



NAMIBIA'S URBAN FUTURE

**RETHINKING HOUSING
AND URBANISATION**

Book of Proceedings

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Guillermo Delgado & Phillip Lühl, eds.

With contributions by Richard Dobson, Anthea Houston, Bulelwa Makalima-Ngewana, Nina Maritz, Diana Mitlin, Rose Molokoane, Sheela Patel, Kwame Tenadu, Cecile van Schalkwyk and Members of the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia and the Namibia Housing Action Group

Foreword by Leilani Farha

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RETHINKING HOUSING AND URBANISATION

2020 Namibia University of Science and Technology

This volume is dedicated to the memory of Fabio Todeschini.

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Introductory Remarks

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Foreword

Leilani Farha

United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing

I am sorry I am unable to be with you in Namibia, but I am very pleased to be able to offer you this message. I think the Urban Forum is coming at the right time and I do hope your deliberations include a full spectrum of the right to adequate housing and what it means in the urban context in Namibia.

Let me begin by saying Namibia is a party to a number of international human rights treaties which include the right to adequate housing included in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)¹ and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities². Namibia also made commitments to the New Urban Agenda³ at Habitat III⁴ as well as to the Sustainable Development Goals⁵. This therefore has a direct impact on how Namibia moves forward in the area of housing and suggests that the right to adequate housing has to be taken quite seriously in order to meet Namibia's obligations and commitments.

So, the question is, what does the right to adequate housing mean? Most people would say it is access to four walls and a roof, and while that is true, the right to adequate housing also has a much broader definition. It means the right to live in peace and security and with dignity, and it identifies some key characteristics that inform what adequate actually means: characteristics like security of tenure and freedom from forced evictions, and access to basic services like potable water and electricity. One of the things that those of us who are close to the issue of adequate housing note is the way in which housing has 'tentacles' to any other socio-economic rights and many civil and political rights. Adequate housing is related to the right to health and/or the right to education as well as, of course, the right to life.

One of the misconceptions about the right to adequate housing that many government officials have is that, if we embrace the right to adequate housing, it means that we need to provide a home immediately to everybody. Under international human rights law, the right to adequate housing is a progressive right: it can be realised progressively. That means states need to take steps immediately and continuously through time to ensure that everyone, particularly vulnerable groups, have access to adequate housing. There are of course some immediate obligations on states, namely in those situations where there are violations of rights, for example, and a state is required to immediately address homelessness or to ensure access to basic services in informal settlements. One of the things that I have been discussing with states on an ongoing basis is the need for states to adopt national housing strategies that are based in human rights and I think now is the right time for states to start trying to draft those strategies if they do not have them already in place, because those strategies will be essential to meeting the commitments under

the New Urban Agenda and Target 11⁶ of the Sustainable Development Goals, which deals with adequate housing for all. I think that, in the development of national strategies, a key component will be ensuring the meaningful participation of affected communities, particularly communities that are living in vulnerable situations, those in informal settlements, and those that might be subject to forced evictions. It would make sense to include these communities if you want to ensure an effective strategy going forward.

I would also say that, in moving forward in the area of housing, it is important that all decisions taken with respect to housing are run through the human rights framework, in other words, ensuring that every decision taken with respect to the strategy and with respect to financing the strategy are made in ways that further the right to adequate housing and do not undermine it. For example, I have been working quite recently on the issue of financing of housing⁷ and it appears that, in many developing countries, there is a new push to have a financialised housing market that involves, for example, mortgage financing in order to enable sections of the population to buy housing. In Namibia we need to think carefully if that is actually realistic and a viable option. I think there are many creative housing solutions that could be considered, that go beyond just building new housing and that includes measures like developing forms of security of tenure for tenants and residents.

I would like to say that, as Special Rapporteur, I am available going forward if you need assistance on more information and knowledge on the right to adequate housing. I would like to visit Namibia at any time. I wish you all the success in the next two days and I do hope that the right to adequate housing remains central in your deliberations.

⁶ "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable"; <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg11>, last accessed 10 August 2019.

⁷ UN/United Nations. 2017. Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component on the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context Human Rights Council, Thirty-fourth Session No. A/HRC/34/51. United Nations General Assembly. Available at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/009/56/PDF/G1700956.pdf?OpenElement>, last accessed 10 August 2019.

¹ A multilateral treaty adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 1966 and enforced in 1976, it includes the right to an adequate standard of living. The Covenant is part of the International Bill of Human Rights, a 1948 UN General Assembly Resolution on human rights. Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>, last accessed 10 August 2019.

² Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>, last accessed 10 August 2019.

³ Available at <http://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda>, last accessed 10 August 2019.

⁴ The United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), held in Quito, Ecuador, on 20 October 2016.

⁵ Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>, last accessed 10 August 2019.

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.

