choice of spatial space. This paper finds that new approaches such as social investment are instrumental in promoting inclusivity and the accessibility of social and economic opportunities [63–65]. This is achievable through integrated infrastructure network systems and efficient land governance, which can trigger economic diversification, inclusion, and empowerment of communities [25]. There is also a need for accessible water, sewerage, transport, education facilities, police, and health facilities. The accessibility and affordability of these services and amenities promote healthy living and instil a sense of belonging and responsibility among the city residents. For instance, water is an important basic need, but prospects of future droughts in Southern Africa are likely to polarize urban inequalities, and regress progress in water access [66]. Thus, urban planners and developers must ensure that water resources can sustainably support all the systems of urban life.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal number 11 (SDG 11) calls for inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities. To advance and achieve this goal, urban planning and development must focus on inclusive and accessible health care, education, housing, safety, jobs, and innovation, as well as the reduction of air pollution [67]. Literature shows that social investment can accelerate the achievement of these ideals. Social investment is a new approach to social welfare in which governments prioritize policies and programmes that promote employment, equipping people for productive work through training, skilling, reskilling, and supporting socio-economic development through progressive policies [64,65,68]. Globally, social investment is becoming increasingly important in

addressing both social and economic challenges. This is possible through the provision of finance to organizations and institutions with the explicit expectation of a social as well as a financial return [69,70].

However, social returns must be clearly defined a priori and not as a spillover of a commercial project [71]. Over the last decade, several OECD member countries have been actively creating policies and mechanisms for the support of social investment [63]. For instance, social housing in South Africa is a government programme aiming to redress the old apartheid spatial inequities by providing low- and moderate-income households with good quality and affordable rental housing opportunities in well-located parts of South African cities [39]. According to Totaforti [20], the issues of sustainable urban development should not merely prompt analysis of the consequences of urban development in African cities, but also the development of new paradigms or the assessment of the adequacy of traditional development paradigms in understanding the consequences that new urban dynamics have on the quality of life of the cities' residents. Thus, social investment, as one of those new paradigms, needs to be studied in the context of South African sustainable urban development. This view corroborates Kanayo and Mngometulu's contention that social investment has the potential to address poverty and inequality and spark inclusive economic development [70]. They recommend that South Africa's macroeconomic policies need to be rethought and worked into more inclusive policies.

4.2.3. Formulate and Accelerate Policy Reforms

Over the past several years, South Africa has embarked on the formulation of policies and programmes aiming to facilitate reforms in urban development, as indicated in the literature overview section. However, the main challenge has been the effective implementation of these policies. The Coalition for Urban Transitions [72] report outlined the six ways South Africa can advance a socially just urban transformation. These ways include accelerating policy reforms to enable municipalities to procure their clean energy and use renewables to improve electricity access; putting pro-poor urban measures at the heart of plans and development; prioritising improved mobility for lower-income urban residents; revamping housing strategies to prioritise smaller-scale projects that can be built in city sub-centres, and on providing well-connected, serviced sites for construction; providing targeted support for cities of different sizes and economic structures; and protecting and restoring ecosystems in and around cities and investing in greening the urban landscape [72].

Socially friendly policies are important in achieving urban sustainable development in South Africa. This is because the processes of urbanization and industrialization are socially, economically, and politically mediated and may not automatically improve the livelihoods of city residents if they are not supported by progressive legislation. Policies that support people who are organizing themselves and advocating for the securing of a better life, conducive working conditions, and access to well-located land for settlement are necessary for sustainable and inclusive urban development in South Africa [62]. These pro-people policies premised on constitutional rights can help to promote decent urban living conditions, especially when supported by social investors and with sufficient government resources. Moreover, leadership and investment plans seeking to boost jobs and livelihoods, as well as essential services, must be policy-embedded. Moreover, climate policies must be accelerated to address inequalities and develop equitable water distribution and conservation measures to ensure sustainable and inclusive adaptation to current and future climate changes [66].

4.2.4. Investing in Rural Towns

The influx of people in urban areas is exacerbated by rural–urban migration [9,28,51,60]. This is because of the 'pulling' factors such as jobs and access to services in cities, as well as 'push' factors such as poverty and unemployment in rural areas. Therefore, to have sustainable economic urban development, rural towns must be developed to absorb the

number of job seekers migrating to urban areas [61]. Moreover, Arndt, Davies, and Thurlow [13] studied urbanization, structural transformation, and rural–urban linkages in South Africa and recommended expanding and maintaining investments in rural areas to provide job- and income-based opportunities for poor rural households who would otherwise migrate to cities. They argue that financing urbanization by reducing rural investment is counterproductive. According to COGTA [25], responding to urban challenges does not imply an exclusive focus on cities, but also the alternative, which is rural development. This is because, in South Africa, the different types of 'urban' and 'rural' settlements are interconnected in dynamic ways and driven by a range of historical and contemporary factors such as cultural practices, capital flows, and environmental resources [25]. It is anticipated that investing in and establishing rural towns will lessen the pressure on available urban resources and services such as housing, water, and healthcare, among others.

