

Uis on the Rise: From Settlement to Town – What This Means for the Community

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Uis is a historically significant and rapidly developing community located in the Dâures Constituency of the Erongo Region, Namibia. Known for its mining roots and proximity to the iconic Brandberg Mountain, Uis is now poised for a major administrative upgrade and transformative milestone: with its official declaration as a town in November 2025.

This shift carries both exciting opportunities and critical responsibilities.

A Community with Deep Roots and Big Aspirations

Uis is more than just a dot on the map. Once holding village status, it had a functioning village council and even a mayor, reflecting its early role as a local administrative hub. However, in 2010, Uis was reclassified as a settlement, placing it under the direct administrative oversight of the Erongo Regional Council. Despite this shift, Uis remained the heartbeat of the Dâures Constituency, both administratively and economically.

Located along the C36 road, Uis serves as a logistical and cultural link between Namibia's inland regions and the coast. With an estimated population of around 14 600, the area is predominantly youthful, with a median age of around 22.8 years. The community is linguistically and culturally rich, home to speakers of Khoekhoegowab (Damara/Nama), Afrikaans, English, and Otjiherero.

Educational services are currently provided by Brandberg Primary School and Petrus !Ganeb Secondary School, though both institutions face infrastructure and resource challenges. The economy is driven by tin and tantalite mining, tourism, and small-scale mining and retail trade.

The Path to Town Status

The reclassification of Uis as a town is being carried out under the provisions of the Local Authorities Act, 1992.¹ This legal process has included feasibility studies, community and stakeholder consultations, and formal recommendations by the Erongo Regional Council. The final proclamation is expected in November 2025, after which Uis will formally establish its own Town Council.

The transition from a settlement or village to a town depends on several key factors:

Criteria	Description
Population Size	A growing and stable population that justifies self-governance.
Economic Activity	Presence of significant trade, business, or industrial activity.
Infrastructure	Adequate roads, water supply, sanitation, electricity, schools, and clinics.
Revenue Generation	Capability to generate income through taxes, rates, and services.
Governance Capacity	Ability to manage administrative responsibilities through a local council.

Briefly, the application and approval process is as follows:

- Feasibility Study:** Conducted by the regional council or ministry to assess whether the area meets town criteria.
- Consultation:** Engagement with local stakeholders including traditional leaders, residents, and businesses.
- Recommendation:** The regional council submits a recommendation to the Minister of Urban and Rural Development.

¹ Act 23 of 1992.

4. **Proclamation:** If approved, the Minister officially proclaims the area a town in the Government Gazette.

5. **Establishment of Town Council:** A transitional town council is set up until local elections are held.

This marks a significant step toward greater local autonomy. The new Town Council will have authority over service delivery, budgeting, development planning, and governance; allowing residents to directly elect local representatives and influence their own development path.

What the Change Means for Land and Property Rights

One of the most significant changes following proclamation will be the status of land in Uis. Much of the area that was previously considered state land, under the management of the Regional Council or MURD, will now become the responsibility of the newly formed Town Council.

For residents who have built homes or businesses on unproclaimed or informal land, this transition raises serious questions. These individuals may be required to apply for formal tenure, either as leaseholders or landowners, through local government processes. If not carefully managed, the change could result in legal uncertainty or even displacement, particularly for families who have lived in Uis for generations without formal land rights.

The new Town Council will therefore need to prioritize:

- Demarcation of plots and issuing of land rights
- Protection of vulnerable residents
- Regularization of informal settlements
- Transparent, fair, and affordable land allocation processes

Rising Community Concerns: Services, Housing & Employment

As the transition approaches, community members have voiced concerns over the affordability and availability of basic services. Chief among these are:

- Current high water bills & debt
- Shortage of formal and affordable housing
- Water scarcity in Uis
- Lack of local employment opportunities

These concerns are rooted in structural inequalities and service delivery gaps. Many jobs in Uis, especially in mining and tourism, require specialized skills, which local residents often do not have due to limited training opportunities. This results in outsiders filling jobs, while the local population remains underemployed or excluded.

A Call for Skills Development

To ensure inclusive growth, skills development must become a core priority of the Erongo Regional Council and Uis Town Council and its regional partners. The Erongo Regional Council, vocational institutions, and employers should work together to launch programs in:

- Mining operations and safety
- Hospitality and tourism management
- Construction and artisan trades
- ICT and small business entrepreneurship

By investing in youth and adult education, Uis can develop a workforce ready to take advantage of new opportunities, keeping jobs and income within the community.

“As Uis becomes a town, the development of local skills will be as critical as infrastructure. A town cannot grow on buildings alone, it must grow on its people.”

Benefits and Risks of Town Status

The proclamation as a town brings real, tangible benefits such as:

- Locally elected government, enabling more responsive governance
- Direct access to national and donor development funds
- Improved public services, including water, sanitation, and infrastructure
- Attraction of private investment and tourism
- Structured urban planning and land use zoning

However, the change is not without risk:

- Potential conflict between traditional authorities and new elected leaders
- Resource disputes over land and mining revenue
- Risk of corruption or poor management if accountability structures are weak
- Environmental degradation from unchecked mining and tourism
- Exclusion of vulnerable groups if development is not inclusive

Community Readiness Is Key

The success of Uis as a town will depend not just on what leaders do, but on how the entire community prepares and participates. Residents are urged to:

- Vote wisely and engage in local elections
- Monitor development projects and budgets
- Advocate for fair land and housing policies
- Join consultative forums and ward committees
- Preserve cultural identity while embracing change
- Encourage local residents to take active roles in shaping the future of Uis

The move to grant the settlement its own town status is expected to boost business confidence, especially in the banking sector and fixed property investment. With a population of around 14,600 people and a combined total of 381 houses in Onder Dorp and Bo Dorp, the area meets the threshold for urban development. However, residents and stakeholders emphasize that the regional council must hand over the settlement in sound financial and infrastructural condition. This includes zero outstanding debts, a new water reticulation system, and sufficient water storage to last at least five days without replenishment. Community members stress that a bankrupt town cannot be expected to function efficiently under new leadership. There is also a call for the Ministry of Health and Social Services to upgrade healthcare and social facilities to align with town-level requirements. The people have high expectations for improved services and opportunities, and these must be met to ensure a successful transition and sustainable future.

Uis at a Turning Point

Uis's transition to town status is a historic opportunity, but not a guarantee of progress. It is a doorway, not a destination. The real work lies ahead: in **planning wisely, governing justly, and growing together.**

With its rich heritage, strategic location, and dynamic population, Uis has every chance to become a model for rural-urban transformation in Namibia. But this vision will only be realized through accountable leadership, transparent governance, and deep citizen involvement.