

# Urban land and life in Namibia's informal settlements

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In light of Namibia's persisting issues regarding urban land rights and informal settlements, this chapter presents selected descriptions of life in Namibia's informal settlements, as presented by residents of the three urban/semi-urban areas of Oshakati, Gobabis and Windhoek. These perspectives act as the background for a discussion on current public and academic perspectives on Namibia's urban land and housing issues. Based on this, we argue for the central importance of drawing on the perspectives of residents of Namibia's informal settlements in policy formulations pertaining to issues of informal settlements, and actively collaborating with these actors in the development and servicing of the areas they live in.

## 1 Introduction

The urgency of Namibia's urban land and housing issues is clear to many in light of the ever-increasing number of informal settlements across the country. This has caused dissatisfaction among Namibian activists, and led to the formation of the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) movement in 2014. They have since organised various interventions, including two demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience in their struggle for improved urban land rights for poor and marginalised Namibians. Likewise, a group of students and lecturers from the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) are, in collaboration with the Shack Dwellers' Federation Namibia (SDFN)<sup>1</sup> and the Namibia Housing Agency Group (NHAG), servicing,

1 A saving scheme assisting residents of Namibia's informal settlements in collectively saving money for acquiring their own erven (demarcated plots of land), servicing this land with water, sanitation and electricity, and building brick structures for its members.

demarcating and formalising land plots – locally known as an erf (singular), or erven (plural) – across Namibia’s informal settlements. Freedom Square and Kanaan in Gobabis are both examples of the success of this initiative (see section 5). The issue of informal settlements has also caught the attention of Namibian artists such as those in the arts collective Decolonizing Space, who, among other things, address issues of urban land rights through arts interventions such as the Land Pavilion Project. Private actors are equally engaged on the issue, with a recent example being Standard Bank’s “Buy-a-Brick” campaign. According to Lühl and Delgado:

There are three main ways that Government invests in urban housing: through the National Housing Enterprise (NHE) and the suspended Mass Housing Development Programme (MHDP), through the Build Together Programme (BTP), and through support to Shack Dwellers’ Federation of Namibia (SDFN). The NHE is characterised by a slow pace of delivery and high input cost. Although BTP is the most long-term and far-reaching programme there is no thorough evaluation of its impact; a pilot study by NUST is currently underway. Government support for SDFN is through an annual financial allocation to the Twangana Fund, but this is negligible versus the scale of the informal settlement challenge.<sup>2</sup>

They continue arguing that the budget allocations of the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) for these projects historically amount to around 0.1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). They deem this to be inadequate for reversing Namibia’s current housing backlog,<sup>3</sup> which some estimate to be around 300 000 housing units.<sup>4</sup>

Between 1992 and 1998, the GRN commenced with the development of the Flexible Land Tenure System (FLTS) – a three-step land tenure system for low- and middle-income groups residing in informal areas. The system allows these residents to upgrade and formalise their land, starting from a “starter title”, and moving up to a “land hold title “ that provides initial tenure security until residents have resources to upgrade to a “freehold titled deed”. The Flexible Land Tenure Act (No. 4 of 2012) (FLTA) was however only passed in parliament in 2012.<sup>5</sup> As we enquired about the implementation of the FLTS, we found that it had only recently

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2 Lühl, Philip & Gillerimo Delgado, ‘Urban Land Reform in Namibia Getting Ready for Namibia’s Urban Future: Policy Paper for Submission to the 2018 National Land Conference’, Windhoek, 1–5 October 2018.

3 Ibid.

4 Remmert, Dietrich & Pauline Ndhlovu, *Housing in Namibia: Rights, Challenges and Opportunities – Research Report: Right to Housing Project*, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Windhoek, 2018.

5 For a more detailed explanation of the FLTS and FLTA, see Christensen, Åse, ‘Namibia’s Flexible Land Tenure System’, in Bankie, B.F. & H. Jauch (eds), *The Urban Housing Crisis in Namibia: Exploring a Youth Perspective*, National Youth Council of Namibia (NYCN), Windhoek, 2016, pp. 100–109; Weber, Beat & John Mendelsohn, *Informal Settlements in Namibia: Their Nature and Growth – Exploring Ways to Make Namibian Urban Development More Socially Just and Inclusive*, Development Workshop Namibia, Windhoek, 2017.

started being rolled-out, and we were not able to make a proper assessment of its implementation. However, it is striking to note that the implementation of this system is only occurring more than 20 years after the formulation of the FLTS.

Following increasing public attention on the country's land issues, Namibia held its Second National Land Conference on 1–5 October 2018. One component that distinguished this conference from the First National Land Conference, which was held in 1991, was the topic of urban land. Some resolutions related to urban land that are of particular interest for this chapter include:

- Government to subsidise low-income housing and essential services to increase affordability.
- Scale up community-based land delivery process for the lower income community as they have a much bigger impact.
- Timeframe for land delivery should be limited to six months.
- Prioritise large-scale informal settlement upgrading and integrated, planned urban expansion areas (for new urban residents) and mainstream to all local authorities.
- Build 300 000 housing units/opportunities over the next seven years. This is a national emergency.
- Allow for partially serviced land (sewerage and water) to be sold. Other services can be added.
- Include the rights to housing as a human right in the constitution.
- Government expenditure should be increased from the current level of 0.1% to at least 10% of GDP.<sup>6</sup>

These resolutions will be discussed together with public and academic perspectives on the urban land and housing issues in Namibia, and perspectives from residents of Namibia's informal settlements in section 7.

## 2 Aim

In this chapter we analyse descriptions of life in Namibia's informal settlements in relation to public, academic and political perspectives on urban land rights, informal settlements, and equal access to serviced land and housing in urban areas. This generates an understanding of some main issues and concerns shaping peoples' everyday lives in Namibia's informal settlements. We hope this will inform future policy developments pertaining to the issue. Public debate often becomes politicised and fails to remain focused on the concerns of residents in the informal settlements; their everyday experiences are characterised by a lack of basic services (such as water, sanitation and electricity), increasing insecurity caused by the

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6 GRN, 'Resolutions of the Second National Land Conference, 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> October 2018', Ministry of Land Reform, 2018 (<http://www.mlr.gov.na/documents/20541/638917/Second+National+Land+Conference+Resolutions+2018.pdf/15b498fd-fdc6-4898-aeda-91fecbc74319>).

growing influx of people, the spread of diseases such as Hepatitis E, and exposure to crime and assault. We argue that the possible solutions to these issues will require the active and inclusive involvement of the residents of the informal settlements, both in terms of policy-formulation, and the practical servicing and upgrading of these areas.

