



THIS HOME IS MY HOME

Motions and emotions around urbanisation in Namibia

Erika von Wietersheim

**FRIEDRICH
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Contents

Preface	2
1. Why this study?	4
2. The present situation in Windhoek.....	8
3. What does 'having a home' mean to the people in urban areas?	24
4. Attempts at solutions	48
5. The challenges, wishes, and coping mechanisms of the people	59
Bibliography.....	80
Thanks.....	81

Preface

In 2023, five years after the Second National Land Conference, questions around rural land still feature high on the political agenda in Namibia – maybe even higher than ever before. At the same time, the scramble for land on the outskirts of Namibian towns and cities has gained speed and urgency in an unprecedented manner. In search of income and often driven by the adverse effects of drought, desertification, and climate change, rural residents flock to the urban areas of Namibia in rising numbers. Today, already more than 50 per cent of Namibians live in urban areas; by 2050, this figure will have increased to over 70 per cent.

However, the life and work of the newly arrived urban residents, like most city dwellers on the African continent, are characterised by informality and precarious conditions, including lack of social safety, security of tenure, and access to essential public goods such as housing, water, and transport. This kind of urbanisation entrenches social inequality and stimulates urban frustration and political unrest. Both piecemeal local government interventions targeted at particular beneficiary groups and technocratic solutions, as suggested by concepts like “smart city”, fail to relieve the pressure for change and instead increase it. On the one hand, there is a clear need for people-centred urbanisation narratives – and, on the other, for a holistic urbanisation approach financially supported by the national government.

The ***Just City Survey Namibia***, undertaken by Afrobarometer on behalf of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Namibia in 2021/22, was the first systematic step in this direction. It provided valuable insights into the socio-cultural composition, motivations, and expectations of people leaving the rural areas. Quite unexpectedly, the survey concluded that for most urban migrants, the greater availability of public goods in

urban areas did not play an essential role in their decision to leave their rural homestead. What had driven them from home – or lured them into the cities – had rather been the quest for a monetary income, not necessarily for individual consumption in the cities, but for sending back to their places of origin. This was stated by the majority of the 2,000 people interviewed; the survey thus gave rise to serious doubts about previous assumptions concerning the needs of urban migrants and strongly suggested that any meaningful assistance *for* them should not be conceptualised *without* them.

Against this background, the FES Namibia requested Erika von Wietersheim to continue investigating people's perceptions of land matters, this time in urban areas. The book *This Home is My Home* is thus a logical continuation of her first book, *This Land Is My Land*, published with the support of FES in 2008 and again in 2021. As before, Erika visited various areas and sat down with different people, listening closely to what they were willing to share about their lives, livelihoods, survival strategies, most pressing needs, aspirations, and hopes. She thus gave people a voice with respect to what matters most to them when it comes to land and housing in a city like Windhoek.

For anyone who, privately, professionally, or politically, aspires to improve the situation of urban dwellers in Namibia, this book is mandatory reading. By providing invaluable insights into the views and needs of the people concerned, it guides which developmental interventions should be prioritised – and which might be of little or no relevance to the dwellers themselves.

FES Namibia would like to thank Erika von Wietersheim for her very human, people-centred, and respectful approach to this issue, which is so important for Namibia today.

Freya Gruenhagen, Resident Representative
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Namibia Office, 2023

During my research about emotions around land in the rural parts of Namibia some years ago, one insight remained: The yearning for a piece of land was for many not so much the wish to engage in farming activities but for building a home. The desire to have a secure home was one of the strongest emotions that emerged. 'You know why I really want a farm?' one man, who had applied for a resettlement farm, asked me during my research. 'I want a safe place where nobody can chase me away.' And Selma Tiboth confirmed: All she really wanted was not a farm but 'a small plot where I can build a small house, just a small one. Then I know this is my place.'

From many farmers all over the country, I learned that owning a piece of land fulfilled a deep emotional and social need after the experience of displacement, dispossession, and forced removals during colonial and apartheid times, and because of insecure living conditions in towns (and evictions even after independence), for the majority of Namibia's poor.¹

During my interviews with urban residents in Windhoek, I met similar desires. When asked about her biggest wish, Mirjam K., who lives in a rented shack with her three children in the informal settlement Greenwell Matongo, replied, 'To have my own place. Anything can happen; I can get sick, and then I cannot pay my rent anymore. I do not need a house, just a plot, even when the place is not serviced. The most important thing is a place of my own.'

After many years of land reform in the rural areas during which a single family was often resettled on an area of 1,000-4,000 hectares, it is quite unfathomable that urban land reform, which involves only a few square

1 von Wietersheim, E., 2021. *This land is my land – motions and emotions around land reform in Namibia*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Namibia.

meters of land per family, has taken so long to enter the political agenda. It is even more incomprehensible since the population of Namibia has rapidly increased from around 1.5 million in 1990 to almost 2.7 million today, with more and more people moving to the cities.²

Today, Namibia's urban population is around 52% and is expected to increase to 75% in the next 30 years.³ Of these, almost one million people in Namibia live in shacks across the country under precarious and insecure conditions.⁴ And yet, until about nine years ago, the government focused on agricultural commercial and communal land reform with little public discussion on the urban land question.

It was a youth group that finally pushed the issue into the limelight and onto the political agenda, using the social media platforms of the younger generation. In November 2014, three members of the SWAPO Youth League and (after their expulsion from it) founders of the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) Movement, led by Job Amupanda, occupied a piece of land in an affluent suburb that belonged to the City of Windhoek. Their immediate aim was to expose Windhoek's extremely high property and rental prices, contrasting them with the needs of low-income people. This first step later led to mass demonstrations of mainly young people, who even threatened to take land forcefully and invade some parts of urban land.

In March of the following year, after the national elections, Amupanda succeeded in entering negotiations with Namibia's newly elected president, Hage Geingob. Geingob took the concerns of the young activists seriously, met them in person, and promised to work with them to alleviate poverty and provide plots for the poor.

Since then, Job Amupanda has stayed in the limelight of politics and youth activism. In the November 2020 local government elections, the City of Windhoek's first coalition between the AR Movement,

2 Namibia Population (2023) – Worldometer

3 Lühl and Delgado, dna.nust.na/landconference/submission-2018

4 Latest census of the Community Land Information Program by the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia



Hundreds grab land in Goreangab, The Namibian, 15 July 2015.

the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC), the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM), and the National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO) swept to power after SWAPO did not achieve the majority. In December 2020, Amupanda became the City of Windhoek's youngest mayor. According to the agreed principle of rotation, he only remained in office for one year. Although his efforts to change the situation for people with low income in the cities were hampered by numerous bureaucratic and other obstacles, in 2023, Job Amupanda announced that he would even run for the presidency in next year's presidential election (2024). To make his ambition visible in Namibia's towns, huge billboards were displayed along streets, showing his picture and slogans such as 'Do not worry, your president is coming', advocating himself as the spokesperson for the poor and especially for the youth.

When the Second National Land Reform Conference was hosted in October 2018, it was acknowledged that Namibia was moving from a rural-based society to an increasingly urban one. During the First

National Land Conference in 1991, none of the 24 adopted resolutions referred to urban land; however, of the 40 resolutions taken at the Second National Land Conference, 10 focused on urban land reform. These included efforts to make housing more affordable for low-income citizens, to expropriate unused land in local authority areas, to set a concrete target of 300,000 new urban housing units over a period of seven years, and to increase government expenditure on urban land from 0.1 per cent to at least 10 per cent. It was also proposed to include the right to housing as a human right in the Namibian Constitution.⁵ Although no action resulted from these resolutions, Prime Minister Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila claimed in 2022 that 'a high-level committee' was in place.⁶

Today, challenges around urban land regularly feature in newspaper reports, on social media, and in scholarly literature, as well as in political mobilisation and local elections.

This book on urban land and settlement looks at the importance of urban land and housing for the tens of thousands of people who live in, or have moved to, the informal settlements of Windhoek – from their perspective.

Questions posed to interview partners included:

- What does 'having a home' mean to the people who live in or are moving to Namibian towns, particularly to the vast majority of poor people without a secure financial income and who cannot afford to buy land?
- How do the almost one million Namibian people in the so-called informal settlements without land or secure tenure cope with their situation – and what are their dreams, demands, and aspirations?
- What is being done by the government, NGOs, and the people to improve or deal with their situation of landlessness and insecurity?

5 www.opm.gov.na

6 *Namibian Sun*, 5 February 2022

My team and I interviewed more than sixty people living in Katutura and the informal settlements of Windhoek. Most of the interviews were spontaneous, random, and dependent on the willingness and openness of the people we met. They are not based on tested research and statistical principles. Instead, I listened to their tales with enough time and an open mind, wanting to hear the stories behind the statistics. I interviewed several young people, elderly people, and middle-aged men and women. Some still went to school, some were pensioners, others were employed, many were unemployed, and some had a small, insecure income from day to day. My interview assistants and I found them walking along the street, selling goods on a street market, sitting in front of their shacks, or we visited them at their place of work or their homes. Most of them were open and friendly and willing to talk. 'It's good to have a voice,' they said.

Almost all the young interviewees did not want their photographs taken. Some feared it would expose them to mobbing on social media. One woman said she was afraid of witchcraft, and one young lady sent me a desperate WhatsApp after the interview, asking me not to post her picture in my book. When asked why, she replied, 'Not so long ago, just in the same area where I live, a young lady disappeared after sharing her story.' The elderly people, probably not involved in social media, were all willing to have their photos taken.

2 The present situation in Windhoek

SOME FACTS

The research for this chapter focused on Windhoek. This was mainly due to the time available but also because Windhoek is more or less representative of other towns in Namibia, where problems and challenges are visible in their most extreme form and where the population has tripled since independence.

Windhoek, Namibia's capital city, lies in the Khomas Region in the centre of the country. It is a typical post-apartheid city in southern Africa. In short, this means that the racial segregation between black and white areas has continued to exist as spatial segregation between affluent and poor residents. Due to the high influx of people from rural areas, this segregation has become even more apparent. The suburbs of wealthy residents, where houses are all legally owned, well-serviced, and built according to the city's building regulations, expand slowly to the south and the east. The so-called townships,⁷ which house the majority of poor citizens, grow at a much higher rate across the mountainous areas north and west of Windhoek. The further away from the town centre, the less structured and less serviced they are, and the more illegal their status. Informal settlements are usually defined as areas where inhabitants live on plots without secure tenure, in housing that does not comply with building regulations, and where they lack some or all essential services like water, electricity, and toilets.⁸

7 During apartheid times, a term only used for suburbs for Black citizens.

8 United Nations, *Habitat III Issue papers 22 – Informal Settlements*, prepared for the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, New York, 2015

The population of Windhoek is currently just below half a million.⁹ It is expected to increase to three-quarters of a million within the next ten years,¹⁰ primarily because of the continued migration from the rural areas to the city. According to the Shack Dwellers Association of Namibia (SDFN), in 2019, over 300,000 individuals lived in more than 70,000 shacks in dozens of informal settlements in Windhoek.¹¹

As a political local authority unit, the City of Windhoek comprises the whole area of the town, including Katutura and all other townships and informal settlements. Katutura, established in 1961 to separate the black population from the white, is often still used as a generic name for all townships and informal settlements in the area. Katutura today, however, is only one of the dozens of suburbs and settlements around it.

