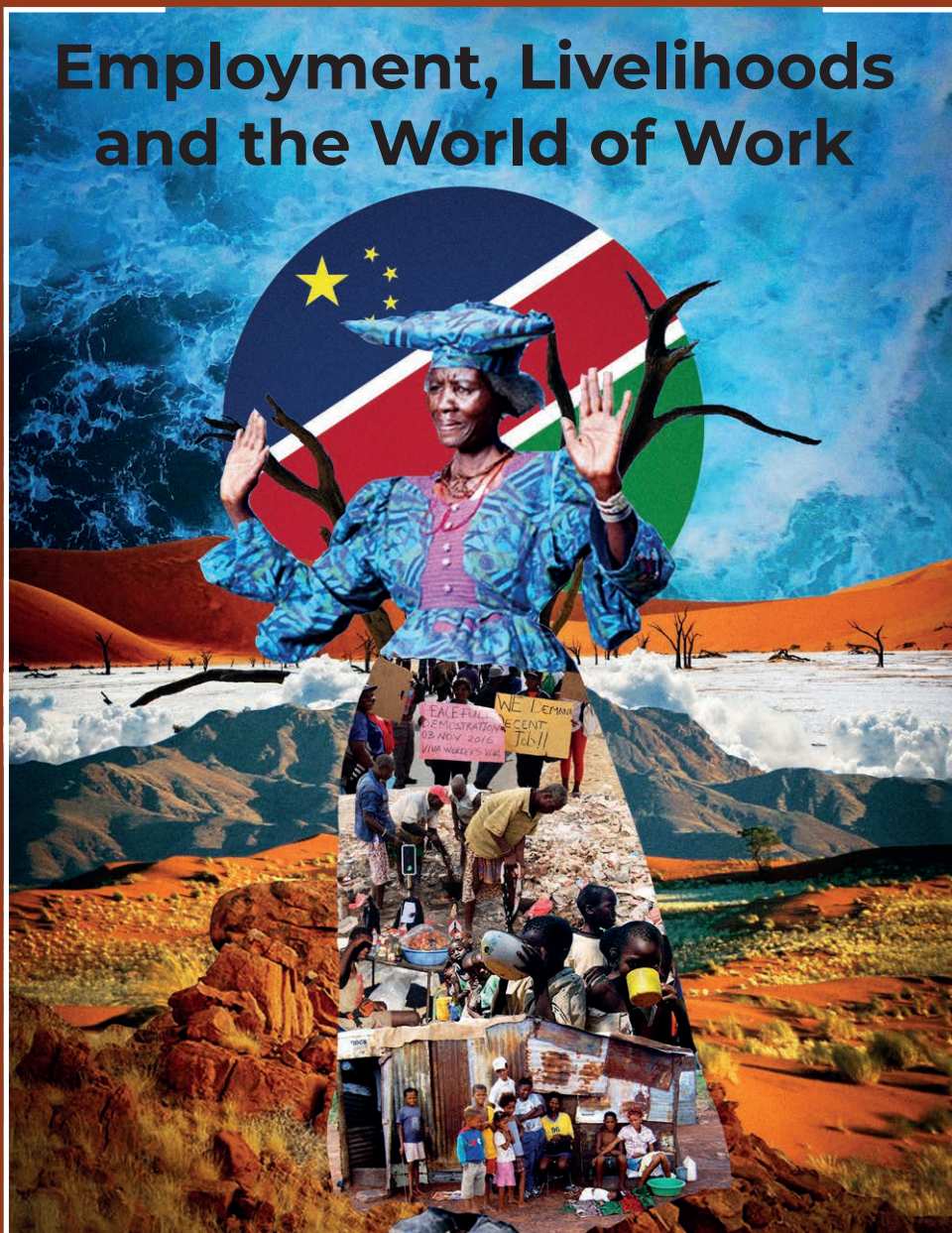


# Employment, Livelihoods and the World of Work



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# **Employment, Livelihoods and the World of Work**

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## Acknowledgements

The Economic and Social Justice Trust is proud to present the third edition of the Namibian Journal of Social Justice (NJSJ). This edition, on *livelihoods and employment*, follows on the second edition, published in 2022, which dealt with *inequality and social justice*, and the first edition of 2021, which was dedicated to the issue of *housing*.

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## Acronyms and Initialisms

AfDB	African Development Bank
AU	African Union
CCDT	capital-centred development theory
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
ECC	Environmental Clearance Certificate
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FDI	foreign direct investment
FLTS	Flexible Land Tenure System
GDP	gross domestic product
GH2	green hydrogen
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICT	information and communication technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LaRRI	Labour Resource and Research Institute
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LLD	labour-led development
MAWLR	Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform
MEFT	Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism
MLIREC	Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation

NAMPOL	Namibian Police Force
NDF	Namibian Defence Force
NPC	National Planning Commission
NSA	Namibia Statistics Agency
NUNW	National Union of Namibian Workers
OTA	OvaHerero Traditional Authority
REC	Regional Economic Community
RWE	Rheinisch-Westfälisches Elektrizitätswerk Aktiengesellschaft
SAPs	structural adjustment programmes
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDI	Shack Dwellers International
SEWA	Self-employed Women's Association
SONA	State of the Nation Address
SSA	sub-Saharan Africa
TA	Traditional Authority
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	UN Conference on Trade and Development
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNECA	UN Economic Commission for Africa
UNECA	UN Economic Commission for Africa
USAID	United States Agency for International Development



## Editorial

When last measured in 2018, the Namibian unemployment rate stood at 33.4%. The high level of unemployment in Namibia, particularly amongst the youth, is a matter of great concern. It is exacerbated by a demographic transition that increases the number of young people entering the labour market. Youth unemployment stood at 46.1% in 2018. This is almost three times higher than the global average of 17.2% (Republic of Namibia, 2023b). The high level of unemployment is primarily caused by the structure of the Namibian economy, but is intensified by a confluence of global and local crises.

Volume 3 of the *Namibian Journal for Social Justice* focuses on *Employment, Livelihoods and the World of Work*. The livelihoods crisis replicates itself globally and has caused displacement and mass migration within and between countries and continents. Volume 3 explores different aspects of employment and livelihoods. These include the structural context of unemployment; the human rights implications of unemployment and underemployment; the right to livelihoods; technology and livelihoods; the informalisation of employment and livelihoods; unionisation; migration; climate change; and the use of natural

resources for livelihoods and job creation. In an array of scholarly articles, case studies, opinion pieces and artworks, different authors reflect on critical aspects of work and livelihoods in Namibia. There is a rich body of Namibian-based research and authorship that is not always known and accessible to the general public; in this edition, we present a review of a book on anthropology in Namibia. All articles approach the questions of employment and livelihoods from a social justice perspective that includes matters of rights, access, equality and participation.

As was the case with previous volumes, we were not able to cover all aspects of the subject matter, in this case livelihoods, unemployment and the world of work. There are some very obvious gaps that we hope will be covered elsewhere. The most obvious of these is workplace discrimination on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation, as well as discrimination against people living with disabilities. What is also missing is the growing phenomenon of the working poor. We often assume that employment is a vector out of poverty, and hence the focus on job creation. However, growing numbers of people are trapped in low-wage jobs, and despite being employed,

they remain poor and vulnerable (Feder & Yu, 2019). This raises the question of social protection, which is dealt with only indirectly in this volume and was not the focus of most authors. The topic remains extremely important because of high levels of unemployment and the devastating effects of climate change on livelihoods. Although 600 000 Namibians (mainly orphans, vulnerable children and the aged) receive social grants from the state (Petersen, 2023), there are substantial gaps in Namibia's social protection architecture as there is little to no access to social protection for the unemployed and informally employed. The gender aspects of labour markets do not receive adequate attention; in particular, women's unpaid social reproductive labour and the gender division of labour are underrepresented. A lot of women's care work is invisible because it remains unenumerated and unremunerated. The mere fact that this volume does not deal with these topics does not render them less important. We hope that future editions will do justice to them.

## **Underemployment and Unemployment**

Unemployment has devastating consequences for individuals and society at large. It has ripple effects that reverberate throughout entire communities and countries. At a macroeconomic level, unemployment leads to reduced income and reduced

consumption. Unemployment erodes the tax base of the economy, with fewer tax receipts for the fiscus. It represents a loss of productive capacity and skills, and higher welfare costs. It places downward pressure on wages and lowers standards of living (Rom Economics, 2017). It can be a major source of social unrest and political contestation (Mouhammed, 2011). At a micro-level, unemployment can have devastating consequences for individuals and families. It affects mental and physical health, increases levels of mortality, depression and anxiety, and is associated with psychosomatic symptoms, low subjective well-being, and poor self-esteem (Belle & Bullock, 2010).

Communities with high levels of unemployment face higher levels of poverty. This intersects with other forms of exclusion like inadequate and low-quality housing, underfunded schools, few recreational activities, restricted access to services and public transportation (Belle & Bullock, 2010). High levels of unemployment also drive up levels of crime in affected communities (Skentelbery, 2021).

## **Focal Areas and Articles in Volume 3**

### *Economic theories*

There are many different theories of unemployment, including classical economic theories of demand and

supply, Keynesian aggregate demand theories, skills mismatch theories, and more systemic social-structural crisis theories. In his article *Enclave Growth and Development in Africa*, Godfrey Kanyenze links unemployment to the structure of the dualist enclave economy. His core argument is that outward-oriented and orthodox economic policies, particularly economic stabilisation policies, have left sub-Saharan Africa with a deepening crisis of poverty, unemployment and underemployment. The lack of economic diversification and beneficiation are core features of dualistic, enclave economies. These economies have limited vertical and horizontal linkages for job creation through the beneficiation and value addition of raw materials. A big stumbling block in the path of job creation through economic diversification is the lack of domestic saving for investment into secondary industries, because the enclave economy lacks the capacity to generate internal savings, and hence its reliance on foreign investment and foreign aid. This causes dependency, under-development and the lack of articulation required for the beneficiation of raw materials to develop Namibia's industrial base and thereby support job creation.

#### *Livelihoods and human rights*

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 23) proclaims:

“Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment” (United Nations, 1948). All over the world people are not able to claim these rights. In his article *Unemployment, Underemployment, and Livelihoods in Namibia: The Human Rights Connection*, John B. Nakuta advances an argument for an “expansive interpretation of the right to life” and a legally guaranteed right to work as set out in Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 23(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. He argues that the right to decent work should be at the heart of all labour legislation and that the state should be held liable for the decent work deficit in Namibia.

#### *Livelihoods and informality*

Participating in the informal economy is often a survival strategy for those who are marginalised by formal labour markets. Informality includes informal employment, informal sector enterprises and informal employment in the formal sector. It also often intersects with informal markets, informal settlement and informal housing. Informality is characteristic of underdevelopment that traps people in low-income and precarious jobs

without legal and social protections (Loayza, 2009). The International Labour Organization (2018) estimates that globally, about 61% of workers are informally employed. This figure is often much higher in developing countries, where it can be as high as 90%. In Namibia, 57.7% of workers are in informal employment (men 54.1%; women 61.2%) (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2018).

Informality and formality are not binary opposites. There are overlaps and movements between these sectors (Anda et al., 2023). Both contain forms of outsourcing, subcontracting, and precariousness (Abramo, 2022), though informality in the labour market may intensify and reproduce inequalities (Deakin, 2013). There is debate on whether the informal sector normalises marginalisation, or whether it is a potential engine for growth. For some it is a choice, but for many it is a last resort in the absence of decent formal sector employment (Anda et al., 2023).

Phillip Lühl's article *Everyday Decolonisation: The Popular Urban Economy of Herero Mall* explores the informal economy as part of a decolonising process that subverts the apartheid economic, spatial, and social logic and restrictions on black economic activities and entrepreneurial acumen. He sees informal sector enterprises as a very

active assertion of agency and traders' right to the city. His ethnographic study focuses on informal trade and informal markets at Katutura's Herero Mall. His narrative illuminates a unique, vibrant, innovative informal market imbued with meaning. In addition to it being a trading space, it is also a space for social interaction. Lühl delves into the micro-level interactions of solidarity, reciprocity and bartering amongst competitors. He dispels what he regards as a myth, namely that the informal economy is simply a survivalist strategy. Herero Mall represents a hive of complex entrepreneurial activity. He outlines how through human agency, a formerly peripheral space was transformed to create both an identity and an economy away from colonial spatial and economic constructs.

Judy Tymon shifts the focus from informal trade to informal settlement. The site of her study is Freedom Square, an informal settlement in Gobabis, Omaheke Region. In her article *Namibia's Flexible Land Tenure System: The Impact on Livelihoods in Gobabis*, she raises the question of whether greater tenure security as envisaged by the Flexible Land Tenure System will have positive effects on social and economic livelihoods and therefore bring about more redistributive justice for people residing in informal settlements. She engages with the complexities of formalisation of informal settlements. Her study showed

mixed result on whether tenure security has positive effects on livelihoods. Her findings show that social livelihoods improved as a result of tenure security. This was reflected in improved access to water, sanitation and energy. More permanence and stability also resulted in neighbourhood upgrading that generated a sense of pride, and allowed individual households to attain greater privacy. With regard to economic livelihoods, tenure security provided improved opportunities to access finance and credit for housing through the Shack Dweller's Federation of Namibia, but residents did not leverage credit for income generation. An important finding was that tenure security did not improve income levels, and consequently, 96% of residents remained below the poverty line. Residents struggled to make land payments and pay fees related to toilet and water meter installations. Her main conclusion is that there is a positive relationship between the legal tenure security and social capital formation. There is, however, no clear relationship between legal tenure security and economic capital.

In his article *Organising the Informalised: A Monumental Challenge for Namibia's Trade Unions*, Herbert Jauch focuses on the challenges of organising informally employed workers. To explain unemployment and informal employment, Jauch provides a brief historical overview

of economic and labour market development in Namibia. His core argument is that Namibia's industrial relations model is more suited to industrialised economies of the global north and excludes informal workers. He further argues that improvements in living and working conditions through minimum wage agreements have not benefitted the under- and unemployed, informal sector workers, casual workers, or domestic workers because they remain outside the realm of collective bargaining and unionisation. He outlines the reasons why such workers are underserved by Namibia's trade unions. These include the inability of trade unions to deal with the informalisation of work, and the highly diverse nature of workers and economic units in the informal economy. Unionisation of informal workers is further impeded by divisions and in-fighting in the trade union movement. He calls for a rethink of trade unions' approaches, from traditional industrial trade union models towards social movement trade unionism.

Casper Bowora documents the achievements and challenges of an informal trader in Windhoek's Hakahana settlement. In his case study, *The Livelihood of an Informal Trader in Hakahana*, Windhoek, he shows how a low-income neighbourhood sustains a vibrant informal economy. Due to low

entry requirements and administrative costs, informal traders are able to provide a variety of goods and services at prices community members can afford. The income generated from informal trade feeds the family. He also shows how informal trade intersects with other aspects of informality. These include informal housing and inconsistent or non-existent access to basic services like electricity and water. The informal trading spaces also expose traders to the elements and can pose safety and security risks.

To delve deeper into the lived experiences of unemployment, Nafimane Hamukoshi presents a short case study on the daily struggles of a 29-year-old unemployed resident of Okahandja Park. The case study, *Informality in Okahandja Park, Windhoek* illustrates the cycle of poverty, deprivation, exclusion and intergenerational transfers of poverty that unemployed people experience. It shows how precarious life is for the unemployed, and how it leads to multiple economic and social exclusions, for example poor living conditions, over-crowding, insufficient sanitation, health risks, inadequate nutrition and lack of access to affordable transport.

### *Livelihoods and migration*

Migration is motivated by a number of social, political, economic

and environmental causes. War, conflict, political, ethnic and religious persecution, economic and employment opportunities, educational opportunities and adverse climate events all contribute towards migration (European Parliament 2023). It is anticipated that Namibia will remain vulnerable to climatic variations and adverse climate events throughout this century. Droughts, desertification, deforestation, water scarcity, rising sea levels, and coastal erosion will negatively impact livelihoods, particularly, land-based livelihoods (International Organization for Migration, 2022). In the subsistence dryland farming areas, women have been most vulnerable because they are mainly responsible for crop production and securing household food supplies, as well as energy and water procurement. All these are negatively affected by the protracted droughts caused by climate change.

Climate change causes disruptions in the water-food-energy nexus and negatively affects women's livelihoods, care work, health and migration (World Food Programme, 2021). Stress migration is at times a climate change adaptation strategy. Women who migrate from rural areas to urban areas may find themselves on the outskirts of towns and cities, mostly in informal settlements and slums with poor living conditions (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2020).

In their article *Trapped in Poverty and Informality: The Effects of Climate Change-Induced Migration on Women in Urban Settlements in Windhoek*, Bruno Venditto, Christian Nekare and Ndumba J. Kamwanyah advance the argument that climate change affects men and women differently due to the intersecting forms of discrimination women face. Some of the core activities related to women's social roles and social reproductive labour such as agriculture and the procurement of food, water and firewood are all influenced by the natural environment and climate variability. Their study amongst female migrants in Windhoek found that changing weather patterns indeed affect livelihoods. Study participants developed different adaptation strategies to combat declining crop yields. Most who migrated to urban areas find themselves in informal settlements where their livelihoods are precarious and they struggle to access basic services like housing, water, electricity and sanitation. Most are engaged in informal income-generating activities.

While migrants provide a source of cheap labour and therefore heightened profits for those who employ them, in many countries they are regarded as a social and political problem. Migrants are often stigmatised, criminalised and subjected to racial, ethnic and xenophobic discrimination. With

the advent of Zimbabwe's extended economic crisis, the country has become a net exporter of labour and skills. This has depleted its own human resource base and brought about a significant global distribution of Zimbabwean migrants, mainly to other African countries (Hadebe, 2022).

As is often the case with long-term migration, Zimbabwean migrants to South Africa retain familial bonds. Although they reside in split households, they still take part in decision making, transfer remittances, and share intimacies with family members and spouses in Zimbabwe. In their article *Keeping the Fire Burning: How Migrants Rejuvenate Relations with Spouses at Home: The Case of Gwanda District, Matebeleland South Province, Zimbabwe*, Emelder M. Tagutanazvo and Vupenyu Dzingirai shed light on how spousal intimacies are maintained with the aid of technology. Their study focuses on the maintenance of spousal bonds between South African-based male migrants and their female spouses in the Gwanda District of Matebeleland in southern Zimbabwe. The study found that almost all migrants had regular communication with their spouses (only 4% of participants did not), and for 31% this communication occurred on a daily basis. Technology-mediated intimacies keep conjugal bonds alive amidst physical separation.

Technological change, climate change, demographic transitions and economic trends impact on job creation and job destruction. Digital access and frontier technologies make certain jobs redundant while at the same creating new jobs. Digitalisation, automation, robotics, artificial intelligence, machine learning and large language models are set to have a greater influence on the world of work in the future (World Economic Forum, 2023). Digital divides and unequal access to digital technology within and between countries increase inequalities. Conversely, access to technologies can improve livelihoods and incomes.

In his opinion piece *Inclusive and Universal Access to the Internet and Digital Technologies: A right to access Public Goods and Improved Livelihoods in Namibia*, Dickson Kasote raises the question of access to the internet and digital technologies. He sees access to such technologies as a human right and argues that the lack of universal access denies citizens their right to improved access to information, improved income generating capacities, improved job searches and access to health services.

### *Livelihoods, natural resources and agriculture*

Economic diversification is central to job creation, improved incomes and improved livelihoods. Despite

its vast natural resources, Namibia remains captured in an extractivist economic model and dependent on primary exports. The country aspires to the environmentally sustainable use of natural resources, economic diversification, and value addition (Republic of Namibia, 2004; Republic of Namibia, 2017). To this end a Joint Value Addition Committee was established (McGregor et al., 2017). Small steps towards value addition and localised production were taken through a ban on exports of unprocessed lithium (Dlamini, 2023) and the imposition of import quotas for horticultural produce (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit [GIZ], 2022).