Keynote Address

Hon. Sophia Shaningwa

Minister of Urban and Rural Development

It is a great pleasure to be back at the Namibia University of Science and Technology for the second Public Forum on Housing and Urbanisation. Last time I was here, two years ago, I was pleased to see this new platform for critical debate on urbanisation emerge. Urbanisation within a free society is a very complex process which requires many minds to come together in order to understand it better and transform it in progressive ways. Today, I see again a broad variety of stakeholders present to discuss issues of contemporary urbanisation and, especially, the aspect of adequate housing, which has a central role within this debate.

Since 2015, the urban land and housing crisis has only become more pronounced in the public discourse, and as a Government we have made a pledge to address it head-on, as laid out in the Harambee Prosperity Plan¹. In fact, the President's notion of building the Namibian House is a metaphor for Government's ambitions to address the lasting socio-economic and spatial inequalities with which Namibia is burdened. However, today it is up to us to turn these legacies around in ways that confirm the vision of a shared future in the Namibian House.

I am excited to see invited speakers from neighbouring countries and overseas who will share with us experiences and useful knowledge from their own perspective and work with us in the next two days to devise strategies that will be able to shape the future of housing and urbanisation in inclusive and equitable ways. Besides that, Namibia has committed itself to various international resolutions, most recently the New Urban Agenda developed during the Habitat III conference in Quito, Ecuador, in October 2016. A Namibian delegation was sent to represent us in this relevant international event. This means that we are eager to learn from other countries' experiences and see what can be useful for the particular case of Namibia. It is now time to decide what the new urban agenda for Namibia will be.

Comrade Vice-Chancellor, distinguished participants:

I am thankful for the colleagues at the Integrated Land Management Institute at NUST who have heeded the call by my Ministry to organise a forum on housing which will inform the ongoing revision of the Government's Mass Housing Development Programme – a priority project which has been commissioned to a trans-disciplinary team led by NUST, but also including experts from the University of Namibia and the private sector. NUST has also assisted the Ministry by taking part in the committee meetings of the Massive Urban Land Servicing Programme, which forms an integral part of the Government's housing strategy.

Land provision, and adequate housing in particular, are issues for which it is difficult to find easy answers and which are even more difficult to resolve in a short period of time. Adequate housing concerns not only my Ministry, but many others; the structure of Government itself does not always encourage integrated development as responsibilities and budgets are sometimes fragmented across different ministries and other Government Offices and Agencies. Yet, the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development is taking a leading role in trying to achieve more integrated approaches to urban development, and the proposed National Spatial Development Framework² will be key to achieving this aim. The Ministry will continue to require the assistance of other ministries, academic institutions, the private sector and civil society to drive the future urban agenda.

While legislation and statutory requirements are being revised to decentralise and make urban development processes more efficient, this alone will not serve to provide land and adequate housing to Namibians. Given the current economic outlook of the country, which requires everyone to tighten their belts, public spending related to land and housing provision needs to be wisely administered. Although Government will not be able to build a house for every Namibian household, it can enable the conditions for Namibians to access the right to adequate housing through various win-win initiatives such as public-private partnerships that the Government fully supports.

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen:

Therefore, one aspect we are looking forward to developing during this forum is to widen the definition of housing. Instead of understanding housing as "a house that is bought through some form of financing mechanism", we are interested in a broad array of housing opportunities which can range from secured land tenure with Government support for incremental housing investment, housing for special needs, informal settlement upgrading, densification of existing plots and underutilised inner city lots of land, to targeted interventions for social and rental housing, amongst others.

The dominant understanding of housing as property, as simply an economic asset, at times limits our vision of imagining better and more adequate housing. Proposals that rely solely on property values, financing mechanisms and formal income will only be adequate for one part of the socio-economic spectrum we need to empower. Compatriots who earn a living in the informal economy and low-paid wage economy need housing as much as anybody else and solutions for them will not be the same as for Government employees, civil servants or young professionals. The elderly, the unemployed, students and rural households are other specific groups we need to consider.

Furthermore, Government's commitment to decentralisation requires us not only to think deeply about the form of rural housing, but also to imagine economic opportunities that can be developed in more remote areas of the country. Shelter alone will not empower people: it needs to allow them to have a base for generating a livelihood in whichever way they can. The large part of the Namibian population that relies on livelihoods generated from informal economic activities will need to be enabled to grow economic activities from

² See Urban and Regional Planning Act, 2018 (No. 5 of 2018), available at https://laws.parliament.na/cms_documents/urban-and-regional-planning--1b90438147.pdf, last accessed 20 July 2018.

¹ Available at <http://www.gov.na/documents/10181/264466/HPP+page+70-71.pdf/bc958f46-8f06-4c48-9307-773f242c9338>, last accessed 10 August 2019.

their homes, equipping them to improve their and their families' socio-economic situation from within.