We define informal settlements in accordance with the UN Habitat III, which defines informal settlements as:

[...] residential areas where 1) inhabitants have no security of tenure vis-à-vis the land or dwellings they inhabit, with modalities ranging from squatting to informal rental housing, 2) the neighbourhoods usually lack, or are cut off from, basic services and city infrastructure and 3) the housing may not comply with current planning and building regulations, and is often situated in geographically and environmentally hazardous areas. [...] Slums are the most deprived and excluded form of informal settlements characterized by poverty and large agglomerations of dilapidated housing often located in the most hazardous urban land. In addition to tenure insecurity, slum dwellers lack formal supply of basic infrastructure and services, public space and green areas, and are constantly exposed to eviction, disease and violence.<sup>7</sup>

These characteristics were prevalent throughout our research. It was saddening that conditions in many of the settlements we visited, particularly those in Windhoek and Oshakati, are consistent with the definition of slums, with many respondents describing a life in hazardous environments without proper sanitation, and as a result thereof, regular occurrences of preventable diseases. Severe fire hazards are also a result of these settlements' high population density and people relying on open fires for cooking and light. However, the settlements also differed greatly, both in access to different services, and in the prevalence of issues such as crime and disease.



**Havana informal settlement in Windhoek**



**A shared flushing toilet in Havana shown by a resident as an example of the unhygienic conditions in the settlement**

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, *Habitat III Issue Papers 22 – Informal Settlements*, prepared for the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, New York, 2015.

The chapter continues with a presentation of our methodology, which is followed by a brief contextualisation of Namibia's informal settlement challenge. This presents the historic transformation of Namibia's urban spaces and their unresolved sediments from the country's colonial and apartheid past. It is a legacy that caters for the spatial segregation that today rests on social class, financial capabilities (and to some extent ethnicity), and is maintained through Namibia's severe socioeconomic inequality. This inequality is argued to be a core reason behind the challenge constituted by the country's informal settlements.<sup>8</sup>

### 3 Methodology

We conducted a series of short, semi-structured interviews within the informal settlements of Oshakati, Gobabis and Windhoek during March – May 2019. These included interviews with 45 residents from four of Oshakati's informal settlements, namely Sky, Ompumbu, Evululuku and Oneshila – all conducted during a five-day fieldtrip. During this trip we also engaged with the Oshakati regional office of the SDFN, and a selection of its members. Lastly, we conducted a semi-structured interview with the Public Relations Officer (PRO) of Oshakati Town Council. In Gobabis we conducted 20 interviews with representatives from the two informal settlements, Kanaan and Freedom Square, during a three-day fieldtrip. We ended our visit with a semi-structured interview with the PRO of the Gobabis Municipality, and the regional coordinator of SDFN. We finalised our data collection in Windhoek, where we conducted 40 interviews in the informal settlements of Havana and One Nation, and two interviews with the regional councillors of Moses Garoeb<sup>9</sup> and Tobias Hanyeko constituencies.<sup>10</sup>

Our contact within the informal settlements was facilitated by the local authorities (LAs) of the three areas. From there we got in direct contact with representatives (primarily headwomen and headmen) from the informal settlements. These representatives facilitated our contact with the remaining respondents. The rationale behind this approach was threefold, and had implications for our data and its analysis. The first consideration was our limited timeframe. We decided that the best starting point would be the people who, ideally at least, communicate with the communities on an everyday basis. The second consideration was for our study to gain legitimacy in the eyes of our respondents. Before the research was

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8 Friedman, Fatima, *Deconstructing Windhoek: The Urban Morphology of a Post-Apartheid City*, Development Planning Unit, University College London, 2000; Jauch, Herbert, 'Youth and Urban Land/Housing in Namibia', in Bankie, B.F. & H. Jauch (eds), *The Urban Housing Crisis in Namibia: A Youth Perspective*, National Youth Council of Namibia (NYCN), Windhoek, 2016, pp. 126–182; Sweeney-Bindels, Els, 'Housing Policy and Delivery in Namibia', *Research Report No. 12*, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Windhoek, 2011.

9 Under which Havana is governed.

10 Under which One Nation is governed.

conducted, a central reflection was how to ensure the trust of our respondents, as such trust when working with socially exposed communities does not come automatically – and rightfully so. We therefore deemed it necessary to show that our research had been officially acknowledged by the responsible authorities. Lastly, we found it important not only to capture the views of the residents of the informal settlements, but also to engage the LAs. This had an effect on how we, as researchers affiliated to the Legal Assistance Centre, were met in the communities. We emphasised that we had not been sent by the LAs, and made our reasons known for going through these entities. However, the LAs' acknowledgement of our study – backed with printouts of our interaction with them – seemed to reassure our respondents of our genuine cause. The residents who showed reluctance towards our study mostly proved willing to engage after seeing proof of acknowledgement from the responsible authorities – an interesting finding in the light of the mistrust and communication issues that exist between LAs and our respondents from the informal settlements (see section 5).

While Gabriel translated our interviews from Oshivambo, Afrikaans and Otjiherero into English, we gratefully received assistance from a young headman in Gobabis who made himself available to translate from Nama/Damara and Setswana.

## 4 Urban Namibia and its present-day challenges

In Namibia land has been a topic of debate and contestation throughout history. Indeed, the protests resulting from the then-South African regime's decision, in line with its apartheid policy, to forcefully relocate the black residents of Windhoek, who resided in the city to obtain employment within its white-owned industrial sector, were a significant emergence of resistance that gave rise to the independence struggle. These residents were relocated in 1959 from the area today known as "the old location" (then known as "the main location" situated in today's suburbs of Hochland Park and Pioneers Park). The residents of the old location were moved to what became known as Katutura, north-west of Windhoek's central business district, with the northern industrial area separating it from the city centre. Katutura thus became Windhoek's black township until the end of the South African occupation in 1990 and is still largely inhabited by the city's black population.<sup>11</sup> There are striking similarities between these events and contemporary developments in urban Namibia. First, an estimated 85% of the inhabitants of Windhoek's informal settlements come from elsewhere, primarily from the northern

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11 Likuwa, Kletus Mukeua, 'Tracing the History of Land Dispossession in Namibia', in Bankie, B.F. & H. Jauch (eds), *The Urban Housing Crisis in Namibia: Exploring a Youth Perspective*, National Youth Council of Namibia (NYCN), Windhoek, 2016, pp. 9–30; Friedman, Fatima, *Deconstructing Windhoek: The Urban Morphology of a Post-Apartheid City*, Development Planning Unit, University College London, 2000.

parts of the country.<sup>12</sup> Many of these seek employment opportunities in the city. Hence, urban migration still largely stems from hopes for employment opportunities within an industrial sector that mainly centres around specific urban areas. Second, the apartheid logic of relocation resonates with the way present-day issues of urban migration and illegal settlements have been dealt with. Consider how the PRO of Gobabis described the Municipal Council's decision to relocate the town's increasing number of informal residents to Kanaan, on the outskirts of the former black township Epako, in 2009–2010: "Kanaan, what happened is that we relocated people from all over Gobabis, because everyone were [sic] building everywhere, some on planned areas and so on. So we relocated them to Kanaan."<sup>13</sup>