Structural transformation and diversification of the Namibian economy require huge amounts of capital. Most African countries rely on external finance in the form of foreign aid, external debt or foreign direct investment (FDI) because they lack domestically generated finance for investment (Achuo et al., 2021). Namibia's reliance on foreign capital is a double-edged sword. It can bring investment for job creation in crucial sectors of the economy, but it can also be a source of external control over the economy, and this affects the country's sovereignty. About 80% of Namibia FDIs go to mining and the financial mediation sectors. The



employment ratio generated by these FDIs remains relatively low, at 6.6% of total employment. This is because FDIs are skewed towards capital intensive sectors of the economy, like mining (Bank of Namibia, 2020).

The challenge lies in clearly and unambiguously defining Namibia's own interests in relation to FDIs and its long-term economic, social and environmental goals, and then developing policy responses that will channel such investments towards those goals and interests.

Agriculture contributes 5.1% to gross domestic product (GDP) but is by far the biggest source of jobs and livelihoods, being responsible for 23% of all employment (Nangolo & Alweendo, 2020). Seventy percent of the Namibian population depend directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihood. The sector holds many more possibilities for growth and job creation if one considers that Namibia only produces 43% of its food requirements, and that 400 000 Namibians are food-insecure (De Klerk, 2023b). Both agricultural production and agro-processing are avenues for job creation (GIZ, 2022). Agriculture holds the potential for food security and food sovereignty, job creation, income generation, innovation, industrialisation, and poverty eradication.

Besides very skewed land distribution patterns, the sector faces climate change-related rain variability, water scarcity, livestock diseases, a lack of skills, and a lack of finance (Republic of Namibia, 2018). With the adoption of the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme, African governments committed to the allocation of 10% of their national budgets to agriculture and rural development (African Union, 2021). To transform Namibian agriculture from its current dualism and to achieve the development objectives, very sizeable investments are needed in agriculture (Dlamini, 2022). However, the allocation to Agriculture as per the budget vote of the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform for the 2023/2024 financial year was only 2.4% of non-statutory expenditure and 0.8% of GDP (Republic of Namibia, 2023a).

Claudius Riruako's case study of a communal farmer in Ohangwena Region titled *Livelihood and Living Conditions of a Female Communal Farmer* demonstrates what the chronic underinvestment in agriculture means for small-scale subsistence farmers. The case study illustrates how the low investment, low skills and low yields model of subsistence agriculture perpetuates a cycle of unemployment, underemployment and multi-dimensional poverty. The case study also

attests to the multiple exclusions small-scale subsistence farmers suffer. These include access to adequate land, access to finance, access to agricultural inputs, access to skills training and agricultural extension services, and access to water and water infrastructure.

### *Minerals-energy complex*

Mining forms the backbone of Namibia's economy and on average contributes about 13% annually to Namibia's GDP. It is also a major source of government revenue and foreign exchange earnings (Republic of Namibia, 2021). Namibian mines are 88.1% foreign-owned (Republic of Namibia, 2021). Hopes for local job creation and income generation are high following successive off-shore oil discoveries in Namibia's Orange basin (Brandt, 2023). There is also renewed interest in exploiting Namibia's Kudu gas field to ensure SADC regional energy security (Republic of South Africa, 2023). It is still not certain how these resources will affect job creation and livelihoods in Namibia, as we are in a time of an energy transition when the world is moving away from fossil fuels in order to attain carbon neutrality. There are also fears that exploitation of these resources may follow the same colonial extractivist model with which we are currently saddled.

The mineral extraction sector is a major source of illicit outflows (which

amount to around 8% of GDP in Africa) that deprive the fiscus of crucial revenue (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2017). It is also a source of ecological destruction and negative health impacts, as seen with lead exposure at Rosh Pinah (Albertz, 2023b,) the suspected contamination of water sources from lithium mining in Daures Constituency (De Klerk, 2023a), and ReconAfrica's alleged oil drilling in the Cubango-Okavango River Basin (Esterhuysen, 2023). Namibia's mining industry remains extractive, with little upstream value addition (McGregor et al., 2017). Despite its huge GDP contribution and due to its capital-intensive nature, it only contributed 1.7% to total employment in 2018 (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2018).

We currently have a free-for-all in the mining sector, with often lawless deployment of FDI. Foreign mining companies shift profits; under-declare the value of the minerals they extract; avoid taxes; deprive local communities of livelihoods; deplete and contaminate water sources; ignore health, safety, environmental and labour standards; dispossess communities of their ancestral land; privatise public infrastructure; and ruthlessly destroy the environment and cultural heritage sites. A case in point is dimension stone mining in the Otjohorong communal area in Daures Constituency. In their case study *The Right to Say No to Mining when it Destroys Livelihoods, the Environment and*

*Cultural Heritage Sites*, Lucy Edwards-Jauch and Herbert Jauch expose how indigenous communities who previously experienced genocide and dispossession are once again engaged in a battle for survival amidst environmental and livelihood destruction by foreign mining companies.

### *Green hydrogen (GH2) and solar energy*

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2023) identified different pathways towards the utilisation of renewable resources to achieve diversification and sustainable development. These include the establishment of domestic renewable energy industries and technologies; synergies between digital and green technologies; and capacity-building for diversification. To achieve such structural transformations, Namibia will have to ensure that the “green hydrogen” (GH2) industry is localised in respect of skills, technologies, capacities and infrastructure (Bruna, 2022).

The partial shifts towards decarbonisation have seen a clamour for Namibia’s renewable resources, particularly in the production of GH2. This has raised great expectations for job creation, and it is estimated that the Hyphen GH2 project will create 15 000 jobs during the construction phase and

3 000 permanent jobs during operations (Albertz, 2023a). However, some are questioning whether this is not simply another form of extractivism, namely, green extractivism.

In her opinion piece *Green Hydrogen: Reality or Fantasy?*, Bertchen Kohrs of Earthlife Namibia provides a basic understanding of GH2 and questions how “green” GH2 actually is. She also raises a number of concerns around the distribution of benefits and burdens of GH2 production in Namibia. These questions focus on how GH2 will ensure Namibia’s own energy security and self-sufficiency, its impact on Tsau//Khaeb Conservation Park’s biodiversity, other environmental costs, and the use of Namibia’s already scarce water resources.

In another opinion piece on GH2, *Germany’s Hydrogen Rush in Namibia: Green Extractivism at its Best*, Johanna Tunn and Franziska Müller pose the very important question of whether what is paraded as a just green transition is not just another form of colonialism and exploitation of African resources. They raise the concern that the GH2 project in Namibia may just be another form of extractivism, namely green extractivism.

Solar energy is globally the fastest growing energy technology. The increase in solar production has

also made it cheaper. Solar energy contributes towards decarbonisation by lowering the use of fossil fuels and therefore greenhouse gas emissions (Blakers, 2023). In his opinion piece, *Turning Katutura into a Transformative Namibian Social and Energy Powerhouse*, Andy Gheorghiu makes a compelling argument for using repurposed shipping containers to house plug-and-play photovoltaic systems in Windhoek because Namibia has the highest average practical photovoltaic power potential in the world.

### *Book review*

Anthropology has had a contradictory relationship with Africa. On the one hand, it has sought in-depth information about the people of the continent, but on the other, it has always been deeply steeped in colonialism, and has therefore viewed Africans through a colonial lens. It has often pursued the racist objectification of Africans as the other, and is associated with colonial political complicity and the cultural denigration of Africans (Murunga, 2002). In recent years there have been more critical reflections on the discipline and a push to decolonise it. Heike Becker reviews Robert J. Gordon's *Ethnologists in Camouflage: Introducing Apartheid to Namibia*, which was published by UNAM Press in 2022. The book is a critique

of apartheid era anthropology in the Afrikaner nationalist tradition. Becker provides an insightful analysis of the book and extracts the core issues and thematic areas contained in it.

**Lucy Edwards-Jauch**  
**Ndumba Kamwanyah**

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## Enclave Growth and Development in Africa

Godfrey Kanyenze

### Abstract:

*Three decades of outward-oriented and orthodox economic policies have left sub-Saharan Africa with a deepening crisis of unemployment, underemployment and poverty. This article analyses the low labour absorption capacity in Africa's enclave economies where a small, modern, formal capitalist sector exists alongside a larger traditional and informal sector. These sectors coexist in tenuous forms while the vast majority of the labour force is trapped in precapitalist modes of production.*

*Using secondary data, the article outlines the continued marginalisation of sub-Saharan African countries in the global economy, pointing to a lack of diversification, the export of*

*unprocessed natural resources and the continued importation of processed goods. This is exacerbated by low levels of intra-African trade and Africa's infrastructure gaps, as well as stagnant foreign direct investment flows which have had minimal developmental impacts. Southern Africa will need developmental state interventions to break the limitation of the enclave economy.*

**Key terms:** enclave economy; dualistic economic structures; intra-African trade; informal employment; development; inequality

### Introduction

The persistent problem of un- and underemployment and low labour



*A small formal sector alongside widespread informality characterises Africa's enclave economies.*

*Photos: Herbert Jauch (left); Valentino Nyambali (right)*

absorptive capacity afflicting the majority of the labour force in Africa has attracted much debate. Since the launch in 1981 of the World Bank-initiated Berg report (*Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action*) (Berg, 1981), the conventional wisdom has been that this was the case because African countries had pursued inward or statist economic policies that undermined investment and growth. The solution flowing from this diagnosis was that African countries implement market and outward-oriented economic policies, which became central tenets of the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) adopted by most developing and African economies at the behest of the international financial institutions during much of the 1980s and 1990s. Even countries that did not necessarily adopt SAPs implemented their own ‘home-grown’ conventional policies.<sup>1</sup>

However, the results have been particularly disappointing (see for example Muqtada (2010)). In the context of SAPs, empirical evidence suggests that macroeconomic stabilisation was often achieved following the implementation of orthodox reforms, but at the expense of sustained levels of investment, economic growth, employment and poverty reduction

– the stabilisation trap (Islam, 2003). The low and inadequate economic growth was often associated with widespread unemployment and poverty. In the appropriately titled paper *The lost decades: Developing countries’ stagnation in spite of policy reforms 1980-1998*, Easterly (2001) found that despite the improved policy environment, actual growth declined, falling well below what had been predicted.

After a long period in denial, the World Bank conceded that after close to two decades of implementing such reforms in developing countries, the results were unsatisfactory. Its detailed analysis of the lessons from reforms is contained in two seminal reports: *Economic Growth in the 1990s: Learning from a Decade of Reform* (World Bank, 2005); and *The Growth Report: Strategies for Sustained Growth and Inclusive Development* (World Bank, 2008). As the 2005 report notes:

*“The principles of ... ‘macroeconomic stability, domestic liberalization, and openness’ have been interpreted narrowly to mean ‘minimize fiscal deficits, minimize inflation, minimize tariffs, maximize privatization, maximize liberalization of finance,’ with the assumption that more of these changes will be better, at all times and in all places – overlooking the fact that these expedients are just*

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<sup>1</sup> An example is the adoption of the five-year Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy in South Africa in 1996, just two years after democratisation.

*some of the ways in which these principles can be implemented.”*

*World Bank, 2005, p. 11*

This report also admits that despite having implemented significant policy reforms, economies of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) failed to take off, with the few success stories also being considered fragile more than a decade later. In the aftermath of the global crisis of 2007–2008, there is an emerging consensus on the need to rethink the traditional macroeconomic framework that emphasised macroeconomic stability (see Blanchard et al., 2010; Blanchard, 2013; Blanchard & Summers, 2017).

The essence of this rethink is that there can be multiple targets in a macroeconomic strategy, and that these can be achieved through multiple instruments, a development that is critical to the design of employment-friendly macroeconomic frameworks. The recognition of fiscal policy as a significant policy tool, particularly in times of crisis when counter-cyclical measures are warranted, and when monetary policy often reaches its limits, is a worthwhile development. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) paper (Blanchard et al., 2010) calls for a review of the inflation target from 2% to 4%, an adjustment which may be sensitive to the conditions prevailing in developed countries while remaining insensitive to those in developing countries, where an inflation threshold

of 11%–12%, beyond which growth will be hampered, has been suggested (see Muqtada, 2010).

A key lesson from the crisis is that economies are not ‘linear’ or ‘self-stabilising’ systems, and that they may well ‘implode,’ as the 2008 crisis showed. Critically, the hope that markets have self-regulatory capacities to overcome deep downturns is misplaced (see Blanchard, 2013; Blanchard & Summers, 2017). When the COVID-19 pandemic and crisis hit the world at the beginning of 2020, developed countries were quick to implement unorthodox policy measures exemplified in huge and recurrent stimulus packages. Most unfortunately, the conduct of macroeconomic management in Africa has continued to be informed by the conventional approaches, as well as the associated ‘trickle-down’ strategy. The persistent problems of un- and underemployment, inequality and poverty in Africa can be traced to the continued reliance on such market-based orthodoxies, as argued in this article.

### **The Conceptual Framework: The Dual and Enclave Economic Structure of Africa and Southern Africa**

Whereas in most African economies, the majority of the labour force continues to be openly unemployed or underemployed, other regions of the world that had similar experiences

have transformed their economies towards a more inclusive growth and development trajectory. This fact has been extensively discussed (see Mhone, 2000; Alternatives to Neo-Liberalism in Southern Africa [ANSA], 2007<sup>2</sup>). This problem of the low labour absorptive capacity of African economies has persisted in much of Africa, resulting in the questioning of the efficacy of ‘trickle-down’ effects of the market in addressing this situation.

In his pioneering work *Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour*, W. Arthur Lewis (1954) argued that capital accumulation in the modern industrial sector would draw labour from the subsistence agricultural sector, where an unlimited supply of labour is available at subsistence wage rates in underdeveloped countries. This approach to development was extended to explain under- and uneven development where African economies have been held back by the colonial legacy of enclave growth and development.<sup>3</sup> Colonialism imparted a dual structure to the economy with two radically distinct parts: a modern or formal segment employing a small proportion of the labour force co-

existing alongside a traditional or non-formal segment employing the bulk of the labour force (see Ghose et al., 2008; ANSA, 2007; Mhone, 2000). This feature is traced to the colonial experience where capital captured a small segment of the economy (the formal sector), leaving the bulk of the economy (the non-formal sector) under pre-capitalist modes of production.<sup>4</sup> Thus, this form of capitalism was deemed to have been ‘grafted’ onto pre-capitalist modes of production that preceded colonialism (Mhone, 2000). Figure 1 illustrates the dual and enclave economic structure of (southern) African economies.

In the formal sector, production involves the use of reproducible capital (including advanced technology) and labour (skilled and unskilled) to produce a surplus – capital accumulation. In the non-formal segment, production largely implies the use of predominantly unskilled labour, with natural resources and simple tools and implements, with limited opportunities to generate a surplus (production is for subsistence), and hence low levels of investment. The non-formal segment is characterised by the existence of surplus labour,

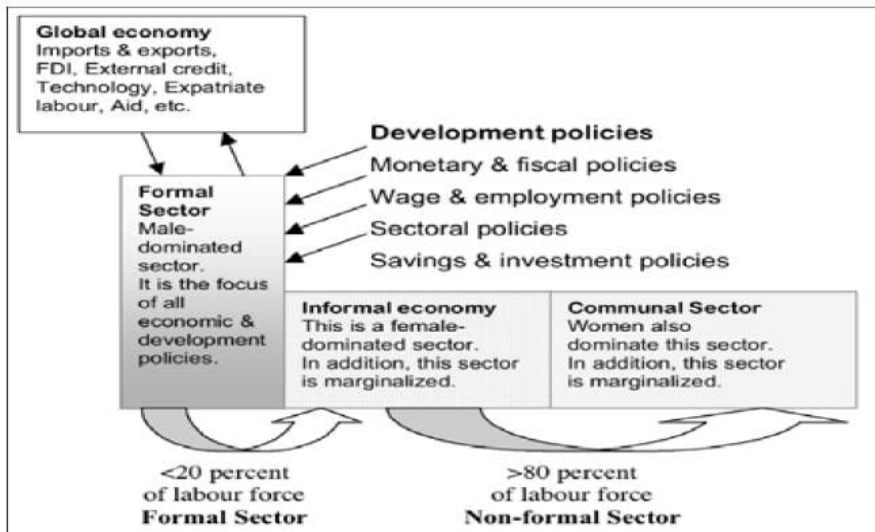
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2 This is the popular version of Kanyenze et al., (2006).

3 While the notion of dualism is implied in the concept of enclavity, it requires its own identification in that the formal sector is predicated on the behavioural and organisational rules and imperatives of the market; the non-formal economy relies on a combination of market and traditional modes of economic behaviour and resource utilisation (see Mhone, 2000).

4 The non-formal segment is broader than, and includes the informal economy, which is defined by the ILO as “... all economic activities by workers and economic units that are – in law and practice – not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements” (see ILO, 2002).

**Figure 1** *Dual and Enclave Structure of the African Economy*



Source: ANSA (2007)

implying that a substantial proportion of workers are underemployed as they are engaged in work and income sharing. These forms of work and income sharing (casual work, self-employment) accommodate surplus labour by ensuring that no one is totally unemployed. Consequently, a substantial proportion of workers in this segment can be withdrawn into the formal segment without affecting the labour input used in production (see Lewis, 1954).

Formal arrangements that include agency (voice), regulations and institutions of collective bargaining generally exist in the formal segment, and are conspicuous by their absence in the non-formal economy. While institutionalised social security is available in the formal sector, it does

not apply in the non-formal sector where most people are forced to work in order to survive. Moreover, the migratory nature of labour allows the formal sector to pay wages below subsistence levels, implying that the non-formal segment subsidises it by taking care of the health, pension and other social security requirements of those employed in the formal sector.

On the basis of the primary motive that drives production, Mhone (2000) argues that from the perspective of capitalism, pre-capitalist forms of work constitute non-productive labour in the sense that it is not captured by capital for profit making or the continuous expansion of capital. Such non-productive labour is seen as not continuously contributing to dynamic growth at the micro- and

macro-economic levels. As such, the simultaneous process of disruption and preservation of pre-capitalist relations in the developing world is argued to have resulted in a self-perpetuating low-income equilibrium trap. Thus, an important requirement for development under capitalism is the need to capture non-productive labour into the productive sphere of capital. However, the major challenge for developing countries lies in the large size of non-productive labour compared to developed countries, where it constitutes a small and often declining share of the labour force.

The evolving social formations therefore suggest the co-existence of the dominant capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production that were fused together into a rather uneasy and tenuous co-existence (grafted capitalism). Because of the way production is organised in these two sectors, there is a huge gap in productivity and incomes between them, with poverty (and the use of child labour) prevalent in the non-formal segment. While developed and developing countries both do have elements of formal and informal structures, it is the predominance of the latter in developing countries that constitutes the major problem. In other words, in most African economies, the majority of the labour force, mainly women, are trapped in pre-capitalist forms of production which are not driven

by the need to employ labour to generate profit and further expand capital (capital accumulation). As such, this disarticulate structure of the economy implies that the formal sector has a growth momentum of its own, and relates to the non-formal segment in a manner that marginalises and impoverishes the latter, resulting in uneven development.

This structural distortion therefore means that even in the presence of growth, the economy is unable to absorb the vast numbers of the un- and underemployed into the mainstream economy. Apart from the under-utilisation of resources, especially labour, another legacy of colonialism is the absence of an internal (endogenous) dynamism for growth and transformation since the economies are dependent on and constrained by external factors. In the absence of an internally motivated and conscious process of transformation, the growth process would not only marginalise the majority of the labour force, but would also marginalise the developing country itself in the international arena. This arises from the following issues that characterise enclave and dual economies:

- **Demand deficiency:** The fact that a large segment of the labour force is engaged in low productivity activities implies that effective demand is low,

limiting the market for formal activities to expand. This deficiency in effective demand also renders the formal economy more reliant on external demand, thereby reinforcing dependency.