The City of Windhoek comprises nine constituencies: **John A. Pandeni** (formerly Soweto); **Tobias Hainyeko** (formerly part of Hakahana); **Katutura East, Windhoek West, Moses //Garöëb** (formerly part of Hakahana/Big Bend), **Khomasdal, Samora Machel, Katutura Central, and Windhoek East.**¹²

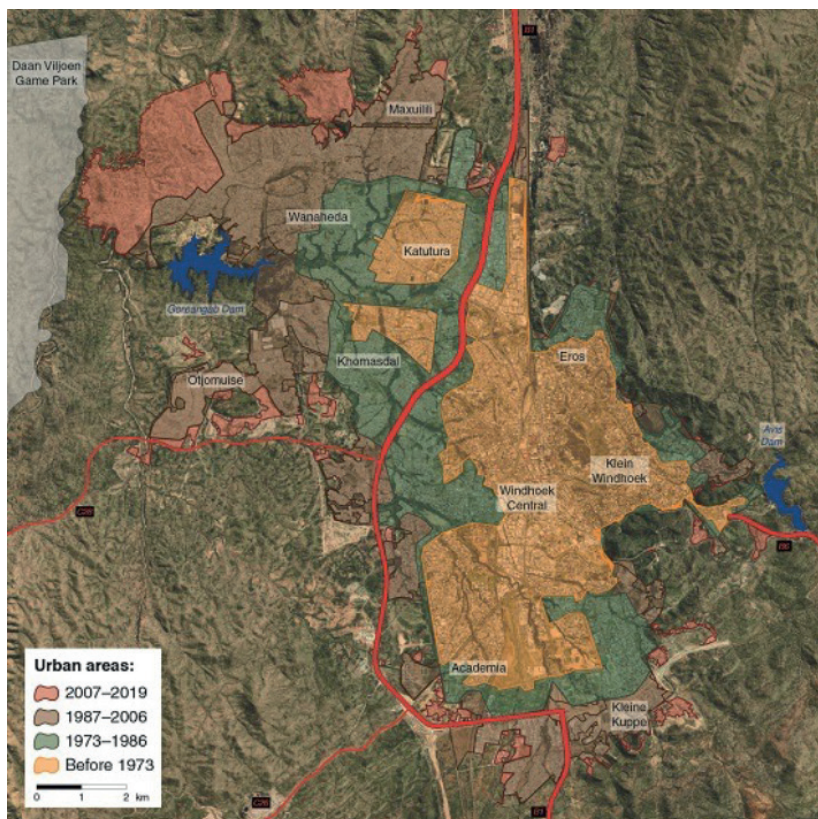
The names of constituencies do not coincide with the names of the different suburbs and informal settlements, which often makes it confusing to find your way. Samora Machel Constituency, named in honour of Mozambican President Samora Machel, is located across the four suburbs of Wanaheda, Greenwell Matongo, Goreangab and part of Havana. Next to the official names of suburbs, there are also numerous popular names created by the residents themselves, like Ombili (meaning 'peace'), Tweetheni ('leave us alone', part of Okuryangava), Luxury Hill Soweto, Dolam, Gemeente and Golgota.

9 <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/windhoek-population>

10 Excel Dynamic Solutions, November 2022

11 www.shackdwellers.com

12 <https://khomasrc.gov.na>



Source: Atlas of Namibia – its land, water and life, Namibia Nature Foundation, Windhoek, 2022.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Writing about settlements on urban land, particularly the informal settlements in Windhoek, turned out to be much more difficult and complex than writing about the different kinds of farms and farmers in rural areas. I knew little about these areas of my town of residence except for visits to friends, colleagues, and places of work in central Katutura (where people have proper brick houses with running water and electricity, even though they cannot always pay their bills and are

sometimes cut off from both). But at least there is some structure and formality, and there are essential services and secure tenure. However, all the townships further north and east, spreading like the arms of a giant octopus from hill to hill, further and further away from the centre of town, with shacks packed closer and closer together, without any visible demarcation of plots, with roads getting sandier and narrower, ending in dirt paths for pedestrians between the smaller and more make-shift shacks, – these parts of town are unknown territory for most people living on the brighter side of the city.

To get a first impression of living conditions, I decided to just go there, to drive to the very last shack and see how my hometown looked on the other side – and where from, every day, men and women walk or take a taxi to the affluent parts of the city to earn money. Some work in households and offices, others at building sites and road constructions. There are those who sell sunflowers or pearl animals on the streets, looking desperately at potential buyers hastening in and out of supermarkets with filled shopping bags, others work as car and security guards all over the affluent suburbs. Some young men sit on the pavements at traffic lights from early morning, waiting to be picked up for short-term work such as offloading goods or gardening. In the late afternoons, more young men arrive in the streets of the affluent, waiting for rubbish bins to be placed outside so that they can live off what is being thrown away. The knowledge of Windhoek's citizens is one-sided: people from the poor areas know where and how the rich live; they know which toothpaste they use, which food they eat, which cars they drive, and what they use and throw away. They pick it up, reuse it or sell it. Many houses and shacks on the poor side of Windhoek are furnished and fitted with the refuse of the other side.

I asked a taxi driver from Katutura, L., to drive me to that part of town that has always been separated from the main part of Windhoek, first in the early sixties because of prescribed racial segregation and today because of economic separateness – the rich living here, the poor far away on cheap land or on land that they occupy illegally.



Windhoek City Centre

STARTING FROM THE CITY CENTRE

We start at the city centre, driving along Independence Avenue, the long axis that stretches from the centre of the town far into the centre of Katutura. It takes us past the Katutura State Hospital and, on the other side, the unmissable, huge, brand-new SWAPO Party National Headquarters, with the bright golden statue of Sam Nujoma on top, holding a golden baby child in his arms. The statue faces north – or at least not the affluent southern parts of town.

I look at L., and he simply says, 'This statue hurts many people.'

'Why is he holding up a child?' I ask.

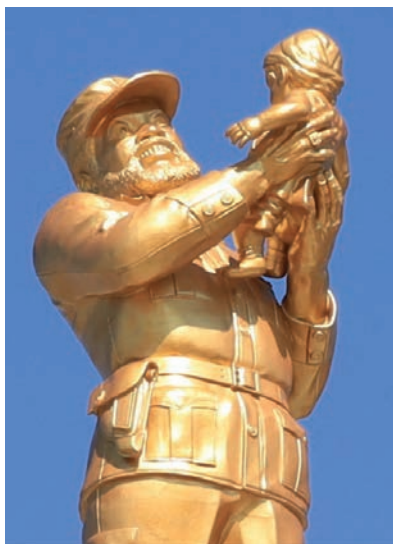
'After the war of liberation, Nujoma said: *Now leave the weapons alone, go and make kids*. Maybe that is the reason. Encouraging us to have more kids?'



Left: SWAPO Party National Headquarters, right: Katutura State Hospital

Later, when I passed the same statue with my interview partner Mirjam, she just shook her head and also commented, 'People feel hurt by this. Here, they build this golden man with a golden baby in his arms, looking toward our shacks, but they have no idea how people live. Many people go to bed hungry at night, and they do not seem to care.'

We drive through modern Katutura, with fenced-in brick houses, with a little garden here and there, sometimes a shack in the backyard, probably rented out, with four-laned tarred roads, streetlights, shopping centres, traffic lights, schools, churches, police stations, government buildings, and some apartment buildings – a modern African town. In the 'old' Katutura, many people still distinguish



The golden statue on top of the SWAPO Party National Headquarters.

between Ovambo, Herero, Damara and Nama Locations and use these names from apartheid times, when not only blacks and whites were segregated but also the different ethnic groups, and 'yes, there are still mainly Ovambo living here, and Damaras, Namas, and Hereros living in other sections,' L. explains. 'In the new informal areas, people are more mixed, mainly because they have little choice about where to settle. They settle where there is an open space or where they can rent a shack according to their means.'



Modern Katutura with tarred roads, streetlights, shopping centres, and traffic lights.



Independence Avenue in Katutura: open markets and modern shopping centres exist side by side.

Following the same street, we drive on and arrive in Greenwell Matongo, where Independence Avenue changes into vibrant Eveline Street, with small businesses leaning against each other, barber shops next to shebeens and eateries, hundreds of cuca shops, stalls, car washes, game tables, car repairs and spare parts outlets, mini-bars, open-air hairdressing saloons, second-hand tyre shops, and fruit and vegetable stalls. Nothing looks planned or structured as in the other part of town but seems to be growing organically like a weed, and like a weed, the strongest seem to survive while some smaller shacks stand empty, many shops gated and barred. Also, the sounds and the noise here differ from the silent city centre – blasting car horns, loud music, shouting people and children filling the air.

‘Here you feel the true heartbeat of Windhoek,’ remarks L. ‘Here is the liveliest part of town. They say that Eveline Street has more than 80 shebeens.’

It is indeed a high-pressure heartbeat, here is the energy and the community spirit, here is what makes the city go round, not in a bureaucratic way, but in an organic way that somehow organises itself creatively.

‘How do they do business with so much competition?’ I ask.

‘You use your friends,’ L. replies. ‘They come, and they bring their friends and so on, and through your friends, you do more business.’



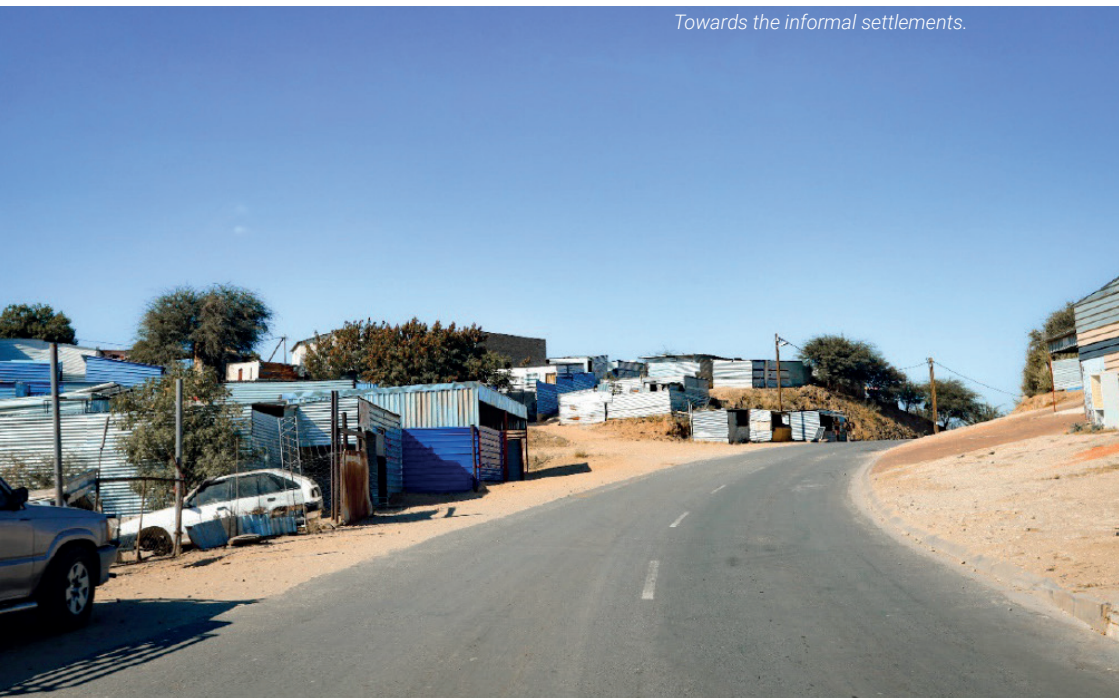
Eveline Street in Greenwell Matongo.

Most of the many people on the streets are busy selling something, waiting for customers, taking something from here to there, doing the laundry, and hanging shirts and towels on a piece of wire in front of the shacks along the street, children in neat school uniforms are returning home from school, some men and women are carrying huge bundles of firewood which they have collected far away where bushes and trees still grow. Everybody looks at us either indifferently or in a friendly manner. Some children wave. They probably think we are tourists who want to see 'the other Africa' for an hour or two.

We visit one of the omnipresent open markets on the street and buy fruit from two women; one has two little children on her lap. I ask them if I can take a photo, but they do not say yes, which I suppose means no. 'We are from Zimbabwe,' then one of them whispers. 'We have no permit to sell here. We are here illegally; if you take a photo, we could get into trouble.'

'Zimbabweans are usually accepted here,' says L. 'They sell fruit and tomatoes, while the Namibians sell meat and bread prepared at home. There is no big competition. There is acceptance. There is enough space.'

Towards the informal settlements.





The end of the tarred road.

We leave the older parts of Katutura behind and approach the extensive slums of Okahandja Park, Babylon and Okuryangava, called 'informal settlements' today. Glancing at the countless shiny silver tin huts spreading from hill to hill towards the north shows that most of Windhoek's inhabitants live beyond formality – makeshift kindergartens and churches cobbled together, tiny gardens and miniature maize plantations visible between the low shacks, and further away, makeshift structures put together with black plastic bags, rusted corrugated iron, and all kinds of scrap materials.

A closer look, however, shows that the settlements are not entirely without structure and services. Most shacks have a large number painted on one of their silver walls, which indicates that the plot is registered with the City of Windhoek; the wide sandy roads have road signs, and every few hundred meters, we see a communal toilet and community water taps. There is also a school here, a clinic there, as well as childcare centres, showing that the city administration is trying to provide a minimum of services to even the poorest of the poor. In Babylon, we quite unexpectedly turn onto a tarred road with streetlights.

L. is excited to see this. 'This is new,' he cries, 'this is fantastic, look at this! Such an improvement!' It is a startling contrast – on one side, iron sheet huts, simple outside water taps, and on the other, a broad tarred road with new meter-high streetlights. So many opposites, so much life, and so much human dignity amidst undignified circumstances.

