



THE NEW LAND QUESTION

Event 2: The urban land question

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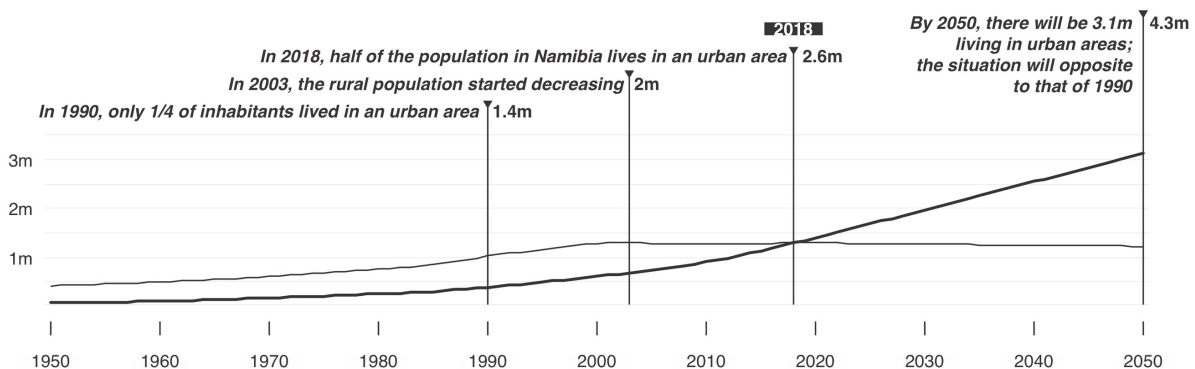
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This second event of 'The New Land Question' programme focused on the urban land question, and discussed a paper to be submitted on this matter to the Second Land Conference.

PREAMBLE

Urbanisation is a defining character of our times. 'The right to the city' is not only the right to live in a city, but the right to change it (Harvey, 2008). This is important because by changing the places we live we change ourselves. Namibia's cities and spaces are the result of an Apartheid-modernist regime aimed to separate. Just as past regimes developed a comprehensive plan to effect divisive policies in the country (e.g. the Odendaal plan), today the Second Land Conference provides an opportunity to deliberate a plan for a new way of producing the cities and spaces where we live.



Source: (UNDESA, 2018)

THESES ON URBANISATION IN NAMIBIA

1. Namibia's future will be predominantly urban. Although on a statistical level this might be understood, the deeper implications of an urban future have not been well articulated.
2. Namibia will need to accommodate 2million additional urban inhabitants by 2050. At this point, the proportion of those living in urban and rural areas will be the opposite of that in 1990. The provision of housing that would be required every year to meet the need, is more than the total numbers of houses provided through state-supported mechanisms since independence.



3. Government expenditure on housing and urban development has been insufficient, compared with much higher levels of investment in OECD countries, Zambia or South Africa.
4. The vast majority of households are excluded from the 'formal' housing market. The Namibia Labour Force Survey (2014) indicates that almost 90% of households earn less than N\$5,000 per month and only about 4% has a monthly income above N\$10,000 (Chiripanhura, 2018).
5. Urbanisation is largely driven by inhabitants mobilising their resources at the grassroots level. Efforts like Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia and other self-organised groups provide examples of how grassroots-led urban development takes place, how it can be supported (or frustrated) by local authorities' professionals.
6. The informal economy is becoming the largest base for employment in Namibia, estimated at two-thirds of employment. Urban planning and development need to acknowledge this reality to actively empower the informal economy.
7. The prevailing low-density suburban model is unsustainable and reproduces social inequality. This is not only expensive to develop and service, but creates a low future rates base, provides little opportunities for informal economies to emerge, and is generally expensive to maintain, both for local authorities and for inhabitants.
8. Emphasis on 'ownership' over other forms of security of tenure can have the opposite effect, namely endangering security of tenure of the urban poor. International experience shows that titling programmes are effective when there's a relative balance between supply and demand (Payne, Durand-Lasserve, & Rakodi, 2009), unlike the case of Namibia. The urban poor are prone to sell in distress situations, even when there's clauses preventing the sale, as transactions may take place informally.
9. Innovation takes place largely at the local government level. Some local authorities have developed planned layouts preparing informal settlements for future upgrading; others have developed local forms of titling; and others have developed a collaborative approach to engage with informal settlement groups. However, local authorities' funding is in pressing need of reform to enable such innovation.
10. The commercial private sector can't provide systemic solutions for the urban poor beyond charity. Public-private partnerships are effective for credit-linked medium-density (rental) houses, but not where there is lack of 'effective demand' (i.e. those in need of a house *with* the funds to acquire it at market prices).
11. Rural and urban development needs to be jointly addressed. New policy and frameworks for the urban need to take the entire territory as a whole.
12. Urbanisation represents a unique opportunity to focus state-supported development efforts, as cities are inherently public, contain a vast amount of opportunities for livelihoods generation, education and other social benefits, and are places where existing networks are intense and can be mobilised to meet public development efforts half-way.



POTENTIAL 'GAME CHANGERS'

The right to adequate housing. This United Nations definition is comprehensive and covers various aspects of housing, learning from past international experience (OHCHR, n.d.): 'Adequate housing' is not just affordable houses, but also needs to be tenure-secure, culturally adequate, optimally located, supported with infrastructure, among others. It does not mean that government should provide houses for everyone, but that it must support the 'progressive attainment' of adequate housing over time.

Prime focus on land delivery. Through informal settlement upgrading and planned layouts with local, flexible forms of titling, major strides can be made in the provision of urban land for sustainable urban development for the vast majority of citizens.

Focus public investment on public infrastructure. Support for livelihoods opportunities (e.g. informal markets), educational and health facilities, recreational facilities, and transport infrastructure that are required to have a dignified life in urban areas.

Review urban design and planning. Higher density urban development and an increase in the variety of housing opportunities (including regulated rental housing) can make housing more affordable, flexible, and more widely available.

Incremental housing development. Embrace a form of development that is progressively attained, and that provides a framework for a different kind of urbanisation to develop from the onset.

DISCUSSION

Land debates, both urban and rural, are often driven by political considerations. Urban land can be a key device in reducing poverty in the country as a whole.

How does one change the narrative enabling 'formal' institutions to support 'informal processes'? There is a perception that acknowledging 'the informal' is 'breaking the law', but the reality is that the formal and the informal need to meet each other half way.

Solutions will differ, whether you depart from the disadvantaged point of view or the privileged point of view. Therefore it is important to include disadvantaged groups in the discussion, so that the decision-making process does not become too technical and does not speak about 'the poor' as 'the other' living 'elsewhere', but as 'us'.

It is also important to acknowledge the issue of representation. Organisations like Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia represent tens of thousands of members, so their arguments should carry more weight than individual contributions.

What would 'social housing' mean in the context of Namibia? The Mass Housing blueprint mentioned social housing, but it did not unpack what such programme would entail.

There is a need to have periodic fora where urban issues are discussed, and the university is a strategic place to do so.



References

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About ‘The New Land Question’ programme The aim is to activate the university as a platform to re-examine ‘the land question’ in Namibia, define the contemporary nature of the situation, and identify emerging questions from a contemporary, multi-disciplinary, and projective point of view. The programme is coordinated by the Integrated Land Management Institute (ILMI) and led by a committee that can be reached at newlandquestion@nust.na