- **Limited internal savings:** The fact that the majority of the labour force live close to subsistence levels implies that they cannot save, and if they do, their savings are not captured through financial intermediation due to missing linkages and market gaps in the financial market. African economies are characterised by low income per capita, which explains the limited savings that are associated with limited domestic investment. The limits of investment are prescribed by inadequate savings that cannot facilitate domestic investment. In addition, the dearth of skills and technology hinder investment potential and constrain the prospects for an internally driven growth and development trajectory. Thus, an enclave economy tends to lack the capacity to generate internal savings, and hence the reliance on foreign investment and foreign aid which pre-empts the need for self-generated savings.
- **Asymmetry between national, regional and international**

### **growth and development**

**needs:** As a consequence of the above problems, African countries find themselves in a dilemma in which disarticulations at the national level, coupled with external dependency, militate against effective regional cooperation and national development.

Under-development is therefore structurally reflected in the inability of the formal sector to generate adequate employment opportunities to absorb surplus labour from low productivity pursuits in the communal and urban informal sectors. It is also reflected in the inability of the urban and communal sectors to transform themselves into high productivity sectors that can sustainably generate surpluses. The implication is that the disruption of pre-capitalist relations of production imparts to a country the potential of internally driven growth. To do so would require the proactive role of the state to help integrate the formal and non-formal segments of the economy in order to break the vicious cycle of perpetual unemployment and underemployment, and allow the majority of the labour force to be involved in productive activities. The 'trickle-down' effects from the formal sector are simply too weak to transform and absorb these sectors into formal activities. Hence, market forces on their

own simply perpetuate this dualism, even in the presence of some growth.

In a nutshell, three indicators are critical for the assessment of the employment situation in developing countries, namely:

- the share of the formal segment in total employment;
- output per worker in the non-formal segment; and
- the unemployment rate.

Other things being equal:

- the larger the share of the formal segment in total employment, the better the employment situation;
- the higher the output per worker in the non-formal segment, the better the employment situation; and
- the higher the employment ratio (the lower the unemployment rate), the better the employment situation (Ghose et al., 2008, p. 63).

### **The Continued Marginalisation of Sub-Saharan African and Southern African Development Community Countries in the Global Economy**

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) continues to be marginalised within the world economy. While Africa accounts for 16.3% of the world's population, its

countries collectively only contribute 2.9% of the world's combined gross domestic products and 2.6% of world trade (exports plus imports) (United Nations [UN] Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2019). The SSA sub-region's importance in global trade has fallen over the past 30–40 years, with its share of world exports declining sharply from 3.7% in 1980 to 1.9% in 1990 and 2010, and 1.1% in 2020.

In terms of economic complexity, Africa is the second-least diversified region in the world after Oceania. Based on the distribution of export shares of products, the continent has the most concentrated export structure. UNCTAD considers a country to be dependent on commodities when these products make up more than 60% of its total merchandise exports. Based on this definition, 83% of African countries are commodity dependent, constituting 45% of the commodity-dependent countries worldwide. In fact, commodities account for more than 60% of total merchandise exports in 45 of the 54 countries in Africa, exposing them to global commodity price shocks and the vagaries of weather conditions (UNCTAD, 2022a). According to the *UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics 2022* (UNCTAD, 2022b), primary goods accounted for 77% of Africa's merchandise exports in 2021, with fuels making up 44%. Two-thirds of SSA's imports are finished products.



Regrettably, SSA exports its natural resources in raw form, and re-imports them as transformed intermediary and finished products. These exports are highly concentrated in a few primary commodities that have relatively low value-added or processing levels, limiting even further its already low potential for employment creation.<sup>5</sup> This is exemplified in the case of petroleum products that stand at the top of SSA's import and export lists. Crucially, crude petroleum is SSA's primary exported product, while refined petroleum is the primary imported one. This therefore implies that the continent's growth model relies heavily on external demand for its primary commodities that constitute the main source of its revenue and foreign exchange, exposing individual countries to fluctuations in global market conditions.

Intra-African trade reflects the current state of African economies and also the prospects for the continent to achieve its goal of becoming an integrated continent by 2063. Though intra-African trade has been rising fast, it is still at low levels, constituting 14.8% of the continent's trade in 2019.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, preferential market

agreements with for instance the European Union and the US encourage the flow of products to those markets instead of neighbouring African countries. Thus, historical ties still play a key role in African countries' inability to do business with each other (Njini, 2013).

The continued marginalisation of Africa is in many ways related to its "... small, fractured and partly isolated markets" (UNCTAD, 2019, p. v). To address this challenge, the Organization of African Unity and its successor, the African Union (AU), promoted the establishment of Regional Economic Communities (RECs). However, instead of enhancing regional integration, multiple and overlapping REC membership structures create a picture similar to what is sometimes called a 'Spaghetti Bowl' (see UNCTAD (2019) Chart 6:8), which has complicated trade relationships among the African countries. For instance, while many member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have eliminated or reduced their tariff barriers since 2000, intra-regional trade has not increased as expected owing to the non-trade barriers that are in place. In this respect, unifying the trade regime across the RECs can

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5 This is tantamount to exporting better quality jobs.

6 African markets account for a relatively small share (18.2 percent) of Africa's total exports (UNCTAD, 2019). For the Southern African Development Community (SADC), 21 percent of its trade was within the Regional Economic Communities (REC), only 2.7 percent with the

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rest of Africa, and 76.2 percent with the rest of the world in 2016 (UNCTAD, 2019). By contrast, 68 percent of all European exports went to other countries on the same continent in 2021. In Asia, the rate was 59 percent.

promote the flow of goods and services on the continent.

Furthermore, the cost of trading amongst neighbouring countries is often higher than trading outside the continent owing to weak intra-African infrastructure and cumbersome customs procedures. The relatively low intra-African trade is also a reflection of the low trade complementarity among African countries, indicating low correspondence (similarity) between export compositions of member states with the import structure of other member states in the same REC. This is related to the high dependence of some countries on primary goods exports, as well as the fact that African countries do not often import what other African countries export, limiting the immediate potential to increase intra-African trade. In *Disconnected: African markets remain fragmented and inefficient*, Felix Njini quotes the analysts Prof. Adrian Saville and Dr Lyal White as noting in a working paper for Visa (South Africa) titled *Realising Potential: Connecting Africa*: “There is little complementarity between African countries and historically, infrastructure was designed and built to extract resources from the continent to be shipped to other locals and not necessarily to connect one African market to the next.”

Of concern is that Africa’s trade balance has been deteriorating due

to high product concentration. Thus, while imports have quadrupled during the past 20 years, exports have only doubled. Apart from product concentration, Africa’s exports are also concentrated in a few markets. Likewise, intra-African trade is also highly concentrated. It is important to note that African countries are open economies.<sup>7</sup> A high level of trade openness suggests greater dependence on foreign markets.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, increased openness to trade in most countries of SSA has been accompanied by current account deficits, driven in the main by trade deficits (imports exceeding exports) (Moussa, 2016). Interestingly, the geographical location of Africa’s main trading partners has been changing since 2000, with East Asian countries rapidly replacing North America and Europe as SSA’s key trading partners in both intermediate and capital goods trade.

While in the contemporary world economy, production processes involve cross-border activities that form regional or global production networks, most SSA countries are only participating at the beginning of these global value chains. Given that intermediate goods hardly feature in most SSA economies, trade flows based

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7 Openness of economies is often measured as the share of the sum of exports and imports in the national income of an economy.

8 SSA is more open to trade than developed economies and Latin America and the Caribbean, but less open to trade than Asia (Moussa, 2016).

on global value chains are less apparent in the region. In this regard, regional production networks are rather weak. Thus, as most SSA economies are mainly commodity-exporting countries, production activities are mainly situated at the upstream segment of the global value chains and their exports are processed and exported beyond the continent. Only about 6% of trade flows within Africa were linked to value chains in 2010 (UNCTAD, 2019).

While most countries in the region desire to participate in regional value chains, this is undermined by poor connectivity related to missing transport links within and across different modes (rail, road, sea and air). In addition, manufacturing productivity is held back by inadequate and/or intermittent power supply linked to the low energy generation capacity of most countries. Furthermore, financial services play a minimal role in facilitating the growth of industries due to limited access by some firms, and especially SMEs (AU, 2015; SADC, 2015). The development of viable value chains remains a far-fetched notion, even under the liberalised market conditions of the African Continental Free Trade Area (UNCTAD, 2022a).

Importantly, countries' access to world markets is based largely on their transport connectivity, especially their shipping services. Africa's low

performance in trade facilitation indicators hampers the development of trade and the economies of the region. The bilateral connectivity index which measures connectivity between country pairs<sup>9</sup> suggests that on average, African countries are better connected to the European Union, China and the United States than to other African countries. In fact, none of the RECs in Africa is an exception in this regard, with intra-African connectivity being the weakest (UNCTAD, 2019). UNCTAD (2022a) shows that African countries' connectivity index is much lower than the world average.

In addition, infrastructure gaps persist across all sectors (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2021; AU, 2015; SADC, 2015). Weak transport infrastructure is one of the key drivers of trade costs in Africa, with electricity emerging as the second most important obstacle facing African SMEs. Furthermore, the use of advanced technologies remains a challenge for most African countries. Lack of access to stable internet connections, worsened by power shortages, poses serious challenges to most localities in Africa. While digitalisation is driving trade in highly knowledge-intensive services, Africa remains the least digitalised continent on the planet.

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<sup>9</sup> The index takes values between 0 (minimum) and 1 (maximum), with higher values indicating stronger connectivity.

Overall, only 10 of the 54 African countries<sup>10</sup> have strong backbone infrastructure in energy, ICT and transport to support the unimpeded flow of services and merchandise within and across countries (AfDB, 2020). Critically, Africa has the lowest overall logistics performance index worldwide at 2.5 in 2018 (on a scale of 1–5), compared to 2.9 globally (UNCTAD, 2022a). Hence, Africa is the least connected region in the world. Njini (2013) notes that in Prof. Saville and Dr White’s view, “Africa’s poor trade performance has been less about policy and preferential access to key markets than about facilitation.”

### **Comparatively Low Foreign Direct Investment Flows and Stocks in Africa**

There is a significant investment gap between developed and developing countries in foreign direct investment (FDI) flows as the former receive about 10 times more in direct investment per capita than the latter group of countries. However, for many African countries, the inflows are way below the developing countries’ average. FDI inflows to Africa averaged 3% of the global total during the period 2014–18 and 2% in terms of total accumulated investment, or inward FDI stock. They more than doubled from US\$39 billion in 2020 to US\$83 billion in 2021, accounting for 5.2%

of global FDI (up from 4.1% in 2020). However, the total for the continent was inflated by a single intrafirm financial transaction in South Africa in the second half of 2021 (around 45% of the total), without which they would have increased moderately, more in line with other developing regions. The *World Investment Report 2023* (UNCTAD, 2023) shows that FDI flows to Africa declined to US\$45 billion in 2022 from the record \$83 billion in 2021, which was 3.5% of global FDI. However, this indicates that flows returned to prior levels after the peak in 2021 caused by a large corporate reconfiguration in South Africa.

Africa’s share of total FDI flows and stocks has remained low and stagnant over time relative to that in other regions of the world. While historically, FDI was concentrated in two sub-regions, namely North Africa and southern Africa, at almost 80% of Africa’s inward FDI flows (averaging US\$25 billion per year) and almost 60% of inward FDI stocks (averaging US\$111 billion per year) in 2004–2008. However, the destinations of FDI in Africa have shifted such that flows to North Africa and southern Africa, which made up the majority of FDI stock in the mid-2000s, lost FDI share to eastern Africa.

Based on cross-country pooled data from 30 SSA countries for the period 2001–2020, Adegboye and Okorie

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<sup>10</sup> These are Algeria, Botswana, Cabo Verde, Egypt, Libya, Mauritius, Morocco, Seychelles, South Africa and Tunisia.

(2023) observed that although FDI inflow is significant, its impact is minimal in the selected host SSA countries. They argue that this could reflect the fact that the inflow of foreign capital might be going into non-investment-beneficial sectors or sectors of the economy that are not bringing about the development of domestic investment. Furthermore, as shown by *Tackling Illicit Financial Flows for Sustainable Development in Africa: Economic Development in Africa Report 2020* (UNCTAD, 2020), what is sobering is that Africa loses about US\$88.6 billion (3.7% of its GDP) annually in illicit financial flows.<sup>11</sup>

### **Magnitude, Composition and Characteristics of Informal Employment in Africa**

Rodrik (2015) points to a disturbing trend in premature de-industrialisation in developing countries: those that had established modest manufacturing industries during the 1950s and 1960s behind tariff barriers and under policies of import substitution experienced falling manufacturing shares (in both

employment and real value added), following liberalisation of trade during the 1980s and early 1990s. He found that low-income SSA economies had been affected nearly as much by these trends as the middle-income economies of Latin America, even though there was less manufacturing to begin with in the former group of countries (see also UN Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 2015).

Available data suggests that overall, there has been an increasing trend in informal employment in Africa over the past decade or so, even though some countries were able to reduce the share of informal employment over a given short period. Informal employment in Africa accounts for 85.8% of total employment (excluding agriculture: 71.9%).<sup>12</sup> This means that eight out of ten workers in Africa are in informal employment, making it the world's region with the highest share (see for example Kiaga and Leung, 2020). The proportion of informal to total employment in Africa dwarfs the proportions in other world regions: 68.2% in Asia and the Pacific; 68.6% in the Arab States; 40.0% in the Americas; 25.1% in Europe and Central Asia; and a world average of 62.1%.

<sup>11</sup> It is estimated that over the last 50 years, Africa lost in excess of US\$1 trillion in illicit financial flows, an amount roughly equivalent to all of the official development assistance received by the continent during the same period (see *Illicit Financial Flows: Report of the High Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows from Africa*, commissioned by the AU/ECA Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (AU, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Informal employment accounts for 89.2 percent of total employment in SSA and 67.3 percent in northern Africa. Within SSA, there is substantial variation, with the share of informal employment at 40.2 percent in southern Africa, under half of the share in central Africa (91.0 percent), eastern Africa (91.6 percent) and western Africa (92.4 percent).

Furthermore, 76.0% of informal employment in Africa is in the informal sector, and a relatively small proportion is in the formal sector (5.5%) and households (4.3%). Own account workers are the largest group within informal employment (94.3%). Informal employment is a greater source of employment for women (89.7%) compared to men (82.7%). Excluding southern Africa, in SSA over 90% of women are in informal employment, compared to 86.4% of men. For North Africa, the pattern is the exact opposite, with slightly more men (68.5%) than women (62.2%) in informal employment.

The youth (94.9%) and the elderly (96.0%) have especially high rates of informal employment. In western Africa and central Africa in particular, almost all young people and older persons are in informal employment. Furthermore, the level of education is closely linked to informality in Africa: 94.0% of those with no education are in informal employment; the rate of employment informality decreases from 88.6% for those with primary education to 68.1% for those with secondary education. Those with tertiary education (27%) are less likely to be in informal employment. Informality is the main feature of both rural area (88.3%) and urban area (76.3%) labour markets. In fact, almost all of the agricultural sector in Africa is in informal employment (97.9%).

As would be expected, the rate of informality, though still very high, is lower in the industry sector (77.4%) and the service sector (70.2%). Regarding the size of enterprise and informality, the majority of workers in own-account owners (94.4%) and micro, small and medium enterprises employing 2–9 persons (90.4%) are informal. Critically, 93% of the world's informal employment is in emerging and developing countries, which highlights the divergence between developed and developing countries. Sadly, as Kiaga and Leung (2020, p. 3) point out, “Given the current situation, high informality will remain a challenge to Africa in the near future, exacerbated by the dwindling ability of formal employment generation to absorb the increasing youth population in Africa.”

As highlighted in the concept note for the policy dialogue on *Informal Economy in Africa: Which Way Forward? Making Policy Responsive, Inclusive and Sustainable* (UN Development Program, International Labour Organization [ILO] & African Union Commission, 2022) in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe on 10–11 May 2022, “... in the past, policy narratives in Africa tended to either neglect informal economies or even viewed them as potentially threatening to formal economies – therefore needing elimination and control rather than support and investment for inclusive structural economic transformation.”

Clearly, informality puts workers at a high risk of vulnerability and precariousness. While not all informal workers are poor, poverty is nevertheless both a cause and a consequence of informality. Typically, the poor face higher rates of informal employment, and poverty rates are higher among workers in informal employment. There is therefore an urgent need to tackle informality given that informality entails a lack of social protection, rights at work and decent working conditions, and for enterprises it means low productivity and a lack of access to finance.

### **Slow Pace of Poverty Reduction Reversed following the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Although SSA experienced a dramatic turnaround as its economic growth picked up in the mid-1990s, this growth has slowed in recent years. In many countries on the continent, poverty rates are the highest in the world. In addition, the number of poor people in the region is rising as a result of population growth. Hence, from a global perspective, the largest concentration of poverty has shifted from southern Asia to Africa.

Poverty is still widespread in Africa, where 32 of the world's 48 least-developed countries are located. The average US\$1 560.14 per capita annual income of SSA in 2019 (adjusted to

2023 prices) is only 13.5% of the world average of US\$11 553.39.<sup>13</sup> Roughly 60% of the world's extreme poor lived in SSA in 2019. SSA is experiencing the slowest pace of poverty reduction of all the regions of the world. Although the poverty rate in SSA decreased from 59.1% in 1994 to 34.9% by 2019, the number of poor people has continued to grow, rising from 284 million in 1990, to 395 million by 2005, and 433 million by 2018, as the poverty rate did not decline quickly enough to counteract population growth in the region.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly, besides the high levels of extreme poverty (34.9% in 2019), SSA has experienced limited progress in reducing the scourge of poverty, especially over the last three decades. The situation was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which pushed 30–40 million people into extreme poverty. While starting from levels that were similar in the early 1990s, eastern Asia and the Pacific, and more recently, southern Asia, have experienced remarkable progress in reducing poverty rates.<sup>15</sup> In view of the demographic trends, global extreme poverty is projected to become

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13 See <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/SSF/Year/1990/SummaryText>. The per capita GNI (current prices) of SADC countries of US\$1 940 in 2019 is 16.8 percent of the world average.

14 See <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/march-2023-global-poverty-update-world-bank-challenge-estimating-poverty-pandemic>.

15 For eastern Asia and the Pacific, the poverty rate declined from over 60 percent in 1990 to just 1.2 percent by 2019, and for southern Asia, from just under 50 percent in 1990 to 8.6 percent by 2019.

even more concentrated in Africa, and the 2030 goal of eradicating global poverty looks far-fetched.

The phenomenon of slowly decreasing poverty rates and an increase in the numbers of those living in extreme poverty is related to the fact that southern African economic growth has not trickled down to the most vulnerable members of society owing to the fact that southern Africa has the highest level of inequality (as measured by the Gini coefficient) of any region in the world. Seven of the world's ten most unequal societies are African (UNECA, 2015, p. 56).<sup>16</sup> Africa is the second most unequal region in the world after Latin America, with high inequality persisting for over 60 years, with no discernible sign of declining (AfDB et al., 2015; Jauch & Muchena, 2011). In addition, economic growth in Africa has not been high enough to provide for its rapidly growing population and pull up those already in poverty. Furthermore, at less than half of the world average, Africa's labour productivity is low.