TURNING WESTWARD

We return to the crowded township of Goreangab and turn westward towards the Goreangab Dam when suddenly a huge development area comes into view – the new Windhoek Waterfront Development. It is a new expansion for employed people with bank accounts, tax certificates, and a million or more to buy their own house. A few hundred houses are completed, a few already inhabited, separated by broad tarred roads, and many open areas for more development, beautiful, neat, modern and spacious. According to its website,¹³ the Windhoek Waterfront Development is a 'mixed-use project' on 50 hectares of land. With green walkways alongside the water's edge, it 'creates a new lifestyle choice that provides a wide range of business activities alongside residential areas.' What is astounding is that usually, housing developments for more affluent citizens are built far away from the poor settlements. However, here we suddenly see rich along poor, structured areas next to wildly growing living habitats, rather sterile housing blocks next to poverty and vitality – areas created for people with 'choice' near to areas for people without much choice.

'That is strange,' I say to L. 'Building this next to the informal settlements that they have to pass through every day.'

'No, they are already busy building a road on the other side that leads them straight to town,' L. replies.

13 www.windhoek-waterfront.com.na



Goreangab Dam



Windhoek Waterfront Development

TO THE NORTHWEST

Back at the State Hospital and the golden statue opposite, glimmering even more golden under the morning sun, we now take a road to the northwest. We drive down Otjomuise Road and stop at a cemetery of the City of Windhoek.

‘This is Oponganda Cemetery Extension B,’ L. informs me. ‘It means “Our House” in Otjiherero. The one on the other side of the road is full. All burials are now taking place here.’

Because of the recent rains, the area is overgrown with grass and wildflowers. From the newer graves, marble tombstones stick out; from the older graves, just thin wooden crosses. ‘This cemetery will also be full soon,’ L. says. ‘It will only last for a couple of more years.’

Later, I read that the City of Windhoek is trying to offer eight-foot graves where two people of the same family could be buried. They also encourage cremations because they take up less space than graves, but until now with little success.¹⁴



Oponganda Cemetery Extension B

14 www.windhoekcc.org.na

'And it is expensive to be buried here,' L. continues. 'Many people therefore rather go to the rural areas and bury their people there.'

'What does it cost to die?' we ask the City of Windhoek officer at the graveyard.

He tells us that there are different grades of cemeteries. A grave space at Oponganda costs N\$195.30, payable once a year. It is cheaper than the formerly white Pionierspark Cemetery, which costs N\$291.90. Katutura cemetery, the largest cemetery in Windhoek, is the most affordable, only N\$96.60. There is also a difference in the cost of funerals. The poorer bury during the week, the richer on Sundays.¹⁵

In this town, it seems there is not only too little land for the living but also for the dead. The graveyards will soon become crowded too. And dying is priced just like living because the dead still need a tiny piece of land.

We drive through a street with Wanaheda to our left and Luxury Soweto on our right, passing two different playgrounds and the Tugela Family Park in Tugela Street in a parklike area. Not far away, we arrive at something surprising. The well-visited Wanaheda Outdoor Fitness Centre, established in 2014 by the City of Windhoek, is a community outdoor gym with rowing machines and cycles, etc. This gym is later mentioned by some young people we interviewed, who love it because it is free of charge but has more or less the same equipment as the expensive fitness centres in town.

We travel further along the Greenwell Soccer Stadium, a neat area with goals and lines, smaller than a standard-sized soccer field, and very stony.

'The ground is very rough. That makes you tough,' says L. 'In many African countries you have good runners and soccer players because they practice on this rough ground.'

15 Katutura: Weekdays: N\$1,141.00 – Weekend: N\$1,714.00/ Oponganda: Weekdays: N\$1,141.90 – Weekend: N\$1,714.29/ Pionierspark: Weekdays: N\$2,037.00 – Weekend: N\$3,058.00

Driving through the different townships, it looks as if the people, despite the hardships, the crowdedness, and the obvious poverty, are deeply rooted in their area. They are active and they are busy, they seem involved in their community and even look like they are in charge of their lives.

But how secure are their living conditions? How secure is their housing? How secure is the land on which they live?

What a difference it is to the gated communities in the more affluent suburbs, 'the silent part of town,' as one young man called it. The part where nobody walks in the streets, except the domestic workers on their way to the bus stops, or some joggers in the evening, and where the main noise is the barking of dogs.

3

What does 'having a home' mean to the people in urban areas?

What does 'having a home' mean to people living in or moving to Namibian towns – particularly to the bulk of poor people without financial means?

From my previous research in rural areas, having a piece of land and having a home are inextricably linked. Is this sentiment the same in the urban areas of Namibia? In areas where renting instead of owning a plot or a house is an option? Where freehold land is costly? Where illegal squatting is more or less tolerated? Is the right to a safe and secure home seen as a human right? Or is it generally accepted that land is a market-based commodity available only to those with the financial means?

THE YOUNG PEOPLE

Thinking about how I could get first-hand, direct, and unbiased information from young people in the informal settlements, I thought of Freddy. Freddy S. is 18 years old, the son of a former teacher colleague, and a grade 12 student. At the beginning of the school holiday, he asked me if I had holiday work for him, and I thought, Why can't he help me with my project? Freddy lives with his single mother in Dolam, Katutura, in a brick house with water and electricity, and he has schoolmates from all parts of Katutura. I asked him to approach ten or more young people, male and female, and talk with them about where they live and with whom, what kind of plot and house they occupy, whether owning

land is important for them, and what their challenges are. Freddy was enthusiastic and immediately replied, 'So, you want me to do a survey? We have learned about surveys at school. And I can also do some recordings.'

I gave him a writing block and some taxi money and left. A few days later, he had interviewed 14 young people in eight different areas, all willing to talk. 'They had many sad things to say, and some even cried while relating their stories,' Freddy told me. He was allowed to record their words but not to take their pictures because



Freddy S., interview assistant

they were afraid that people on social media could abuse them. I drove out to Dolam to meet him, and he presented me with 14 recordings and filled-in questionnaires. Most of his interview partners he contacted on the streets. 'They were young people who were walking somewhere,' he said. 'When talking to them, I always tried to place myself in their shoes and understand, even when some were initially rude.'

I then asked another young man, Riaan !U., who lives in Okahandja Park informal settlement on the outskirts of Windhoek in the Tobias Hainyeko Constituency, to do the same. He came back with 12 more interviews. Altogether, the two young men interviewed 26 young people between 16 and 25; 15 are still going to school, and 11 are unemployed or informally employed. Riaan knew some of the people personally, others he 'just saw on the streets', most living in Okahandja Park. Some were suspicious at first when he approached them, others were curious to know why he asked all these questions. 'At least you are doing

something,' they then said. 'In general, I was happy to see how sociable people are,' Riaan summarised his experiences. 'I can go to somebody's house and ask them, and they will talk to you, though they do not want you to take their pictures. Here we are not as private and secluded as in other areas of town. We are very social.'

When reviewing the interview responses, it became clear that for young people, owning a piece of land was not predominant at this stage of their life. For those still attending school and usually living with their families, the priority was getting a good education, affordable school transport, and a quiet, safe, and secure place to study. Jaylen W., an 18-year-old schoolboy, lives in a shack in Mix, a faraway Brakwater settlement. He lives with his unemployed mother and a brother and has not seen his father 'for a while'. He visits Ella du Plessis High School, but getting to school is a daily effort. The taxi is expensive, and the municipal bus is unreliable. He sometimes walks from Mix to the main road, hoping to get a lift to town for free. 'I want to go to school and finish school and become someone,' he says. 'I really want to take my studies seriously, and my mother always pushes me to go to school, but then we have these transport problems. This leads to some of us dropping out or failing grades. Can the government please speak to the municipal bus drivers? We really need our education.'

'We live in our own house on our own plot. But we do not have any place where we can study,' a young woman, Sharon S., said. 'We can only study at our school. In the evening, we do not have electricity; some people use solar energy, but when it rains, there is nothing; and the people who have generators, they need petrol, and often they cannot afford to buy petrol. So, often, we cannot study in the evening, only during the day – but then it is very noisy. We only have this small period of sunlight.'

Chaden O. is 16 years old and lives in a house in Havana with four people. He walks to I. Shipena High School every day and has similar problems achieving his goal of a good education. 'Here, I can only study

during the daytime, but then there are chores to do and no lights at night when it is quiet. At the end of it, with all these challenges, you get into the mentality that you are unable to succeed because you have so many challenges to deal with that other students do not have.'

Given S., a 17-year-old learner, lives in a brick house in Goreangab Ext. 3 with five people. He gets to school in a taxi, but when there is no money, he must walk with his heavy books, getting tired even before school starts. 'We often get tired of walking long distances to school with our books and then have difficulties concentrating during class. I really want the City of Windhoek to attend to us, to help us school-going youth.'

'Did you learn something new yourself during the survey?' I asked Freddy after listening to his recordings.

'Yes, I did not expect so many people to be much worse off than me,' he replied. 'The dirt, no transport, and how desperately the young people were trying to go to school every day even though there was often no money for a taxi and having to walk long distances.'

Mix settlement, 20km north of Windhoek, still without a school, The Namibian, 20 December 2021.



The young people interviewed who no longer attended school were either unemployed or only informally employed. Their priority was also not to get a piece of land but employment. A job was seen as the first and only basis for their current and future life. A young, employed man said, 'What keeps me going is my work because I know there is hope somewhere in the future.' However, for young people without any employment, the future looks bleak, no matter whether they only passed grade 8 or are graduated university students.

Maria W. is 18 years old and lives in Otjomuise Agste Laan. She finished matric last year and lives in a shack with eight other people. 'My main challenge is joblessness,' she said. 'I do not have the funds to study further and am looking for work, but they always want people with experience. The City of Windhoek and youth councillors must look into doing something for us.'

Another unemployed young woman, Serena O., has been trying to find work for a long time. She said, 'I am still dependent on my family and have no money of my own. Having land will not change this. Finding a job is my priority.' And Ronaldo U., 24, summarised what other jobless youths said, 'If I had work, I could build my life step by step, but without a job, there is no foundation.'

During our interviews, Freddy also randomly asked twenty young people between 16 and 30 on the streets, 'Do you know Job Amupanda?' It seems that the young activist has succeeded in becoming well-known among the young people of Windhoek. Of the twenty youngsters, 80% knew him – not personally but had read about him in the newspapers, seen him on billboards, heard about him from friends, listened to him on the radio or watched him on television. Some called him 'a man of change,' and a young woman



Billboard of Job Amupanda along the road.

described him as ‘a good, smart, and intelligent person with the nation at heart and us young people.’

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Namibia has one of the youngest populations in Africa and will likely reach more than 50% youth unemployment rate in 2021.¹⁶ This means that half of the Namibian youth are left with ‘no foundation’ for the future, whether they or their family own a piece of land or not. Also, the young people who are employed in some way or another usually earn very low wages. According to labour expert Herbert Jauch, about three out of four workers in Namibia earn just around N\$1,400 per month or less, with which they cannot even meet their basic needs, let alone buy a plot or build a house or shack.¹⁷

Addressing the deplorable situation of young urban residents thus urgently needs massive economic and social intervention and a fresh approach that speaks directly to the youth in their language, providing them with a sense of hope.¹⁸

THE SENIOR CITIZENS

Freddy and I also interviewed senior citizens in the suburbs such as Dolam, Goreangab, Herero and Ovambo Location, Katutura Central, Havana, and Samora Machel. Although these informal interviews are not representative, something striking emerged. Our interview partners are all pensioners and thus have at least a minimum monthly income.¹⁹ Those who stay in the ‘older’ suburbs, such as Katutura Central and

16 *New Era*, 26.07.2021

17 *The Namibian*, 5.07.2023

18 According to *The Namibian* of 11 September 2023 and statistics provided by the Namibian Police, a total of 1,542 Namibians took their own lives between April 2020 and March 2023. Deputy Commissioner Kauna Shikwambi cited unemployment and poverty as some of the most common causes.

19 Namibia provides a universal old age pension to all its resident citizens aged 60 or over. The latest figures provided by the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare indicate that 202,294 pensioners receive a monthly old-age grant of N\$1 300 (*The Namibian*, ‘Over 60 000 Namibians surviving on social grants’, 5 July 2023)

Havana, often live in a house that they inherited and that was assigned to their families when the South African apartheid government relocated them in the early 1960s from the Old Location to Katutura. Others bought a plot from the municipality years ago.

Elizabeth H., 70, lives in Katutura Central in her own house and said, 'My mother was relocated from the Old Location to Katutura and given a house, and then I was given the house from my mother.'