This relocation to the outskirts of Epako, and the country's history of racial segregation, apartheid and spatial compartmentalisation based on class and ethnicity, suggest a structural issue that prevails in contemporary urban Namibia, namely a tendency to reproduce the basic ideals of an apartheid city within post-apartheid Namibian society,<sup>14, 15, 16</sup> The main difference being that newly developed segregation is determined on social class and position, rather than ethnicity. However, informal settlements, and the predominance of houses built mainly with metal sheeting within these areas, is primarily a post-apartheid phenomenon, as informal settlements were banned during the years of apartheid.<sup>17</sup>

The phenomenon of post-colonial reproduction of the colonial city finds resonance in Fanon's well-known prophesy:

The violence which governed the ordering of the colonial world, which tirelessly punctuated the destruction of the indigenous social fabric, and demolished unchecked the systems of reference of the country's economy, lifestyles, and modes of dress, this same violence will be vindicated and appropriated when, taking history into their own hands, the colonized swarm into the forbidden cities. To blow the colonial world to smithereens is henceforth a clear image within the grasp and imagination of every colonized subject. To dislocate the colonial world does not mean that once the

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12 Lühl, Philip & Gillermo Delgado, 'Urban Land Reform in Namibia Getting Ready for Namibia's Urban Future: Policy Paper for Submission to the 2018 National Land Conference', Windhoek, 1–5 October 2018 ([http://dna.nust.na/landconference/submissions\\_2018/policy-paper-urban-land-reform-2018-final.pdf](http://dna.nust.na/landconference/submissions_2018/policy-paper-urban-land-reform-2018-final.pdf)).

13 PRO of Gobabis Municipal Council, 'Semi-structured interview with the PRO of Gobabis Municipal Council', edited by Rune Larsen and Gabriel Augustus.

14 This apartheid sedimentation is equally acknowledged by the GRN, which is currently in the process of repealing/amending obsolete apartheid laws (see Likela, Sakeus, '144 Apartheid Laws to Be Repealed,' *The Namibian*, 3 December 2018).

15 Friedman, Fatima, *Deconstructing Windhoek: The Urban Morphology of a Post-Apartheid City*, Development Planning Unit, University College London, 2000.

16 For aerial footage illustrating this urban compartmentalisation, see: Weber, Beat & John Mendelsohn, *Informal Settlements in Namibia: Their Nature and Growth – Exploring Ways to Make Namibian Urban Development More Socially Just and Inclusive*, Development Workshop Namibia, Windhoek, 2017.

17 Ibid.

borders have been eliminated there will be a right of way between the two sectors. To destroy the colonial world means nothing less than demolishing the colonist's sector, burying it deep within the earth or banishing it from the territory.<sup>18</sup>

This dramatic prophesy's manifestation in Namibia's cityscapes suggests that to adequately deal with the country's land issues, "demolishing the colonist's sector" is imperative. Achieving this will require a radical reconfiguration of the approach towards the country's increasing urban poor, and a proper integration of these segments into Namibia's urban societies, rather than their segregation on the outskirts of the former black townships. This will be necessary to ensure socially and economically sustainable urbanisation,<sup>19</sup> not to mention a shared sense of humanity. Including these segments actively in solving the issues of urban land is imperative for decolonising urban land and town planning; it has also proved to be far more efficient than the GRN's previous top-down approaches.

It is of course important to acknowledge the pragmatism behind the relocation in Gobabis, and as elaborated in the following section, it did bring about positive and admirable changes in the living standards of Kanaan's residents.

Furthermore, despite these local particularities, increasing urbanisation is a global phenomenon, and one that comes with both possibilities and challenges. Ottolenghi and Watson reflect on the Namibian Government's Vision 2030, and its goal of diversifying Namibia's urbanisation so that it does not only occur within certain urban centres, but reaches other areas throughout the country. They write:

Though highly desirable, the achievement of these goals should not be taken for granted; indeed if previous international experience is to provide a model, the exact opposite may occur; that is: urbanization may increasingly concentrate in a very few centers with the capital city being ever more predominant, unless strong and proactive guiding mechanisms are applied.<sup>20</sup>

They point to a risk that is increasingly present in contemporary Namibia, namely that rural-to-urban migration generally occurs within selected areas of the country, thus placing pressure on particular LAs. This pressure, and the experience of not receiving adequate assistance from the central Government, was mentioned in our interviews with the PROs of both Oshakati and Gobabis municipalities, and the councillors of Moses Garoeb and Tobias Hanyeko constituencies in Windhoek.

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18 Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth* Grove Press, New York, 1968, pp. 5–6.

19 Lühl, Philip & Guillermo Delgado, 'Urban Land Reform in Namibia Getting Ready for Namibia's Urban Future: Policy Paper for Submission to the 2018 National Land Conference', Windhoek, 1–5 October 2018 ([http://dna.nust.na/landconference/submissions\\_2018/policy-paper-urban-land-reform-2018-final.pdf](http://dna.nust.na/landconference/submissions_2018/policy-paper-urban-land-reform-2018-final.pdf)).

20 Ottolenghi, Roberto & Barrie Watson, *Toward a National Urbanization Strategy for Namibia: Issue Analysis and Key Recommendations*, Windhoek, Government of the Republic of Namibia (Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development) and UN-Habitat, 2011, p. 4.

## 5 Life in the informal settlements

Having briefly presented the context of Namibia's informal settlements, and the colonial and apartheid sediments that have catered for this structural issue, we proceed by presenting findings from the three areas where we conducted our interviews.

General issues such as a lack of basic services (water, sanitation and electricity), and direct experience of crime and violence, coupled with mistrust of LAs and national authorities (NAs), were prevalent within each of the informal settlements. Nevertheless, the experiences of respondents in the informal settlements differed in certain ways. We therefore briefly describe each of the three areas before we present selected descriptions of life in the settlements, combined with observations and reflections from our fieldtrips.

### 5.1 Oshakati

Oshakati is the fifth largest town in Namibia, with 36 541 residents and 2 113 metal-sheet houses (generally referred to as “shacks”) counted during the 2011 National Census. At that time, such shacks accounted for 21% of the towns housing structures.<sup>21</sup> One thing that distinguishes the informal settlements of Oshakati from those of Windhoek and Gobabis is that the town's informal settlements are spread throughout its urban area, rather than being situated solely on its outskirts.<sup>22</sup> This is a result of Oshakati being situated to the north of the Veterinary Control Fence (known as the “red line”) which separates the commercial farming areas to the south from the communal areas to the north, formerly known as “Bantustans” or “homelands” during the apartheid period. Informal settlements had already developed in the 1980s, making some informal settlements in Oshakati significantly older than those of Windhoek and Gobabis.

Due to the town's status as the economic hub of the north, there is a steady daily influx of people, and one issue that the PRO raised regarding the formalisation of the town's informal settlements was the problem of how to determine the number of residents who need to be relocated to serviced plots:

We don't want them [the informal residents] to build at the moment, because it is going to cost us even more. We called a number of public meetings. We had [meetings at] Evululuku and Oneshila – we want to focus on those areas because they are not so complicated as the other areas. However, the ones that are there, we spoke to them

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21 Weber, Beat & John Mendelsohn, *Informal Settlements in Namibia: Their Nature and Growth – Exploring Ways to Make Namibian Urban Development More Socially Just and Inclusive*, Development Workshop Namibia, Windhoek, 2017.

22 For aerial footage illustrating this, see *ibid.*, p. 69.

and said: “Please do not build – we are busy with formalisation.” It is just unfortunate that that procedure takes so long, and some of them are complaining: “You have been telling us not to build for how many years now?” Now, that is a challenge that we are faced with; we don’t want them to build because it is going to cost us more. The more they build, the more they hinder the process of formalising the area. Although they want the area to be formalised, they also need to cooperate! So that is an issue we have. Say you build, and you are in the street – now you are going to hinder the whole procedure, because now we have to wait so we can budget money to compensate you, and while waiting for the money the other person is busy also building, and while waiting for that money the other person is busy building, so that’s a challenge we are faced with.<sup>23</sup>

As is the case in Windhoek and Gobabis, Oshakati Town Council is thus faced with the problem of increasing numbers of informal residents who establish shacks and even brick structures, while the Town Council is busy trying to formalise and upgrade the plots of already established residents. However, the quote from the Oshakati PRO also points towards the pervasive and deeply rooted sense of mutual mistrust between LAs and the residents of the informal areas. This issue will be elaborated upon in section 6.4 of this chapter.

## 5.2 Gobabis

During our second fieldtrip we went to Gobabis, a small town 210 km to the east of Windhoek. The town had 19 101 residents in 2011, and metal-sheet shacks constituted 42% of the housing structures<sup>24</sup>; in 2016, 5 297 metal-sheet shacks were counted around the former black township Epako. A significant proportion of Gobabis’ revenue comes from the farms around the area, and many residents living in Epako and the informal settlements on its outskirts work on these nearby farms. However, these employment opportunities have been negatively influenced by the recent drought, and the country’s deepening economic crisis. Consequently, many of our respondents were currently un- or self-employed. As mentioned, in 2010 the Gobabis Municipality decided to relocate the town’s informal residents to the minimally structured and demarcated area of Kanaan. However, it remained an informal settlement without proper security of tenure for the residents.<sup>25</sup> As alluded to, this relocation was reminiscent of apartheid-era institutionalised segregation. One thing that both residents of Gobabis’ informal settlements and the PRO of the Municipality agree upon, however, was that they all expressed pride in the fact

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23 PRO of Oshakati Town Council, ‘Semi-Structured Interview with PRO of Oshakati Town Council’, edited by Rune Larsen and Gabriel Augustus.

24 Weber, Beat & John Mendelsohn, *Informal Settlements in Namibia: Their Nature and Growth – Exploring Ways to Make Namibian Urban Development More Socially Just and Inclusive*, Development Workshop Namibia, Windhoek, 2017.

25 Ibid.

that representatives from other areas came to this small town to draw inspiration from the demarcation of its informal settlements – in particular Kanaan A and B, and Freedom Square. In contrast to both Oshakati and Windhoek, a striking particularity of these areas was indeed the neat demarcation of plots, and the fact that in the better-off areas the residents had access to private flushing toilets, private water taps, and electricity.

However, these services became scarcer the further we ventured into the settlements, and in the recently occupied parts of the settlements such as Kanaan C, none of these services were yet available. SDFN and NHAG, together with Gobabis Municipality, are currently in the process of upgrading, servicing and formalising all of both Kanaan and Freedom Square as part of the implementation of the FLTS. This is an interesting development, and we deem it desirable to conduct future research on the implementation of this process.

Another characteristic that distinguished Gobabis' informal settlements from those in Windhoek and Oshakati was the extent to which residents tended private green areas and small gardens, undertook small-scale livestock breeding, and decorated their homes. One respondent explained that this is also influenced by the interconnection between life and love in the cosmology of the Damara – an ethnic group that is strongly represented in Kanaan and Freedom Square.

Another, more unsettling, dimension predominant in these residents' narratives pertained to the insecurities caused by the fear of rape and assault. While such sentiments presented themselves throughout the three areas, they were most predominant in Gobabis' informal settlements.



**A small recreational garden and pidgeon breeding in Freedom Square, Gobabis**

### **5.3 Windhoek**

Windhoek is the capital of Namibia and the most populated urban area of the country, with 322 300 inhabitants and 26 736 metal-sheet shacks counted in the 2011 Census. The number of shacks is projected to rise to 51 000 by 2021, based on

estimations of the current growth rates.<sup>26</sup> As mentioned, the city's apartheid history is visible in its present-day spatial appearance, with the eastern parts catering for its black and white elites, while the former townships of Khomasdal (Windhoek's former coloured township) and Katutura to the north-west accommodate the city's middle- and lower-income residents. On the outskirts of these two former townships one finds the city's informal settlements, where the city's poorest residents live. During our data collection we focus particularly on two informal settlements around Katutura, namely Havana and One Nation.

One feature of our findings in Windhoek was the number of respondents with some kind of formal employment, albeit often in low-earning positions such as security guards and shop attendants. Likewise, most of the respondents without formal employment were engaged in different types of informal economic activity (self-employment), such as selling fruit, vegetables, *kapana* (meat cooked over open coals in public areas and markets) and other everyday necessities; working in barbershops, mechanic workshops and other small-scale enterprises across the settlement; working in (or owning) technically illegal but ubiquitous shebeens – seemingly the most prevalent business-model across the settlements. Hence, Windhoek's informal settlements reveal the human ingenuity and agency it takes to build a city – with their own infrastructure, established without assistance from or the approval of the NA. This is not to romanticise informal settlements, but rather points out the latent potential of their residents, who after all have the capacity to build their own cities. This potential should be accessed in finding solutions to Namibia's urban land issues. The success of such approaches can be seen in SDFN and NHAG's interventions across the country, which have enabled “[the building of] 3 488 houses and secured land for roughly 6 230 families.”<sup>27</sup>



**One Nation informal settlement, Windhoek**



**Printing shop in Havana informal settlement, Windhoek**

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> SDFN Website, 'Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia', <https://sdfn.weebly.com/>.

## 6 Narratives from the informal settlements

In this section we present selected descriptions of life in the informal settlements. The section has been divided into four main themes that permeated our interviews, namely: the lack of services; insecurity in the informal settlements; longing for space and ownership; and (mis)communication between LAs and residents. All respondents from the informal settlements have been intentionally anonymised.

### 6.1 Lack of services

One key issue raised by all our respondents was the lack of basic services such as water, sanitary facilities (including flushing toilets) and electricity. Likewise, many respondents complained that public services such as medical clinics, hospitals, police stations, fire-brigades and schools are located far from the settlements. Another dominant issue described by our respondents was lack of garbage collection, which was evident from the heaps of garbage, often burning, throughout the settlements.

#### *Sanitation*

The lack of services has created health risks; the lack of private water supplies and proper sanitation, in particular, creates favourable conditions for diseases to spread. One settlement where these issues were particularly severe was Sky location in Oshakati. Here respondents explained that they live without any sanitation and resort to relieving themselves in the bushes (a common narrative throughout our study). In his field-notes, Larsen wrote:

As we drive out we see a small boy sitting and defecating by the road. The headwoman pokes me on the shoulder and says: "See ... see!" I respond: "I see ... but I don't think it is appropriate for me to take a picture ..." The headwoman says: "You must take a picture". I never take the picture, but promise to include the observation in the writing.

Observations like this were not limited to Sky location, but were made frequently throughout our journey. The sight of small children defecating by the road and having to dodge human and animal excrement when walking through the settlements underlined the severe health hazards the residents must live with. As a 26-year-old woman residing in Havana, Windhoek explained:

Living here has two sides: One thing is that you have a place to live, but there is no hygiene, no water, no electricity and no toilet! Imagine living with these small ones here [points at the child on her lap] – the flies are just coming into the houses ... We are in and out of the hospital with these ones [points to the child again]. We grown-ups are probably used to this by now, but the children get sick ...

Beyond health hazards caused by living without proper sanitation in densely populated areas, respondents also expressed a sense of inhumane conditions and humiliation caused by the absence of sanitary facilities. A young male resident of Sky location said:

There is no dignity! We relieve ourselves in front of our uncles, our parents and our grandparents ... We are just seen as a place of dirt and of rubbish!

Besides constituting a health risk, this lack of sanitation and privacy causes residents to feel disregarded and marginalised. Another issue caused by the lack of sanitary facilities was expressed by a 31-year-old male respondent from Evululuku, Oshakati:

There is also the problem of toilets ... People have to go far into the bush ... Imagine at night – it's very dangerous ... Women and girls can get raped and assaulted when they go there at night ...

A similar sentiment was expressed by a 30-year-old woman who has lived in Havana the past two years:

We are suffering – we just need water and sanitation! For those of us with phones we go far to charge them, and we also walk far to go to the toilet – or we just go to the bush ... It is very dangerous, and when you go there, there might be those guys who are doing drugs ...



**Dumping ground and improvised “toilet” in Oneshila, Oshakati**

In short, numerous issues stem from the lack of sanitary facilities, and these in turn cause insecurity amongst the residents of the informal settlements. The manifestations of this insecurity are elaborated upon in section 6.2.

## **Water**

While some residents did have access to their own private water taps, most relied on communal water points which are accessed using a pre-paid access chip.



**Public water tap, Havana, Windhoek**



**Water meter, Ompumbu settlement, Oshakati**

While residents said that access to water had improved over the years, and pointed to the issue of the lack of sanitary facilities as a matter of greater urgency, the lack of private water taps does cause certain difficulties, particularly for elderly and physically disabled residents. While her unwell husband was being assisted into a taxi by two people, a 61-year-old female respondent from Kanaan B explained:

The water taps were also [installed], but they stopped in the middle [of the settlement]. To go and fetch water is very difficult as I am a pensioner – an old lady. The water points are very far from my place, and as you can see my husband is also sick.

Likewise, including those relying on the public water taps, many respondents complained about high water prices.

## **Electricity**

Another concern for the majority of respondents was the lack of electricity. One lady who has lived in Freedom Square, Gobabis for the past 20 years explained:

Our houses are burning day and night, because we don't have electricity ...

This lack of electricity makes residents resort to gas or kerosene stoves and open fires for cooking, and candles for illuminating their metal-sheet shacks. However, the issue is not only accessing electricity, but also the additional financial burden that follows when the residents add electricity to their already tight monthly budgets. A 44-year-old woman from Evululuku, Oshakati explains:

We don't receive any help from the government – there is only electricity for those who can afford it ... My rent is N\$600, but some months this is too much for me to afford it ...

Hence, beyond the mere provision of access to basic services, it is important to consider the affordability of these services, as many of the respondents were without formal employment and had to rely on informal income to sustain themselves, and pay for whatever services they could access.

For many people relying on an income from informal trade and production, electricity is a crucial asset that our respondents explained has the potential to ease their financial burdens. Consider the words of a female section leader in One Nation, Windhoek:

We used to sew, but there is no electricity – we used to use our generator and buy five litres of petrol, but that finishes in one day ...

Services such as electricity can assist residents in generating their own income, thereby contributing to sustainable urban growth. However, this requires adequate support, and if needs be, subsidisation (in line with the resolutions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Land Conference outlined in section 1). It would be counterproductive to demand payment for electricity if the cost of the service prevented residents from engaging in income-generating activities.

Many respondents described the effectiveness of streetlights in preventing crime and assault in their communities. A 35-year-old woman from Havana, Windhoek told us:

The crime is not too bad because we have streetlights now. The problem is that the *botsotsos* [thugs, gang members] are standing there by the toilets at night to check if you have a phone or something with you ...

This points on the one hand to the generally agreed-upon benefit of streetlights in Namibia's informal settlements. On the other hand, however, it highlights the fact that this only solves one aspect of the crime problems in the informal settlements: even with streetlights, residents remain insecure, and at risk of being robbed or assaulted. These problems probably stem from the severe poverty and the “lack of order” described by most residents of the settlements.

Lastly, many respondents complained about the inaccessibility of clinics, schools, fire brigades and police stations. One lady in her forties from Freedom

Square, Gobabis described the inefficiency of the police in responding to violence in her community:

And if you have to phone the police, they never respond or come back to us. If there is a fight and people stab each other, and you call the police, they will ask you for your number, and then even if that person has to die from the bleeding it will take HOURS for the police to respond to you.

## 6.2 Insecurities in the settlement

As shown above, a direct consequence of the lack of basic services is insecurity on the part of respondents. This is manifested in many ways, such as the spread of Hepatitis E and other life-threatening diseases that are preventable through proper sanitation; fire hazards resulting from the use of open fires in densely populated areas; high crime rates and a lack of law enforcement; tenure insecurity due to many respondents' status as *de jure* illegal occupants; children playing on roads with cars speeding past due to the lack of recreational facilities; and high levels of alcohol consumption causing frequent incidents of physical violence, to mention but a few. The experiences of crime has already been mentioned above. The words of a retired 63-year-old male police officer from One Nation, Windhoek underline the severity of this problem:

There is an issue of safety and security – if a family is going up north they and have to go early in the morning and then people come and rob them using their guns. And these are not small guns – it is machine-gun sounds I hear from the bush in the morning.

Another issue is the high consumption of alcohol in the communities. A 65-year-old headman from Evululuku explained the consequences of this consumption:

There are a lot of problems around here. Crime is a big problem and people are fighting and assaulting each other at night when they go from the shebeens. They just go around and beat each other up!

The woman from Freedom Square quoted above also explained:

In this location the youth is very much involved in the alcoholic actions. And these young kids do not drink this alcohol we buy in the shops – the kids are drinking *tombo* – home-brewed alcohol.

The high consumption of alcohol in the informal settlements, combined with the multitude of factors presented in this chapter, contributes to insecurity induced by violence (intensified by inadequate crime prevention and law enforcement), and uncertainty regarding the upbringing and futures of the children in the settlements.

The high consumption of alcohol is not restricted to the residents of the informal settlements, however: the World Health Organization reported Namibia's national annual alcohol per capita (15+) consumption (in litres of pure alcohol) to be 9.8, compared to the World Health Organization (WHO) African Region's average of 6.3. High alcohol consumption is thus a broader national phenomenon.<sup>28</sup> In combination with other structural issues that pertain in Namibia's informal settlements, however, this has particularly deleterious consequences for the residents.

While some respondents had received some kind of recognition of their residence, others were still deemed *de jure* illegal occupants of the land. Some of these residents explained how the LAs had marked their metal-sheet shacks with the words "Illegal – Remove". In Oneshila, Oshakati, a number of residents reported such labelling of their shacks. We saw evidence that residents had painted over these words in an act of silent resistance.



**"Illegal – Remove" labelling on shacks obscured by residents in Oneshila, Oshakati**

The residents explained how their lack of tenure security, and being labelled as "illegal" occupants of the land, also intensified the unstructured character of the settlement. A 57-year-old female resident from Oneshila explained:

If you look at the land where people have settled illegally, you'll find that people are just squeezing ... And there you'll find quarrels and disputes and arguments with newcomers who has started building their structure right next to yours ... That is also why there is no hygiene and that is why there is no order in terms of where people should put their garbage, so people decide that they will just throw their rubbish where they feel like ...

A 40-year-old woman in Evululuku, Oshakati, expressed a similar sentiment:

I just want them to give us our own plots. It will make me very happy. Having our own place will make it possible to put things in order.

28 World Health Organization, *Alcohol – Country Profiles: Namibia*, WHO, Geneva, 2018.

By way of contrast, although Kanaan A is not problem-free, residents expressed appreciation for the improvements demarcation and partial servicing had brought to their community.

### 6.3 Longing for space and ownership

Longing for space and ownership was a central narrative. Many respondents expressed how tenure insecurities in the country's informal settlements – intensified by forceful evictions – hindered them from establishing a stable livelihood. A 30-year-old woman from Havana, Windhoek told us:

We feel isolated – we don't feel safe! We need demarcated land so we can have security and start our own businesses.

The notion of tenure security providing both a sense of existential security, in terms of having a place to call one's own, and a more tangible sense of livelihood security in terms of feeling able to start private businesses without fear of eviction, was mentioned by many respondents.

Likewise, when discussing the prospects of one day obtaining their tenure-secure private plots of land, many respondents highlighted that this would enable them to leave something behind. A 32-year-old woman from Oneshila, Oshakati explained:

I would be very happy to own my own land as it would make me able to extend my place and leave something for my children.

Another dimension relates to dreams of having one's own private space, with the ability to create a sense of freedom for oneself. A 46-year-old woman and member of SDFN, living in Oneshila, Oshakati, in light of other members of SDFN obtaining their own land, explained the prospects of one day getting her own erf:

All I want is a place that I can call my own. Having a place that you can call your own gives you freedom, and you don't have to feel like you are disturbing others when your children are playing around.

This is more than a wish for personal comfort. One consequence stemming from the lack of personal space emerged from the school-going children of residents of Oneshila, Oshakati: when asked to draw a picture of their families, some drew parents having sexual intercourse, presumably due to the lack of privacy in the metal-sheet shacks. Overcrowding also results in a greater risk of fires within the settlements, exacerbated by the fire brigade's inability to access areas with poor or non-existent road infrastructure.

## 6.4 Miscommunication between local authorities and residents

Mistrust of both LAs and NAs was widespread among respondents, as can be seen in this example of a 49-year-old male resident from Kanaan C, Gobabis:

We are people who are not sustained by the people who are having authority over us – our leaders – they are just coming here to sustain us with food and blankets whenever they want something from us! Whenever they want something ... Now we are at that point where we are going towards elections – it is just that you came too early ... Start from June, July, and they start coming, and they are coming with empty promises: “We are going to do this, we are going to do that”... And then we poor people, because we don’t have food at home and because they are giving mealie meal there and giving rice there, so what are we going to do? So we go and [show support] to those leaders who are there, because if you don’t [show support], or you don’t wear that T-shirt, you are not going to get those benefits ... So because we are poor – what can we do?

This sentiment that politicians and LAs only make themselves visible during election times was widespread. Together with complaints about the lack of basic services, this was among the most common concerns expressed by the respondents. In describing the Town Council’s interaction with her community, a 26-year-old resident of Sky, Oshakati told us:

At some point you’ll see locations that are being developed, but us living here, there is always a delay when it comes to servicing land and making electricity ... There are other locations that are moving forwards, but when it comes to Sky – it is always the last location ... When you compare us, it is like we are not counted as human beings, we are just counted as isolated animals ... But we are breathing – we are human beings! It is just that the standard of living – it is not good ...

An explanation for this perception of being excluded and dehumanised was presented by the PRO of Oshakati:

Okay, our first priority of relocation: We already did a public meeting on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, at Eemwandi. We have been strategising internally before we went out to tell the people. So the idea is to already have enough plots serviced for Eemwandi. Because it is better to relocate the whole area first, rather than taking a portion from here, and a portion from there. The minute you take five people from here, those open spaces that you leave there, someone will come build up a shack. Then again you have to start over ... When strategising this thing we kept quiet, so that we don’t encourage people. By the time we are going to relocate Eemwandi there are thousands of people there because [they say] “Oh, they are going to be relocated there, let’s all go settle there.” Because they know that they are being relocated there. Even Sky – I’ll mention it to you know – we gave them hints that they are after Eemwandi – we are relocating

them after Eemwandi. Eemwandi is worse than Sky – trust me. That’s why we started with Eemwandi. Sky is our second priority. So, even though we told them we want to relocate you – we don’t want to spread too much of it. Otherwise if we start to spread too much of it, by the time we want to start with Sky it is full! We don’t even know from where these people are coming. Some people even have houses in urban areas – I mean in the town land – but they will go and build there.<sup>29</sup>

Clearly, then, experiences of being neglected and disregarded stem at least in part from mutual distrust between residents and LAs. It is therefore imperative that community members be included in the process of formalising and upgrading the settlements – at the very least, to minimise the chances of miscommunication resulting in their feeling excluded and ignored. In light of their already engrained mistrust towards LAs and NAs, however, establishing such inclusive collaborations with the residents of the informal settlements will be a formidable challenge to be overcome.

## 7 Discussion

Much scholarly and policy-oriented work has been published on the issue of urban land rights in Namibia. However, what often goes unnoticed are the voices of the people residing in the informal settlements. In the preceding sections, we have presented a small selection of such voices, although including only short quotes does partial justice at best to the sentiments shared by our respondents. These perspectives will now provide the background for a discussion on existing literature, and perspectives from public and political discourse.

One point of contestation relates to the involvement of private sector actors in potential solutions to Namibia’s urban land and housing issues. Sweeney-Bindels suggests that the Namibian government should “involve the private sector as a tool for integration and scaling up delivery,”<sup>30</sup> whereas Jauch, based on his comparative analysis between Zimbabwe, Kenya, South Africa and Namibia, argues that “the private sector may not be capable of delivering houses to low-income households which do not have a regular income.”<sup>31</sup> Our respondents’ accounts seem at first glance to legitimise Jauch’s scepticism regarding reliance on private sector solutions, particularly as they already struggle with the unaffordability of the basic services provided by private entities (see section 6.1: Water and electricity). On this issue, however, Sweeney-Bindels also states that:

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29 PRO of Oshakati Town Council, ‘Semi-Structured Interview with PRO of Oshakati Town Council’, edited by Rune Larsen and Gabriel Augustus.

30 Sweeney-Bindels, Els, ‘Housing Policy and Delivery in Namibia’, *Research Report No. 12*, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Windhoek, 2011, p. 4.

31 Jauch, Herbert, ‘Youth and Urban Land/Housing in Namibia’, in Bankie, B.F. & H. Jauch (eds), *The Urban Housing Crisis in Namibia: A Youth Perspective*, National Youth Council of Namibia (NYCN), Windhoek, 2016, p. 145.

... problems in the housing market are often problems caused by the input markets. Especially in Namibia, one could argue that this might be exacerbated by the small scale of the market. In addition, the high inequality in Namibia could play an aggravating role. Certain providers of inputs and producers of housing might be used to high returns in one part of the market, but reluctant to move to another sector of the market where those returns might be lower.<sup>32</sup>

Relying on private actor engagement as the solution to Namibia's urban land and housing issues would therefore seem to be a dubious approach – especially considering the profound socioeconomic inequality in Namibia that pushes market prices upwards, thus accentuating the income gap that underlies the structural issues that bedevil informal settlements.

One solution suggested by Jauch is that the Namibian government should diversify their approaches towards general housing delivery, on the one hand, and social housing, on the other. He suggests that a “mix of delivery modes and tenure systems seems to be the best option for Namibia.”<sup>33</sup> He points out that various degrees of government subsidisation on housing, and the option of establishing realistically rentable housing in urban areas, would be possible examples of such diversification. He also criticises how the NHE was contracted to build affordable housing units, but in the event only middle-income buyers could afford them. Remmert and Ndhlovu hold a similar view:

It is clear that house ownership remains a priority strategy for government in addressing housing shortfalls. This approach continues to ignore citizens' needs and preferences for a wide variety of housing options. The survey demonstrates this clearly with Walvis Bay respondents having much more interest in affordable rented accommodation than ownership. Low-income groups might also be better and faster served with urban land and associated legal tenure rights than costly houses constructed under government initiatives.<sup>34</sup>

Considering these sentiments in the light of our respondents' perspectives strengthens the case that by and large, only lip service has been paid in NA and LA initiatives to the inclusion of community members in finding solutions for Namibia's urban land and housing issues. In line with Remmert and Ndhlovu's study, we found that most of our respondents did indeed wish for some degree of

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32 Sweeney-Bindels, Els, 'Housing Policy and Delivery in Namibia', *Research Report No. 12*, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Windhoek, 2011, p. 10.

33 Jauch, Herbert, 'Youth and Urban Land/Housing in Namibia', in Bankie, B.F. & H. Jauch (eds), *The Urban Housing Crisis in Namibia: A Youth Perspective*, National Youth Council of Namibia (NYCN), Windhoek, 2016, p. 176.

34 Remmert, Dietrich & Pauline Ndhlovu, *Housing in Namibia: Rights, Challenges and Opportunities – Research Report: Right to Housing Project*, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Windhoek, 2018, p. 73.

ownership. This was based on their experience of tenure insecurity and problems caused by the lack of space and proper demarcation, however, and not on dreams of mortgaging their homes in order to secure loans for future investments. This seemed far from most of our respondents experienced reality.

Hoffman argues that the modern city has become alienating and uninhabitable for the urban poor, who are often forced into demeaning environments that were not made with their interests in mind. This is especially true in the modern African city, which is a product of constant externally driven experimentation.<sup>35, 36</sup> This concern is serious, and based on our research we deem it imperative to actively and creatively include the residents of Namibia's informal settlements in both the formulation and the implementation of policy. The success of this approach is manifest in the achievements of SDFN and NHAG initiatives, which many point out greatly outnumber those of the GRN's approaches to urban land issues, particularly in view of the differences in resources spent.<sup>37</sup> And again, residents of Namibia's informal settlements do manage, in various ways, to create some kind of livelihood within the near-uninhabitable spaces many have no choice but to live in.



**Women doing tailoring in Kanaan B, Gobabis**



**Scrap metal collected by young men in One Nation, Windhoek, as a means of supporting their mother's household**

35 Hoffman, Danny, *Monrovia Modern: Urban Form and Political Imagination in Liberia*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2017.

36 Interestingly, the word 'Katutura' loosely translates into: "the place where we don't want to live" in Otjiherero.

37 See, for example: Jauch, Herbert, 'Youth and Urban Land/Housing in Namibia', in Bankie, B.F. & H. Jauch (eds), *The Urban Housing Crisis in Namibia: A Youth Perspective*, National Youth Council of Namibia (NYCN), Windhoek, 2016; Lühl, Philip and Gillermo Delgado, 'Urban Land Reform in Namibia Getting Ready for Namibia's Urban Future: Policy Paper for Submission to the 2018 National Land Conference', Windhoek, 1-5 October 2018; Sweeney-Bindels, Els, 'Housing Policy and Delivery in Namibia', *Research Report No. 12*, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Windhoek, 2011; and Weber, Beat & John Mendelsohn, *Informal Settlements in Namibia: Their Nature and Growth – Exploring Ways to Make Namibian Urban Development More Socially Just and Inclusive*. Development Workshop Namibia, Windhoek, 2017.