This slow pace of poverty reduction in Africa is therefore related to the pattern of growth. This phenomenon is related to the atypical enclave feature of African economies that leaves the

majority of its population behind. Before the COVID-19 crisis, Africa experienced nearly two decades of sustained economic growth – above the global average. However, that rapid economic growth has not been associated with rapid poverty reduction. Africa has failed to create enough decent jobs, and in particular, the structural transformation which is associated with the relative growth of employment in high productivity sectors. As such, the continent's fastest growing economies have the least responsiveness of employment and poverty reduction to growth (see for example Page and Shimeles (2015)). This contrasts sharply with the Asian experience, where economic structural transformation drove inclusive growth and poverty reduction.

### **Resolving the Enclave Model and Informality: Towards Inclusive Growth and Development**

Given the limitations of space, this article will only sketch the framework for redressing the problem of enclave growth, informality and inequality. Following Mhone (2000) and ANSA (2007), the enclave and economic dualism of African economies implies that such economies are characterised by extreme inefficiencies, and lack adequate internal demand to foster backward, forward and lateral linkages across sectors, as well as effective value

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<sup>16</sup> Three of the ten most unequal countries in the world are from southern Africa (South Africa, Namibia and Zambia (see Kanyenze et al., 2017).



chains. The inefficiencies associated with the enclave economy, including the lack of linkages between sectors and value chains, require a radical paradigm shift in order to address the perennial problem of un- and underemployment. Thus, to address the problem of underdevelopment in such enclave economies requires bold measures of transformation that go beyond marginal programmes and projects. This process will facilitate the emergence of a growth trajectory where all parts of the labour force are integrated, blurring the distinction between formal and non-formal sectors.

Relying solely on markets will not result in the required structural changes that would allow greater numbers of workers to access the more advanced parts of the economy and markedly improve their productivity and income levels. There is therefore a case for the state to take proactive measures to address the historical conditions of enclave growth and inequality. This therefore requires a clear understanding of the constraints on an integrated development process which transforms both the formal and non-formal sectors, as well as their relationship.

The first step involves the redistribution of resources, and in particular land and capital, and the creation of productive employment opportunities

for the vast labour force currently trapped in the non-formal sectors. This ensures that an increasing segment of the labour force could contribute towards the creation of internal demand, savings and re-investment, thereby imparting to the economy an internal dynamic supporting development. An important aspect of this strategy is the creation of value chains and linkages as a component of internally-driven (auto-centric) development.

This approach therefore takes a human rights approach to development, where issues of equity and fairness in the distribution of resources are given prominence. This helps shift the capital accumulation process in the non-formal sectors from a largely subsistence orientation to a profit orientation, or surplus generation. As such, commercialisation of the social and economic relations in the non-formal sector will ensure the capturing of its labour force under market imperatives to facilitate the accumulation of capital.

The proposed strategy is people-led (as opposed to one dictated by the IMF, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation, and donors).

It proposes:

1. an alternative production system primarily based on domestic

- demand and human needs and the use of local resources and domestic savings; it also proposes the “horizontal” integration of agriculture and industry;
2. a grassroots-led regional integration, as opposed to the current fragmentation;
  3. a strategic, selective delinking from neoliberal globalisation and the preparation for a negotiated relinking to a fundamentally different global production and distribution system;
  4. an alternative policy on science and technology based on harnessing the collective knowledge and wisdom of the people;
  5. forging of strategic alliances and networks with progressive forces at national, regional and global levels;
  6. a politically governed redistribution of wealth and opportunities from the formal to the non-formal sectors of the economy;
  7. women’s rights as the basis for a healthy and productive society;
  8. an education system that addresses the needs for sustainable human development by improving technical, managerial, research and development skills; and
  9. the creation of a dynamic, participatory and radical democracy, which regards peoples’ mobilisation, demonstrations, and open hearings as part of the struggle for an ethical and developmental state (ANSA, 2007, p. 8).
- While the transformative impact of the eastern Asian developmental states is widely acknowledged, the question has been whether African states can develop the required state capacity. A body of literature has emerged showing how ‘Democratic Developmental States’ can evolve in Africa (Mkandawire, 2001; ANSA, 2007; Kanyenze et al., 2017). Such states are not gifts, but can only be created through sustained struggle, including in education, consultations, debate, action and reflection. Such states use their autonomy to consult, negotiate and build consensus with social partners such that the national developmental project becomes a ‘hegemonic project’ that is voluntarily embraced by key stakeholders. They also build state capacity at all levels to effectively implement transformative economic policies.
- Following the ‘discovery’ of informality in 1972, the thinking was that it was a temporary phenomenon that would disappear with economic development. This view changed, however, in light of its growth and

persistence across the world. Through much research and policy debate, the understanding of informality evolved beyond its narrow focus on the 'informal sector' to the broader 'informal economy'. The *2002 International Labour Conference Resolution on Decent Work and the Informal Economy* provided a framework which recognised the scale, diversity and heterogeneity of the actors and activities in the informal economy (ILO, 2002).

Based on this increased understanding, the ILO social partners' meeting at the 2002 International Labour Conference adopted a comprehensive response based on the four pillars of Decent Work, namely, employment, rights, social dialogue and social protection. The adoption of policy guidance through ILO Recommendation *R204 - Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204)* through a strong tripartite (governments, employers and workers) consensus provided Member States with a normative and a developmental framework for moving out of informality and transitioning to the formal economy through integrated strategies. R204 provides tailored approaches to respond to the diversity of situations and the specificity of national circumstances.

The ultimate objective is to support transition to formality by facilitating the progressive inclusion of the informal workers and entrepreneurs into formal channels of protection and support and the mainstream economy while preserving existing dynamic activities. The analysis of the drivers of informality showed that piece-meal approaches were unlikely to result in a sustained impact. This calls for a comprehensive and integrated gradual approach across a range of policy areas, as well as policy coherence. This approach is critical in view of the need to address the diverse drivers and dimensions of informality.

The adopted strategy to promote transition to formality includes seven key areas of policy action, namely: (i) growth strategies and quality employment generation; (ii) regulatory environment, including enforcement of International Labour Standards and core rights; (iii) organisation, representation and dialogue; (iv) equality: gender, ethnicity, race, caste, disability, age; (v) entrepreneurship, skills, finance, management, access to markets; (vi) extension of social protection, social security, social transfers; and (vii) local (rural and urban) development strategies (ILO, 2009; Kiaga and Leung, 2020; Islam and Lapeyre, 2020).

Encouragingly, some of the policies seeking to transition to formality are already present in some countries, albeit in an isolated manner, with few or no positive effects on formalisation of economic units or employment – hence the call for a comprehensive and integrated policy approach. However, at a practical level, since 2013, the ILO Regional Office has been implementing the *Innovative Solutions for Formalization in Latin America and the Caribbean* programme. The programme has three components: (a) generation and dissemination of knowledge on formalisation policies; (b) technical assistance to specific countries; and (c) capacity-building of workers' and employers' organisations in formalisation issues. The process of developing national formalisation strategies<sup>17</sup> has been formulated, and is taken root on the African continent, with Cameroon and Zimbabwe, for example, having finalised such plans with the assistance of ILO and the UN Development Program.

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<sup>17</sup> See Policies, Strategies and Practices for the Formalisation of Micro and Small Enterprises ([https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed\\_emp/--emp\\_ent/-ifp\\_seed/documents/publication/wcms\\_533204.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_emp/--emp_ent/-ifp_seed/documents/publication/wcms_533204.pdf))

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# Unemployment, Underemployment, and Livelihoods in Namibia: The Human Rights Connection

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## **Abstract:**

*Namibia is grappling with an unemployment crisis. The youth, women, and people living in rural areas and informal settlements are disproportionately affected by the scourge of unemployment. The profile of the unemployed is a portrayal of the country's racist colonial and apartheid-induced inequalities. Viewing the unemployment crisis through a human*

*rights lens holds great potential. To start with, the right to work is recognised in several international treaties. The right to work is inextricably linked to several other human rights, including the right to human dignity, the right to non-discrimination, and the right to life. Importantly, an expansive interpretation of the right to life reads into it a right to livelihood. This was the*



*Most Namibian workers do not enjoy decent work. Photo: Herbert Jauch*



*finding of the Indian Supreme Court in the 1985 Olga Tellis. This case, arguably, holds tremendous persuasive value for potential social justice adjudication in the country. Achieving sustainable employment and livelihoods for all requires creative, imaginative and innovative thinking, as well as a mindset that acts 'outside the box' and is underpinned by a human rights-based approach.*

**Key terms: inequality; decent work; unemployment; precarious; livelihood; sustainable**

## **Introduction**

Namibia is currently burdened with frightening levels of unemployment. Women, young people, and those residing in urban areas disproportionately shoulder this burden. Furthermore, those fortunate enough to be employed are mostly doing menial, short-term, contract, and poorly paid work. Unemployment and underemployment both affect the lives and livelihoods of people. Consequently, terms such as 'in-work poverty' (Pembroke, 2019) have been conceptualised. The intersection of these variables is vivid and difficult to dispute. However, precarity is not just a labour market matter. It has far-reaching consequences outside of the workplace (Pembroke, 2019). It affects the lives and livelihoods of a great number of people. This requires the application

of an intersectional approach to these issues. Intersectionality provides us with a useful and powerful lens to better understand and overcome the underlying, deep-seated legacy of structural inequalities bedevilling our country. This is what the Constitution mandates. This is the position advanced in this article.

This article is premised on the assumption that a greater emphasis on the right to work, both in law and practice, could achieve greater dividends of social justice for the unemployed and underemployed in Namibia. The article begins by giving a brief synopsis of the right to work. It then proceeds to give reflections on the decent work deficit in the country. The scourge of unemployment, specifically, women unemployment and youth unemployment are used as the benchmark for the brief analysis in this regard. The final section of the article explores the theme of decent work and livelihoods for all. It makes the connection between the right to work, the right to life, and the right to livelihoods. Towards this end, it offers potential solutions for achieving greater social justice for both the unemployed and those trapped in precarious jobs.

## **Methodology**

Methodologically, the article falls in the discipline of law, and specifically in the area of international human rights

law. In this respect, it proceeds from the premise that states, including Namibia, should act in conformity with their human rights obligations.

The author gleaned data from various reliable sources relevant to the research. This primarily included secondary data sources consisting of policy documents, research project reports, academic books, and journal articles. Complementary to the above, statistical data, court decisions and newspaper articles were also collected to gain an impression of the prevailing outcomes in respect of the state of unemployment and underemployment in the country.

### **The Right to Work in a Nutshell**

The right to work is enshrined in numerous international human rights treaties. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) is widely considered as the central instrument for the protection of the right to work. The right to work is expressly guaranteed in Article 6 of the ICESCR. The content and scope of the right to work is clarified in General Comment 18 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) – the United Nations Treaty body entrusted with overseeing the implementation of the ICESCR. The Committee clarified that the right to work should not be understood as an

absolute and unconditional guarantee of employment. Rather, it requires governments to undertake particular actions to facilitate employment as part of their overall human rights obligation to fulfil the enjoyment of rights. This includes safeguarding the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain their living by work which they freely choose or accept. Such work must not be forced. It must be voluntarily accepted and not entered into under threat of penalty. This right also implies that people not be unjustly deprived of work, and so requires adequate protection from unfair dismissal (CESCR, 2006).

The right to work encompasses both individual and collective dimensions. The individual dimension of the right guarantees to everyone the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work, and in particular, the right to safe working conditions. The collective dimension of the right to work, on the other hand, recognises the right of everyone to form trade unions and join the trade union of his/her choice, as well as the right of trade unions to function freely and to collectively bargain.

The right to work is also enshrined in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 23(1)), and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of

Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In this context, Article 11 of CEDAW guarantees to all women the right to work, employment opportunities, equal remuneration, free choice of profession and employment, social security, and protection of health.

African human rights instruments similarly contain express provisions and references to the right to work. For instance, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the African Charter), the continent's premium human rights instrument, provides that every individual shall have the right to work under equitable and satisfactory conditions (African Charter, Art.15). The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Commission) in its Principles and Guidelines on the Implementation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2010) provides great clarity and substance in interpreting the right to work. For instance, the African Commission clarified that state parties to the African Charter have an obligation to take "appropriate steps to realise the right of everyone to gain their living by work which they freely choose and accept". It furthermore obliges states to "establish a system of social protection [...] for workers in both formal and informal sector[s], including [...] members of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups" (African Commission, 2010).

Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) (African Commission, 2003) enshrines an elaborated list of work-related rights for African women under Article 13. In this respect, it enjoins state parties to, amongst other things, promote women's rights to "equality of access to employment", "equal remuneration for jobs of equal value for women and men", and the creation of conditions necessary to "promote and support the occupations and economic activities of women, in particular, within the informal sector" (African Commission, 2003, p. 14). From the aforementioned, it is clear that the right to work is not explicitly entrenched in either the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights or the Maputo Protocol per se. Both these instruments only entrench the subsidiary rights to work.

The right to work is also not explicitly recognised and guaranteed in the Namibian legal order. While certain labour-related rights are protected in the Namibian Constitution and other relevant laws, an explicit right to work is not one of them. Some of the core labour rights guaranteed in the Constitution and the Labour Act (11 of 2007) include the prohibition of forced and child labour, non-discrimination in employment, freedom of association, and collective bargaining. Importantly,

Namibia has a monist legal system. International treaties to which Namibia is a state party are directly applicable in the country (Namibian Constitution, Article 144). The ICESCR and CEDAW respectively guarantee the right to work as alluded to earlier. Namibia ratified both the ICESCR and the CEDAW. These instruments are accordingly the relevant standards to be upheld and invoked to claim the right to work in the country. In fact, the claw-back clause in Article 144, “unless otherwise provided by this Constitution or Act of Parliament”, is mitigated by the international law principle enshrined in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. In particular, Article 17 of this treaty mandates that a State party “may not invoke the provisions of (an) internal law as justification for its failure to perform a treaty” (Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 1969).

Furthermore, the right to work may also be claimed in Namibia through the indivisibility principle of human rights. This right, as stressed by the African Commission, is essential for the realisation of other economic, social and cultural rights. For instance, it constitutes an inseparable and inherent part of human dignity. It is integral to an individual’s role within society. Access to equitable and decent work is at the core of respect for the fundamental rights of the human person and the rights of

workers regarding conducive working conditions, safety and remuneration. It can therefore also be critical for both survival and human development (African Commission, 2010).

It is important to stress though that “jobs at any cost”, to paraphrase Cooper, is a misnomer under international law (Cooper, 2009). The emphasis is on decent work as conceptualised by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 1999). The concept of decent work covers a wide range of issues and is categorised under four pillars, namely:

- employment creation and enterprise development;
- standards and rights at work;
- social protection; and
- governance and social dialogue (ILO, 2007).

Many countries, including Namibia, have embraced the Decent Work Agenda. In fact, Namibia and the ILO contracted the Namibia Decent Work Country Programme for the period 2010–2014 in April 2010.

The link between ‘rights at work’ and the concept of ‘decent work’ is also clarified in General Comment 18, referred to earlier, which affirms that the ‘work’ in the context of the Article 6-guaranteed rights connotes decent work. That, importantly, presupposes work that “[...] respects

the fundamental rights of the human person as well as the rights of workers in terms of conditions of work safety and remuneration” (CESCR, 2006).

Decent work further entails a decent income – in other words, an income that allows workers to support themselves and their families (CESCR, 2006).

The right to work has a specific scope and content. Expressed differently, it is anchored on the existence of several interdependent and essential elements. These elements are crystallised around the so-called ‘AAAQ’ framework, in human rights parlance. In this context, the interdependent and essential elements of the right to work are the following:

- i. **Availability:** This requires the existence of specialised services to assist and support individuals to enable them to identify and find available employment.
- ii. **Accessibility:** This element essentially mandates that the labour market must be open to everyone; to this end, it
  - a) proscribes discrimination of any kind, whether direct or indirect;
  - b) it emphasises the physical accessibility of employment, especially, for persons with disabilities; and
  - c) it also emphasises information accessibility in respect of the

right to seek, obtain and impart information relevant to gaining access to employment.

**iii. Acceptability and Quality:**

These components pivot around the right of the worker to just and favourable conditions of work, particularly, to safe working conditions, the right to form trade unions, and the right freely to choose and accept work (CESCR, 2006).

Lastly, like all human rights, the right to work imposes three types or levels of obligations on the State. These are the obligations to respect, protect and fulfil. The obligation to respect the right to work requires States to refrain from interfering directly or indirectly with the enjoyment of that right. For example, organs for the State should not be ones violating the right of workers. The obligation to protect requires States to take measures that prevent third parties from interfering with the enjoyment of the right to work. This requires the State to prevent employers from violating the rights of their works and to intervene when such violations occur. The obligation to fulfil, on its part, includes the obligations to provide, facilitate and promote the right to work. This implies that States should adopt appropriate legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial and other measures to ensure the full realisation of the right to work, for instance.

From the above it is clear that the right to work is a fundamental right and not a mere illusion. It is legally guaranteed, contains a specific content, and imposes unassailable obligations on the State. A curious and joint reading of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda and the CESC's General Comment 18 reveals a great amount of convergence between these authoritative soft law instruments. This allows for an assessment of the decent work deficit in Namibia.

### **The Decent Work Deficit in Namibia: Some Evidence**

An analysis of the Decent Work Agenda in Namibia is limited, due largely to the lack of data. The country has an acute gap in labour market information, especially regarding information relevant to the decent employment pillars. Data limitations aside, the existing literature on the labour market still allows for a cursory examination of the country's experiences in respect of the Decent Work Agenda. Only the strategic pillar most relevant to the theme under discussion, namely, employment creation, is explored.

#### *The scourge of unemployment in Namibia*

It is no exaggeration to assert that the rate of unemployment in Namibia has reached critical proportions. Official data sources affirm this. For instance, the most recent Namibia Labour Force

Survey (LFS) 2018 Report puts the overall broad unemployment rate for the country at 33.4%. This represents a slight decrease of 0.6% compared to the 34.0% official unemployment rate recorded in 2016 (Namibia Statistics Agency [NSA], 2019). These figures, importantly, do not reflect the job losses experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The scourge of unemployment disproportionately affects women, young persons, and those residing in rural areas. Women and young persons, in terms of General Comment 18, are amongst the demographic groups that must be prioritised in respect of job creation (CESC, 2006). The following sub-sections accordingly briefly reflect on the plight of unemployment that afflicts women and young persons in the country.

#### *(a) The burden of women's unemployment*

The 2018 LFS shows that unemployment rates for females in all age groups under 65 years are higher than for men in the corresponding age groups. The overall female unemployment rate is 38.3%, compared to 29.8% for males (NSA, 2019). The 2018 LFS, like all other official data sources, did not collect ethnically disaggregated data. Regrettably, empirical evidence on how women from the different ethnic and/or racial groups are differently impacted by unemployment is accordingly

lacking. The merit and demerits of the prohibition, and concomitant lack of population data delineated by ‘race and ethnicity plus gender’ (Sharpe, 2019), are beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that women are not homogenous. Their lived experiences differ. For example, anecdotal evidence suggests that more women from the San communities are unemployed than white women. Similarly, more San women than Ovambo women are unemployed. This, in the words of Sharpe, amounts to a trivialisation of the importance of race–gender and ethnicity–gender data, which in turn has implications for policy planning. It also wreaks havoc with the accurate collection and analysis of data (Sharpe, 2019). It is difficult to dispel such assertions, and it is therefore understandable why the United Nations CESCR specifically urged Namibia to generate labour force data that is disaggregated by factors related to the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups (CESCR, 2016). Skirting around the edges of the structural inequality issues haunting Namibian society is not helpful, as it can only disguise and perpetuate the cycle and legacy of deprivation and exclusion (Rorke, 2011) the country inherited from her racist colonial past. That said, it is safe to state that the majority of the women reported to be shouldering the burden of unemployment in the country are black.