Rachel M., 70, said, 'I was resettled from Old Location in Pionierspark to Katutura Okuryangava and had my own house.'

Selma S. (no age given) bought a plot from the municipality and has lived in her house in Samora Machel 'for a long time.'

Most elderly people seemed rooted in their community, and most also wanted to be buried in Windhoek because they wanted to 'remain' near their families and other family graves. Freddy, who conducted most of the interviews, resumed, 'Many have been in their settlement for a long time, and they have adjusted to the situation. There is no returning.'

'When I asked them for their most important wish, one wish excited them all,' he continued. It was also not getting a piece of land, although it was mentioned as 'something that would help the younger people,' or they wished for other elderly people in more insecure conditions to receive plots 'where they would feel safe.' However, their biggest wish was to see an increase in employment.

More than anything else, they were all deeply troubled about the shocking unemployment rate of



Old man in front of his house.

the young people around them, the suffering and hopelessness it caused, and the often-seen consequences of alcohol and drug abuse and crime.

Helena B., 62, said, 'The worst thing about my location is the selling of drugs and alcohol abuse, and my one wish is for the youth to get jobs and stop the violence. Government must provide jobs!' Almost all other senior interviewees echoed this.

Ismael A., 60, said, 'The most important change that I wish – creating jobs for the youth.'

Justus K., 61, stressed, 'The first thing I want to change is to give work to the young kids.'

'What is the worst?' Eugenia Gulishe, 73, asked. 'Young people's joblessness, drowning their sorrows in drugs and alcohol, teenage pregnancy, all this results in a sick society.'

THE MIDDLE-AGED GROUP

The situation looked very different for the middle-aged group, for those who want to build a life for themselves, who have school-going children, and who are at the same time responsible for an extended family and elderly family members, the so-called sandwich generation.²⁰

For several interviews with people in the Goreangab settlement, I was accompanied by Mirjam K. Goreangab settlement stretches north from the Goreangab Dam up to Monte Christo Road and further. It was a Saturday and a long weekend because the 1st of May was Workers' Day, but the people we met in the far outskirts of Goreangab did not have much to celebrate. They do not have work, they have no income, and they survive by selling firewood collected on the slopes of the nearby mountains or doing a lady's hair on a long weekend when the day before was payday.

20 According to a survey of Old Mutual of 2021, 63% of Namibians are 'sandwiched' between two generations who rely on them financially. (The Namibian, 13 June 2023)

Mirjam very sensitively introduced me, herself, and our intention to do interviews with the men and women we met on the streets in front of their shacks. They were initially reluctant to talk, even suspicious, but Mirjam speaks Oshiwambo, and her friendly voice and face created trust. They all agreed to an interview after we had explained that we wanted to give them a voice in a book about land. They also were okay to provide us with their name, albeit reluctantly at first, and they all allowed us to take a photo, except for one lady. 'Maybe later,' she said politely. In the end, we also took their phone numbers, on the one hand, because they were looking for work and hoped we could assist them, on the other hand, to be able to contact them for the launch of the book and to hand them a copy.



Mirjam K. with her children in front of her shack in Greenwell Matongo.

PEOPLE COMING FROM THE NORTH

From the randomly selected more than 30 middle-aged interview partners, more than half had migrated from the northern rural areas, some only a few years ago, others much longer. Most of them were from the Oshiwambo-speaking community.

In the face of the challenges awaiting them when arriving in urban areas, I wondered why so many people had moved from rural areas to towns. Would they not be better off staying in the communal areas where getting a small piece of land is much easier than in Windhoek? The

main reason given was that in the rural areas, they usually have enough food but lack cash income, which they need to send their children to school or universities, for medication and clothing or mobile phones. They moved to towns, hoping to find employment and send money to the family back home. Younger people also came for their studies and to access better services than in the rural areas, like transport, internet connection, medical care, and to enjoy modern city life.

Some men we interviewed came to Windhoek years ago and found secure jobs. However, they came alone, leaving their family behind in the north, where they own a piece of land and a house. From how they described their lives, they still live like the thousands of contract workers during apartheid times: working at a place far away from home and sending money back to their families that they had left behind. Theoretically, they could now bring their families along, which was prohibited during apartheid. However, the situation has not changed for many because bringing their families to Windhoek is far too expensive.

Andreas I., 33, rents a shack in Havana. 'I do not have my own place; my family is in the North. I would like my family and the kids to come here, but it is too expensive. Even if I can get a plot, it will be somewhere



Young construction worker.

far away from my place of work, and there will be no electricity and water, so my situation will stay as it is. I was born in the north, so that will remain my home.'

He and others we interviewed in a similar situation feel okay in the city but do not feel at home. They accept their landlessness and lack of services, seeing their stay in Windhoek as transitional.

For young unmarried people from the north, the situation is somehow different. Many (we were told) would like to stay in Windhoek and build a life here. However, this proves difficult.

Hilma I., 30, also employed, was born in the north and came to Windhoek in 2011 for her studies at NUST.²¹ She rents a shack with one room in Otjomuise, Sewende Laan, for N\$1,000 a month. 'If I would get a plot, I would stay here and have my own place,' she said. 'I did apply at the City of Windhoek for a plot long ago, but I never got any feedback.'

Tuwilika K., 28, lives illegally in a shack in the far-away Goreangab



Andreas I. and Samuel A. at their workplace.



Hilma I.

21 Namibia University of Science and Technology

settlement. She earns some money by doing hair. She also came from the north but wants to stay in Windhoek and apply for a plot. 'It is very important to have my own plot, your own place where you can settle.'

Mirjam K. came to Windhoek in 1996. For the past nine years, she has lived with three children in a rented shack in Greenwell Matongo. Her rent is N\$1,000 per month. She is employed but has not been able to get her own plot. She has applied for her own erf many times and has been on the City of Windhoek's waiting list since 2011.

'The municipality told me that they are still busy with applications from the year 2004,' she said. 'Also, the waiting lists are not processed as they come. There are always people with connections who come first. It depends on who is the master of the lists.' She does not mind where the plot is. 'It can be anywhere. My biggest wish is to have my own place. Anything can happen, I can get sick, and then I cannot pay my rent anymore.' Because of the difficult circumstances, she would like to return to the North when she is older and her kids are grown up. 'Life in the rural area is much more peaceful and stressless. In Windhoek, it is all about money; everything costs money, and life is very hard if you don't have work.'

And then there are those who came from the north with the hope of finding a job, building a life, and at the same time supporting their families back home – and for whom this has remained just a hope.

We met Hileni S., 30, at the outskirts of the Goreangab settlement. She moved to Windhoek from the north in 2015 to look for work but has still not succeeded. Her husband, 32, is also unemployed. Sometimes, he collects firewood in the mountains to sell, while she occasionally sells sweets. She lives with her two children, renting one shack in a row of three for N\$300 a month.

'Yes, I would like to apply for my own plot, but for an application, you need to have work, so I am not entitled to apply.'

'Why then don't you go back to the north?' I asked.

She shook her head, looking down. 'In the north, we are also suffering. We came here to send something back to our parents. How can I expect my parents up there to take care of us? We are supposed to send something to our parents, not the parents taking care of us.'

She was silent for a while and then added in a low voice, 'I came eight years ago to the city of Windhoek, but there is nothing good I have experienced living here.'

This woman stayed in my mind for a long time. Her hopelessness. Her shame to have nothing to give. Her shattered expectations. Her insecure life with almost no fighting spirit left. And I wonder – how many people have been uprooted from their homes in the rural areas and have never taken root in town?

ROOTED IN THE CITY

We also interviewed two other women from the north, one employed and one living from selling *kapana*,²² who seemed very content for one reason: they have their own plot and have built a house on it. They both received their plot through the Shack Dwellers Association, a community-based network of housing saving schemes.

Fransina S., 42, lives in Okahandja Park with her husband, children, and extended family. 'To have your own house is good, and you are free,' she said.

Selma S., 45, who lives in Greenwell Matongo with her husband and children, told us, 'It was important for me to have my own plot because, even when I decide to go back to the north, I am confident because my children have a place where they can stay.' She presently lives in a shack, and her next wish is to build a house 'Because in the shack it is not safe, anything can happen, especially when the shack catches fire,

22 Beef strips grilled over an open fire, a popular street food.

it can destroy many houses because we are too close together, there is not enough space to rescue something.'

In contrast to the other interview partners without land, they feel secure and rooted in the city, even if they only live in a shack.

The same is true for the other interview partners, who live in their own house on a plot they acquired from the municipality. They feel a deep sense of security even though poverty, lack of services, and other challenges trouble their lives.

Ruth S., 59, lives in Damara Location with her two sons in her own house, which she bought a long time ago in the 90s. 'At that time, it was much easier to buy a house with the pension money I was paid out after I stopped teaching and invested with Alexander Forbes. Before that, I was always moving around, from Wanaheda to Havana, to a garage in Khomasdal. I did not have a home. This house was cheap but very dilapidated, but I renovated it with the help of friends. Owning your own house is much better than renting a house or shack. Owning my own house makes me feel at home. We feel secure with our erf.'



Ruth S. and her house in Katutura.

At Mix settlement, about 20km north of Windhoek, we met Johanna I. at her stall, where she was selling *vetkoek*²³ and chicken. In Mix, all huts have big numbers on one of their walls in black or brown paint.

23 A small unsweetened cake of deep-fried dough.

Johanna stood next to her shop, a corrugated iron sheet structure with the number M9 painted on it. This number indicates that the place is a business. 'Ordinary huts have 3-digit numbers,' she informed us.

We talked about her business and environment and were intrigued by her positivity. 'I like Mix settlement,' she said. 'We are a mix of people here, Damara, Nama, Ovambo, even some Baster and white people. We feel secure with our erf, and nobody can take it away. It's a good settlement.'

What makes her feel 'secure' is the certificates that the City of Windhoek handed them for the plots they had occupied illegally before. 'They are now ours. We are very happy here, and usually, it's peaceful.'

'Is it really yours? Can you sell it?'

'Yes, I can sell it. I can inherit it; I can also build a proper house on it. We just pay a small fee every month.'



E. von Wietersheim, author, and Johanna I. in front of Johanna I.'s shop in Mix settlement.

I later read that about two years earlier, more than 1,000 residents of Mix settlement received so-called Land Occupation Acknowledgement Certificates from the Minister of Rural and Urban Development, Erastus Uutoni, who explained, 'Now that you have certificates, you can start your home gardens and prepare it. It is a sign that development has

reached this settlement.' On the same occasion, Fransina Kahungu, the mayor of Windhoek at that time, advised beneficiaries to now 'follow proper procedures to start constructing permanent structures.'²⁴

RENTING AS AN OPTION?

Renting is an option in many towns in Namibia for those who do not have enough money to buy a piece of land and build a house. The condition, however, is a regular and high enough income. Some young people we interviewed, who are single and earn a good income, are quite happy to rent a shack in Windhoek's informal settlements, at least for a while, because it is comparatively cheap. Shacks can be rented for as little as N\$300 a month up to N\$2,000 a month, depending on how close it is to a main road and if the shack has its own sanitation, water, and electricity. 'There are many shacks around here that are rented. N\$1,000 for me is not so expensive. In other parts of Windhoek, rooms are much more expensive,' said Hilma I. She has postponed owning a piece of land for a time later in life.

For those who do not have enough money to buy a piece of land and build a house and at the same time have a low, insecure, or non-existent income, renting is also the only option, but it is a miserable option. It is associated with insecurity, fear of eviction by intolerant landlords, and undignified living conditions. Poor residents renting a shack or a room often feel unwelcome, lost, and unrooted.

Frieda T., 54, rents a shack in the backyard of a church in Katutura. 'I don't have a place of my own. I am renting a shack from the church. The church needed money to pay its municipal bills, so they rented out some shacks around the church to many people. It is quite crowded. We pay N\$1,000 a month. I have a few cattle in the 'reservaat' (in the communal area), but this little income is also not secure because, more and more

24 17 September 2020, *New Era*



Frieda T. in traditional Herero dress in front of her rented shack.

often, the cattle are stolen. I asked the Municipality for a piece of land, and they said they would also build houses, but nothing has happened. We have not even seen any land clearing. I say today: The years with the Boers were good; they built brick houses, and we could buy them. Today, houses are only built for people who have money. We Hereros must return to the reserve once the children are old enough. There is no place for us here. No place when we are old. I would stay if I had a small shack or house here, but it must be my own.'

Ruth S., who has rented a shack for a long time, said, 'If you rent a shack, it is, for example, difficult to have visits by family members, they cannot stay long; otherwise, the landlord or landlady will increase the rent. If you have your own house, family members can visit or stay with you as long as you wish.'

Thomas S., who sells hand-made pearl animals in front of supermarkets, has to send money home to Zimbabwe for his school-going son on the one hand and pay N\$1,000 a month in rent for a shack in Single Quarters on the other. 'I never know how the month will end. And what

is the first thing I must pay? If I do not pay rent, I might lose my shack. If I do not send money for my son, he cannot write his exam. Sometimes the landlord waits for a month, but I never know.'

LAND GRABBING – 'FREED FROM PAYING RENT'

For this reason, some impoverished and desperate residents resort to another option: they 'grab' land. They move to areas on the very far outskirts of town where they settle illegally. This frees them from renting, at least for a while, and they hope that the City of Windhoek will tolerate their presence.

Hilma K., 45, lives in Goreangab with her boyfriend on 'illegal land' where she has built a simple shack. She was living with relatives before. 'It was important for me to live in my own house because I cannot pay anything and staying with relatives or at someone else's place is not easy.'

Tuwilika K., 28, Goreangab, who also lives in a shack on 'grabbed' land with her cousin, answered curtly, 'What is good? We do not pay rent.'

A middle-aged man, no name given, also living illegally on the outskirts of Havana, said, 'Before, I rented in Katutura, but then I grabbed the



Empty land on the outskirts of the informal settlements.



Wherever you find a place, you settle down.

land. Now we are free with my wife as we are not renting. This is the only solution for me.'

And also Anna K., 44, who also 'grabbed illegal land' on the outskirts of Goreangab and now lives with her two children in her own shack, told us that some time ago, she also rented a house, but it was important for her to have her own shack because it 'freed her from paying rent.'

One reason for living on illegal land without too many worries is that illegal squatters do not usually face an immediate threat of eviction anymore. The City of Windhoek more or less tolerates the illegal occupation of unused land, mainly because it has become increasingly difficult to control the vast and increasing number of illegal squatters on municipal land and the desperate housing shortage. Also, a 2013 High Court judgment interdicts the City of Windhoek and the City Police to demolish housing structures and evict occupants without obtaining an order from the court.²⁵ Yet, these illegal, poor, and often unemployed residents remain in a state of illegality, without any rights and perspective. They can be notified at any time to vacate their area if the city deems the area dangerous or unsuitable or when it needs it for roads or other formal developments.

25 www.lac.org.na

Also, for young professionals in Windhoek, housing and renting is a huge challenge because Windhoek's exorbitant renting prices are not controlled. Affordable houses or apartments are scarcely available even to middle-income families, and City Council applications for land can take years to be processed. As a result, even some of these families consider moving to the informal settlements to put up a shack. According to the leadership of the Teachers Union of Namibia (TUN), a small survey in 2015 showed that over 200 teachers were living in corrugated shacks in the capital due to high land and housing rental prices. TUN's president, Mahongora Kavihuha, said the survey showed that most teachers live in the shacks without electricity and proper sanitation, making it difficult for them to prepare for their teaching lessons.²⁶

CONCEPTS OF LAND – “EVEN A BIRD HAS ITS NEST, WHICH IT CALLS HOME”

In general, what concepts of land do urban citizens have? Namibians today live with two main land tenure systems: land on commercial farms and in towns is owned privately or under freehold title, including by the municipalities, and can be bought and sold. In rural communal land areas, non-freehold land is allocated for a small fee to individuals, while ownership remains with the state and is administered by the traditional authority. To get a piece of land, you do not have to buy it (and also cannot sell it), but in most cases, you can demarcate it and have private tenure rights to your homestead, cropping fields, and cattle pens.²⁷

Many people coming from rural homes to the city have lived with the traditional concept of communal land and communal land tenure arrangements. Coming to town, they face the situation that land

26 Controlling housing and renting prices (*Namibian Sun*, 17 July 2015)

27 www.lac.org.na

must be bought or rented. At the same time, they see that the City of Windhoek possesses large areas of empty land. Although they accept that the City of Windhoek has the authority over the land, they find it hard to understand why they cannot settle on empty space and why they must buy a tiny piece of land without having the financial means.

Andreas I., coming from the north, asked, 'There is a lot of land in Windhoek, why does the City of Windhoek not provide us with land?'²⁸

The longing for a piece of land and a secure home is thus also the central narrative for most people living in urban areas. Having land is, for many, the priority for a decent and dignified life, as Mirjam K. explains, 'I do not need a house, and even if the land is not serviced, the most important is a place of my own. Then I know I can go forward.'

A 'secure place of my own,' even if full tenure security is not yet achieved, implies existential security without the fear of eviction by the municipality or landlords. It encourages people to start a legal business, they can leave something behind for their children, and they have a place with clear demarcations.

Interestingly, nobody mentioned the idea of building and living in flats. L., the taxi driver, argued that they would be too expensive to build and therefore the rents would be very high. However, according to John Nakuta, residents of informal settlements in Windhoek generally object to living in flats as they see life in a flat as foreign to their culture, and the multi-storey flats constructed by the NHE in Otjomuise, Windhoek, have indeed proved unpopular.²⁹

My 60-plus interviews only represent a small segment of the tens of thousands of people living in precarious and often hopeless conditions in our cities, unable to contribute meaningfully to our economy and

28 Even for the resettlement farms that the government is allocating within the framework of land reform, beneficiaries do not have to pay for the land. While the farms remain the property of the state, the relevant ministry has started to issue 99-year leasehold agreements to resettlement beneficiaries, which will secure tenure for resettled farmers and enable them to access loans from Agribank as well as commercial banks in the future. (*Namibia Economist*, 28 August 2009)

29 *Namibia's Housing Crisis in Perspective*, Namibian Journal of Social Justice, Volume 1, Economic and Social Justice Trust 2021, p.39

social development. Therefore, it is no surprise that groups of people continue to show up with picks and shovels to clear land illegally and erect rudimentary structures on it, for example, in Otjomuise in January 2021 or August 2022.

A video on Facebook published by *The Namibian* on 7 August 2022 (*We want land*) generated a huge number of spontaneous comments on this kind of land grabbing and on the concept of land people have when posting their thoughts without censorship. They are mentioned here without a name, some commas added, some words made more readable, and some comments shortened.

A couple of comments are from people who think that people should rather remain in rural areas:

‘But why Windhoek, go to the village and grab the land!’

‘You left productive plots at the village where you were supposed to cultivate and produce food and you came and fight for a plot that you cannot maintain, so sad, to be honest, urban areas are not for us poor.’

‘Just get land in your village. Poor people cannot afford city land. Sometimes we have shallow thinking.’

Some replies to these comments were:

‘Something to be remembered is that not all people in Windhoek are from the villages. Windhoek is a village of someone.’

‘Those who are saying people should go back to villages. Are there universities in the village? Are there jobs in the village? People want land so they can go to work and save taxi money for their kids to further their studies at universities...’

However, most commentators supported the ‘land grabbers’:

‘Get your land, my people. It belongs to all of us. If the government and local authorities do not want to do their jobs, get your land; it’s your motherland.’

'Whether it is legal or illegal to occupy – but is it legal to keep me for 10 or 15 years on a municipal waiting list? What do you expect my people...'

'Go ahead, I'm also coming. Imagine the pain of being unemployed and having to pay rent from selling in the streets or getting paid 3,000, paying rent for 2,500, hey, we are tired. It's better to be poor with a roof over your head.'

'People of Namibia, wherever you see a beautiful land, take it! It belongs to you.'

'So yeah, just give the people land. Anything else, they will take care of themselves.'

For numerous commentators, having land was seen as a human right:

'Land is for all Namibian people regardless of financial status. Not everyone can afford a car, but it should be everyone to own a plot because no one can operate in air space. Even a bird has its nest which it calls home, and this tree is on land...'

'Everybody deserves a piece of land, leaders... pls open your eyes and see what you are doing to Namibians. You are the reason things will get out of hand. You as the leaders will be to blame.'

'To be honest, why do we have to fight for what God gave us? Plz, give land to people...'

'Give people land now and bring the services later as long as they have a place called home...'

'Why do people talk of Namibian citizens grabbing land? This is their land, and they are utilising it, not grabbing it!'

Several comments stressed that the lack of access to residential land is one of the unfinished projects of the liberation struggle causing political and economic instability in Namibia:

'Keep it up; our parents fought for this land, and the GRN has failed the people; it's time for action.'

'We waited for our land, now is 31 years of independence, every Namibian must be free, it is our land, no renting.'

'People must be given land to build their houses. How are we going to survive poor people in Namibia? We want the land that our parents fought for when they went into exile.'

Generally, it is evident that people's predominant wish is to get a piece of land or an erf on which they can build a house step by step. Getting a piece of land is obviously seen as a human right. In contrast, housing is usually seen as something individuals can take responsibility for. This general preoccupation with land over housing coincides with other reports and findings, where 'the majority of respondents stated that they would rather buy land than a house if given the opportunity.'³⁰



Just a small piece of land to build a home.

The government, the City of Windhoek, and the regional authorities are all aware of the potentially explosive situation in Namibia's urban settlements. What are they doing to deal with it?

30 D. Remmert and P. Ndhlovu, Housing in Namibia: Rights, Challenges and Opportunities, Research Report: Right to Housing Project, February 2018

4 Attempts at Solutions

What is being done by the government, the City of Windhoek, NGOs, and the people themselves to improve or deal with landlessness and insecurity? How can people with no or only insecure income be included in getting a piece of land and a house? How can land be supplied to thousands of landless migrants to towns who are there to stay? What has the City of Windhoek done concerning non-market-based solutions with a broader perspective on land?

THE NAMIBIAN GOVERNMENT/MINISTRY OF URBAN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

At independence in 1990, the Namibian government identified housing as a priority.³¹ The overall aim was to reduce poverty and accelerate economic growth. However, almost 30 years later, in the run-up to the 2019 elections, President Hage Geingob declared living conditions in informal settlements a ‘humanitarian crises,’ and in newspapers and other media, news about the worsening situation of poor residents in Namibia’s cities have appeared almost daily during the past years.

For all the years after independence, political parties have used the land issue to canvas political support. Every election year, SWAPO promised fast delivery of houses and land, especially for the poor voters. The Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) promoted the idea of the ‘One Namibian – One Plot’ policy, the Affirmative Reposition (AR), the favourite of the landless youth, promised land and houses, and the Landless People’s Movement (LPM) promised to fight for the return

31 National Housing Policy 1991

of ancestral land.³² Although five opposition parties (PDM, LPM, IPC, NUDO, and AR) are presently (since 2021) in charge of the Windhoek City Council, people are still waiting for accessible land and affordable housing as promised, and service delivery has even slowed down.³³

It is not because nothing has happened. Since 1991, several housing policies and programmes have been initiated by the government. The **National Housing Policy** was introduced in 1991, updated in 2009, and revised in 2022. It obliges local administrations to promote the speedy provision of low-cost housing and calls for 5 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) to be expended on housing.³⁴ One of the resolutions taken by the **Second National Land Conference (2018)** demands an increase in government expenditure on urban land to at least 10 per cent. Neither has happened, and budget allocations to housing development have remained around 0.1 per cent of the GDP.³⁵

Also, government programmes to rectify the slow pace of serviced land and affordable housing, such as the **Build Together Programme**, the largest government-funded programme, the **National Housing Enterprise**, or the N\$45 billion **Mass Housing Development Programme**, have not created an impact – primarily because of slow implementation but also because the houses that were constructed remained unaffordable to the majority.³⁶ Therefore, in 2018, cabinet decided that houses built under the Mass Housing Programme would be subsidised by 65 per cent from the government in the future. This means a small two-bedroom house valued at N\$200,000, built by National Housing Enterprise, would sell for N\$70,000. However, how long this subsidy will apply and for how many houses is unknown.³⁷

One government intervention seen as helpful for promoting easier access to land for people with low income and giving them security of

32 *neweralive.na* 3 Sept 2021

33 *NBC Online*, March 2023

34 www.npc.gov.na

35 *Republikein, The All-Elusive Namibian House*, 16 February 2022

36 *New Era*, 16 July 2019

37 *New Era, E. de Klerk, 'Mass houses sell at N\$70,000 for low earners'*, 5 February 2018

tenure is the **Flexible Land Tenure Act of 2012**, which finally became operational in 2018. With this Act, the government created a simpler and cheaper land title for land in urban areas for people without any rights to the land they presently occupy. This is done by creating a 'starter title' which gives the holder the right to occupy and erect a dwelling on a block erf at a specific location. Although this title is a right of use and not a right of ownership, it provides security over a piece of land on a so-called block erf. The holder of a starter title may build a house on a specified section of a block of land, live there, leave the house to their heirs, and rent out the house to another person. They can also sell their starter title to someone else who meets certain criteria. The land rights held under a starter title cannot be used as a security for credit but can be upgraded over time to a land-hold title, which gives the owner rights over the land. This means they can also sell, donate, inherit, and use it as a security for credit. The land-hold title can, with time, be upgraded to a full freehold title, which gives the holder full ownership rights over the piece of land in question. The condition is that most residents occupying the block of land agree on this decision.³⁸

SHACK DWELLERS FEDERATION OF NAMIBIA (SDFN)

The Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia is another government-supported initiative that has been quite successful. It was mentioned by three women during my research.

'Yes, I know it,' said Tuwilika K., 28, living in Goreangab. 'They have community leaders and have regular meetings. They decide, for example, who may erect a shack in their area.'

The SDFN is a network of 956 community savings groups with almost 30,000 members nationwide, of which 66% are women. Its explicit

38 Guide to Namibia's Flexible Land Tenure Act, 2012 – Ministry of Land Reform, Directorate of Land Reform and Resettlement, Republic of Namibia 2016

focus is 'to improve the living conditions of low-income people living in shacks, rented rooms, and those without any accommodation' and, simultaneously, to bring poor communities closer together to support each other. By the end of the financial year 2021/2022, the SDFN had collectively saved N\$39 million. In partnership with the government and municipal authorities, it uses the collective savings to buy blocks of low-cost land from local authorities like the City of Windhoek and allocates individual plots to member households. They can then, step by step, develop the site and construct shacks, a practice that was previously illegal. When a household has enough funds, it can start building a low-cost house with the assistance of the federation with special low-cost materials. Members can also take out a loan to buy a plot and build a shack or house. Most of the finance for acquiring land and developing houses comes from the members' savings groups and the government's annual N\$1 million contribution.

Since its inception in 1998, the Shack Dwellers Federation has built more than 7,200 brick houses nationwide for low-income and poor people in informal settlements. According to the SDFN's website, more than 30,000 people 'have moved into a life with dignity and hope – through their own commitment and persistence.'³⁹

DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP NAMIBIA

Another successful registered Namibian NGO is Development Workshop Namibia (DWN), which cooperates with donors such as B2Gold and the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development. It also focuses on informal settlements and the disadvantaged communities that reside in them. One of its programmes is Housing for All, which aims to establish a national programme to provide planned and serviced low-cost residential land. Residential plots sold through this programme cost between N\$10,000 and N\$35,000 and are settled by clients within 12

39 www.shackdwellersnamibia.com

to 24 months. A loan scheme is in place. Once the plot is fully paid off, the client is allocated the land and is required to initiate assisted low-cost construction within one year. As of December 2022, the program has developed over 4,000 plots in 17 new residential neighbourhoods in ten towns. The NGO partners with municipalities that provide the land for free. DW Namibia then plans, surveys and installs minimal services such as water points and on-site sanitation.⁴⁰

CITY OF WINDHOEK

On the internet page of the City of Windhoek, Windhoek is introduced as a “multicultural city, characterised by the tranquil co-existence and ample lebensraum for its people. Visitors and residents alike enjoy the best of both worlds from European-style culture and comforts to the vivid drumbeats of Africa.”⁴¹ Looking at Windhoek, these sentences seem to be written more for tourists than for the majority of its residents, who are far removed from European-style culture and comforts and enjoyable vivid drumbeats.

While these introductory sentences insinuate that the city is unaware of the dire straits of most of its citizens, they do not reflect what is being done. Since independence and the rapidly increasing migration to Windhoek, the city has tried various ways to tackle the situation. For example, the city created so-called reception areas where newcomers could settle provisionally (but where most have stayed) and demarcated other areas such as relocation and development areas. Also, when driving through the informal settlements, it is evident that despite all the seemingly creative chaos, the City of Windhoek is stretching its bureaucratic fingers to even the most remote areas. This is visible by big black numbers sprayed conspicuously on the external side of the front wall of the corrugated iron shacks. According to the City of

40 dw-namibia.org

41 <https://www.windhoekcc.org.na>

Windhoek, these numbers indicate that the occupants are registered with the city council and are on the plan for future upgrading.



Most informal areas have some form of structure, like broad streets, traffic signs, and numbered shacks.

The City of Windhoek and other local authorities in the country also proactively address the backlog of adequate and affordable housing in their urban areas with different policies, programmes, approaches, and experiments. While these strategies have not always brought success, they show that even with limited resources and other constraints, the situation can at least be mitigated in some ways, even if it cannot fully be resolved.

One of the city's housing programmes is the **Affordable Housing Project**, which was approved in 2016. The aim was to address the housing backlog, estimated at that time at 120,000 houses, and to promote the building of affordable houses for middle-income and ultra-low-income earners who earn less than N\$3,500 per month and live in informal settlements.⁴²

42 www.observer24.com.na. City of Windhoek Affordable Housing Programme, 16.09.2022

In 2019, the Windhoek City Council approved the **Informal Settlement Development and Upgrading Policy** to build houses in areas that already have essential services. The programme was officially launched in August 2020 in cooperation with the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development. By July 2023, the corresponding programme had delivered 570 houses to middle-income earners in various informal settlements.⁴³

The Minister of Urban and Rural Development, Erastus Utoni, described the programme as follows: 'This is a custom-made and deliberate approach to affordable, decent houses for those with very minimal incomes. Therefore, it makes us proud when we witness the transition of our people from corrugated iron shacks into proper houses. I, therefore, urge the recipients to take good care of their houses so that their children and grandchildren will have a place to call home even in the years to come.' The programme includes the establishment of so-called Neighbourhood Committees for all of Windhoek's informal settlements, which were also mentioned by several of our interview partners as something helpful. According to Utoni, 'these committees empower communities to run their own affairs and provide a coordinated and direct liaison with the city council on local issues affecting the community with the aim of improving living conditions and facilitating and encouraging self-help development.'⁴⁴

The **Informal Settlement Development and Upgrading Policy** also responded to the need of informal residents to have the occupation of their plots formally acknowledged. This happens by issuing 'Certificates of Acknowledgement of Occupation' to residents in areas such as Mix settlement, where Johanna I. told us about them. These do not provide ownership but acknowledge the occupation of a plot on municipal land and are backed by the Flexible Land Tenure Act. As of June 2022, more than 21,000 such certificates had been issued, according to the Mayoral Report 2022 of the City of Windhoek.

43 <https://thebrief.com.na>, July 2023

44 City of Windhoek, Facebook, 14 October 2022

In September 2022, during the handover of Certificates of Acknowledgement of Occupation in Otjomuise, Sade Gawanas, Mayor of Windhoek at that time, replied to the question, what the certificates mean, that 'once an area is issued with the certificates, the concerned area is locked and any person seeking to erect a structure in the area should approach the relevant department for guidance. Please accept these important documents as Council's commitment to ensure all residents of Windhoek have a decent place to call home.'⁴⁵

She added that occupants no longer need to fear eviction once given certificates, allowing them to engage in economic and social activities. They are also allowed to erect permanent structures once they have contacted the municipality so that erfes can be properly demarcated, and they receive title deeds before they start construction.⁴⁶



In 2020, Khomas regional governor Laura McLeod-Katjirua handed certificates to 730 Otjomuise residents, acknowledging their occupation of municipal land. The Namibian, 19 October 2020.

45 <https://www.windhoekcc.org.na>

46 *New Era* 17.09.2020

After the meeting, Kahungu elaborated, 'We want to provide land. Our concentration is not on housing this time. We are emphasising more on providing land – and not just land but ownership to land.'

In 2021, the City of Windhoek also launched the **Windhoek Spatial Development Framework**, and in 2022, the Council introduced the **Transformation Strategic Plan 2022-2027**, which focuses on basic services, land delivery, and formalising and upgrading informal settlements.⁴⁷

All these programmes are partially successful, but the fact remains: there is a lack of implementation due to limited capacity and cumbersome bureaucracy, but mainly because of a lack of funds. According to the Revised National Housing Policy 2022, the government will have to spend more than N\$2 billion annually to provide adequate and affordable housing to ultra-low- and low-income Namibians (about 88% of households nationally) by 2030.⁴⁸ However, already in February 2015, then Windhoek Mayor Muesee Kazapua said the lack of housing and the acute shortage of serviced plots for housing had been brought about mainly by the lack of adequate financial resources.⁴⁹ The same year, city spokesperson Lydia Amutenya explained the impasse the city faces. On the one hand, it is mandated to deliver municipal services for all residents, with most residents being unable to afford these due to unemployment and poverty. On the other hand, besides property rate taxes, the city's revenues mainly rely on charges for providing water, electricity, refuse removal, sanitation, and other services for its residents.⁵⁰

The same is true for land. The city owns townland, which has a high market value on which the city relies for finances. At the same time, the city must acknowledge and accept that a large part of the land cannot

47 Mayoral Report 2022 – City of Windhoek

48 *Republikein*, Jo-Mare Duddy Booysen, 16 February 2022

49 Statement by His Worship the Mayor of the City of Windhoek, Cllr. Muesee Kazapua, 24.02. 2015

50 *Namibian Sun*, 17.07.2015

be used to **make** money but must be used to **spend** money for the sake of its poor citizens. To develop the City of Windhoek into a peaceful and prosperous town, the municipality is thus caught between a pro-poor and a capitalist market orientation. On the one hand, the city urgently needs to use its urban land to generate income by selling or renting land to the highest bidders or other profitable land uses. On the other hand, it has to provide land for the town's ever-increasing and primarily poor population. This means not much income for the city's coffers from its largest asset, namely land, and huge expenses for providing the essential services when people are settled on it. Making land available for the majority of poor residents, which includes servicing or partial servicing, comes at a high expense and is, at the present pace and with the current funding, only partially possible.

Children fetching water at a communal water point.



Evidently, there is no lack of knowledge, ideas, or programmes. However, the rapid growth of informal settlements, rising poverty, and crowded and unhealthy living conditions are stretching the City of Windhoek's limits.⁵¹ Financial, bureaucratic, and other restraints hamper the implementation of positive initiatives and policies, while people are urgently waiting for a comprehensive people-orientated concept for providing land and affordable housing to the majority of the poor. Therefore, the different attempts at solutions by the City of Windhoek, government and NGOs can only be seen as damage control – trying to plug holes in a dam while the flood water continues flowing. In the face of the rising wave of newcomers to the city without the perspective of a better life, it is almost a miracle that this situation has not yet resulted in large-scale dangerous social unrest and more crime and that there is still basic social peace.

Therefore, my last question to our interview partners was: How do people survive without land or secure tenure and with little or no money, let alone a regular income, in our city, Windhoek? What is the worst thing they are experiencing daily, and what is the first thing they would like to change? What do they experience as the most inhuman? And what keeps them going, what helps them to survive in difficult times under impoverished circumstances?

All the more than 60 interviewees were asked the following three questions: What is good (what helps you to survive?), what is bad (what makes life particularly hard for you?), and what is ugly (what is most inhuman in your situation?). I did not only ask these questions out of curiosity but also to draw attention to priorities for short-term changes and improvements.

51 In Windhoek, informal settlements are growing at a rate of 10% each year, according to Sade Gawanas, the city's former mayor and member of the Landless People's Movement (LPM). (*Namibian Sun* 2023-05-06)

5 The challenges, wishes, and coping mechanisms of the people

I started with ‘the ugly’ – and almost all respondents immediately replied, ‘The ugliest thing in our life is that we do not have toilets.’ Consequently, to the question about the first thing they wanted to change, they replied, ‘To have a proper toilet in our houses or that more public toilets are built.’

For many residents in the informal settlements, blocked communal toilets or defecation in riverbeds or in the bush is the only option. Mirjam K., who lives in Greenwell Matongo, showed me where people relieve themselves in her area – in a dirty, smelly riverbed near her shack where sanitary pads, excrement, and tissues litter the ground.

‘What is the ugliest?’ she repeated my question. ‘That we do not have toilets on our erf or in the house. There are only public toilets, but many are broken, some are locked by people, and then we must go to the bush, which is very dangerous.’⁵²

Riaan !U., aged 24, lives in Okahandja Park and loves writing poetry; when asked about the ‘ugly’, his spontaneous answer was, ‘The public toilets. They are so dirty, unhealthy, and smelling – I think they are really inhuman, it makes our life so undignified.’

‘People relieve themselves everywhere,’ one young woman said, ‘and men relieve themselves in front of other people, this makes you feel so uncomfortable.’

52 According to the Namibian Chamber of Environment (NCE), more than half of the people living in informal settlements lack access to any toilets at all. The NCE also estimates that more than 40 tons of human faeces are deposited through open defecation each day in Windhoek’s informal settlements alone. (*The Namibian*, 2 May 2023)



Broken and dirty communal toilets, The Namibian, 24 January 2020.

The absence of toilets in the houses or nearby public toilets is also particularly unsafe for women, who are in danger of being robbed or sexually assaulted when seeking the privacy of the bush. Crime, in general, was also mentioned by women as something extremely 'ugly' in their environment.

For example, Frieda T., 54, said, 'There is no safety. There is crime everywhere, especially in wintertime when it is dark in the mornings and the evenings. People grab your handbag, and if

you hold on, they hit you, also if you are an old woman. After eight in the evening, you cannot walk out of the house. We have become almost used to it; we don't even complain anymore.'



A self-made toilet in the yard of a shack in Greenwell Matongo. Photograph by H. Falk.

This was confirmed by Mirjam K. 'The location is not safe,' she said. 'People grab your cell phone, some of them are waiting in the riverbed, and there is no police activity. In some areas, people work together, and they beat up the gangsters, but not here. The gangsters are from the families in the location, and when the police come, they are hiding them in their houses.'

Mirjam K. also mentioned the lack of waste management as something very ugly: 'They don't give us plastic bags anymore. The municipality gave the waste management to small businesses with a contract, but then these just sell the bags; for the last five years, we did not get any bags. You buy your own bags and then take them to the big containers, but some people only throw the garbage anywhere on a free piece of land, and the municipality also does not empty the containers regularly. The municipality only comes when the water meters are broken, and this is because they make money with the water meters.'

During our interviews, there were often rather heavy rains. Thus, the problem of rainwater was also mentioned several times as something ugly.



Lack of waste management is evident.



Waste management by the City of Windhoek.

‘When it is raining, life is not easy. Where we stay, in the corrugated iron shacks, the water seeps or drips inside where you sleep. The rain is good for the other side of town, and I know that we need rain, but what it does to our houses, there is no remorse, it destroys,’ said Riaan.

Another young man added, ‘When it rains, it’s a disaster. It flows into the huts, it is wet and cold, and when it is not raining, it’s extremely hot. You burn yourself when you touch the iron sheets of the shack, and in winter, it is extremely cold. The bright silver sheets also blind your eyes. They are glaring in the sun.’

The City of Windhoek, the government and the media are aware of this abject ‘ugly’ situation. According to *The Namibian* of 2 May 2023, over one million Namibians nationwide do not have adequate access to toilets. According to the World Health Organization, Namibia ranks sixth for the highest rates of open defecation in the world and very low in southern Africa. In March 2023, Namibian Prime Minister Saara Kuuugongelwa-Amadhila admitted that the government had ‘identified the need to improve universal access to sanitation and hygiene in informal urban settlements and rural communities.’ In 2021, the

government had already launched the Namibia Water Sector Support Programme (NWSSP), with the aim to improve sanitation for one million Namibians, funded by a loan from the Africa Development Bank. However, until today, the scheme's major projects are still in the design and procurement phase.⁵³

A non-governmental organisation, Development Workshop Namibia (DW), is making a concrete effort to help communities across the country to become 'open defecation free' (ODF) and provide urban residents in Namibia with improved sanitation. They work with volunteers and communities in informal settlements in ten towns across the country, supporting residents in informal settlements to build safe, low-cost toilets. By 2022, there were nine participating towns, including Windhoek. By December 2022, residents had constructed 5,254 toilets, providing access to safe sanitation to more than 7,000 families or 22,000 residents.⁵⁴

Providing decent and enough toilets for the Namibian population should undoubtedly become a priority and a matter of course for our government and city councils. During our interviews, it became clear that this was seen as the minimum of dignity a government should grant its citizens.

THE NOISE – AND NO LIBRARY

Next, we asked the question: What is the worst for you in your settlement, and what is your most urgent wish? What was striking about the answers of the school-going youth was that they were very similar. As mentioned before, their first and foremost challenges are having affordable transport to school and studying effectively at home. For the latter, the noisy environment was cited as something 'really bad.'

53 *Namibian Sun* 2023-05-06

54 www.dw-namibia.org

Silas S. lives in a shack in Otjomuise, Sewende Laan, with his little brother and sister. He said, 'For us young people going to school, it is hard to concentrate on our studies, as there are shebeens and bars, open 24/7, making excessive noise, playing music very loud, and I don't have taxi money to go to a library to study there in peace. I also struggle to sleep at night, and it is difficult for me to concentrate during class.'

Most other young people also mentioned the noise pollution from bars and shebeens that create an extremely 'noisy environment' and do not close at prescribed times. They also sell alcohol to minors, leading to 'uncontrolled alcohol consumption' and crime with 'no security to prevent fights and conflict.'

Riaan commented, 'The shebeens – they are everywhere, they are so noisy, a lot of partying is going on, people get drunk, and they fight, it is traumatic being outside then. I would really love so much to live in a quiet place.'

Also, the senior citizens interviewed, while seeing youth unemployment as 'the worst', regarded noise pollution as something 'very bad' and agreed that the many shebeens negatively influence the youth.

Johannes T., 66, said, 'The worst thing is noise pollution. I cannot sleep properly because of five shebeens next to my house.'

Rachel M., 70, commented, 'The worst thing about living in Okuryangava is the violence, drugs, and noisy, loud music.'

Selma S., living in Samora Machel, said, 'The worst thing is violence, drugs, and hubbly bubbly. My one wish is for my sons to get jobs.'

And Ruth S., 59, complained, 'The worst thing in my community is that already the young children are involved in alcohol and drug abuse and crime like drug selling and break-ins. Also, it is very loud, and I cannot sleep during weekends because of the shebeens. The first thing I would change is that drug and alcohol abuse would stop. We old people do not know what to do about it. Most old people just sit and watch and are crying. In all locations, there is the same problem.'



A shebeen in the middle of a residential area.

Back to the youth: When asked about their greatest wish, 12 out of the 16 school-going youth, replied: a library in our settlement.

Hafeni N., 19 years old, living in Okuryangava in a rented shack with his younger brother, said, 'We need libraries in Okuryangava. A proper facility to study effectively, that has an internet connection, where the youth can get help with their schoolwork, a library with proper books that help us to do research, because, at school, we are not provided with enough books, so a library would help us, just any place where we can get help with our schoolwork.'

And Martha A. from Mix settlement said, 'We do not have a library where we can study or have access to the internet. Not all of us have enough pocket money to buy Aweh (mobile phone credit) and access the internet because not all our parents have employment. I try my best to have at least Aweh twice a week so that I can finish my assignments in time, but what I really want is a community library with free internet so that we can do our research and finish our assignments on time.'

As mentioned before, for the unemployed youth, the absolutely worst is their joblessness and, therefore, their inability to build their future. For the few young people who have some kind of informal job, the lack of infrastructure and services was the 'worst', making their life and even keeping their jobs very difficult.

Thomas N., 23, lives in Greenwell Extension 6 in a shack. He gets to work and back by municipal bus. His main problem is that there is no electricity connection in Greenwell. Therefore, the only way to cook food is on an open fire. 'After work, I have to collect wood and sticks to make a fire and cook my food, and when it rains, I sleep hungry, as there is no way to cook a decent meal. During the rainy season, it is especially hard. Many people here try to connect electricity illegally, but it's a risk. Fetching water is also far because no tap water is available at the houses.'

Others also mentioned that 'sometimes there is no eating, and the children go to school hungry the next day,' and also that 'some house owners use candles and sometimes kids play with burning candles which can cause fire as well as to the next house.'

THE SANDWICH GENERATION

When asking the middle generation about the 'worst' in their settlement, the responses varied, depending on their economic situation, their type of settlement, and the services provided or lacking. For those who have some kind of income and live in a rented or their own shack, the worst is also the lack of services.

Andreas I., 33, said, 'We do not have water and electricity in our homes, so when you come home late from work, you must first walk far to collect water. It would be so good to just come home, you just wash and cook and sleep. The city must provide water and electricity to every plot.'

'We have no running water in the house,' said Frieda T., 'and we have to get water from some neighbours. During the rainy time, we collect rainwater in tubs, and with this, we do our washing. We sometimes get electricity for the lights from a solar panel.'

And Anna K., 44, who lives in Goreangab with her two children in her own house, said, 'The worst thing is that there is no water, no electricity and no toilets.'

For several women, the lack of safety in their area is a huge problem.

Hilma K., 45, who lives in Goreangab, said, 'There are no streetlights in our area, and it is dangerous to walk in the darkness when we are going to work in the morning.'

Hileni S. said, 'That there are no streetlights is a huge problem because it is very dark for many hours, and there are robbers on the street, and we do not have a police station nearby.'

For those who live on the far outskirts of town, the distance to public services, the lack of transport, or the high transport cost are significant issues.

Tuwilika K., 28, living in Goreangab, said, 'We are far from public services, and we have to walk far to catch a taxi.'

Anna K., 44, commented, 'The road where we can catch a taxi is far from me and also the hospital and clinics.'

Fransina Shikombo, 42, living in Okahandja Park, said, 'The higher institutions are far from us, and kindergarten and pre-primary schools are few in our location. The children are just there, not attending school because there isn't money for transport.'



Children left on their own.

'The hospital is very far, also the schools; the girls walk to school every day, about 90 minutes in the morning, and then back again,' said Helvi I., aged 33. 'The shops are also very far away. Everything is far from us.'

In Mix settlement, 20km north of Windhoek, the absence of a primary school is one of the biggest problems for parents of school-going children. When we visited Johanna I., we saw at the edge of the settlement a newly built school in bright blue and green colours. 'It was built many years ago,' Johanna I. informed us, 'but it has not yet opened. There is still no school for schoolchildren like my own son. He is in grade 4. His father drives him and several other kids to schools in Windhoek every weekday, which is very expensive. Taxi fares are around 600 to 700 Dollars a month. Many kids do not go to school or have dropped out when there is no money for transport. The school was already constructed in 2017, but they say it cannot be opened because of a lack of electricity and water. They say they are still busy with the installation.'

Other interview partners also defined the noise level in their area as 'very bad'.

'Life in this settlement is very difficult and risky, and the location is dirty, the music is everywhere and anytime, we cannot rest, and our children cannot study because of the loud noise,' said Hilma K.

Fransina S., 42, who lives in Okahandja Park, remarked, 'The worst thing in this settlement is that people are drinking alcohol too much and noise is everywhere.'

And for some residents, simply their unbearable poverty is the worst.

When we asked Hileni S., 'What is the worst for you living here?', she replied, 'That often my kids have to go to school on an empty stomach. And we were not even included in the food bank project.'

She tries to make some money by cooking Ovambo chicken for sale and takes us to a backyard behind her shack, where we see a pot on a firewood fire. 'We can't cook on gas,' she said. 'We have no money for that.'

‘GOOD DAYS IN A SAD LIFE’

The last question we asked was, ‘What is good in your life? What helps you to go on, what helps you to survive?’ The hope was to end the interviews with something positive that could show a crack in the huge wall of difficulties where the light could get in.⁵⁵

Many elderly interview partners and the ‘sandwich generation’ referred to the community as something that helps them deal with daily hardships and feel at home in their settlement. More than half of the respondents mentioned the assistance of their neighbourhood in various ways.

A young woman we spoke to at a market stall remarked, ‘What helps me is this togetherness to build a good community. We stand together, and we communicate with each other.’ Her neighbour added, ‘Bonding is very high in our community. Community members are there for each other. And we help each other as individuals.’

A young woman, Constanca S., commented, ‘We assist each other in tough times, e.g., funerals or accidents. Also, some business owners help customers in tough times. They can buy goods and pay later or at the end of the month. You feel at home here, even though we are poor, we feel here is our home.’

Many more mentioned how ‘community members unite to



The children lend a helping hand in the community.

55 *There is a crack, a crack in everything. / That's how the light gets in. (Leonard Cohen)*

solve problems.’ They come together as groups or neighbourhood committees, often elect a group leader, and discuss ‘ways to get electricity or some people try to do peace-building exercises in their community.’

Others mentioned that ‘community members share important information if there are vacancies for jobs etc. We learn from people in our community. As a human being, you will learn things that will change your life from bad to good.’



A young man teaching kids in his community.

An elderly woman said, ‘A helpful thing is that I am close to my church (Evangelical), so I can pray when I want.’

