

Editorial Introduction

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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