Housing, thus, has a role to play in the larger economic development and industrialisation of the country. While we are historically very dependent on imports, especially from South Africa, housing does not only imply short-term jobs in the construction industry: people will also need to buy furniture and household utensils, materials that could be manufactured locally and local services –all of which could have a lasting economic impact. All these sectors and more could be stimulated with concerted efforts towards adequate housing provision.

Director of Ceremonies, distinguished participants:

Design and construction of housing should also be varied in relation to varying climatic zones in Namibia, environmental limitations and resource availability, sustainable energy production, affordable green-alternative solutions, and the social and demographic realities of households. Given the fact that Namibia's future is set to be predominantly urban, as in many other parts of the world, we need to understand that housing cannot be seen only in terms of individual housing units, but only also as the building blocks of streets, neighbourhoods and, ultimately, the city. Thus, it is critical to invest in the public and shared infrastructure in the urban design of well-integrated neighbourhoods and cities to ensure they are accessible and well-connected with regard to public transport options, public facilities and collective spaces.

Housing can be an issue that can be divisive, but it can also be an occasion for joining forces. Lack of access to housing and urban land can be a major factor leading to social instability, as people realise how urban opportunities become increasingly uneven. However, if we come together and develop inclusive, equitable and progressive strategies, housing can become a factor of unity, of solidarity, and of contributing to the sentiment of One Namibia, One Nation.

Let us therefore welcome our international guests, members of Government, local authorities, professionals, students, community-based organisations and members of the media to this Forum that invites us to “rethink housing and urbanisation” in Namibia at this crucial time for our country.

I hereby declare this event open and wish you all the best in the worthwhile tasks ahead.

I thank you.



Editorial Introduction

Guillermo Delgado

Land, Livelihoods and Housing Programme Coordinator, ILMI, NUST

and

Phillip Lühl

Lecturer, Department of Architecture and Spatial Planning, NUST

It is not an understatement to say that the gathering that this book documents marks a key moment in Namibia's socio-spatial development. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the gathering took place while the largest programme targeting urban areas, the Mass Housing Development Programme (MHDP)¹ was under review. It was a time of reckoning, reflection and reimagining of what would come next. Secondly, a wide coalition of stakeholders had eagerly joined together to make the event possible. The Ministry of Urban and Rural Development, the City of Windhoek, the GIZ, private sector institutions and professional bodies all responded to a call by a team at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), which hosted the event, to address the issue of socio-spatial development in the country. A third reason was that it may arguably have been the largest event of its kind, as it gathered more than two hundred participants from all over the country. These included local authority officials, councillors, politicians, professionals, youth leaders, students, grass-roots representatives, academics, businesspeople and trade unionists, among others. A fourth reason can be derived from the above, namely that the interest in urbanisation and housing in Namibia had finally taken centre stage in the public debate arena. There are several other reasons; these we will try to expand on in the course of this introduction. We will also provide some background on the founding of the Forum in 2015, describe the particularities of its 2017 iteration, and summarise the key contributions to the latter.

Background

The Forum gathered about two hundred participants to engage with eight international speakers and a Namibian counterpart. All had been invited to share their experiences and insights on housing and urbanisation. The Forum grew in scale when it became part of the body selected to review the MHDP, which holds the potential to shift the way in which housing production takes place in Namibia.

The MHDP Blueprint review body was led by the two authors of this text and Charl-Thom Bayer, Head of the Department of Land and Property Sciences at NUST at the time. When the MHDP Blueprint was launched in 2013, it was conceptualised as the most ambitious public programme since Namibia's independence in 1990². However, after only two years of its implementation, it was suspended by the new Government due to widely published irregularities.

Clearly, a new approach was required, so a public call was made to revise the blueprint that had guided the programme. When the NUST team's proposal was selected to undertake this revision, it seemed pertinent to utilise the Forum as a public platform for part of the review process.

The Forum is a multi-stakeholder event hosted by NUST every two years to focus on urbanisation. The first Forum was held 2015. For its second edition, namely in 2017, it seemed pertinent to give the Forum a broader reach and stronger focus on housing and related urbanisation dynamics, and to document the ensuing discussions as a means of informing the work undertaken by our 32-member team, which are acknowledged along with many others who made the event and the publication of this book possible (see Acknowledgements section).