Furthermore, even where women are able to secure work in the formal

economy, this does not necessarily equate to decent work. In fact, many women, in 2018 LFS parlance, are engaged in vulnerable employment situations. This, arguably, is a euphemism for precarious work. There is, admittedly, currently no uniform definition of what constitutes precarious work (ILO, 2012). However, the broad contours of precarious working conditions include a combination of:

- low wages;
- poor protection from termination of employment;
- lack of access to social protection and benefits usually associated with full-time standard employment; and
- lack of rights at work, or limited capacity of workers to exercise such rights (ILO, 2012).

In this context, the 2018 LFS reveals that the rate of persons employed in precarious working situations in the country (as a percentage of the total employed) is as high as 31.6%. Most of these vulnerable workers are reportedly own account workers (44.1%), followed by subsistence/communal farmers (41.0%), whilst unpaid family workers account for 7.4% of the national total. The majority, namely, 65.1% of those employed under precarious working situations are reportedly found in rural areas (NSA, 2019). The same arguments ventilated above regarding the lack of disaggregated unemployment data

according to the ‘race and ethnicity plus gender’ lenses apply in respect of those employed under precarious working conditions. These arguments will not, as such, be repeated here.

Women’s precarity is intersectional. The main factors behind the high numbers of women in precarious work, as pointed out by Buckingham and others, include the disproportionate amount of time that they spend in caregiving roles and domestic work – both of which are unpaid and largely unrecognised, as are embedded stereotypes (Buckingham et al., 2020). For instance, gender segregation is a notoriously and deeply entrenched feature in the Namibian education system and in other occupations and sectors. These gender-based inequalities that women face in both paid and unpaid work, as correctly asserted by Buckingham and others, exacerbate their precarity and undermine their economic autonomy (Buckingham et al., 2020). Such women workers are exposed to highly exploitative working conditions and face almost

insurmountable obstacles to organising and bargaining collectively (ILO, 2012). Additionally, the gendered aspect of low wages and precarious work also impacts on household incomes (Cooper, 2009) and has a deep impact on both individual women and society at large.

### *(b) Youth unemployment*

International human rights mandates that young persons be prioritised in employment creation. The reasoning behind this is twofold: “Access to a first job constitutes an opportunity for economic self-reliance and in many cases a means to escape poverty. ... [In the same vein] young persons, particularly young women, generally have great difficulties in finding initial employment” (CESCR, 2006).

The definition of ‘youth’, in this context is young persons aged 15 to 34 years (NSA, 2019). Youth unemployment in Namibia is alarmingly high. A summary of the state of youth unemployment by age group and gender as extracted from the 2018 FLS is shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1** *Youth Unemployment by Age Group and Sex*

Age group	Both sexes (%)	Female	Male
15–19	69.9	74.1	65.5
20–24	57.0	60.4	53.4
25–29	42.3	44.8	39.7
30–34	32.5	33.5	31.4
Total	46.1	48.5	43.7

Source: NSA, 2019



The overall youth unemployment rate is 46.1%. This represents an increase of 2.7% over the youth unemployment rate of 43.4% reported in the 2016 LFS. The trend of youth unemployment seems to be in step with that of the national unemployment rate. Youth unemployment is, similarly, feminised and rural, and a fairly high number of young workers are precariously employed.

The survey reveals that, in comparison to their male counterparts, more young women are unemployed. The total female youth unemployment rate at the time of the survey reportedly stood at 48.5%, compared to 43.7% for young men. Youth unemployment was found to be higher in rural areas (49.1%) than in urban areas (44.0%); unemployment was reportedly higher for female than male youths in most regions, with the exception on three, namely, Erongo, Oshana and Oshikoto. Youth unemployment rates were highest in Kavango East (62.5%) and Kunene (53.0%) regions. The 2018 FLS further reveals that the majority of young persons (32.7%) were employed in elementary jobs – menial, short-term and poorly paid work. Greater percentages of women than men, and rural than urban dwellers, were likewise employed in elementary jobs (NSA, 2019, pp. 65–68).

The issue of youth employment currently features strongly in the

national discourse. Social commentators such as Jauch (2023) argue that the State of the Nation Address (SONA) delivered by President Geingob on 16 March 2023 failed to recognise the magnitude of the unemployment problem. Indeed, a word count of the 76-page SONA document reveals that the word ‘unemployment’ only appears once, and ‘unemployed’ twice. The former was in reference to the announcement of new recruits for the Namibia Correctional Services, the Namibian Police Force (NAMPOL), and the Namibian Defence Force (NDF) during the 2023 financial year to “respond to the challenge of unemployment” (SONA, 2023). To this end, the Namibia Correctional Services, NAMPOL and the NDF were to recruit 300, 1 000 and 1 500 new personnel, respectively, during the 2023/24 financial year (SONA, 2023). Needless to say, these figures constitute a drop in the ocean of unemployment. Similarly, the word ‘unemployed’ was only used in the SONA document in reference to the announcement that an incentivised National Internship and TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) Apprenticeship Programme would be rolled-out in 2023.

At this juncture it is opportune to buttress a point equally relevant to the right to work: that is, the right not to be discriminated against.

The aforementioned recruitments were all marred in controversy. For example, the outcome of the recruitment process of police cadet officers for //Karas Region revealed that the majority of the 183 shortlisted candidates have Oshiwambo-origin surnames (Joseph, 2023) – this, despite the fact the Nama ethnic group constitute the majority in the region. Not surprisingly, this caused a major public outcry, with NAMPOL being accused of tribal bias in the recruitment process. Such accusations are by no means isolated. In fact, several opinion pieces, SMS (short message service) pages, and call-in radio programmes in the mainstreaming media have made similar assertions. Indeed, the recurrent complaint in this regard relates to the perceived over-representation of the Ovambo tribe in almost all government ministries and agencies, and especially in NAMPOL, the NDF, and the recently established NamRA (Namibia Revenue Agency). It is important to stress that there is substantial agreement in juristic thought that justice must not only be done, but must manifestly be seen to have been done. The appearance of injustice is the denial of justice (see, for example, the 1985 *Olga Tellis* case). Moreso, the temper of the right not be discriminated against repudiates all forms unfair discrimination – whether perpetrated intentionally or unintentionally. This cardinal principle and standard equally applies to systemic

discrimination, which, as clarified by the CDESCR in its General Comment 20, can be: “[...] understood as legal rules, policies, practices or predominant cultural attitudes in either the public or private sector which create relative disadvantages for some groups, and privileges for other groups” (CESCR, 2009, par.12).

There is a strong argument to be made that the growing perception of the resurgence of a one-tribe-dominance in the public service in respect of recruitment, employment and promotions amounts to indirect systemic discrimination. Importantly, the accessibility mandate of the right to work enjoins, amongst other things, equal employment opportunities for all, irrespective of tribal background or affinity. It is therefore encouraging to read about the “80-20 regional natives” recruitment policy directive in respect of all future NAMPOL recruits, as recently announced in the National Assembly by the Minister of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security, Albert Kawana (Joseph, 2023). According to Kawana, 80% of all future police recruitments will be reserved for persons indigenous to a given region whereas the remaining 20% will be allotted to ethnic groups associated with other regions. This public policy directive, albeit a knee-jerk response to the public outcry concerning the matter, is a step in the

right direction. After all, this is what the Constitution mandates. It is imperative that the Government of the Republic of Namibia stay true to the spirit, purport, and letter of the Constitution – in both law and practice. This policy directive should, logically, be extended to all other government offices, ministries, and agencies – more specifically, to the NDF.

At the time of writing, the National Assembly was similarly seized with the issue of youth unemployment. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resources and Community Development were conducting public hearings on youth unemployment. This was as a consequence of a motion on youth unemployment tabled by a Member of Parliament, Inna Hengari, in July 2022. The motion “seeks to discuss and debate the youth unemployment crises in Namibia” (Hengari, 2022). The key discernible issues from the motion include the following:

- ever-increasing graduate unemployment;
- the disconnect between the education system and the labour market;
- an education system that emphasises theory over practice (at all levels);
- the over-representation of young persons in precarious jobs;
- the proliferation of exploitative

insecure work arrangements as being the main driver of precarity for those fortunate enough to be employed; and

- the inescapable link between youth unemployment and social issues such as alcohol and drug abuse, and sex work (Hengari, 2022).

The motion made several calls for urgent action, including:

- increased investment in horticultural production and other essential agricultural commodities;
- access to land for young entrepreneurs to venture into commercial farming;
- action to address the access-to-information challenges faced particularly by rural unemployed young persons;
- action to address the intersectional development challenges such as electricity in both rural settings and informal settlements in urban areas; and
- the implementation of effective monitoring and evaluation systems (Hengari, 2022).

Hengari characterises youth unemployment as a generational crisis requiring extraordinary and urgent interventions. Against this backdrop she called for youth unemployment

to be declared a national state of emergency. However, President Geingob expressed reservations about declaring youth unemployment a state of emergency during the debate on his SONA. Responding to questions on this, the President reportedly said: “[...] I am worried about declaring a state of emergency on youth unemployment, although I agree it is a serious problem” (Shipena, 2023).

The above global level analyses attempted to show that the issues of unemployment, underemployment, lives, and livelihoods are intertwined.

### **Decent Work and Livelihoods for All**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015) pledges to leave no one behind. This commitment is underpinned by the notion of inclusive and equitable development, and is a recognition of the fundamental dignity of the individual (Lynch et al., 2019). The commitment to leave no one behind, as empathetically stressed by Lynch and others, requires that the needs of the most marginalised, discriminated against, impoverished, and vulnerable populations be prioritised (Lynch et al., 2019). The unemployed and working poor are, undoubtedly, within the frame of the “leave no one behind” commitment. Indeed, Goal 8 of the SDGs (“Decent work and economic

growth”) under Target 8.5 ambitiously aims to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, by 2030. This, in the context of the theme under discussion, triggers the questions: Is there a right to livelihood? If so, how, if at all, is this right linked to the right to work?

Answers to these questions are discernible in the jurisprudential work of the Indian Supreme Court, known to be conscious of social justice issues. Specifically, in the *Olga Tellis* case the Court was called upon to decide whether the right to life includes within its ambit the right to livelihood. The Court affirmed the notion that the sweep of the right to life is wide and far-reaching, and further that the right to life connotes life that is more than mere animal existence. The Court was unequivocal in holding that the right to livelihood is an integral component of the right to life. In the view of the Court, to deprive a person of his/her right to livelihood equates to depriving him/her of their life. This is so because no person can live without the means of living – that is, the means of livelihood. In fact, excluding the right to livelihood from the right to life would effectively deprive a person of his/her very right to life. Thus, depriving someone of his/her/their means of livelihood, in the phraseology of Article 22 of the

Namibian Constitution, would negate the essential content of the right to life.

Furthermore, people have to eat to live. That they can do only if they have the means of livelihood. This where the relevance and co-dependency of the rights to life, to livelihood, and to work become pronounced. Again, the Indian jurisprudence aptly illustrates the indivisibility of these rights. For instance, Justice Douglas in the *Baksey v Board of Regents* case held the following to illustrate the indivisible nature of these rights: “The right to work is the most precious liberty because, it sustains and enables a man to live and the right to life is a precious freedom.”

The African Commission in its General Comment 3 on the Right to Life made similar clarification:

*[...] a number of other rights which might, collectively, be constitutive of the condition of life, especially a dignified life, its progressive realisation of various economic, social and cultural rights will contribute to securing a full and dignified life. Violations of such rights may in certain circumstances therefore also entail violations of the right to life.*

The dominant conclusion emerging from this discussion is that employment and livelihood issues are not new (Pawar, 2021). The question is: How do

we address the menace of under- and unemployment in the country? There is, admittedly, no simple answer to this question. It is clear, though, that sustainable employment and livelihoods for all require creative, imaginative and innovative thinking and acting ‘outside the box’ that will develop new policies and programmes (Pawar, 2021).

That, minimally, will require the introduction of legislation that protects the standard employment relationship and confronts the insecurity and unpredictability associated with non-standard employment (Pembroke, 2019). There is, similarly, a strong case to be made for reducing the standard full-time work week, without a concomitant reduction in salary (Veal, 2021). That would be a laudable way to expand decent and sustainable employment to all in tandem with the “leave no one behind” principle, and to subserve the common good. Lastly, to address the sustainable employment deficit, the introduction of a basic income grant remains key to ensuring livelihoods for the masses of unemployed and precariously employed persons who are struggling to survive. When we, to paraphrase Pawar, carefully address the core issues and causes of unemployment and underemployment, providing sustainable employment and livelihoods for all is not beyond our reach (Pembroke, 2019).

## Conclusion

The purpose of this article was not to propose that a right to work should necessarily be included in the Namibian Constitution. It bears repeating that even under the current constitutional dispensation, the interests and values underlying the right to work may be attained through an expansive interpretation of other rights guaranteed in the Constitution. Similarly, because of lack of space, this article has not sought to explore the relationship between the right to work and the issue of social protection, or the plight of those working in the informal economy.

The aim of this article has been more modest, namely, to establish the connection between the internationally guaranteed right to work for all; unemployment and underemployment; and lives and livelihoods. The central thrust of the article is that the right to decent work is an internationally guaranteed right. Namibia is a state party to some of the core human rights treaties that guarantee this right. Namibia is accordingly expected to implement this right progressively, i.e., over time and to the full extent of its available resources.

Human rights are only meaningful if there are ways to protect and uphold them. Namibia's court system is the country's primary means of protecting

rights. However, to date, Namibian courts have not yet been called upon to consider the right to work per se – this, whilst Rome is proverbially burning. The Namibian state must undoubtedly be held accountable for the prevailing decent work deficit in the country. The hordes of unemployed and underemployed youth, women, and rural residents should, as rights-holders, consider using the court system to ensure that the Namibian government uphold the right to decent work in accordance with the standards of international law. Achieving sustainable employment and livelihoods for all requires creative, imaginative and innovative thinking, and acting 'outside the box' to meet the demands of the Decent Work Agenda and human rights imperatives.

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# Everyday Decolonisation: The Popular Urban Economy of Herero Mall

Phillip Lühl

## Abstract:

*In Namibia, informality is widely used with reference to informal economies and informal settlements, which are fast overtaking formal urbanisation processes. Informal actors and practices are continually marginalised. As a result, few attempts are made to understand their everyday socio-spatial practices for what they are. Instead, the lack of compliance with the dominant colonial-modernist urban development paradigm is foregrounded. This paper is based on ethnographic research undertaken for my PhD thesis on the case study of Herero Mall, an informal market in central Katutura (Lühl, 2020). The research was framed by the question of how traders inhabit Herero Mall socially, spatially and economically, with the latter aspect forming the focus of this paper. I construct a notion of a popular economy that thrives on diversity, co-dependence and spatial innovation and thereby quilts inherited modernist urban fragments into a decolonising urbanism that works for the majority.*

**Key terms: informality; everyday life; popular economy; post-colonial city; decolonisation; ethnography**

## Introduction

In urban development discourse in Namibia, the term ‘informal’ is used largely in relation to two spheres, namely referring to the ‘informal economy’ and ‘informal settlements’. Community-led enumerations indicate that ca. 60–70% of the urban population live in ‘shacks’ in informal settlements, and the Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA) reports that 57% of employment in urban areas is ‘informal’ (NSA, 2017). Analysis of the demographics of these two spheres makes it clear that the urban poor, consisting largely of the black majority, is discursively constructed to embody ‘informality’. This begs the question of how this term relates to decolonisation and the postcolonial Namibian city.

*That's the thinking in Namibia, that the informal sector does not belong in the mainstream economy. It does not belong in the main street in the CBD, they are dirty, they must be out, we must clean them ...  
(Informal sector organiser)*

Apartheid ‘native’ housing and urban planning models of the 1960s

and 1970s established representations of orderliness, modernity and progress which continue to shape contemporary imaginaries of urban development. The gradual removal of influx controls from the late 1970s until independence in 1990 allowed free movement to urban areas (Simon, 1996, p. 52), which was paralleled by the larger transition from labour scarcity to labour surplus in southern Africa (Ferguson & Li, 2018). Post-independence policy, steeped in the urban development paradigm assuming economic growth, formal employment and industrialisation, focused on formalisation without concomitant redistribution of public resources. This led to the emergence of unregulated urbanisation in the 1980s and 1990s. I argue that in the Namibian developmental discourse, the 'informal' is discursively constructed as urban, black, female, non-conforming, illegitimate, and economically immeasurable, and therefore not considered to contribute to national development (Lühl, 2020). It is conceived as the binary opposite of the formal, the regular and regulated, the predictable, the stable, the secure, and the legal. This discursive construct implicitly blames the poor black majority for falling short of inherited normative development imaginaries that are quintessentially colonial. In this paper I aim to provide a different lens through which we can reimagine

the potential that 'urban informality' holds for the future of our cities.

## **Objectives and Methods**

The overarching objective was to re-conceptualise 'urban informality' as socio-spatial practice and as a site to excavate latent possibilities for more socially-just cities (Brenner, 2012). I pursued this through an ethnographic study of Herero Mall, a popular 'informal market' in Katutura, the apartheid-era black township of Windhoek. I engaged with and listened carefully to those who produce this space, including food vendors; owners of restaurants, shebeens and car washes; hair specialists and barbers; butchers; and a cobbler, amongst others. The guiding research question was how people inhabit Herero Mall spatially, economically, and socially, and the focus of this paper is on the economy that produces – and is produced through – these everyday practices. This exploration is based on a range of qualitative methods. Participant observation allowed me to spend substantial time at the mall and interact with traders and visitors without a predefined agenda. Semi-structured interviews with business operators at the mall covered aspects of demographics, economic activity, social relations, and spatial aspects of the business and its relation to other

businesses, the neighbourhood and other geographical sites and scales, temporal rhythms, and how buildings had been adapted over time. I also mapped the larger area of the mall, including built structures; spatial distributions and linkages; circulation and barriers; construction methods; institutional, economic and social linkages; shared infrastructure; and informal governance, to spatialise the economic dynamics that were observed.

Data gathered through semi-structured interviews was processed by crafting a series of diagrams (see Figure 4) that reflect spatial and economic logics, temporality, social relations, and aesthetic codes of individual businesses in relation to the mall, and wider territorial scales. These socio-spatial diagrams, together with narrative descriptions, took on the role of an analytical tool, through which I constructed, or in the words of Latour (2005), deployed, various actors as networks that cut across sites and scales. While my original research question and interview guide distinguished spatial, social and economic aspects, the diagrams reveal that, in terms of lived experience, these spheres are impossible to separate. Theoretically, such separation would be incongruous. Instead, they allow us to see these instances of spatiality to be the “site, medium and outcome”

(Brenner, 2012, p. 11) of a process of urbanisation underpinned by popular economy that is distinctly different – I argue – from an urbanisation propelled by industrialisation and formal economic growth.

