

Executive Summary:

South African CBDs continue to face persistent challenges of infrastructure failure, crime and grime, weak urban management and economic decline, limiting their ability to function as inclusive and economically vibrant urban centres. Building on the momentum of the COGTA CBD Revitalisation Strategy and its associated implementation plans, the SALGA CBD Revitalisation project was developed to expand and extend this approach to an additional ten CBDs in Gauteng. The project sought not only to refine and apply existing methodologies, but also to strengthen delivery by embedding a more people-centric and partnership-driven approach, focused on turning plans into action through collaborative engagement and on-the-ground implementation.

Original project scope

The initial scope of the project was largely aligned with traditional revitalisation approaches. The intention was to undertake detailed profiling of CBDs, identify challenges and opportunities and prepare intervention proposals and implementation guidance for municipalities.

This approach aimed to provide municipalities with strategic direction for addressing key urban management challenges such as safety, cleanliness, maintenance, infrastructure deterioration and economic decline within CBD environments. The project was also intended to strengthen municipal understanding of CBD conditions and establish a framework for prioritising future interventions.

However, as discussions progressed with municipalities and stakeholders, concerns emerged regarding the effectiveness of producing another planning document in environments where implementation capacity and stakeholder coordination remained the primary constraints.

From planning documents to partnership-based implementation

Ongoing discussions with municipalities revealed a more urgent need - something beyond another strategy or profiling document. It became clear that most CBDs already had existing plans and proposals that largely identified similar interventions, but implementation remained weak.

As a result, the project scope evolved towards testing implementation through a people-centric approach. The revised approach recognised that revitalisation can only be sustainable if all those who use, depend on and make a living from the CBD are actively involved in shaping and supporting change.

Instead of producing extensive intervention reports for municipalities to pursue independently, the revised approach focused on creating a dynamic partnership platform through which stakeholders could contribute to revitalisation projects in the short term, while simultaneously establishing a foundation for longer-term collaboration and ownership.

Platform to Leverage Area Contributions and Expertise



NEW APPROACH

towards compiling Implementation Plans for Revitalisation of Gauteng's old CBDs

TAKE NOTE OF THE ...

- Shaped by implementation
less document, more process
- Committed to a citizen-centric focus
people-powered, not policy-driven
- Anchored in a partnership - not a full structure yet, but a collaborative platform
series of outcomes-based stakeholder workshops, not needs-based public participation meetings
- Built to be more than a traditional CBD
every citizen takes ownership and contributes what they can, not relying on the municipality and large businesses alone
- Driven by political involvement from the start
Councillors lead, motivate, and stay present, not just approve and adopt plans
- Oriented towards co-creation of a revitalised CBD space - starting tomorrow!
creative thinking redefines the roles of officials, citizens, and communities, acting beyond business-as-usual

We need your assistance **NOW** - help us to identify stakeholders and co-host workshops to kickstart the co-creation PLACE process

your CBD needs it!

Platform to Leverage Area Contributions and Expertise

your CBD needs it!

The PLACE Process

The PLACE Process (Platform to Leverage Area Contributions and Expertise) became the central implementation methodology. Its primary purpose was to establish a sustainable partnership platform capable of bringing together municipalities, businesses, property owners, informal traders, civic organisations and local communities to participate collectively in CBD revitalisation and urban management.

Rather than relying on traditional public participation models that tend to ask stakeholders what they need from government, the process intentionally reframed discussions around contribution, responsibility and co-creation by asking:

“What can you contribute towards improving your CBD?”

The shift was designed to encourage self-reflection, strengthen ownership and unlock the often-overlooked social capital, local knowledge and practical capacity that already exists within CBD communities.

Multistakeholder workshops explored stakeholder willingness to actively contribute towards CBD upliftment, while the co-creation workshops guided participants through a facilitated process to identify practical activities within designated kickstart zones.

The process was intended to move beyond consultation and toward practical, action-based collaboration capable of generating visible change while strengthening long-term relationships between stakeholders.

Outcomes, challenges and lessons learned

The implementation of the PLACE process across ten pilot CBDs produced varying levels of success in establishing functioning partnership platforms. In some cases, stakeholders demonstrated strong willingness to collaborate and contribute towards revitalisation activities. In others, institutional limitations, political dynamics, resource constraints and inconsistent participation hindered the full establishment of long-term collaborative structures.

Despite these challenges, the project generated valuable lessons regarding the realities of people-centric urban regeneration in South African CBD contexts.

The process demonstrated that relationship-building is inherently slow and requires ongoing facilitation, trust-building and visible action to maintain momentum. The project reinforced that people-centric planning is not an alternative to traditional planning, but a necessary condition for sustainable revitalisation. Where engagement occurred meaningfully, discussions shifted away from plans and budgets towards shared responsibility, collective ownership and lived experience.

Ultimately, the PLACE process highlighted that long-term urban regeneration cannot be sustained through documents or government alone. Rather, durable revitalisation depends on building collaborative cultures, strengthening relationships and embedding partnership-based urban management approaches into everyday functioning of municipalities and CBD communities.

CBD Revitalisation Strategy: Implementation Plans

Dec 2025

Key Information:

The SALGA CBD Revitalisation Implementation Plans project emerged from earlier work undertaken through the Gauteng COGTA Revitalisation Strategy, which focused on profiling CBDs, developing strategic frameworks and indentifying implementation interventions for municipalities. During engagements with municipalities throughout the process, it became increasingly clear that most CBDs already possessed plans, strategies and policy documents aimed at facilitating revitalisation. Yet, implementation remains limited due to fragmented stakeholder relationships, weak urban management coordination and a lack of collective ownership.

In response, the SALGA project shifted away from a conventional planning exercise towards a more people-centric and implementation-orientated approach. The project recognised that meaningful revitalisation cannot be achieved through municipal action alone, but requires active participation from businesses, property owners, informal traders, civic organisations, residents and all those who rely on the CBD for their livelihoods and daily activities.

This resulted in the adoption of the PLACE Process as the core methodology for the project. Rather than producing another strategic document, the project sought to establish collaborative partnership platforms within each CBD, creating practical mechanisms through which stakeholders could jointly contribute towards revitalisation and urban management.

Project Details:

Location:	Gauteng
Time-frame:	12 months
Project lead:	Annemarie Loots, Reinier Minny
Project coordinator:	Jorinda Steenkamp
Core consulting team:	The Cadre Group 081 265 0800 reinier@cadreplan.co.za
Project sponsor:	South African Local Government Association
Project partner:	Gauteng Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs