

Reception Areas Analyzing the Delivery of Land for Housing in Namibia

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SUMMARY

Local authorities have for years devised programmes and approaches to deal with the demand for land for housing, especially for the urban poor. In Namibia, the delivery of housing has been an area of contention for years. Reviewing data on housing programmes and emerging initiatives on upgrading informal settlements, the study highlights how slow delivery of projects leads to development fatigue, residents being trapped in household debt, exclusion, and a growing informal land market in informal settlements. As one of Sub-Saharan Africa smallest countries, Namibia has been reaching high urbanization rates, with 50% of the population now estimated to be living in urban areas. A major difference from ten years ago. To meet the demand for housing, local authorities relied on the servicing of greenfield land and, informal settlement in-situ upgrading for low-income urban residents. Newcomers without housing were catered for in reception areas.

Reception areas were created after independence in early 1991 to cater for informal settlement growth and land development. These areas were planned to be temporary spaces to cater for communities needing land for housing. Basic planning processes were applied through layout drafting to provide rudimentary services and to ensure effortless upgrading later. While local authorities serviced and develop land elsewhere in the city, with the aim of relocating households. However, despite its novel aims, the process has created permanent informal settlements presenting challenges for town planning, living majority of households without the security of tenure, limited access to services and high anxiety on when the next relocation will take place. This study considers the impact of reception areas on households and the role of local authorities in delivering land for housing. Windhoek has over 80 informal settlements, with close to 40% of the population residing in areas with no access to individual toilets or water connections. The precautionous condition of housing makes residents susceptible to the negative effects of climate change. Professional services required for efficient land delivery have been blamed for the current housing backlog.

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A largely qualitative study that adopted a case study design, shows cases of how two settlements in Windhoek were left in limbo after relocation took place. This paper critically examines the informal settlement upgrading process, legislation and institutional frameworks influencing land delivery of major local authorities. The findings show the historical impact of local authority planning on informal settlements. Our analysis highlights how for years local authorities have been struggling to meet the demand for housing and the negative impacts of exclusion on communities. The study recommends an improved planning process that involves considering people-centred approaches to ensure fast delivery of services and reduced development fatigue by communities. The paper concludes by discussing the limitations and opportunities available to planning authorities in the delivery of sustainable housing programmes for informal settlements.

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