

Welcoming Remarks

Prof. Tjama Tjivikua

Founding Vice-Chancellor, NUST

Ladies and gentlemen¹:

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all on behalf of the Namibia University of Science and Technology to this special high-level event: the Public Forum on Housing and Urbanisation. The brainchild of architect Leon Barnard, the Forum was initiated in 2015 as a cross-institutional platform with a shared interest to explore, analyse and debate urbanisation in Namibia. Mr Barnard consulted me on this new initiative and I immediately agreed to our University hosting the Forum. Its success so far goes to show the need for its existence and the convergence of diverse stakeholders' interests. Well done, Mr Barnard; well done, our Team in ILMI – the Integrated Land Management Institute in the Faculty of Natural Resources and Spatial Sciences.

The initiative was launched in the presence of Honourable Sophia Shaningwa, Minister of Urban and Rural Development, who is again with us here today, and Her Excellency the First Lady of Namibia, Madame Monica Geingos, with the overall question: How can economic inclusion be facilitated through the progressive restructuring of cities?

The lively debate that ensued and the relevance of the discussions for the future development of Namibia led me to pledge that the event should become an annual multi-stakeholder gathering focused on urban, housing and land-related issues and to be hosted by NUST.

This year, the Forum – under the theme Rethinking Housing and Urbanisation – aims to address the broad spectrum of technical, economic, social and legal aspects that are relevant to the production of housing and urbanisation in general, and to prepare the ground for a holistic, cross-disciplinary review of Namibia's housing and urbanisation agenda. Recently, NUST signed an agreement with the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development to review the Blueprint and develop a Strategy for the implementation of the Mass Housing Development Programme. The same Ministry is also one of the main sponsors of this Forum, as the issues to be discussed in the coming two days are closely linked to the larger project of reviewing Government's response to the crises of housing and urban land use and management.

NUST is happy to involve many of its academics, students and alumni in this important project for the development of Namibia, and it is particularly proud to have established a competent team including experts from the University of Namibia and the private sector.

The Forum is conceived as a two-day workshop, with nine parallel sessions addressing relevant thematic areas related to housing and urbanisation, led by international and local scholars and experts, professionals and civil society representatives. Participants are invited to contribute from their wide spectrum of experience to discuss what is to be done to enable progressive and innovative strategies to avail adequate housing to the largest part of the Namibian population.

The closing panel discussion tomorrow evening, which is open to the general public, will bring together the various aspects that were discussed during the Forum in order to grasp the complexity of the question of housing and urbanisation. If we remind ourselves of the country's history of socio-spatial inequalities, contemporary urbanisation is to be understood as a challenge that can only be redirected if the complexity of the production of space is actively rethought in trans-disciplinary ways.

Such an approach must cut across the social and spatial divisions and include all spatial disciplines; Government organisations, ministries and agencies; civil society organisations; the private sector; and inhabitants.

Distinguished audience:

I am heartened by the initiative taken by the Integrated Land Management Institute (ILMI) here at NUST, which has partnered with the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development, the Namibia Urban Design Institute, the Namibia Institute of Architects and the German International Development Cooperation Agency (GIZ, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) to collaborate in convening this event. This is not an ordinary academic conference, but a platform where you all should get involved in the formulation of a progressive housing and urban development agenda to shape Namibia's urban future. But such a huge effort requires every stakeholder's participation and contribution. Therefore, without imposing on and chasing the interested parties away, I would like to request the stakeholders to make a pledge towards a contribution that will sustain this noble cause. Kindly engage our team for a lasting partnership.

I have no doubt that the Forum is leading us to a productive and healthy society. Thank you, and I wish you fruitful deliberations!

¹ The official welcoming protocol has been shortened for ease of reading.