About the 2017 event

Each of the invited speakers made a significant contribution in his/her field and shared some of their broad experience in key issues related to housing and urbanisation. We took particular care to ensure that their message was relevant to Namibia at the time in question. Namibia is one of the least densely populated countries in the world,³ with a population of only 2.3 million.⁴ It is also one of Africa's youngest democracies. However, although the economy is generally considered stable, it is one of the most unequal countries in the world.⁵ Furthermore, the urban question has only recently started to hold sway in public discourse as, historically, the population has largely been rural,⁶ cities were the monopoly of 'whites',⁷ and the country's last – and still only – national spatial development strategy was implemented in the 1960s to consolidate the apartheid regime in the then occupied territory of South West Africa.⁸ At the same time, Namibia has had a remarkable record on bottom-up organising around issues of housing and access to land.⁹

Nonetheless, we rejected the idea of a 'Namibian exceptionalism'¹⁰ that often attempts to dismiss experiences from elsewhere by retreating into a kind of certainty drawn from 'the way things were' and 'the way things currently are'.¹¹ This tendency prevents us from understanding how ongoing and long-standing processes that are unfolding globally – such as urbanisation, the precarisation of labour, climate change, digitalisation and neoliberalisation – also take place in Namibia. The question, therefore, is not whether Namibia's society is changing or not, but how it is doing so. For instance, we have argued that the future of Namibia is urban,¹² and while noting that the process of urbanisation can provide an opportunity to overcome inequities, it could also be a way to enhance them. This tension underlay our selection of topics and participants for the 2017 Forum programme, because we wanted to include the many conceptions and misconceptions about housing and urbanisation that we experience daily when lecturing at NUST, debating with colleagues, holding discussions with members of the private sector, engaging grass-roots groups and collaborating with the Government. It is from this tension that the list of speakers and the programme emerged.

³ According to 2018 World Bank statistics, after Mongolia, Namibia is the least-densely-populated country in the world (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POPDNST>, last accessed 14 August 2019).

⁴ NSA/Namibia Statistics Agency. 2016. Namibia Inter-censal Demographic Survey – 2016 Report. Windhoek: NSA. Available at https://cms.my.na/assets/documents/NIDS_2016.pdf, last accessed 13 August 2019.

⁵ According to 2017 World Bank statistics, South Africa topped the list of Most Unequal Country in the World as measured by the Gini coefficient; Namibia ranked second (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI>, last accessed 14 August 2019).

⁶ Delgado, G & Lühl, P. 2018. Namibia's urban revolution. The Namibian, 29 June 2018. Available at <http://ilmi.nust.na/sites/default/files/20180629-Namibias-urban-revolution-GD-PL.pdf>, last accessed 14 August 2019.

⁷ Several references document Namibia's spatial apartheid of the past; see e.g. Hishongwa, NS. 1992. The contract labour system and its effects on family and social life in Namibia: A historical perspective. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan; Muller-Friedman, F. 2005. "Just build it modern": Post-apartheid spaces on Namibia's urban frontier. In Salm, S & Falola, T (Eds). African urban spaces in historical perspective. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, pp 48–72; Simon, D. 1991. Windhoek: Desegregation and change in the capital of South Africa's erstwhile colony. In Lemon, Anthony (Ed.). Homes apart: South Africa's segregated cities. Cape Town: David Philip, pp 174–190.

⁸ Delgado, G. 2018. A short socio-spatial history of Namibia. Integrated Land Management Institute Working Paper 9. Windhoek: Namibia University of Science and Technology. Available at <http://ilmi.nust.na/sites/default/files/WP9-DELGADO-A-short-history-of-Namibia-WEB.pdf>, last accessed 10 January 2019.

⁹ For a historical overview, see: Keulder, C. 1994. Urban women and self-help housing in Namibia:

¹ The project, entitled "Revision of the Blueprint and development of a Strategy to guide the implementation for the National Mass Housing Development Programme", was undertaken by a team led by NUST during 2017. A website for the project was established to disseminate the review findings (see <http://newmasshousing.nust.na>, last accessed 20 July 2019).

² Hailulu, V. 2014. Housing: An agent of economic growth. Presentation at the International Housing Conference, Cape Town, 2014. Available at http://www.sahf.org.za/Images/2014Proceedings/2014_Presentations/4_HAILULU_VINCON.pdf, last accessed 10 August 2019.

A case-study of Saamstaan Housing Cooperative. Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit Working Paper 42. Windhoek: NEPRU; MRLGH/Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing & Ibis. 1996. Upgrading of shanty areas in Oshakati, Namibia. OHSIP Best Practice Report. Windhoek: MRLGH & Ibis. For a contemporary account of recent processes, see: Mitlin, D & Muller, A. 2004. Windhoek, Namibia: Towards progressive urban land policies in Southern Africa. International Development Planning Review, 26(2):167–186.

10 During the session with Nina Maritz (see chapter entitled “Design, construction and sustainable spatial processes” in this volume), Gabriel Marín Castro, Special Advisor on Mass Housing to the Minister of Urban and Rural Development at that time, noted the tendency among Namibians to regard their situation as unique.

11 Examples of which were “We Namibians want to own our house. We don’t want to live on top of each other” (referring to living in structures of two or more storeys) and “We don’t want to live in town; we just come here for work.”

12 Lühl & Delgado (2018).

13 According to 2018 World Bank statistics, South Africa’s population is more than 22 times that of Namibia’s (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>, last accessed 14 August 2019) and its economy, measured by gross domestic product, is 26 times larger (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>, last accessed 14 August 2019).

