

RECREATION FOR ALL – BACK TO BASICS

Mr. Maribe Mamabolo

North West Provincial Recreation Council (PROREC)

‘Open spaces’ as contributors to human social wellbeing is a well-researched area across social sciences and urbanization studies. However, the lived reality by most people in South Africa is that open spaces have become a heaven of social ills. Criminal activities have taken over parks, substance abuse is practiced at parks, and parks have become a dumpsite. This ultimately renders what was supposed to be an area for the promotion of community wellbeing into an area feared and despised by many. Most open spaces/parks are managed and maintained as a key responsibility of local municipalities from a maintenance perspective.

However, the care of such facilities has increasingly become poor. Parks are vandalized, the grass hardly gets cut, waste and litter not removed are just some of the observations across numerous public open spaces in communities. Comparatively, gated communities and private residential estates seem to prioritize the maintenance of open spaces, especially where there are young families. This phenomenon is a clear example of the effects of inequality in the country. However, the failure of the state in the provision of the most basic of social needs, results in private market opportunities. In these communities, parks have facilities and equipment, the grass is watered and maintained, waste management practices are in place. This poses the question of, “whom and where can the challenge be attributed to?”.

The South African government and the private sector have invested heavily in the elite professional sport since the turn of democracy. However, multiple attempts to create a national policy for recreation have ensued in very substandard outcomes and policies. The consequence of that has been a direct disregard of all recreation-related activities, infrastructure, equipment, and personnel which has resulted in poor service delivery of recreational activities. The erosion of a basic recreational policy at the grassroots level is a threat to the sporting, health & wellness, and social cohesion ambition of any particular country.

The Provincial Recreation Council (PROREC) of North West, the last remaining of its kind, is advocating for a “back to basics” approach to recreation service delivery. The utilization of open spaces/parks as a means to promote social wellbeing is fundamental to our vision. The investigation of a suitable and sustainable financial model to manage and sustain open spaces/parks by local municipalities is necessary. The correct skills and attributes to manage such spaces is essential and furthermore, the delivery of guided recreational activities as a means to promote the culture of recreational participation amongst communities is essential.

PROREC is well placed to research, develop, and implement a sustainable holistic recreational model however will rely increasingly so on a partnership model with various stakeholders locally and internationally.