Despite a lack of traditional family structures in urban areas, community spirit and social cohesion seem to have evolved in different forms, at least in some areas. Establishing community boards and neighbourhood committees also plays a role. It is interesting to note that only one person mentioned the church when this question was asked.

Although the lack of services is deplored by many living in the far outskirts of Windhoek, others, most of them from the northern rural areas, are thankful for the services they receive and the opportunities

the city provides. Some stressed that even though life is challenging, many aspects of life are better in town than in their rural homes.

Some comments were:

‘My place is rather safe and near the road, so I can easily get a taxi to work.’

‘What we got from the government are the water points for which we have to pay.’



An extended family in Okahandja Park.

‘We are connected with water and electricity, and also the schools and clinics and hospitals are not so far like in the rural areas.’

‘The good? To live in an informal settlement is actually quite cheap. You do not pay for a plot, you do not pay rent, you just register with the community board without payment.’

‘Waste management is consistent; black plastic bags are distributed 4 times a month, and we can collect cans and sell them.’

‘Schools are available and often nearby, also health clinics, bus stops, and taxi stops.’



A school in an informal settlement.

'We have access to the internet for learning, we can use our smartphones or laptop, we can use it for the internet as a student.'

'There is a shopping area nearby; cuca shops are available for daily needs.'

Joanna I. from Mix settlement, whom we met at her stall where she sold meat pieces in a delicious-smelling sauce, said, 'Nearby are three abattoirs, and we can buy meat there, very cheap. And yes, we have water taps here, many. We buy prepaid cards at the municipality, very cheap. And we also have many communal toilets and three times a week there comes a mobile clinic from Windhoek, that's also very good.'

One young man, Andre V., mentioned that he really appreciates the Katutura Pet Care and Feeding Project, which comes to poor townships to feed dogs and cats. 'They come twice a year and give them food and wash the dogs. They also arrange for cats and dogs to be spayed or de-worm them,' he told us.

Several interview partners also stated that more job opportunities are available in the town than in the rural areas, especially informal employment such as selling fruit, vegetables, meat, or second-hand clothing, running a small hair salon or a shebeen, working informally

as a mechanic or selling sweets and cooldrinks at traffic lights on the streets.

‘Living in the settlement is good. When you have a business, you can make good prices, and there are a lot of people in the settlement area. You can see customers.’

‘More business opportunities are available here than in the rural area. There are many ways you can make money.’



Selling meat in Mix settlement.

A shop owner in Eveline Street whom we asked about his business mentioned a highly appreciated service for shop owners – Jabu. ‘It has made my life as a shop owner so much easier and also helped me to make bigger profits. I used to buy my goods at different outlets in town, and for this, I had to close my shop and pay money for a taxi. Now I can call Jabu on my phone, and they deliver everything I need directly to my shop for free.’

Jabu Logistics was founded in 2020, according to Charlotte Cranz, product manager, and assists shop owners in informal settlements to order supplies for their businesses. Jabu’s customers include small

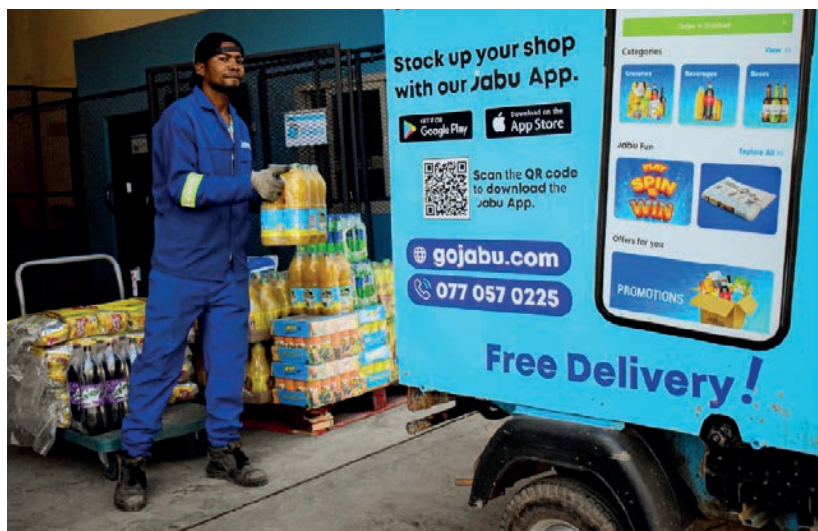


Photo: Jabu Logistics: www.gojabu.com

retailers, bakeries, restaurants, bars, mini-markets, and street vendors. Jabu charges normal shop prices and has its own distribution centres in the cities where it operates. They have dozens of own trucks plus external partners to deliver the ordered goods daily. They currently serve several thousand shops in Katutura and employ around 400 people.

Appreciation of better services and business opportunities coincide with the findings of the JUST CITY NAMIBIA Report of 2022, published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (submitted by Survey Waterhouse) about citizens who had moved from rural into urban areas. The survey included 500 interviews with people in urban Windhoek of different ages and gender. The survey found that access to services like electricity, piped water systems, and sewage systems, as well as transport, schools, markets, and clinics, was rated much higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Also, most felt that the living conditions in the city were 'fairly good', while only 20% said this about living in rural areas.

Sadly, two women who had also come from the north could not find anything 'good' in their present life. Anna K., 44, said, 'I came some

years ago to the city of Windhoek, but there is nothing good I have experienced living here.' There was just weary hopelessness.

WHAT KEEPS YOU GOING?

As a last question, Freddy and Riaan also asked the young people, 'Despite the hardship you are experiencing, what keeps you going?'

For those with jobs, it is simply their job.

David S., 25, said, 'What keeps me going is my job because I work and can pay at least all the rent, and I sleep under a roof, even if it is only a shack, and I can buy food to eat and keep healthy and stay well.'

Joseph S., 17, who lives in Samora Machel, said, 'Despite the hardships I am going through, what keeps me is me going to work and having my little brother go to kindergarten; it keeps me going because knowing my little brother and me are doing our things. I know there is hope somewhere in the future, and I will make sure I get through.'

Most other young people, such as Bert T., mentioned sports as something that made them happy and kept them going. 'What helps me as a young person to have a good time in Katutura is watching

Playing soccer keeps the youth off the streets.



soccer matches at the Sam Nujoma Stadium with my friends. It is a lot of fun as it keeps us busy and occupied with things that make us happy, knowing we are ploughing back into the community and supporting the locals.'

Some other comments were:

'We play netball, me and the girls in Mix settlement, and this motivates us to keep going. It also keeps us off the streets.'

'We in Mix settlement have a soccer field, and it keeps us busy by cheering and watching the settlement guys play for money. It actually helps someone to come out and show they are talented, so it is keeping us busy and having a good time.'

'We have a soccer and a netball field, where we keep ourselves busy, especially during the weekend. It is keeping us away from alcohol, instead of just abusing alcohol and drugs. It is a good thing to have a soccer field. It can make somebody come out as a soccer player and show that he has talent.'

'What helps us in my township to survive is that I love playing soccer, but we play in an open space that we built ourselves, me and my soccer guys, and we sometimes play for money, and that is fun. It keeps us busy, and with time, we became better at playing soccer and developed skills.'

Several young men also mentioned the Wanaheda Outdoor Fitness Centre established by the City of Windhoek in the Tugela Family Park in Wanaheda, for which no fees are charged.

'What makes my friends and me enjoy is exercising at the Wanaheda Outdoor gym. We enjoy keeping fit regularly, and it is a protected and safe training area, so there is no bullying, and I like that. People from all parts of Katutura come here. It helps me to build my body and keeps us young people off the streets.'



The Wanaheda Outdoor Fitness Centre. Photograph by G.Fasse

Others mentioned their studies, such as Albertus W., 22, who said, 'What keeps me going as a young person is that I am a student attending NUST, and this is my final year, knowing that I am almost done with my studies.'

And several young women mentioned a youth programme.

Jemmy R., 20, living in Shandumbala, said, 'I attend a programme in my location called DREAMS every Saturday. It teaches and mentors girls about teenage pregnancy, family planning and HIV/AIDS, and it also helps us to further our studies or helps us to start a small business and make a living from that. This has kept me and many girls going – and off the streets. Despite the challenges I'm facing, it has kept me motivated and going, as I'm an orphan, and I really appreciate that there is such a programme in my location, I'm so grateful for that.'

Another young woman remarked, 'Attending this centre in Shandumbala where we do exercises that help us to study effectively and develop skills to become better helps me a lot, and we also do fun stuff like going out on tours and seeing a lot of cool things. I can say this makes us girls at the centre have a good time and become better.'

Two young men were also aware of this programme and were sad it was only for girls. 'Why are we not included? We also have dreams, we also have problems. Why are we left out? What have we done?'

I finally asked Riaan !U., the poet, who is also unemployed, 'What keeps you going?'

'What keeps me going is that I write poetry. Writing poems about my life pushes me and motivates me. I make sure that I write every day, and I hope that I will one day look back and say, it was good that you wrote these poems. They kept you going. They transcended the bad things that I see and experience every day.'

Here is one of his poems:

Welcome to my life by Riaan Rivaldo

*After the morning prayer
I'm staring at the sunrise.
I'm from the darker side of the globe,
still holding on to that rope of hope.
I live good days in a sad life.
My face plays the friendly
but there are problems
piling up behind that cute smile.
I stay in an environment of dead
poets' society,
came a long way together with
famine.
And this is what the heart speaks,
and my pen bleeds the ink,
tears run while I write this.
I studied the semantics,
rewriting my story in Braille
doing meditations for new
intentions –
I'm another teen from Africa.*



Riaan and his cousin Ronaldo in their bedroom in a shack in Okahandja Park.

The answers to our last question about the '*good days in a sad life*' and how people are '*still holding on to that rope of hope*' show their amazing strength and resilience. This presents a not-to-be-missed opportunity to still turn the tide and work on more and better and more speedily implemented solutions.

In almost all articles, books, analyses, statistics, essays, case studies, small human-interest stories, and on social media and in newspapers, urban migration is analysed as a huge social, economic, and political problem. But is the unstoppable move of citizens to our cities not also a chance to use for the benefit of the country as a whole?

According to economic analyst Klaus Schade, rural-urban migration could be a blessing in disguise. According to him, providing basic services, including schools, clinics, hospitals and transport, is less costly in densely populated towns than in rural areas, where people live far away from each other and from town centres. Also, government services such as business registration and driver's licenses are more accessible to the urban than the rural population. Schade also mentions that the regions that experienced the highest population growth rates between 1991 and 2011, namely the Erongo and Khomas Regions, had the lowest (Khomas) and third lowest (Erongo) unemployment rates in 2014.⁵⁶

Urban planner Martin Mendelsohn therefore writes that in the long run, the 'provision of urban land is quite possibly the most cost-effective, dignified, easiest, and best long-term solution to economic, social, and environmental development we have in Namibia.'⁵⁷

Last but not least, it would make a fundamental right under Article 8 (1) of the Namibian Constitution a political reality: 'The dignity of all persons shall be inviolable.'

56 NMH as an EAN Business 7 contribution, 8.03 2017

57 The Namibian, 14.09.2018

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Last but not least, I thank the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung for their support throughout the research and writing of this book and their willingness to give a voice to the people on the ground.

Erika von Wietersheim

September 2023

More than two years after the launch of the second edition of *This Land Is My Land*, Erika von Wietersheim has once again embarked on a journey to learn more about how the land issue personally affects people on the ground. This time, she explores the situation in urban areas, particularly in the fast-growing, crowded, and poverty-stricken formal and informal settlements of Windhoek/Katutura.

In more than 60 interviews, von Wietersheim sat down with young people, elderly people, and middle-aged men and women. Some still went to school, some were pensioners, others were employed, many were unemployed, and some had a small, insecure income from day to day. She listened to their experiences and views regarding land and housing in urban areas and asked: What matters most to you? How do you manage to survive? What gives you hope?

Erika von Wietersheim, author

Erika von Wietersheim is a Namibian freelance journalist, author, and international correspondent. She has been involved in numerous national and international projects promoting social and political development and intercultural understanding. She is the author of *This land is my land – motions and emotions around land reform in Namibia*, published by the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation in 2008, 2021 and 2023.



Valentino M Nyambali, photographer

Valentino Nyambali from Icebreaker Photography says, *"Working on this project was an absolute glee for me. Discovering the most valuable lesson was to appreciate the little you have and live life to the best of your ability, helping others and being hopeful for a better tomorrow. The joy and laughter on the kids' faces was just priceless, and I was glad to be part of a journey that I could capture and tell the story for the next person."*



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