14 To compare, see recent figures for Namibia: 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 1. Windhoek: Development Workshop Namibia. Available at <http://dw-namibia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Informal-settlements-in-Namibia-their-nature-and-growth-DWN-2017.pdf>, last accessed 14 August 2019; and for South Africa in: HDA/Housing Development Agency. 2012. South Africa: Informal settlements status.

The programme

The Forum served as a platform for an intergenerational, multi-stakeholder and multi-country exchange, at the centre of which were urban matters, and particularly housing. Speakers addressed a broad spectrum of technical, economic, social and legal issues relating to the production of housing and urbanisation. The programme was structured as a two-day workshop with nine parallel sessions addressing relevant thematic areas. Each session had topic keynote address and a closing panel discussion.

The sessions profited from the experience of speakers from Ghana, India and South Africa, while others offered insights from their work across the world. Many sessions shared experiences from South Africa because of the historical bonds that make it Namibia’s closest ‘sister’ country. However, although the scale of the South African population and its economy is many times that of Namibia’s,¹³ the relative magnitude and nature of challenges concerning informal settlements can be considered similar.¹⁴ It would seem easy, therefore, for Namibia to emulate South Africa’s experiences. However, it was sobering to hear South African presenters speak with scepticism about their situation: how, despite massive subsidies, housing shortages were on the rise;¹⁵ how, despite acknowledgment that their central government needed to work with inhabitants in informal settlements, the bureaucratic reality made it extremely hard to make such alliances work;¹⁶ how, despite having a progressive and strong legal framework enshrining the right to adequate housing, the battle to give meaning to this right and to be effective on the ground seemed to be an uphill one.¹⁷ Ultimately, focusing overtly on the South African experience might reinforce the pre-Independence situation that ‘provincialised’ Namibia by putting South Africa at ‘the centre.’ This, then, is one of the lessons that we have learnt: to reimagine a unique and decolonialised urban future for Namibia, it may be strategic to draw lessons from contexts beyond those presented by the former colonial powers.

This volume

This publication of the second Forum’s proceedings presents transcripts of the contributions by invited speakers during the various sessions and the ensuing debate. Apart from one or two presenters, none spoke English as a mother tongue/first language. Editorially, we decided to respect the nuances of language use in the text to account more authentically for the different voices within the debate. Where necessary, transcripts were amended by our editorial team in respect of repetition or in the interests of brevity. Some of the contributions were reviewed by the speaker themselves, while others added new references for the reader’s benefit. Source materials are referred to briefly in footnotes and in full in a list at the end of this volume. The publication is distributed free of charge and is available online through NUST’s repository to ensure broad dissemination.

A summary of key contributions

Leilani Farha, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, is part of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In this capacity, Ms Farha monitors how governments across the world not only ensure that inhabitants enjoy the right to adequate housing, but also prevent the violation of this right. Unfortunately, Ms Farha was not able to join us in Windhoek and instead delivered a video address for the opening session in which she confirmed that Namibia was a signatory to the UN Conventions that recognise the right to adequate housing. Therefore, it seemed natural to invite the Special Rapporteur to what would have been her first country visit to Namibia in respect of her mandate.¹⁸ In her address, presented as the Foreword herein, she reminds us how housing has “many tentacles” that have implications of national interest, including how the notion of housing affects public health and education and how spending public funds on housing is a social investment. She notes that housing offers better places for young people to do their homework, and provides healthier conditions for families – which in turn allows them to contribute to the country’s development.¹⁹ The Special Rapporteur warned how some approaches that seemed logical might not necessarily be the most adequate or realistic; in this regard, she singled out housing finance approaches or ‘turnkey’ housing solutions. Most importantly, she offered assistance via her Office to ensure the right to adequate housing through public interventions in Namibia could be realised.

Rose Molokoane Chair of the World Urban Campaign and National Chairperson of Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), brought to the fore the lived experience in informal settlements and how collective efforts gained low-income inhabitants a foothold to urban life. Her candid approach won empathy among a room full of professionals, local authority representatives and high-ranking government officials. Her presence – along with that of members of the Shack Dwellers’ Federation of Namibia (SDFN) and unions representing domestic workers – created a situation that **Sheela Patel** (Director of the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers – SPARC – in Mumbai, India) noted was crucial in these kinds of debates: one where ‘poor people’ were ‘in the room’ as partners reimagining Namibia’s urban future. Ms Molokoane’s key message was that low-income groups had demonstrated the capacity to undertake their own development, and that governments employed their resources better when engaging and partnering with such groups and co-produced a kind of development where parties met each other halfway. Since her voice was one of experience, she did not sugar-coat the complex realities of such processes; she admitted that, every day, she and her organisation were involved in trying to solve one problem after the next. These challenges included conflicts within groups, bureaucratic hurdles, corruption, and the nature of authorities that are often ‘reshuffled’ (i.e. changing portfolio or office frequently). Therefore, she did not offer a panacea, but rather an alternative to state- and contractor-led strategies such as mass

Johannesburg: HDA. Available at http://upgradingsupport.org/uploads/resource_documents/HDA_Informal_settlements_status_South_Africa.pdf, last accessed 14 August 2019.