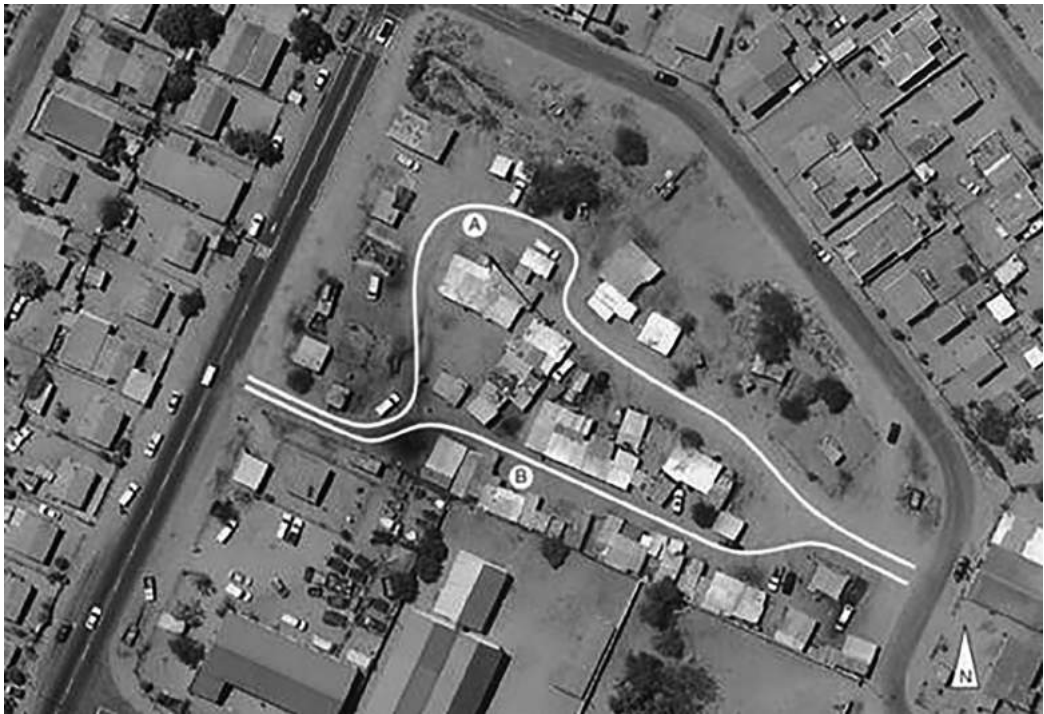
## **Background on the Case Study**

Herero Mall is the popular name for an ‘informal’ market in central Katutura. It is situated on two adjacent plots of land at the heart of a residential area: a large municipal plot and a smaller plot owned by the Ovaherero Traditional Authority (OTA). The land, originally reserved for future institutional use, was appropriated around 2005 by ‘informal’ traders, and today features food outlets, numerous shebeens, a car wash, auto mechanical and welding services, hair salons, meat cutting services, and small convenience shops, amongst others. These businesses are housed in self-built steel and corrugated iron structures, re-used shipping containers or discarded car bodies loosely arranged along two main vehicle thoroughfares traversing the site (see Figure 1). Until late 2017 there was no sanitary provision at the site; electricity remains distributed through precarious networks, and storm water management is near to absent. Over the years, the number of businesses has fluctuated, and it is difficult if not futile to attempt to determine that number. Many visitors

regularly frequent the mall, sometimes on a daily basis, and weekends are considerably busier. Patrons from within the neighbourhood come for entertainment, some for traditional food, a chat and a drink; farmers from hundreds of kilometres away buy cattle feed-troughs from local welders; others

rent a trailer to transport cattle over the weekend; while others get their cars repaired or washed while they wait and socialise. Some come from wealthier neighbourhoods across the city to get meat cut to size, and others just want to play some pool accompanied by local music.

**Figure 1** Herero Mall in 2011, with vehicle thoroughfares (A) and (B) indicated



Source: City of Windhoek, adapted by author

The mall “has divided public opinion. For some, Herero Mall is an eye sore [sic] and the representation of underdevelopment and social decay. ... [Political analyst Alfredo Hengari] described it as ‘a symptom of our failure 17 years after Independence,

notably our half-hearted attempts at nation-building and innovative city planning’ and called for the City of Windhoek to tear down the market and replace it with something that would offer a proper place of entertainment, especially for the youth” (Lühl, 2020, p.

66). This sparked a fierce public debate in the print media over the meaning and identity of the mall: while some stressed its role as an enabler of livelihoods and a hub of cultural identity and social interaction (Tjirera, 2013), others saw it as a direct challenge to law and order (The Namibian, 2011).

Particularly controversial in this regard is the public discourse on the regulation of shebeens, the popular name for (often unlicensed) bars, usually to be found in former townships, where they historically emerged as illicit alcohol outlets in residential houses to avoid colonial control of alcohol consumption. According to Dobler (2010, pp. 181–182) the Liquor Act (6 of 1998) combined the contradictory objectives of increasing control and state revenue through licensing of alcohol outlets, especially shebeens, while at the same time addressing moral and public health concerns around alcohol abuse. Particularly contentious were the requirements for licensing of shebeens, which included, amongst others: compliance with existing zoning regulations and approval by a health officer before starting operations; separate male and female toilets on the premises; smooth floor finish read: concrete floor; and that shebeens were not be used as a habitable space (Isaacs, 2006). The prohibitive regulations drew wide opposition led by the Namibia Shebeen Association with support from political and civil society organisations,

who argued that shebeens presented one of the scarce opportunities for economic participation by the most disadvantaged citizens (Dobler, 2010, p. 184). This included coordinated protests at Parliament by hundreds of shebeen operators, forcing the government to review the requirements (Isaacs, 2006). Dobler (2010) holds that, post-independence, this was one of the few moments of mass popular protest and debate about regulatory reform, as the regulation of alcohol use impacted many in their everyday lives. I argue that this also signifies the contention over ‘informal’ economic activities as a central locus of everyday urban politics.

### **Popular Urban Economies**

Herero Mall is a so-called informal market. This is a designation which is discursively structured as lacking, deficient, and non-conformist. It characterises the market as a place of non-being, something that is neither measurable in conventional economic terms nor fully compliant with statutory regulations, and is therefore deemed to lack legitimacy. But once one becomes more familiar with the setting and the people, even spending just one lunch hour there – observing the space and the dynamics for what they are – is enlightening:

*It is 1:30 pm. I order pap with meat and gravy from Muarii who operates next to Uzuva's shebeen. Before I know what's*

going on, she has organised me a table with a tablecloth and chairs at Uajenenisa's place on the other side of the thoroughfare for cars. Her other customers sit on beer crates and self-made furniture in the shaded area of Uzuva's shebeen and they hold their plates in their hands or on their knees. I realise that I only carry a 200 Namibian dollar note on me, which is quite a lot of money around here. But this is not a problem. Uzuva's sister, who also makes food nearby, takes some change from her bra but soon realises that it is not enough and disappears to get change elsewhere. She and Muarii must be working together somehow? There is clearly no shortage of cash here, and soon the problem of change is resolved, at least for me. Uajenenisa's place, where I sit, has stackable steel and plastic chairs. It is essentially a roofed and paved veranda alongside a 20-foot container in which the fridges and freezers and other equipment are stored. Containers are more difficult to break into than corrugated iron shacks that are the general standard around here, but they are also more expensive. Next to it is a food cart that permanently rests on stacked bricks. The sun is burning, and everyone gathers in the few shaded areas that are provided. Sitting all by myself, I feel awkward at the special treatment I receive, but it is not entirely unexpected. I am, as usual, the only white person around, which tends to create this

kind of situation. But it allows me to calmly observe the scene. At Tjikaa's place opposite, which is also a veranda, customers make space on the benches for some seemingly high-status individuals who joined to eat. As usual, Tjikaa's seems the most popular place to be at the mall during the day. Next to me on the veranda two women peel potatoes in large quantities. Kovii, who runs the food cart next to Uajenenisa looks energetic today. I arrange an interview with her for later in the afternoon. Two hawkers selling plastic flip-flops and car keyholders pass through. Children, on their way back from school, walk through the mall and along Klaagliedere [Lamentations] Street at the back. Music blasts from different shebeens, indistinct. Parked cars fill up the open spaces between buildings. The roof of a nearby house is being repaired, which becomes part of the soundscape. Utaara arrives to have lunch at Tjikaa's and brings his own plate. He greets me in passing. More school children cross. A woman passes through, selling meatballs which she carries in a large Tupperware container for five dollars. I ask and she tells me she cooks them at home. She offers me some, but I decline because I just finished my big lunch. A man and a woman return to Uajenenisa's carrying a 25-litre water container that they refilled at one of the neighbouring houses. The water will surely be used for cooking those

*many potatoes. An old man with a hat, a beard and a beautiful, thin knobkierie [wooden club], made from acacia branches with the root ball carved as the handle, passes by. He swings the kierie elegantly as he walks...*

Author's notes

The above reveals the interdependency and mutual assistance between traders who on the surface are direct competitors; that cash is required to lubricate these transactions; that this economy forms part of wider local and global networks of distribution; that minimal infrastructure, providing only basic shelter from the elements, is sufficient to make this space habitable and conducive for business and socialising; that the space is perpetually under construction to suit evolving needs; that activities here partly depend on the surrounding formal infrastructure and governance regimes as part of a system of distribution of goods and provision of services; and that this place allows class differentiation and cultural affiliation to overlap in a multi-layered system of social membership. In the following sections, I will elaborate on some of the key business types at the mall.

### *The shebeen as the beginning of business*

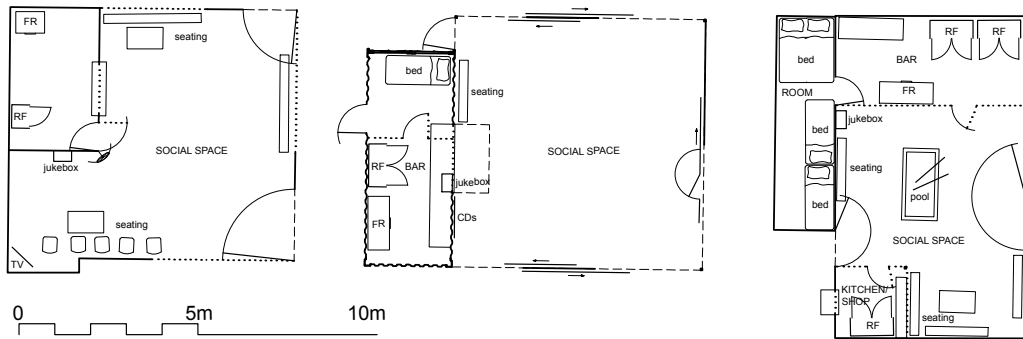
The shebeen is the most common architectural typology at the mall

(see Figure 2) which is sometimes repurposed as a shop or a restaurant. The largest space is usually the social space of the shebeen, which opens up to the outdoors, often on multiple sides and with large openings. There is usually a separate room inside or adjacent to the social space. This space functions as the bar and most commonly takes the form of a cage made of expanded metal mesh or iron burglar bars with a counter and a little opening to pass through drinks, while protecting the bartender on the inside. The bar usually houses a variety of fridges and freezers for keeping drinks cool, as well as other valuable equipment, and is generally the most secure space in the shebeen. The third space, sometimes an additional room, sometimes just a niche inside the bar, is used for storage and often for bartenders to sleep, as evidenced by rolled up and stowed-away mattresses. This arrangement is mostly to ensure the security of the business, equipment and stock during the night, as structures are easy to break into. While concern about the inadequacy of corrugated iron structures as habitable dwellings remains, as do questions about the exploitation of family labour, such spatial arrangements provide an effective solution under the prevailing circumstances.

Most shebeen operators relied on a collaborative stance towards 'competitors,' as customers were largely



**Figure 2** *Different versions of the shebeen typology showing the permeability and flexibility of spaces that open up to several sides (RF = fridge, FR = freezer)*



*Source: Author's drawing*

reported to be loyal to certain shebeens and their owners and/or operators. Beyond alcohol consumption, other leisure activities available in bars include listening to music, gambling, watching television, and playing pool, amongst others. Remaining competitive requires comparing pricing with competitors and seeking reductions in transport costs, the main differentiating factor, while retail prices for drinks generally vary little. Only a few had alternative livelihood strategies outside of the mall, which usually led them to rent out their 'properties' or employ someone to run their business. In many cases this emerging landlordism provides a foothold in the city for rural migrants who only speak indigenous languages and often have no identification documents, and thus have little chance of success in seeking formal employment. As their employment is often combined with shelter inside

the shebeen (see Figure 2), the mall effectively functions as a conduit for rural migrants to becoming urban dwellers, providing a setting where this transition is facilitated through the familiarity of language, food and other customs.

Charman et al. (2017) argue that in the case of Eveline Street, the predominance of shebeens has statistically declined during the period 2008–2016, an indication that shebeens as drivers of the “leisure economy” play a role in the diversification of business activities (2017, pp. 45–46). My study was not designed to prove such an assertion quantitatively, but interactions with shebeen owners supported the claim that starting a shebeen provides a “beginning of business”, as the informal sector organiser I interviewed coined it. All shebeen owners I engaged with either already pursued additional

economic activities or were aiming for business diversification, and in some cases wished to “professionalise” their businesses. While the normative discourse I studied in my thesis would have it that insecurity of tenure, inaccessibility of capital, inadequacy of service infrastructure, and a lack of identification are *inherent* to ‘informal’ economies, economic activities at the mall show that people negotiate these constraints continually but selectively by engaging the municipality or other relevant authorities, where required, and distancing themselves, where it is opportune.

#### *The car wash as anchor*

Amongst the first businesses at the site were two car washes which had been established at the two outer edges of the mall, one of which closed down some years ago. The remaining one is seemingly the largest business at the mall. The car wash is located on the portion of land that belongs to the OTA, and the owner pays the organisation a monthly rental based on an oral agreement. Besides this agreement, his current tenure relies on a letter provided by the OTA consenting to the use of the site, which is required by the City of Windhoek (CoW) for the issuing of a Certificate of Fitness, which indicates municipal approval of the business based on its meeting certain minimum requirements. The Certificate of Fitness

in turn is required by the municipality to provide the business with a separate water meter, and it is still the only entity at the mall that has piped water. This all happened despite a 2010 Council Resolution that mandated the sale of the plot to the OTA for “institutional use” under the condition that “trade [is] to be stopped” and “illegal occupants” are to be “removed” from the site. Although this stipulation has not been effected, the threat of eviction remains imminent.

Car washes have become a mainstay within Windhoek’s popular economies, and in the case of Herero Mall, the two car washes have been instrumental as two anchor points in its spatial and economic development. The car wash clearly renders any formal/informal dichotomy baseless and misleading: it cannot be considered a survivalist strategy, but rather a complex entrepreneurial activity that is opportunistically compliant with municipal regulations yet perpetually insecure in terms of tenure and operations. While the language of council resolutions remains delegitimising of “informal trade”, municipal actions, including the provision of water and electricity and selective enforcement of regulatory control with regards to the car wash at the mall, speak of a more pragmatic approach towards popular economies, as long as these are situated on private

land and cost-recovery for services provided is ensured. From a governance perspective, such ambiguity allows the municipality to affirm a supportive stance towards emerging economies while keeping options open for withdrawing such tolerance when it becomes politically opportune to do so. This requires business owners to continuously negotiate which aspects of formal regulatory requirements to comply with and which ones to consider irrelevant for their operations to continue. At the same time, traders innovate in making infrastructure removable to mitigate the ever-present threat of eviction, as previously open land is increasingly enclosed.

### *Food as marker of cultural difference*

Food vendors usually exist in some form of symbiosis with shebeens, and in some cases it is not obvious that they are separate businesses. Of the three permanent food vendors I interviewed, one cooked on an open fire next to a shebeen with a veranda where her customers would usually sit (see Figure 3), while two had premises of their own. Of the latter, one rented a stationary food cart and shared a veranda with the lessor, while the second had a stand-alone veranda with a paved floor and fixed steel benches, a tree, and a car chassis as storage. In all cases, drinks were available from

adjacent shebeens and food vendors often made use of their electricity. In addition to the permanent food vendors, a number of women regularly cook in the open near the former car wash, usually on weekends, with no infrastructure and protection from the sun. As temporary vendors, they pay a daily fee to the traders' committee and store their equipment in neighbouring shebeens when they are not there. Cooking mostly happens outside on an open fire on the bare ground, and firewood is sold at the mall every morning directly from farms. The food vendors cook once in the morning for the entire day, as their pots are large enough to hold sizable quantities. They are busiest around lunch hour and after work, and none of the interviewees had employees. They acquired their non-meat supplies from nearby supermarkets or wholesale retailers and butcheries, highlighting their dependency on formal retailers. Meat was usually sourced from the Single Quarters market nearby. Cattle are slaughtered at Brakwater, a peri-urban area with smallholdings about 10km to the north of Katutura.

Food vending plays a central role in the economic network of the mall, and usually occurs in symbiosis with shebeens. Food is largely prepared out in the open and consumed in the shade of multiple verandas that are often shared by customers of more than

**Figure 3** *Food vendors cooking in front of a shebeen with a veranda*



*Photo: Phillip Lühl*

one vendor. Food vending effectively operates within a shared space on the interstices between the interior and the exterior. While it lacks overt physical markers such as dedicated premises or visual advertising, which other businesses at the mall have, as an activity it has a permanent presence during the daytime, and its success depends on exposure to customers, and customers being exposed to each other. This explains why the open veranda is the ideal spatial typology for this activity, as it facilitates the public display of its essential popularity. Mobile food vending further transcends the logic

of land use zoning, in terms of which food is prepared at home and sold at the mall and in surrounding streets.

But food transcends more than just social and spatial confines. Specifically, the economy of meat forms circuits of distribution between rural and urban areas that are neither formal nor informal, but rather partially institutionalised (Hull & James, 2012). Supply chains for non-meat products are more directly dependent on the dominant formal retail sector. Smaller economies are created around food preparation such as the provision of firewood, locally produced

cooking equipment, and syphoned-off fat sold for flavouring pap. In addition, non-monetary chains of distribution have been established with reference to food leftovers that are bartered in return for washing dishes. As result of the lack of water provision at the mall, a market for water provided by surrounding residences has been created, leaving vendors in the vulnerable position of paying between 11 and 14 times the municipal water tariff. If understood as a signifier of cultural identity, *food culture* allows urban residents to articulate cultural difference in a non-exclusionary way and helps to bridge the gap between established rural traditions and an emerging urban culture.

