



URBAN LAND REFORM IN NAMIBIA: GETTING READY FOR NAMIBIA'S URBAN FUTURE

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http://dna.nust.na/landconference/submissions_2018/policy-paper-urban-land-reform-2018-final.pdf

INTRODUCTION

We stand before you wearing two hats: Firstly as architects and urbanists who are working on housing and urbanization at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). In the beginning of 2017 we were commissioned by MURD to review the Mass Housing Programme and the findings are currently with the Minister of MURD for his input.

Secondly, we stand here as young residents of Windhoek who would not only like to see our children grow up in a more inclusive city, but also because we are going to spend most of our professional lives working alongside others to transform our urban areas.

In our presentation today we will not make a lot of technical input: this we will leave to the breakaway session on urban land reform tomorrow and Thursday. Today, it is important to remind ourselves why we are talking of the urgent need for an urban land reform.

At the first land conference in 1991, Namibia was 30% urbanized; today we have reached an urbanization rate of 50% according to the latest UN figures¹, which is corroborated by Namibia Statistics Agency which reported 48% urbanization in 2016². In the next years 30 years, which is almost the same amount that passed since the first land conference, we will have reached about 75% urbanization rate: that amounts to an additional 2 million people in urban areas, nearly as much as Namibia's current population.

Yet, up until 5 years ago, there was little public discussion on the urban question. In fact it took a youth movement, the Affirmative Repositioning Movement, to put the issue at the centre of the national agenda. Even during the recent Khomas regional consultations, we had to fight hard to get the urban land issue discussed as a stand-alone topic, let alone to portray it as the foremost issue for this region in which nearly 85% of the population lives in an urban area, the city of Windhoek!

1 UNDESA. (2018). *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision*. United Nations Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Retrieved from <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/>

2 Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey 2016 Report, Namibia Statistics Agency



This happens while we find ourselves in a deep, national humanitarian crisis. We would like to dedicate this presentation to those who have died from cholera, flash floods, stray bullets piercing through corrugated walls, and those who have suffered from gender-based violence and other forms of every day violence that our cities produce in their current form. As a Nation we have failed these people, who like most of us here were simply looking forward to a better life.

We recently learned about an African proverb, which says:
"If you close your eyes to facts, you will learn through accidents".

With regards to urbanization, we are currently learning through accidents; we are in damage control mode!.

WHAT IS THE URBAN

'The urban' is the defining characteristic of our times. We would like to argue that Namibia's future is urban, and it is necessary that this conference recognizes this fact and provides the foundations for a future vision for our cities.

Cities cover only 0.5% of the Earth's surface, yet they produce 80% of the world's GDP³. This is an important fact to keep in mind if Vision 2030 is to be realised.

Urbanization is not just about cities, but the territory as a whole becoming 'urban'. This includes roads, power lines, information and communication technology infrastructure, railroads, ports; as well as the land for mining and marine resources which is still missing in the discussions at this conference.

In Namibian cities, we see a specific kind of urbanisation taking place; we can call it 'informal urbanisation'. However, this is not something characteristic of Namibia alone, but arguably found in most countries in the world.

Africa is the fastest-urbanising continent in the world, and yet only 1 in 3 countries have a 'national plan' for urbanisation⁴. At the moment, Namibia is not one of them.

This is an opportunity, because such plans are usually developed by professionals and officials, creating top-down visions that often exclude the urban poor. Namibia has the chance to develop its first national spatial plan after independence through a partnership approach and in an inclusive way.

It is alliances that create the opportunity to work together, that will make a difference in this respect; not policy of plans alone. The right attitude to engage in inclusive urbanisation is 'meeting each other half way'. Namibia still has a unique opportunity to steer urbanisation

³ World Bank. (2018). Urban Development: Overview. Retrieved from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview>

⁴ Turok, I. (2015). Turning the tide? The emergence of national urban policies in Africa. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 33(3), 348-369.



in just and equitable directions, which, as the President said in his opening remarks, needs to confront the status quo.