15 See Session 9 hererin.

16 See Session 1 hererin.

17 See Session 6 hererin.

18 See <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/CountryVisits.aspx>, last accessed 14 August 2019.

19 How improved living conditions contribute to the national economy was a point also raised in the discussions following the session keynote address entitled “Community-based urban strategies and social innovation” by Sheela Patel.

housing, where inhabitants would be engaged as partners in a process that had proven to yield equity and other positive results. During the discussion, Ms Molokoane also shared that she had become the Chair of the World Urban Campaign to make it clear that professionals, as well as local and central governments, had a lot to learn from inhabitants of informal settlements. She ended her session with an invitation to join hands to find solutions to Namibia's urban housing problems.

In the session led by **Sheela Patel**, she proposed that instead of dwelling only on the experiences from India, the session should be focused on the processes that the SDI supported, with a specific focus on the Namibian achievements in the field of urban housing. Ms Patel, who also serves as a member of the SDI Board, explained the origins of her organisation and SDI in India. They soon realised that “the state was not the only one that had the wisdom to produce policy”. This realisation was not sudden, but part of a process of organising women in informal settlements (known in India as slums), and engaging professionals, government and the private sector in the upgrading of living conditions.

Otilie Nailulu and **Inga Boye**, two members of the SDFN, introduced the Federation and presented some of their successes. They clarified that they were only able to afford smaller plots than those of a minimum size that the Namibian Government promoted, and that this allowed them to accommodate more members on the land they were allocated by Local Authorities. **Ms Patel** reminded the audience that both India and Namibia had “imported colonial administration procedures ... that just [didn't] work for poor people” and called it “a mockery” to speak of ‘standards’ when two thirds of a community lived “in abject poverty”. The call for overcoming the apartheid and colonial city found resonance throughout the Forum.

Richard Dobson, who represented a South African non-governmental organisation (NGO) known as *Asiye eTafuleni* (AeT), shared experiences and reflections on his work on the case of the Warwick Junction, a transport node in Durban that has become a key example of multi-stakeholder intervention to support livelihoods through informal trade. This work, he argued, was particularly relevant in view of South Africa's exclusionary past, which had laid the foundations for a segregated reality “with parallel worlds” where neither party learned from the other. In a very down-to-earth manner, he spoke about informal trade as simply “people's reaction to joblessness”. At the same time, he cautioned that the scale of this kind of economy in South Africa, as well as in Namibia,²⁰ could no longer be regarded as marginal because it represented the livelihood of the largest portion of South Africa's population. Mr Dobson also outlined how so-called informal livelihoods provided “a new entrance to the city” for many coming from smaller towns or rural areas, and that while such newcomers were initially “not urban-literate”, they eventually acquired a significant “urban intelligence” that was different to that of municipal officials and professionals in urban development fields. He suggested that the process

of engaging with informal processes in urban areas allowed one to create unique spaces beyond the one-dimensional, modernist-apartheid vision that continued to characterise many urban areas. Key to his contribution was that local Government had transitioned from being “scared of informality” – associating it with crime, the ‘black market’ and tax avoidance, for example – to engaging with it through innovative modalities such as area-based urban management.

Bulelwa Makalima-Ngewana, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Cape Town Partnership (CTP),²¹ a public-private partnership (PPP) to improve the City of Cape Town's central business district (CBD), spoke about urban transformation and how public-private efforts have tried to create partnerships to adapt to these changes. She explained how, since South Africa's democratisation in 1994, the city centre gradually entered a phase of “decline”. The newly created City of Cape Town Metropolitan Area was not particularly interested in dealing with the main city-centre CBD since it had various other CBDs to attend to in the Cape Town area. As a result, property owners entered into an agreement with the City in what became known as the Cape Town Partnership. This entity was set up to provide certain supplementary services which they believed the city needed, such as security and additional trash collection. One of the key points Ms Makalima-Ngewana raised was how, through investment, the CBD indeed started to develop, but that this kind of development was not necessarily inclusive as much of it involved speculative investment. She noted how property prices in the CBD had since become unattainable for most Capetonians, and that this had contributed to rather than subverted the housing situation: affordable housing remained at the city periphery, while work opportunities remained in more central areas, resulting in vast and expensive commuting by those least able to afford it. She observed that “where high land values become problematic, they can only be mitigated by the municipality to ensure affordability”. However, she also presented successful examples of activating the city centre through art festivals, support to informal trade and sports activities. She stressed how it was not only that such activities took place, but also that they did so in public spaces: “I do not think we will be able to reverse the apartheid city design without paying particular attention to public spaces,” she stated.

