



Integrated Land Management Institute

HOUSING

Background

Namibia is compelled to observe and to undertake efforts to realise the right to adequate housing, since it has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1994. In short, the right to adequate housing does not mean that governments should build a house for every citizen, but it does compel them to demonstrate that they are taking steps to realise this right for every citizen. This right includes security of tenure; availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; affordability; habitability; accessibility; adequate location; and cultural adequacy. It furthermore includes protection against forced evictions, arbitrary interference with one's home, and the right to determine one's place of living. Furthermore, this right is envisioned to be progressively attained.

What has been done?

- Before independence, there was no 'national housing policy' as such. The Namibia Building Investment Corporation (NBIC, or 'Nasboukor' for its initials in Afrikaans) was established in 1978 and produced housing for low-income groups, but this was not favoured by conservative municipalities due to low standards and it was also not favoured by beneficiaries as they perceived the products to be inferior and costly.
- A month after independence, a workshop on housing was convened and the first National Housing Policy was drafted soon thereafter. The policy was very comprehensive and positioned the National Housing Enterprise (NHE) as the government agency responsible for providing affordable and quality housing. It was also in this document where the minimum erf size of 300m² was established, which was a directive from the Minister of Local Government and Housing at that time. The policy was reviewed in 2008 to include the Build Together Programme and the efforts of the Shack Dwellers Federation.
- NHE is the government parastatal in charge of housing and serves those in the 'gap market' i.e. those earning a stable income ranging between N\$4,000 and 30,000 per month. This is the sector of low- and medium-level government workers. However, the institution is characterised by its slow pace of delivery. It only develops about 400 units every year.
- The Build Together Programme was established in 1992 with external support as a form of state-supported micro-credit lender for land and housing development and improvements managed by the line ministry (today Ministry of Urban and Rural Development). The programme was decentralised in 2007 to local authorities and although some capacity issues hindered the initial phases, the programme remains active and is arguably the government programme with the widest reach.
- The Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia emerged from an association of housing groups established in the 1980s and today count almost 30,000 members among their ranks or about 1% of the Namibian population. Through saving groups they have managed to mobilise resources to develop blocks of land, build housing, improve living conditions, and to provide other non-housing-related loans. Their key challenge is access to suitable urban land with infrastructure.
- The Mass Housing Development Programme was launched in 2013 and had seven sub-programmes aimed at building 180,000 units by 2030. The first phase focused only on one sub-programme, namely the delivery of credit-linked housing. Due to various obstacles, the programme was discontinued in 2015 and is currently under review by a team led by NUST.
- Namibia has witnessed the emergence of gated communities (sectional title developments) and 'lifestyle estates' geared towards maximum profit-extraction, which only serves to enhance the segregated nature of the urban experience.
- The Habitat Research and Development Centre (HRDC) was developed to explore alternative construction materials and other 'habitat-related' issues, however, it has reportedly not accomplished its goals.
- In 2016, the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) movement legally challenged government to institute rent controls, however a decision on this proposal has yet to materialise.
- There is no 'social housing' nor a comprehensive system of subsidies for the provision of housing in Namibia. Government maintains a number of residential properties (e.g. government flats), and while local authorities have sold most of their housing stock, it still maintains some units.

Evidence so far

- State expenditure on the built environment has been comparatively insufficient in comparison with neighbouring countries.
- That which has been spent to date indicates that government funding is best suited for the provision of bulk infrastructure; coordinating housing needs and urban development; supporting people's processes, and keeping their activities and programmes up to date.
- Commercial finance is only able to serve those with formal employment or considerable economic means, but even this demographic is increasingly becoming a minority in Namibia today.
- New materials can help to reduce some costs and the environmental footprint, but the total cost of housing cannot be reduced with this alone.
- Most of the housing being developed currently comprises of single-family homes on individual plots, which has proven to be expensive from the land servicing point of view and may not be adequate to cater for every demographic (e.g. bachelors, youth, elderly, single couples).
- Land use embeds high costs in land for housing by imposing planning restrictions, densities, and development regulation

Missing evidence

- Comprehensive audits of land allocated by local authorities for housing, the nature of beneficiaries, and the impact on their development.
- Audit and review of the Build Together Programme, nature and extent of beneficiaries, and the impact on their development.
- Evaluation of the adequacy of the 'waiting list' approach of allocating land in urban areas.
- The extent of evictions and forced displacement in urban areas.
- Opportunities for inner-city affordable rentals.
- Government position on housing subsidies.
- Government position on densification.

Openings for intervention

- The review of the MHDP is set to pave the way in which the line ministry (MURD) engages with the housing question. It is currently being reviewed by the government.
- A pilot study by NUST is exploring the effect of 'people-led' (SDFN, BTP) and 'developer-led' (NHE) processes in Tsumeb and once completed could be rolled out nationally.
- Government currently owns about 900 housing units nationwide and subsidises tenants occupying these. This is a ready-made 'social-housing' programme and can be studied to understand how a 'social housing programme' in Namibia could look like. Local authorities could also coordinate to mobilise the housing units they own through a more comprehensive programme.
- 'Available land' for housing needs to be re-thought from land available 'at the edges' of local authorities, to land in centrally-located areas that is either publicly-owned or underutilised.
- New housing developments challenging the apartheid city structure, creating areas where affordable, medium-density housing in centrally-located areas, can be developed.

Contact

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About ILMI

The Integrated Land Management Institute is a centre of the Faculty of Natural Resources and Spatial Sciences (FNRS) at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), which is committed to developing reputable and multidisciplinary research and public outreach activities in the field of land administration, property, architecture and spatial planning. <http://ilmi.nust.na/>

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