Transforming the places where we live is fundamental, because the places where we live change ourselves! It is a fundamental right for us to be able to change our towns, cities, villages and settlements, to shape our land, urban and rural, in ways we would like our kids to grow up in. This is the right to urban life; the right to the city.

WHY URBAN LAND REFORM?

Currently Namibian cities are growing, powered by women and men building them on an everyday basis; what we often simply call 'informal settlements'. Yesterday, former President Pohamba mentioned that women farmers in rural areas need to be supported as they "cannot do the work". With all due respect, we would like to question such a statement. In urban areas we can safely say that women are on the forefront of constructing houses, earning livelihoods and improving their family's lives with the little means that are available to them.

Informal employment already accounts for 67% of all employment⁵, and according to the latest census of the Community Land Information Program by the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia, about 995,000 people live in shacks in 308 settlements across the country, many of which are proclaimed areas. With a total urban population of 1.1 million⁶, that is more than 3 quarters of urban residents.

In the ongoing proceedings of this conference, urban land reform seems to be narrowly defined as 'tenure reform' with the Flexible Land Tenure System (FLTS), which has first been mooted in the mid 1990s. The FLT Act was proclaimed in 2012, and the regulations have only been gazetted this year. In these past six years about 200 000 people have moved to urban areas, the vast majority of which has moved to informal settlements: we are losing the fight against time.

As mentioned earlier, if we take the long-term view over the coming 30 years, we need to accommodate another 2 million residents in urban areas. That equates to 5x Windhoek, 22x Rundu, or 100x Gobabis! This cannot be achieved by scaling up land delivery alone. Instead we need to talk of urban land reform in a broad sense, which, similar to land reform, must be understood to transform the colonial urban structures we inherited, and not just add more flesh to the skeleton that apartheid planning has established.

As the First Lady has recently said, we need a counter-Odendaal Plan⁷. The Odendaal plan was a very thorough spatial development plan, which of course was developed for all the wrong purposes. Yet, since Independence, we have not articulated a counter plan.

⁵ The Namibia Labour Force Survey 2016 Report, Namibia Statistics Agency

⁶ Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey 2016 Report, Namibia Statistics Agency

⁷ New Era. (2018, July 16). Match Ondendaal's efforts to undo land injustices – Geingos. *New Era*. Retrieved from <https://www.newera.com.na/2018/07/16/match-ondendals-efforts-to-undo-land-injustices-geingos/>



WHAT SHOULD THIS 'COUNTER-PLAN' ENTAIL?

We need to define a broad vision for 'urban land reform' as part of 'land reform'.

As the Minister of Justice alluded to yesterday, when speaking about the fundamental rights in the constitution, we could add the UN-defined 'right to adequate housing' to the bill of rights. This right speaks to more than just shelter or affordability, but it encompasses all the various aspects that are necessary for housing to be adequate: cultural aspects, where the house is located, whether there are schools or clinics nearby, playgrounds, and so on⁸.

We should speak thus about 'adequate housing', not just 'affordable housing'. Furthermore, this right is progressively attained. It is not that we wake up tomorrow and there will be adequate housing. We have to think incrementally: how on-going processes such as 'peoples processes' of incremental land servicing and housing construction can ultimately lead to adequate housing and liveable neighbourhoods. Today's informal settlements are tomorrow's middle-income neighbourhoods if we support inhabitants to support themselves, and if we have the vision for it.

Through their incredible work of more than two decades, the Shack Dwellers' Federation has deserved priority support. This is furthermore due to their work being in the interest of the vast majority of urban residents. But supporting how? The point is not to replace these efforts with government intervention, but to support them financially and by building broad alliances between communities, central/local government, professionals, and universities to scale up their processes.

While the above addresses the existing crisis of living conditions in informal settlements, we need another strategy for those millions that are joining us in urban areas in the coming years.

As has been shown in a number of local authorities, this can be done through pro-active planned urban extensions, where people can settle with basic serviced plots and tenure security, while services are incrementally being improved. Examples of this can be found in Otjiwarongo amongst others, and the work that colleagues from Development Workshop⁹ are embarking on.