Anthea Houston, CEO of Communicare, one of the largest social housing companies in South Africa, shared her organisation's experience with social housing in her country. As Namibia currently does not have a social housing sector, her presentation included recommendations for establishing such a sector within the array of housing options. Crucially, she explained not only the mechanisms of the social housing system in South Africa, but also its inherent contradictions and how such obstacles could be overcome. In South Africa, social housing was defined as rental housing for a specific, legislated income group, and was provided by accredited and tightly regulated social housing institutions such as Communicare. She highlighted that the provision of social housing was not merely a matter of administration and finances: crucially,

21 Shortly after this Forum, funding for the CTP ceased. The body is now defunct.

20 The latest Namibia Labour Force Survey shows that two-thirds of the population that is considered to be employed can be considered ‘informal’. See: NSA. (2019). Namibia Labour Force Survey 2018. Retrieved from Namibia Statistics Agency website: https://d3rp5jat0m3eyn.cloudfront.net/cms/assets/documents/Namibia_Labour_Force_Survey_Reports_2018_.pdf

it was about “the way you engage with people”. She gave some examples of how various challenges had been overcome, such as negotiating for a social housing development to be built within a middle-income neighbourhood or familiarising new tenants with the ways of collective living. In her experience, “there is a social price to pay down the line when people are disengaged”.

Cecile van Schalkwyk of the Legal Resources Centre (LRC) in South Africa presented the experiences that that country had undergone with regard to the right to adequate housing. Although this right was enshrined in the South African Constitution of 1996, it was not until the 2000s that its full implications were made transparent through the Grootboom case²² litigated by the LRC. She explained how the case was only the beginning of a sequence of struggles to advance the right to adequate housing. She shared key insights with regard to the lessons learnt through these struggles, namely how property titles had proven to be a problematic way of addressing security of tenure for the very poor; how individualised or ‘Westernised’ forms of ownership disregarded already existing social arrangements; how women were at a disadvantage, particularly because of customary marriages; how housing ‘waiting lists’ had caused confusion and corruption instead of equity; how South Africa’s various mechanisms to fight corruption in local government were not adequately enforced; how efforts to limit the resale of subsidised housing had instead created an informal market for such properties; and how political parties used housing allocations as a way to influence elections in certain areas. Despite being a legal practitioner herself, Ms Van Schalkwyk admitted that legal recourse had its limits, and gave as an example how only 1% of housing evictions took place in accordance with the law.²³ Although much had been learnt, in Ms Van Schalkwyk’s opinion, it still seemed that the right to adequate housing as a constitutionally entrenched prerogative had not ‘solved’ the housing question in South Africa; indeed, it had instead created a different set of conditions in terms of which the struggle for housing was unfolding.

Kwame Tenadu, Chair of the International Federation of Surveyors’ (FIG) Commission on Spatial Planning and Development, presented experiences from China, Ghana and Rwanda in respect of land reform. Speaking from a land administration perspective, and specifically referring to the process of land reform, he highlighted the questions of whether land reform happened “through due process” and whether it was “equitable”. He explained how China adopted a system in which the State retained land ownership, only selling rights of use to non-State parties. Turning to Rwanda, Mr Tenadu shared how its land policy and law created a clear distinction between urban and rural land, providing strong institutional systems and decentralised procedures that enabled systematic land registration nationwide. Ghana, the speaker’s own country of origin, was unique in that most of its land (80%) was owned by community chiefs. He explained how the country did not have a unitary system of land registration, but had different systems regulating different tenure modalities, similar to those which obtained in Namibia.²⁴ He concluded by proposing a hybrid model that created neither easy and abundant wealth for

some, nor abject poverty and dispossession for others, but rather encouraged the retention of a middle path where everyone got a relatively fair share.

Local architect **Nina Maritz** launched her presentation by offering an overview of the housing situation in Namibia, followed by the rest of her contribution in four sections. In the first section she defined housing typologies, and then outlined the various typologies that she had observed in the Namibian context. She discussed the latter in terms of cost, cultural adequacy, usefulness for different social groups, materials, social arrangements, and other aspects of housing adequacy. The second section of her presentation, which dealt with construction and housing delivery, highlighted the need to experiment with and to test housing strategies that recognised and responded to the reality on the ground. The third section dealt with issues of sustainability. Ms Maritz clarified that, in referring to environmental sustainability, she sought interventions that were sustainable in terms of, among other things, affordability, materials, environment, technology and design. In this regard, she emphasised the specific benefits of compact and dense cities. The last section of the presentation dealt with urban living. In this part, Ms Maritz explained how cities were places of multiplicity, where the criteria of what one group thought as ‘pretty’, useful or necessary might be contested by others; how cities were places where new ways of living could emerge; and how informal strategies were part-and-parcel of urban life, all around the world. Her presentation was rich in visual input by way of maps, photographs, diagrams and floorplans, and offered scenarios from many different parts of the world.