*As long as the hair is done well ...*

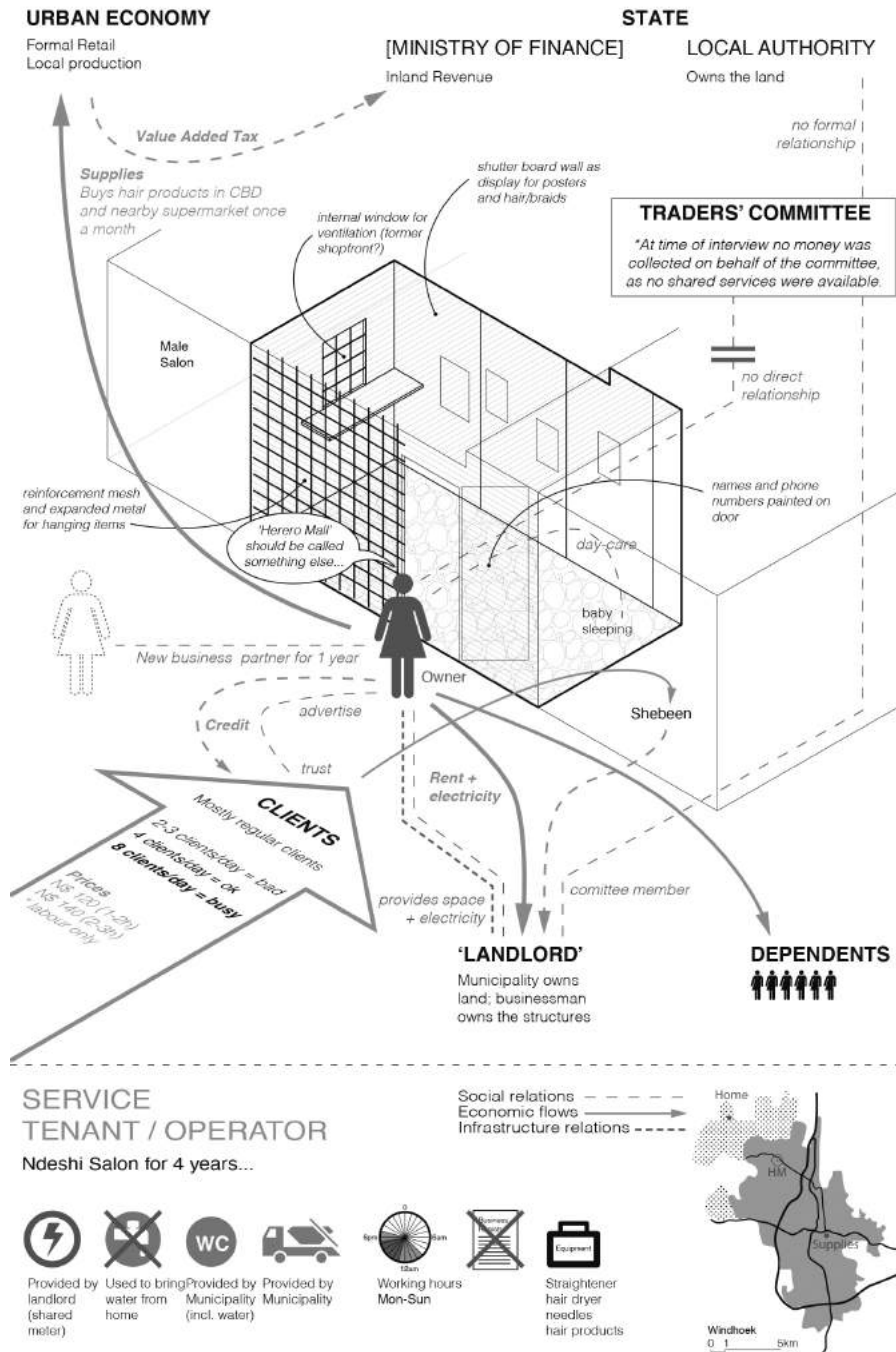
Hair salons and barber shops abound at the mall and are usually gendered spaces. Within the mix of businesses at the mall, hair salons and barber shops provide an opportunity to start a business without the need for major infrastructure, equipment, or formally acquired skills. As independent economic activity they often create significantly higher incomes than domestic work, which ranks amongst the lowest paid regulated formal employment. However, this comes at the cost of long working hours as the processes, especially braiding hair, tend to be lengthy. Workspace is accessed

by renting a chair from an established salon, or by renting a complete space, revealing the landlordism that has emerged since the original occupation of the land. Only a few salon operators own their building if they had been able to secure a portion of the land. Being generally more introverted spaces, salons rely on outward visibility of the services they offer. They often face the street or pedestrian corridors, and display services rendered and contact details on their outer walls. As a highly personal service, established hair salons and barber shops generate a regularity of returning customers – as long as the hair is done well – which benefits the mall as a whole as customers often frequent shebeens or food vendors before or after their visit. Generally, salons are largely dependent on formal retail for products and are part of city-wide networks of distribution that cut across scales of formality. Fig. 4 exemplifies the socio-spatial diagrams I constructed from the interviews and observations for the various businesses.

*Herero Mall as one-stop shop*

The conception of Herero Mall as an informal *market* is misleading, and the idea of a *mall* appears conceptually more fitting. The mall is an important central place for Ovaherero people far beyond the neighbourhood and the city, as one elderly farmer recounted to me. As a business owner at the mall,

Figure 4 Socio-spatial diagram of female hair salon



Source: Author

he receives income from there, he gets supplies for his farm, has his cars repaired, and eats and socialises with his community, or attends cultural and traditional events. This speaks to the principle that popular economies thrive on intricate spatial, social and economic interrelationships. The owner of the car wash, defined it most clearly:

*There are shebeens, welding, kapana, hairdressers: we call it a one-stop shop. Without each other the businesses will suffer. We need each other, otherwise there is not a chain, connected in delivering to the customer. [We] Hereros love cattle, so the welders make cattle brands, troughs for lick, tyre repairs. People feel safe, at home, together: there is no tribalism troubles. We are family. The difference with this car wash and the ones in town, where you book your car and come back: here it takes 40 minutes to 1½ hours to wash. So, to release after hard day's work [you] grab a beer, a piece of meat... it's one concept. You should feel at ease.*

*Car wash owner*

It is an image that I have heard often at Herero Mall: “After going to a [hair] salon, people want to eat” as I was told by a trader. The availability of alcohol, in particular, is often thought to play a significant part in the popularity of the mall, as opposed to formal municipal markets where the sale of alcohol is prohibited. An owner of a number of

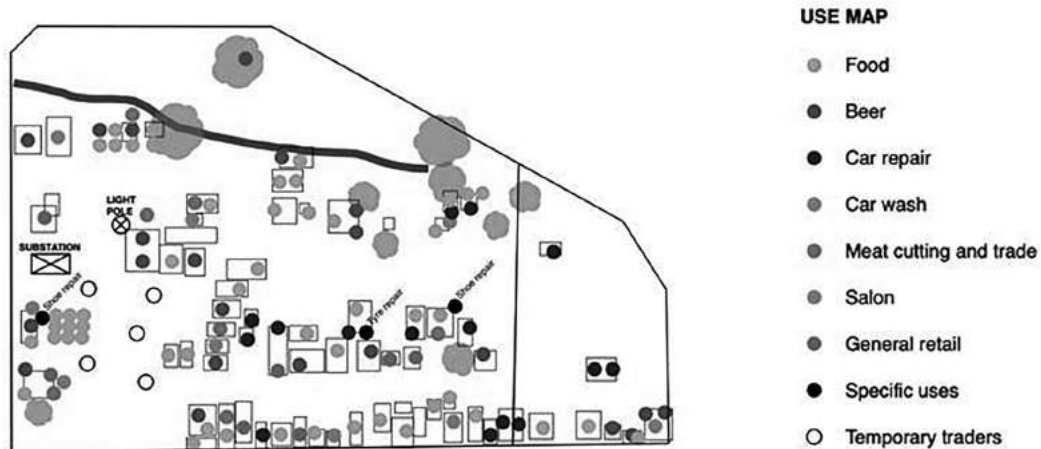
shebeens around the city, including in the mall, put it this way:

*Compare the mall to Soweto [market], especially on Saturdays, when there is very little movement at Soweto. Oshetu [official name for Single Quarters market] is only busy because of the meat. Or look at Khomasdal market, where not much is happening. [This] is a car wash, hair salon, people want to eat and drink.*

*Shebeen owner*

As elaborated above, interdependencies between shebeens and food vendors are amongst the most discernible interdependent relationships, both spatially and economically. But these are by far not the only ones: often the jukeboxes and gambling machines inside shebeens are rented out by owners to be operated by someone else, which can be a profitable business. Meat cutters cut meat for food vendors. And people waiting for their turn at the hair salon would spend the time at a nearby shebeen having a drink and a chat. In the same vein, the local welders work for business owners that want to repair or transform their structures or manufacture equipment for food vendors. Beer wholesalers supply the shebeens that are not able to organise their own transport. Bottles and cans are collected by boys who sell them elsewhere for recycling.

**Figure 5** Map of functions established through a participatory workshop with traders in 2015



Source: Lühl et al., 2016, p. 6

But the concept of a one-stop shop makes sense at another level: as an economic central hub, the mall provides a model of development that is not alienating to the residents who still often have rural backgrounds, as the owner of the car wash explained:

*You need to bring development to the people, not like Maerua Mall. People are used to this life, they are happy, they will be afraid of high-end developments [...] All the politicians come here because they were born here, and their families are here. Some people come here because the place is like the village...*

*Car wash owner*

Here he clearly distinguishes the mall from formal commercial developments in formerly white areas of the city that

might alienate people whose references and mental conceptions are more thoroughly embedded in memories of rural life. This point was also made in conversation with a customer who suggested that to empower informal businesses, formalisation needed to happen gradually, over time: “It can’t be once off.” As such, Herero Mall provides a transitional space, historically and personally, for people who have their roots in rural areas.

## Discussion

Herero Mall embodies the full complexity of Namibia’s post-colonial urban landscape. On the one hand it presents a rupture with inherited spatial patterns of the apartheid city, but on the other it is a space where many social legacies of colonialism are reproduced.



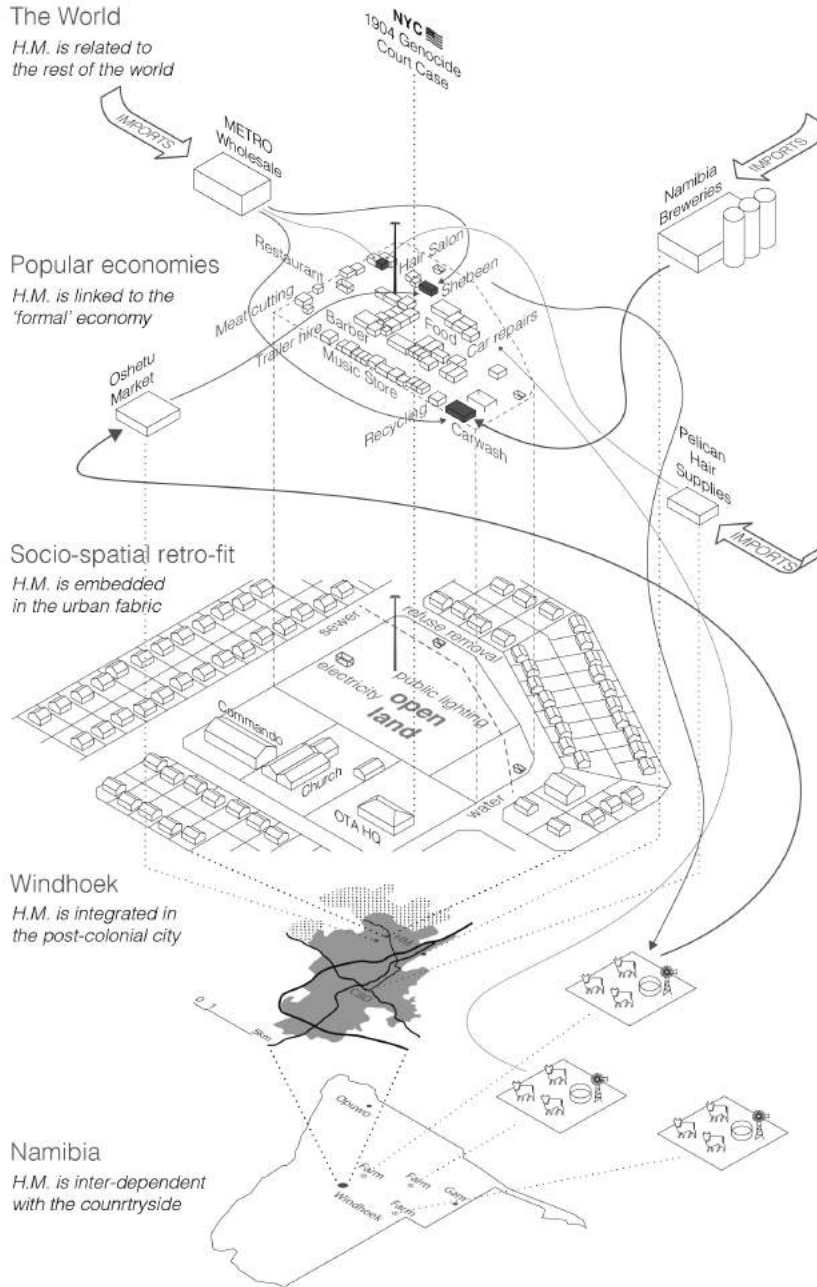
As an ‘informal’ market within a formal neighbourhood it is technically illegal yet practically tolerated by municipal authorities, though not enough to provide basic services to affirm its existence, suspending traders in ambiguity for years. It is a unique local space of difference, imbued with meaning far beyond the scale of the neighbourhood and the city, which split public opinion about the nature of post-colonial urban development.

In this paper I aimed to shed light on the ways that traders pursued an array of livelihood strategies which literally make the city – particularly this former dormitory township – work for those who do not have access to a formal job. Through occupation – an inherently decolonising act – the land has been re-configured as a resource for economic activities that span the spectrum from survivalist strategies to entrepreneurial opportunism, which includes extracting rent from public land. These economies are networked at various scales, including with formal enterprise, and operate within circuits of distribution that reach far into rural areas. Traders clearly articulate the interdependency of Herero Mall economy, while the concept of the *mall*, instead of the *market*, has firmly taken root in the popular imagination of the place. They also assert that its gradual process of transformation

creates a sense of familiarity instead of the alienation caused by ‘development’ that is associated with ‘town’ – in other words, with the European-derived colonial urban construct. In combination with the ongoing transformation of surrounding residences that increasingly house shops, restaurants, businesses, churches, and rental accommodation in addition to their initially primary function of residential dwellings, the mall thus provides a diversified urban economy that the neighbourhood was denied in its original design. Elsewhere in my thesis I observed that the mall also allows room for non-conformity in terms of gender and sexuality to exist side-by-side with more traditional ways of life and thus provides a space of difference that characterises urban life. This process of urban and social transformation can be argued as a process of decolonising the township from within. Figure 6 visualises this conceptualisation of Herero Mall as a popular economy that is spatially, socially and economically enmeshed with the post-colonial city and the world, and larger territorial scales and circuits of distribution.

Ambiguous governance by the municipality overlaid with the influence of the OTA and partial self-organisation of traders has created varying degrees of vulnerability amongst traders. The

**Figure 6** Spatial diagram of popular economies and their relations to wider economic and spatial scales



Source: Author

hierarchy in descending order of vulnerability includes owner-operators with employees, owner-operators without employees, tenant-operators, informal employees, temporary vendors, and hawkers. The higher up one goes within this hierarchy, the more traders are visible to the local authority and thus need to negotiate formal requirements and observe regulatory compliance in order to not jeopardise their livelihoods. But such challenges also lead to spatial innovation, with particular reference to making infrastructure removable to mitigate the lack of secure tenure.

Popular economies further thrive on the principle of shared spaces which act as social condensers for an array of recreational activities that weave together an interdependent and diversified urban economy. This economy provides necessary amenities, work opportunities, specialised commodities, generates rural – urban and city-wide circuits of distribution with substantive dependency on formal retail but also enabling non-monetary forms of distribution at the neighbourhood scale. Following Cruz and Forman's concept of density of social relations (2015), popular economies establish a density of economic relations which render the spaces they inhabit essentially urban. These activities are underpinned by a transactional logic of economic

interdependence, expressed through spatial proximity and an inherent mix of uses. The density of social and economic interrelations thus fundamentally subverts foundational premises of rationalist zoning and land-use planning that remain at the core of planning practice in Namibia.

## Conclusion

If the apartheid city was designed primarily to facilitate an efficient and stable pool of (cheap) black wage labour in service of colonial industry and white domestic space, using strict land-use planning and police control to foster the segregation of races and urban functions, then the mall subverts such economic, spatial, and social logic in nearly all aspects. The original urban fabric of Herero Location, comprising single-family, residential, rental houses with a near-total absence of public amenities, and connected to industrial areas by dedicated public transport, exemplifies the apartheid conception of urban life for blacks. However, this socio-spatial reality has been fundamentally transformed from within this formerly peripheral setting, creating both an identity and an economy of its own that does not foreground colonial spatial and economic constructs. Charman et al. have used descriptors like *leisure economy* (2017) or *township economy* (2020) for describing their insights about similar settings. However, by

relegating such insights to niche activities or spaces, they fail to capture the latent potential of such economies and the mode of urbanisation that they embody. I described this process as retrofitting the apartheid city through inserting popular economies into the gaps that modernist economic and spatial planning left blank. Through appropriating common resources such as public land and municipal services, traders effectively accomplished a degree of spatial re-distribution from the ground up. Following Roy (2005), I argue that by elevating the use value of the land over its exchange value as property, traders effectively subvert a key aspect of coloniality – property – and thereby assert their right to the city. While the discourse of ‘informality’ is a powerful mechanism of exclusion, the everyday spatial and economic practices of the subaltern resist exclusion. Instead of framing these practices as the binary opposite of the formal, and therefore rendering them illegitimate, as most of the literature on informality continues to do, this study contributes to understanding these practices for what they *are*. I contend that what we witness is the ongoing process and spatial manifestation of decolonising the apartheid city from below. In the process, normative modernist principles and imaginaries such as an industrial production-based urban economy, property rights, land use-based planning, and state-centred

provision of services are subverted and de-centred, creating potential for alternative pathways towards a decolonial urban development.

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## Namibia's Flexible Land Tenure System: The Impact on Livelihoods in Gobabis

Judy Tymon

### Abstract:

*In 2012, the residents of Freedom Square in Gobabis, the capital of Omaheke Region in Namibia, embarked on a ten-year long process of in-situ upgrading, eventually becoming a pilot programme for the Flexible Land Tenure System (FLTS), a tenure security system designed for low-income communities. This study examines the impacts of that programme on social and economic livelihoods and also examines the programme through the lens of social justice. It is based on data gathered in the field from residents, municipal officials and NGO representatives.*

*The FLTS has provided residents with both de facto and legal tenure security, and a number of positive impacts on social livelihoods were observed during this study. The case for improvement in economic livelihoods is less clear. FLTS did provide Gobabis residents with procedural justice in that it is an example of a bottom-up approach, allowing residents some control over their future, and the ability to make decisions and negotiate for improvements with local authorities. The challenge, however, is to*

*replicate this experience so that the FLTS provides the same benefits for other communities and becomes a framework for distributed justice throughout the country.*

**Key terms:** flexible land tenure system; tenure security; livelihood; social justice; informal settlements; Gobabis; Namibia

### Introduction

The scarcity of affordable serviced land in urban areas in Namibia forces migrants from rural and urban areas to live in informal settlements characterised by high levels of poverty, unemployment, low living standards, and few basic services. Land is allocated according to an arcane set of regulations that make it difficult for informal settlers to own land and to benefit from land as an asset (De Vries & Lewis, 2009). The construction of homes, and land ownership itself, is only permitted on fully serviced land, preventing low-income households from attaining tenure security and finding a pathway out of poverty. Land

ownership is viewed by many as the means not only to eradicating poverty, but also to attaining food security and gender equality, and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (Enemark et al., 2014).

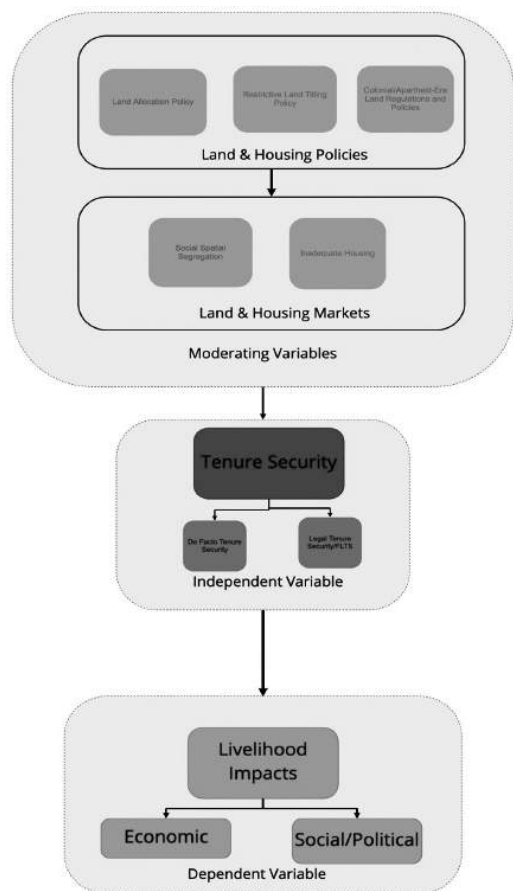
FLTS provides a means of acquiring land tenure for low-income households through the establishment of a new title system, potentially making access to land more equitable for populations in informal settlements (Matthaei & Mandimika, 2014). In Gobabis, 1 086 land hold title certificates were issued in March 2021 under the FLTS. However, very little is known about its impact on the livelihoods of residents. The programme is currently at a crucial point, with pilot programmes having been completed in three communities (Gobabis, Oshakati and Windhoek). The government is now considering national implementation of the programme and has asked a local NGO to evaluate the results of the pilot. In addition, the National Housing Policy is in draft form and includes references to the FLTS. The findings of this study can be useful in determining if equitable outcomes have been achieved in Gobabis, as well as in informing policy and the way forward with nationwide implementation.