However, to achieve this two-pronged strategy at a scale that will make an impact, the servicing of land needs to be subsidised structurally. In fact, there is a need for a comprehensive system of subsidies supporting urban land reform, similar to the various other land reform programmes. Not only for Shack Dwellers' Federation and informal settlements, but also for those wanting to develop affordable rental opportunities, the National Housing Enterprise, and local authorities with social housing initiatives.

8 OHCHR. (n.d.). *Right to Adequate Housing* (No. Fact Sheet No. 21). Geneva: Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights and UN-Habitat. Retrieved from

http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS21_rev_1_Housing_en.pdf

9 Weber, B., & Mendelsohn, J. (2017). *Informal settlements in Namibia: their nature and growth. Exploring ways to make Namibian urban development more socially just and inclusive* (Occasional Paper No. 1). Windhoek: Development Workshop.



This system of subsidies should be considered land reform, and poor urban residents should be considered land reform beneficiaries.

Let us emphasize: poor people in cities need to be seen as land reform beneficiaries.

POST-CONFERENCE PROCESS

While we are prioritizing these urgent interventions, we need to create a post-land conference process to collectively imagine a future vision for urban areas, and translate this into a National Spatial Development plan and urbanisation policy as envisaged by the Urban and Regional Planning Bill. This should become 'the counter-plan'.

The way we currently plan our cities is through zoning schemes, which embed inequality in urban areas. We plan for "low density" and "high density" when in reality we mean "rich" and "poor". We plan for residential and business areas to be apart, while in reality we know that we need the both together. We refer to what we *know*, but the reference should be a radically different imagination of an urban future.

Why can't we imagine housing for low-income residents here, right across the street from Safari Hotel? We estimate that in Windhoek alone, if we would build up only 30% of the disproportionate public open spaces belonging to the Local Authority – these vast areas of bushveld you see everywhere across the city – we could build between 20 000 and 50 000 affordable housing units could be built within centrally-located areas of the city.

Today, we might think that is impossible, because in our current city the poor remain on the other side of the Western Bypass – this "red line" separating our city. And this does not concern Windhoek alone. Most other urban areas still have some form of bypass, buffer zone, or separation mechanism. These spatial boundaries need to be overcome.

If we all do our work of developing this country and its people, the poor worker of today should be enabled to create the basis for a more prosperous future for her children. We must make sure that the poor have the best possible access to public amenities and economic opportunity, which is more likely achieved in more well-located areas.

In her opening address of the Urban Forum we organized at NUST last year¹⁰, Honourable Sophia Shaningwa, then Minister of Urban and Rural Development, highlighted the importance of the urban transformation, and I quote:

"if we come together and develop inclusive, equitable and progressive strategies, housing [and I would like to add here urban land reform] can become a factor of unity, solidarity, and of contributing to the sentiment of "one Namibia, one Nation".

¹⁰ See: <http://urbanforum.nust.na/>



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As public university, together with our students we stand ready to offer our capacities and an open public platform for the debates and the work that needs to be done. We are happy to be in the final stages of developing MoUs with both MURD and the City of Windhoek to this effect. *Once* we have a clear idea of our shared urban vision, *then* we need to increase spending on urbanization. In that way we avoid repeating the mistake of spending a lot of public funds on housing programs that have very limited impact.

During the first land conference, there were few voices addressing the urban land question. Given the dominance of rural concerns, these issues did not find their way into the consensus resolutions. Therefore, it is not sufficient for this conference to merely discuss the urban land question; it needs to be given the priority that future generations deserve. Paraphrasing the title of the memoirs of our first Minister of Local Government and Housing, Dr. Libertine Amathila, today we have the opportunity of “making a difference”.

Mr President, in addition to what John Nakuta said earlier regarding the ancestral land question, we would like to suggest another potential legacy of your Presidency: that of establishing a new foundation for Namibia’s urban future.

We thank you.

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