The concluding panel discussion brought together all Forum participants²⁵ and opened with a session address by **Prof. Diana Mitlin** from the University of Manchester and the International Institute for Environment and Development. In her work, Prof. Mitlin has focused on Namibia since the 1990s, but also profits from experiences of the SDI and the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights. A pre-eminent thinker on matters of the built environment across the world, she brought a synthetic set of insights that were relevant for Namibia to consider at this crucial time. She argued that housing was not simply a matter of shelter: it was also about engendering a sense of belonging, strengthening incomes and economic opportunities, reducing individual and social vulnerabilities, and contributing to the overall objective of promoting democracy through neighbourhoods where social groups interact and deal with each other. She also reminded participants that the urban present in Africa was informal, and that housing strategies recognising this may be more adequate if they reduced costs of living, promoted densification and shaped situations that brought different social groups together. She also pointed to the vast body of evidence showing that displacing low-income groups, even if part of a well-intended upgrading strategy, made the displaced even more vulnerable by disrupting support networks and often relocating inhabitants to more marginalised areas. She also stressed the need to go to scale,²⁶ and how this could best be done by collaborating with the residents of informal

²⁵ Anthea Houston, the CEO of Communicare, had to return to South Africa and could not join the final panel discussion.

²⁶ This point was also raised by Patel in her session discussions, where she mentioned that the need to “produce full evidence for each town that poor people can do something” as being one of the key barriers to going to scale. See chapter in this volume entitled “Community-based urban strategies and social innovation” with Sheela Patel.

²² Grootboom and Others v Government of the Republic of South Africa and Others - Constitutional Court Order (CCT38/00) [2000] ZACC 14 (21 September 2000).

²³ The limits of legal recourse coincide with Patel’s assertion herein (see chapter entitled “Community-based urban strategies and social innovation” in this volume) that “poor people institutions feel that they get further impoverished if they take anything to court”, and how the SDI only resorted to this recourse when it was strategic to do so.

²⁴ LAC. (2005). A place we want to call our own: A study on land tenure policy and securing housing rights in Namibia. Legal Assistance Centre. <http://www.lac.org.na/projects/lead/Pdf/aplacewewanttocallourown.pdf>

settlements. In her last point she stressed the need to understand housing provision as a learning process: “What makes the difference is learning from experience, convening people to understand what is going on and what has been tried on the ground, and looking at the evidence together.” She noted the success of bottom-up processes such as those undertaken by the NHAG, SDFN and the Build Together Programme. At the same time, she admitted that “communities cannot do it alone”, and that multi-stakeholder alliances and co-learning would be required to go to scale. The ensuing panel discussion provided some synthesis of the event.

Concluding remarks

When the closing panel was opened up for contributions from the floor, a NUST student argued that the costs incurred in holding the Forum would have been enough to build “one or two houses”. **Sheela Patel** replied that, in her long experience, she had heard similar criticism to events aiming only to create a platform for discussion. She said that she had learned, through her engagements with other women activists, that building one or two houses was merely “Band-Aid”:

We do not want Band-Aid. We want to be part of a multi-generational process in which we make sure that we, the young people, do not make all the mistakes that you have made.

This was the spirit of the Urban Forum: to collectively convene a process to disrupt some of the ongoing and long-standing patterns that produce uneven socio-spatial development. It is still too soon to measure the effect that the Forum had, but one of the concrete outcomes was that a group of lecturers from NUST and the University of Namibia as well as members of NHAG got together to draft a concept note on how to scale up participatory informal settlement upgrading,²⁷ which is currently receiving some attention from Government. The debate on urban land reform and related matters in Namibia has continued to gain traction, and is to be one of the key thematic areas discussed at Namibia’s Second National Land Conference slated for 2018.²⁸ Now that the platforms for ‘multi-generational’ and multi-stakeholder engagement have been created, that bottom-up processes are recognised as valuable and impactful, that lessons have been learned from previous approaches, and that political will seems to have been kindled, Namibia’s urban future is entering an interesting phase.

27 National Alliance for Informal Settlement Upgrading. 2017. Concept Note. Available at <http://nationalalliance.nust.na>, last accessed 10 August 2019.

28 The thematic areas were Commercial land reform programmes and related matters, Communal land reform programmes and related matters, Land tax and valuation systems and related matters, Ancestral land rights and restitution, and Urban land reform and related matters. For the official Government website, see <http://www.mlr.gov.na/land-conference1>. NUST opened a ‘mirror’ website at <http://dna.nust.na/landconference/landconference.html> to have the documentation of the Conference available online.



Photograph by Martin Namupala



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