LUANDA, THE ANGOLAN CAPITAL, is witnessing rapid infrastructural development, with modern, flashy buildings springing up everywhere. The development of the Marginal on the seafront is very attractive and impressive.

While the development of Angola’s infrastructure is positive and should continue, there are questions about the quality and sustainability of this infrastructure. An Angolan in Luanda commented: “It is amazing how fast buildings go up. In some cases it takes two to three months and a new building is complete! I am not sure that is enough time for the cement in the foundations to dry. Some of the roads have just collapsed and they actually feel like you are driving on a roller-coaster: up-down, up-down. The hospital in central Luanda which was built less than 10 years ago had to be closed down because it was falling apart! The infrastructure is also being built on an old sewage system that has not been upgraded.”

This rapid infrastructural development should provide the perfect opportunity to create employment for and develop skills among the largely unemployed Angolan youth population. The demand for architects, managers, technicians all the way through to skilled, semi-skilled workers and apprentices is high. However, the government is not investing to provide these opportunities for ordinary Angolans as the gap between the rich and the poor increases. Instead, it is importing almost all the skills needed, including manual labour. This has resulted in “reverse” migration, with mass immigration into Angola by large numbers of Portuguese and Chinese citizens, among others, who are entering the market partly in response to the international economic crisis.

THE KILAMBA KIAXI (City of the Future) housing complex in greater Luanda is another clear example of Angolans being left behind. This complex has cost an estimated US $3.5 billion to develop and was intended to house over 120,000 people. However, the complex has remained empty because ordinary Angolans cannot afford to buy an apartment there, since there is no access to housing loans. With monthly rents of US $4,000, not many Angolans can afford to lease them either. So while the future is “literally” being built, the Angolans are unable to be part of that future. There is a serious shortage of housing and yet these apartments remain empty. If they are not occupied soon, they will start to deteriorate and that will be another waste of money and resources. Several MPLA members and senior civil servants were awarded houses there prior to and after the recent elections. However, many of them already have houses, and just across the road there are informal settlements where people live in extreme poverty.