A study by Kajiita and Kang'ethe [73,74] shows that rural areas have great potential for social investment due to the availability of unexploited resources such as land and readily available labour. Through innovative planning approaches, urban planners, working through social investors, can keep people in their rural communities by creating employment opportunities and bringing services to their proximity. Previous studies have recommended that the South African government should review its urbanization policies related to the management of rapid rural–urban migration [44,75]. This is because the rural–urban migration leads to housing, water, electricity, and unemployment challenges in the cities. These undertakings can be considered an urban resilience strategy, which is defined by the OECD as a strategy for enabling cities to absorb, recover, and prepare for future shocks related to economic, environmental, social, and institutional changes [19]. The Urban Resilience Strategy entails identifying the extent of residents' demands for developments and/or services to be provided; the benefits such developments or services will bring to the city and its community; the preparedness of the residents of the city to pay for the development or service through their taxes and/or user payments; and the extent to which the development reinforces the resilience of the city in meeting existing or future 'shocks' of any nature.

4.2.5. Investment in Superior Technology and Innovation

As the world's population grows exponentially, millions of people are added to urban environments. Thus, communities and cities must start to build and rebuild differently and use space more efficiently. The infrastructure designs must enable the use of modern technology and innovation to make the cities more sustainable and resilient to human pressure. Urban planners and developers must prioritize smartly in making decisions about where and when to invest and look for plans and designs that serve multiple users with multiple objectives [76]. Research shows that superior technology in communications, control systems, and big data has a great potential for guiding urbanization, and connecting people with the services they need most [76,77]. The South African National Space Agency (SANSA) has indicated that there is an urgent need for effective and sustainable urban planning and development management supported by an adequate and up-to-date geospatial information database. According to SANSA [78], using satellite-based earth observations and other socio-economic and environmental datasets can effectively support the implementation of key national programmes and policies, helping to achieve sustainable urban development. This is because Satellite Earth Observation is vital in supporting the National Development Plan in its curbing of urban sprawl through the densification of housing on well-located land parcels in the inner cities and in its focus on holistic urban development.

Moreover, geospatial information derived from satellite imagery is critical in planning and identifying suitable locations for human settlements and infrastructure development. This information enables planners to broaden their understanding of the urban ecology, which is necessary for designing smart cities resilient to the various impacts of social, economic, and environmental changes [78]. Thus, the superior spatial and temporal parameters from satellites allow for the simultaneous assessment of various parameters for sustainable

planning. This reduces the costs and time involved in data acquisition, especially for urban areas, providing accurate spatial coverage and the change detections necessary for the national Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), which are instrumental for urban housing and settlements.

5. Discussion

The imperative of urban transformation towards sustainability is not unique to South Africa. Globally, the importance of cities and urbanization in driving sustainable and equitable forms of development is acknowledged in multilateral conventions such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, and the Paris Agreement [57]. These conventions, agendas, and agreements portray the global recognition of the kinds of innovation, investment, and management needed to realize the drivers of sustainable development at multiple scales [57]. Globally, the urban population is fast-growing, a phenomenon that prompts more efforts towards sustainable development than ever before. Therefore, the concept of *sustainable urban development* has gained momentum in the current arrangement in order to balance the social, economic, and environmental resources needed to support current and future generations. However, achieving sustainable urban development is not smooth sailing, as it is linked to the complexities of economic, social, and environmental needs [79]. For instance, research shows that the provision of affordable housing in South African cities does not match the rapid rate of urban growth, hence leading to informal settlements and squalor conditions that threaten urban sustainability. Moreover, the findings revealed that immigration, insecurity, apartheid legacies, and lack of good governance impede sustainable and inclusive urban development. These impediments are interlinked to the extent that one could affect the entire chain of sustainable development. For instance, unemployment leads to poverty, which might cause rural–urban migration. When people without sufficient finances to meet their needs move to cities, they are likely to establish informal settlements and involve themselves in illegal activities, hence causing insecurity in urban areas. Perhaps this is the reason why the literature recommends a regular critical assessment of urban development approaches to track whether urbanization is on a sustainable trajectory [80].

The strategies for sustainable urban development must focus on the economic, social, and ecological, as well as sustainable spatial development and cultural continuity. It is for these reasons that the World Bank Group supported South Africa in urban development, focusing on creating a more enabling intergovernmental environment for coordinated development in human settlements and urban public transport, and streamlining policy and regulatory systems [14]. These undertakings are significant in supporting South African cities' transformations and strengthening the capacity of municipalities to lead, plan, finance, and execute elements of urban sustainable programmes. The United Nations Habitat for Africa notes that sustainable urban development in Africa can serve as an enabler in attaining the desired structural transformation, increased prosperity, and peaceful co-existence within the framework of Africa Agenda 2063 [4]. This implies that urbanization that is not inclusive is detrimental to the quality of life of the urban poor, and ultimately all city inhabitants. Therefore, getting urban planning and development right could lessen the impediments to decent jobs, economic growth, social inclusion, and protection of local and regional ecosystems, and ultimately reduce environmental pollution [44].

However, despite the benefits of urbanization, the global trend of rapid urbanization prompts local, national, regional, and global urgency for sustainable urban development. This is because emerging issues such as climate change and migration have local and international effects and require both homemade and collaborative solutions. For instance, the risks of environmental and land degradation are high in urban areas due to increased rural–urban migration, leading to informal settlements and eroding social cohesion, which affects the safety of cities due to inherent inequalities [67]. Therefore, there is a need for more strategic approaches and models of urban planning and development which deliberately

balance the economic, social, and environmental inputs and outputs of development. One of the approaches identified in this paper for accelerating sustainable urban development in South Africa is social investment, focusing on housing, transport, and recreational facilities, among other social services. This is aligned with the United Nations Habitat's [2] recommendations of mainstreaming social inclusion in all types of urban projects and throughout all project phases. This is important because social inclusion cannot be seen as a mere exercise in rhetoric, but rather as an integral approach to urban development in its entirety.

To achieve sustainable urban development in South Africa, urban developers and planners must ensure meaningful participation from all levels of society, including the disadvantaged groups, through local-level partnerships reaching to the most senior levels of governance and investors. This is important to harness and enhance the development and concrete implementation of inclusive urban development proposals. The consultations among stakeholders as a participatory process are necessary for knowledge and expertise sharing through the life cycle of urban development. Sustainable urban development approaches must consider both formal and informal types of labour markets and spatial arrangements through detailed assessments of job opportunities and distribution, accessibility to basic services, and cultural dynamics in ways that strategically support the progressive transition of informality to formality [2]. Thus, sustainable, and inclusive urban development has multidimensional components requiring multiple stakeholders and approaches to achieve the intended goals.

In summary, the literature on urbanization and urban development, especially the analysis described in this paper, has widely employed qualitative research approaches, with a few adopting quantitative approaches. These studies have focused on spatial dynamics such as space planning, infrastructural and structural development [20,51,53,57], social inequality and migration [6,9,13,28,66], violence and safety in urban areas [41,42,45–47], and economic growth and unemployment [44,48], to mention a few. These studies, among others, illustrate the factors affecting urban economic development in South Africa as it works towards achieving sustainable urban development. Moreover, research on solutions to rapid urbanization in South Africa has focused on curbing immigration, investing in rural areas [6,9,13,28], policy development and improved governance, and spatial inclusivity [57,62,67]. Recent studies have also focused on technology and innovation [58,77,79], and on social investment [65,70,73,74] as an alternative approach to various aspects of socio-economic and urban development. These studies highlight various factors which can be considered as impediments or accelerators to inclusive and sustainable urban development. Nonetheless, the literature lacks explicit studies focusing on inclusive and sustainable urban development in the context of South African rapid urbanization but provides insights and direction for future research and development interventions.

6. Conclusions

Understanding the dynamics around sustainable and inclusive urban development is important for South Africa's rapidly growing cities and towns. South Africa is the most urbanizing country in Africa, with continued prospects of increased growth. Despite the benefits of urbanization, such as economic and infrastructure development, urbanization has an equal share of challenges, such as urban poverty, pollution, informal settlements, crime, and inequality, to mention but a few. This paper focused on nuances that impede sustainable urban development in South Africa as well as the strategies that can accelerate sustainable urban development. The study established the following as impediments to sustainable urban development in South Africa: informality of settlements and businesses, lack of active consultations and engagement with urban citizens, unresolved apartheid legacies, insecurity, and migrations. Moreover, the study found the following strategies to be ingredients for sustainable and inclusive urban development: working with and not against informality, promoting inclusivity and access to resources, accelerating policy reforms, investing in rural towns, and adopting and investing in superior technology and

innovation. These findings contribute to the understanding of the complex dynamics of urban development in South Africa. The nature and scale of urban growth, and its impacts on socio-economic transformation, technological shift, climate change, and general insecurity provide an opportunity for urban developers and planners to embrace multisectoral investment frameworks and governance to make urban areas more inclusive, resilient, productive, and sustainable. However, these investments and development plans must be premised on models that are resource-sensitive and people-centric. Importantly, the study recommends increased investments in urban housing to accommodate the rapidly growing populations of South African cities. This would lessen the burden of informal settlements by increasing the accessibility and affordability of housing facilities in the country. Future research could focus on determining the relationships between these nuances and sustainable urban development in South Africa.

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