In late January 2019 *The Namibian* newspaper paraphrased President Hage Geingob as having stated in the context of the GRN's Harambee Prosperity Plan<sup>38</sup> that he wants all “shacks” to have been removed from Namibia within the next five years. Considering this optimistic objective, we found it interesting to ask the PROs and councillors if they considered this implementable in light of the realities they face as LAs. The four replied as follows:

### **PRO, Gobabis**

For myself, and this is my personal opinion – not the council's, those things are realistic only if the government decentralises it – if they give the money to the local councils – we can do it – we can do that! We can!<sup>39</sup>

### **PRO, Oshakati**

From my point of view it can be done. How can it be done? If we revoke some of the laws. Some of the urban land laws require us to build with certain types of bricks – certain standards. But there are people from other countries, and they come to Namibia, and they say: “You know what, in America for example, there are those straight brick things – I don't know what you call them – but you just pour in cement, and then the structure is safe.” There are people in informal settlements who want to build – but they don't have money. They want to take up loans, but the bank will only fund on urban land that is proclaimed, but if those things can be looked at and we remove some of those harsh requirements – I think it can be done.<sup>40</sup>

### **Regional Councillor, Tobias Hanyeko Constituency**

I can't say that in five years the shacks will be reduced, because, if we since 2016 have been struggling with the budget – I don't know if the budget will come once. But we can't make it. Honestly speaking – even in five years. Because, number one, where people are now the ground servicing might take even one or two years. Secondly, where people are living now, their [living] standard – for me to put you into the [better living] standard it must not be like a spoon to put in your mouth, I would rather use the talent of you to upgrade you and to upgrade me. It is not easy work. Even if we take one area, we cannot make it in five years – seriously. That means that politically it might be working, but when it comes down to the practicalities it is a challenge ... We should have started this process already, but up until now we did not start. Then it is a challenge. It is a challenge and we must face it.<sup>41</sup>

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38 Ngutjinazo, Okeri & Ndanki Kahiurika, ‘Shacks ‘Offend’ Geingob ... Wants Them Gone in 5 Years’, *The Namibian*, 20 January 2019.

39 PRO of Gobabis Municipal Council, ‘Semi-structured interview with the PRO of Gobabis Municipal Council’, edited by Rune Larsen and Gabriel Augustus.

40 PRO of Oshakati Town Council, ‘Semi-Structured Interview with PRO of Oshakati Town Council’, edited by Rune Larsen and Gabriel Augustus.

41 Regional Councillor of Tobias Hanyeko, ‘Semi-Structured Interview with the Regional Councillor of Tobias Hanyeko’, edited by Rune Larsen and Gabriel Augustus.

## Regional Councillor, Moses Garoeb Constituency

Yes. The previous president, Dr Pohamba, was having a project of mass housing and here in Windhoek, my friend, nothing has happened here. All has moved out, but now what about Windhoek? Windhoek sees dust in the air! You demarcate a plot, so that people can now have a plot, and you stop people from settling on their own – because you have provided basic services. We demarcate plots, put up the street – we make a plan. A plan is just to draw up a paper and then you make a plan, then you go to the area and you see here we adjust and here we change. Then the plan is there and people can get their place, there is a room there – a space – then you charge them a small fee, you charge them 50 Namibia Dollars. This 50 Namibia Dollars will make for you another fund for you to service the land. People have already settled there, but services are coming. That way we will manage it. But now, since last year when the land conference took place – we are waiting for these programmes of the land conference to take place. But here in the city, the resolutions will start in the city, but I am telling you, if the city worked together with the State House, things would happen!<sup>42</sup>

As these four LA representatives' different perspectives illustrate, reaching the goal of eradicating metal-sheet shacks in Namibia within the next five years requires more than just a few marginal adjustments, especially in light of Namibia's increasing urbanisation.

Four central resolutions pertaining urban land, made during the Second National Land Conference are:

- Build 300 000 housing units/opportunities over the next 7 years.
- Government expenditure should be increased from the current level of 0.1% to at least 10% of GDP.
- Scale up [the] community-based land delivery process for the lower income community as [this process has] a much bigger impact.
- Allow for partially serviced land (sewerage and water) to be sold. Other services can be added at a later stage.<sup>43</sup>

These resolutions all point to the necessity of radically reconfiguring the way in which urban land is being dealt with in Namibia, especially if the first objective of building 300 000 housing units/opportunities (presumably within a price range affordable for Namibia's poorer segments) is to be met. Interestingly, the resolutions echo the sentiments shared by the LAs above. Considering the words of the councillors, and the example given earlier regarding the delayed implementation of the FLTA, however, one wonders when – and indeed if – these admirable resolutions will be implemented. Particularly the objective of increasing GRN urban land expenditure

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42 Regional Councillor of Moses Garoeb, 'Semi-Structured Interview with the Regional Councillor of Moses Garoeb', edited by Rune Larsen and Gabriel Augustus.

43 GRN, 'Resolutions of the Second National Land Conference, 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> October 2018', Ministry of Land Reform, 2018 (<http://www.mlr.gov.na/documents/20541/638917/Second+National+Land+Conference+Resolutions+2018.pdf/15b498fd-fdc6-4898-aeda-91fecbc74319>).

to 10% of GDP, in the midst of an economic crisis and the government's struggle to provide basic land servicing to its urban poor, would entail a drastic change in the way public finances are allocated. That being said, our research also showed that the FLTS is (slowly) being implemented. While we were not able to assess its impact, it shows that the resolution of scaling-up community-based land delivery processes has been initiated – despite being over 20 years in the planning, and both LAs and respondents from the communities expressing a lack of knowledge about its progress and implementation.

## **8 Concluding remarks and suggestions for further research**

While our study did not clearly assess how the residents of the informal settlements envision solutions to their current predicament, we did manage to highlight some common concerns that emerged throughout our interviews. Our study lends support to the adoption of a new approach, based on active community involvement on various levels, to deal with Namibia's informal settlement challenge. We encourage future research focused on community-centred projects and initiatives to generate better understanding of Namibia's urban land and housing issues, and to evaluate innovative solutions to these issues. We also encourage longer-term qualitative and ethnographic research in Namibia's informal settlements as our study, within the limitation imposed by the available time and resources, points to the necessity of deepening our understanding in these regards. Despite this limitation, however, we established that there is a disconnect between the concerns of the informal settlement residents and GRN initiatives to solve housing and land issues, and illustrated how miscommunication stemming from mutual mistrust between LAs and residents in the informal settlements results in a counterproductive repeating cycle of LAs keeping information from community members, who as a result of the perception of exclusion defy the LAs, for example by building regardless of the LA's restriction on further developments before relocation (see section 6.4).

We likewise pointed out the apartheid sedimentation that characterises the phenomenon of informal settlements in present-day Namibia. In order to counter this historic sediment in Namibia's cityscapes, we argue that a reconfiguration of the approaches towards urban land and housing is imperative. This requires the integration of the urban poor into Namibia's broader urban spaces. One way of achieving this is exactly by including these actors in the decision-making and policy-implementation processes concerning issues that they are deeply affected by. The perspectives presented within this chapter should be considered an invitation to initiate and scale-up such collaborations.