### Conceptual Framework

This study explores the relationship between tenure security as provided

by the FLTS and the livelihood of the residents of Freedom Square, through interviews with a group of residents who have obtained titles to their land and who have lived in the settlement for the duration of the in-situ upgrading process. Both de facto and legal tenure security will be examined, with the FLTS as the independent variable. The dependent variables are social and economic livelihoods as observed during the study. There is abundant research documenting the genesis of

**Figure 1** *Conceptual Framework*



the existing land and housing crises that exist throughout the global south and in Namibia (Huchzermeyer, 2009; Bah et al., 2018, Remmert & Ndhlovu, 2018). Those are considered moderating variables and are not examined as a part of this study.

### **Land Policy**

Apartheid and colonial rule dramatically affected the allocation of land in Namibia, creating an impoverished black majority population, driving an increase in informal settlements, and leaving a legacy of segregation that is considered to be “the defining characteristic of its urban areas” (Lühl & Delgado, 2018). These forces concentrated ownership of land, natural resources and financial assets within the white minority and contributed to poverty and income inequality. As a result, Namibia has one of the highest Gini indices of 59.1 (2015 figure), second only to South Africa (63.0 in 2014) (World Bank, 2018).

In 1998, the Land Policy, stating that all citizens have equal rights and opportunities for ownership of land and access to tenure, was adopted. It provides for the establishment of urban areas as townships and recommends that laws and regulations be passed that are transparent and flexible, with close consultation with local authorities (Delgado, 2018).

Today, Namibia suffers from a severe housing and land crisis that restricts access for the poor to decent housing and serviced land. In response to these pressures, the Urban and Regional Planning Act (5 of 2018) was promulgated in order to streamline land delivery and spatial planning. The Act has the potential to accelerate land delivery by eliminating some of the current administrative procedures required to subdivide land (Ulrich & Meurers, 2015), but continues to uphold the practice of forbidding freehold ownership of communal land, which some interpret as discouraging economic investment (Mendelsohn, 2008.) The Act is intended to decentralise planning practices by allowing local authorities to play a larger role and increasing public participation in the planning process (Remmert & Ndhlovu, 2018).

### **Housing Policy**

In the past, families were discouraged from accompanying black migrant workers into cities, resulting in the construction of single quarters rather than family accommodation (Remmert & Ndhlovu, 2018). After independence, as apartheid regulations were eliminated and families moved into cities, the freedom to own, buy and sell property combined to increase the pressure on housing markets, resulting in the existing inadequate and crowded accommodation (Odendaal, 2005;



Remmert & Ndhlovu, 2018; Matthaei & Mandimika, 2014). Without clear legal title to land, residents of urban informal settlements are not allowed to legally build a house. Without a title, structures can be demolished and households evicted. The threat of eviction is real in post-apartheid communities where the battle for space often occurs between informal settlements and public/private interests (Huchzermeyer, 2009). Before the upgrading plan was put in place for Freedom Square, the local government had planned to relocate the community in order to develop the land for a formal housing project (Delgado et al., 2020).

The primary challenge in the Namibian housing market is the mismatch between the supply and demand for low-income housing (Chiripanhura, 2018; Remmert & Ndhlovu, 2018; Asino, 2018). According to the Bank of Namibia, growing income inequality and rising unemployment rates have resulted in over 70% of residents being excluded from access to credit, reducing housing options for the urban poor (Asino, 2018). Government programmes to supply housing have proved to be inadequate as they have targeted middle-income households. This includes the National Housing Enterprise, which focuses on those earning over N\$5 000 per month. Programmes such as Build Together provide some options for

very low-income groups, but they have not been able to scale up to meet the demand (Remmert & Ndhlovu, 2018). As these trends continue, the demand for housing is expected to increase by over 46 000 units annually between 2031 and 2041, with a majority of that housing required by the urban poor (Asino, 2018).

### **Tenure Security**

At the time of Namibia's independence, the idea of accumulating wealth and capital through the creation of a titling system for informal settlers was popularised by Hernando de Soto, who claimed that the provision of titles is the key to unlocking vast amounts of wealth and capital, and could bring a population out of poverty by "enlivening dead capital" (De Soto, 2000). De Soto's ideas gained popularity in some quarters but attracted criticism for suggesting a simple solution to intractable poverty. Some suggested that he ignored the practical problems associated with land titles, including procedural costs (Lee-Smith, as cited by Buckley & Kalarickal (2006)); the acceptance of a title as collateral by local financial institutions; and the existence of a "continuum of tenure categories" that often exist in the Global South (Payne, 1997), where certain types of 'tenure' are more valuable than others. The value of more flexible, customized tenure systems has been recognised as a possible solution, as opposed to the

“silver bullet” espoused by De Soto (Buckley & Kalarickal, 2006).

### *Levels of tenure security*

Van Gelder describes three forms of tenure security: perceived tenure, which equates to the probability of eviction from the experience of the individual tenant; de facto tenure, which increases over time and implies recognition through either documentation or installation of infrastructure; and legal tenure, which has the backing of state authority (Van Gelder, 2010). De facto tenure is often provided by third-party support, as well as the presence of networks of friends and relatives in the community (Smart, 2009). It is often associated with a particular settlement, documenting the length of time that residents have occupied a settlement (Van Gelder, 2010). In some cases, de facto tenure security can be an impediment to the implementation of legal security, as it can increase land prices and precipitate the displacement of poor communities (Payne & Durand-Lasserve, 2007).

Legal tenure security is typically described according to the expectations of the owner that land rights will be enforced by the state and is often referred to as statutory tenure. Payne categorises legal tenure as public (owned by the state); private (owned by individuals);

or customary/communal ownership (owned by a group). Customary tenure is common in areas where land has been owned in common for farming or grazing of animals and is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, including Namibia (Payne et al., 2009a).

Land categories in Namibia include state land (including national parks), urban land (owned either by the state, by a local authority, or privately), commercial private farmland, and communal land. The rights to the land can be secured through customary land rights, freehold tenure or leasehold tenure, the latter being limited to 99 years. Additional tenure categories include Permission to Occupy certificates (phased out after the introduction of the Communal Land Reform Act (5 of 2002); and prescription ownership, which is granted after uninterrupted possession for 30 years. Freehold titles can be transferred or used as collateral for bank loans and are considered the “highest form of ownership”, and can be secured in either communal or rural areas (Delgado, 2018). The FLTS provides two additional title categories: starter, and land hold, that are available to informal settlement residents prior to obtaining a freehold title (Delgado, 2019).

### *The Flexible Land Tenure System Bill*

In 1994, the Ministry of Lands and Resettlement (now known as the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform (MAWLR)) in collaboration with the Danish organisation IBIS, explored alternative forms of tenure which could be used in parallel with the existing system (Odendaal, 2005). Pilot projects were planned in 1995 (two in Oshakati and one in Windhoek) although it would take until 2012 before the Bill would be passed. As stated in the Bill, the objectives were “to create alternative forms of land title that are simpler and cheaper to administer than existing forms of land title; to provide security of title for persons who live in informal settlements or who are provided with low income housing; to empower the persons concerned economically by means of these rights” (Flexible Land Tenure Act (4 of 2012)). Six years later, in 2018, the Regulations were passed and the pilot programme was implemented. However, numerous delays in implementation were caused by the inability of government institutions to come to a consensus regarding which branch of government would have responsibility for the programme (Matthaei & Mandimika, 2014). The issue of overlapping institutional authority continues to this day, as the MAWLR is responsible for the implementation of the FLTS, while the Ministry of Urban and

Rural Development is responsible for local authorities and urban planning (Matthaei & Mandimika, 2014). In Gobabis, this dual responsibility caused a delay in the initial implementation of the FLTS, as the MAWLR failed to take into account local residential control (Delgado et al., 2020).

Today, the FLTS is being considered as the solution for a national delivery of land to the urban poor that goes beyond the current pilot programmes. The GIZ is currently working with various ministries to determine what changes need to be made to the Act, the Regulations, the implementation process, and the budgets so that the FLTS can be rolled out nationwide (NGO 1, personal communication, June 14, 2022).

### *Social Livelihood*

Advancing social livelihoods can provide a pathway to sustainability, as it depends on the collective actions of individuals and the level of trust within groups among those individuals, and often provides the ability to undertake action for the well-being of that group (Villalonga-Olives & Kawachi, 2017). Policymakers are looking closely at social livelihood as a measure of a community’s resilience or “localized response” as a possible solution to the needs of disadvantaged communities (Gingerich and Cohen 2015 as cited

by Mpanje et al. (2018)). However, this research cautions that due to the diversity and complexity of informal settlements, the definition of the term and its indicators requires a deep knowledge of the context in which it is used (Mpanje et al., 2018). That complexity is reflected in the view held by some that informal settlements are associated with a lack of organisation and social cohesion (Sadeghi et al. (2007) as cited by Hosseini (2015)). An alternative view is that informal settlements are highly organised and productive, as they can provide more cost-effective housing than the formal market (Napier et al., 2014).

Multiple social livelihood indicators are referenced in research studies. Putnam believed that three indicators should be included: awareness, civic institutions and participation (Putnam as cited by Hosseini (2015)). The World Bank has developed a Human Capital Index that is designed to measure the resilience of each generation, by measuring the infant mortality rate, educational levels and health environment for each country (World Bank, 2020). Other indicators can be summarised as either direct, including trust in neighbours, the municipality, and other ethnic groups; or indirect, which would include participation in the community, having close friends and assisting with charitable aid (Hosseini, 2015). The Sustainable Livelihood

Approach, as developed by Pons Cortes in collaboration with Oxfam (Pons Cortes, 2008), proposes a framework that goes beyond the definition of social capital and encompasses natural, physical, financial, social and political capital, while emphasising the need to utilise the framework with “creativity and imagination” in order to find the right balance in a particular situation (Pons Cortes, 2008). Again, the cautious approach in any situation is firstly, to examine the context of the community, and secondly, to evaluate the desired goal for the framework.

### *Economic Livelihood*

Before De Soto launched the debate linking the creation of wealth with land titling (De Soto, 2000), UN-Habitat had recognised the importance of land titles during its Global Campaign for Tenure in 1999 (Payne et al., 2009a). The debate has focused on economic benefits, but also on its being perceived as either legal or de facto, and on the distinction between the two being directly related to the fear of eviction (Van Gelder, 2010).

The key to establishing a relationship between title ownership and economic benefit will ultimately depend on what is called the ‘attribution gene’: the identification of the particular policy that affected the desired outcome (Payne et al., 2009b). This relationship is

difficult to quantify, with many studies concluding that there is no significant relationship between title ownership and economic benefit (Gilbert, 2002; Velasco et al., 2014). Some studies demonstrate a relationship between title ownership and rising property values, which could benefit the owner, but only if they decide to sell the land (Payne et al., 2009b).

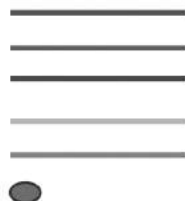
## Methodology

The Freedom Square settlement in the town of Gobabis consists of 1 086 households and approximately 4 000 residents. It is located on the north-eastern boundary of the town, adjacent to the settlement of Kanaan.

*Map 1 Freedom Square and Surrounding Settlements*



- Freedom Square
- Kanaan
- Unplanned settlement
- Transect walk 1
- Transect walk 2
- Shacks



### *Research Strategy*

The research is a case study using a mixed-method data analysis. The research methods used are a combination of desk research and fieldwork and include both quantitative and qualitative data.

### *Interviewee selection*

A group of 14 residents was selected from the population in 1086 households. An in-field NGO representative who is a resident of the settlement and helped facilitate the establishment of FLTS in Freedom Square identified and selected community leaders and other residents to be interviewed. Because several of the selected residents were not able to be present for interviews, additional residents were selected during two transect walks. These walks were conducted over a three-day period, during which the researcher was accompanied by a local guide and/or an interpreter, who assisted in identifying the additional residents.

### *Qualitative data*

Qualitative data were collected over a two-week period in Namibia, with four days spent in the case study area of Freedom Square. Livelihood indicators were examined through semi-structured interviews with residents and during transect walks. These data were triangulated with additional

qualitative data obtained from a series of semi-structured interviews with those individuals who had either written academic literature regarding the Gobabis FLTS process or who have been involved directly through their association with an NGO or with a local Gobabis government agency.

### *Quantitative data*

The qualitative data gathered from interviews were supplemented with a quantitative database provided by members of the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN)/Namibia Housing Action Group (NHAG) in Gobabis. Beginning in 2012, SDFN/NHAG collected demographic data from over 700 households including on income and access to basic services. In 2015, demographic data were updated and the number of households grew to 1086. Initial enumerations were updated using Social Tenure Domain Mapping software, with support from the Global Land Tenure Network and the Namibia University of Science and Technology in preparation for certification (Chigbu et al., 2021). When certificates were issued in 2021, a new database was compiled that included demographic information. Because the data were not exactly replicated across the different databases, only those variables common to both databases (2015 and 2021) have been used: the number of households; income levels; and employment status.

### *Limitations*

Field research was limited to four days in Gobabis and five days in Windhoek with NGO representatives. Although both a guide and an interpreter were in attendance at all interviews, cultural familiarity was lacking, resulting in less freedom and latitude to discuss all livelihood issues in depth. Also, due to time limitations and limited social connections in the area, the research relied on a third party to choose subjects for interviews.

The study took place after applicants had received certificates, so that livelihood changes documented in the study had taken place since tenure security had been granted. A longitudinal study would have been able to more accurately observe livelihood changes pre- and post-tenure security status.

Qualitative data challenges and limitations include reliance on self-enumeration data gathered by the community in cooperation with SDFN/NHAG beginning in 2012 and continuing through 2015. A separate data set was provided that includes updated data after the issuance of tenure certificates in 2021. The data contained in the 2012–2015 data set are inconsistent with the 2021 data in that not all records contain the same data variables, and the numbers of records in each dataset do not match.

### **Findings**

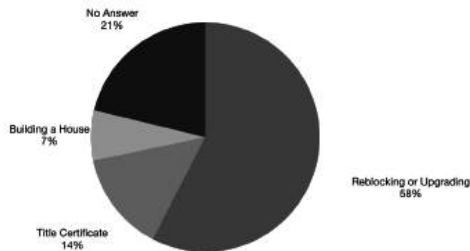
During the course of the interviews, it became clear that residents experienced tenure security in stages, along the “continuum of tenure categories” (Payne, 1997) from de facto security to legal tenure security. There was a very clear distinction made between the process of upgrading (de facto tenure security) and the acquisition of a title certificate (legal tenure security). As a result of this observation, the analysis will focus on the impact of these two stages on social and economic livelihoods.

### *Social livelihoods*

Interviewees were asked two sets of questions: the first were demographic questions, including the age of respondent, the size of household and the duration of residence in Freedom Square; the second, open-ended questions designed to determine levels of social and political cohesion, sense of safety and security, financial independence and overall quality of life in the settlement. One of the questions in this second set asked was: “What was the most important event that has taken place since you have lived in Freedom Square?”

57% of respondents stated that the upgrading process that took place between 2015 and 2018 was the most important event that had occurred in

**Chart 1** Resident Interview Question:  
*Most important event*



Freedom Square. This process actively engaged the community and had a positive impact on social livelihoods. Residents’ participation in planning the re-blocking of plots and roads, the location of open spaces and the installation of infrastructure helped to create a sense of pride and ownership in their surroundings.

Residents described the neighbourhood positively, with many using terms such as ‘friendly’, ‘nice’ and ‘comfortable’ to describe interactions with neighbours and friends. These responses indicated a level of community support, a presence of communal activity and a dependence on each other for that support. Residents also responded positively (10 out of 14) when asked about safety for themselves and their children. They acknowledged that children attend the local school and recognised the importance of education. Several residents also talked about their roles as caretakers for the children from other households, while

one resident mentioned that his family was responsible for the children of a deceased relative. Municipal officials confirmed the significant livelihood improvements provided by de facto tenure (Municipal Official 2, personal communication, June 19, 2022). They observed a positive change in residents’ attitudes, as well as their confidence in the future for themselves and their families.

When the upgrading process was being planned, residents were asked about their priorities for the installation of services, including water, sewerage and electricity. Residents determined that their greatest need was for water and sewerage, with electricity as the third highest priority (Delgado et al., 2020). This was confirmed during my interview with municipal officials. During the planning process it was also determined that residents preferred pre-paid water meters so that they could have some control over the expense. As of 2020, 90 communal water taps had been installed (Delgado et al., 2020). In order to access the communal taps, residents have access to a pre-paid account that allows them to determine the exact amount of water that they wish to purchase (NGO 3, personal communication, June 19, 2022).

The de facto tenure security process also precipitated major changes in daily life, as water and sanitation were



introduced. Prior to installation of these services, access to water had been limited to communal water pumps, while sanitation had consisted of communal toilets and open defecation in the bush. Residents now had access to the communal water taps and, for additional charges for sewerage hook-ups and installation, the option of installing private toilets.

The lack of electricity was mentioned in every interview as high priority issue for the community. It was also seen as an impediment to safety, since the streets were not lit at night and were considered unsafe for women and children. The lack of electricity also required that fires be used for cooking, which increased the danger of uncontrolled fires in the settlement.

Several residents did mention the lack of electricity as a possible impediment to starting and maintaining a business, although no one expressed an interest in starting a business. One business owner mentioned the lack of electricity as an impediment to sustaining regular business hours (Resident 19, personal communication, June 19, 2022).

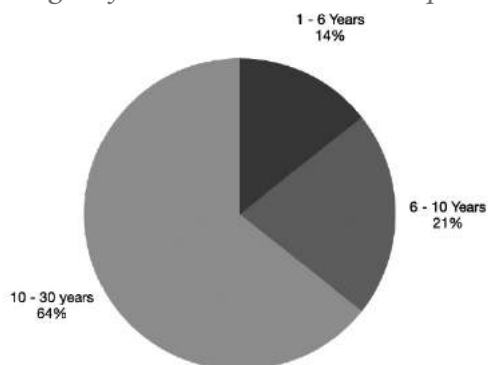
Residents were able to identify the plots as their own, with clear boundaries, and were also able to attain a sense of privacy by having a defined plot. Many residents mentioned the privacy afforded by streets and many had installed fences to define plot boundaries. Before the re-blocking, trespassing had been very common, and residents mentioned that they now felt more secure and safe on their property.



*Photograph 1 Shacks in Freedom Square*

During the interviews, I was able to talk with residents who had spent over ten years living in Freedom Square. There was no indication that these residents were planning to move out of the area, or that they were dissatisfied with the length of time spent living in the settlement. The feeling expressed most often was that of pride in having lived in one place for so long.

**Chart 2** Resident Interview Question: Length of Residence in Freedom Square

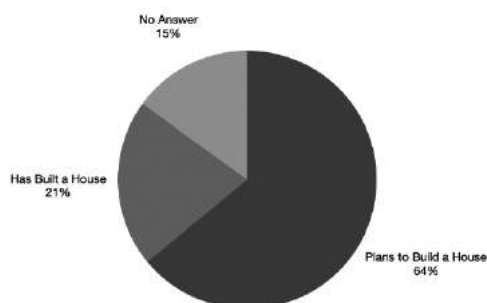


### *Economic livelihoods*

De facto tenure security afforded residents the opportunity to secure credit, to borrow capital, and to build houses with loans from the Twahangana Fund which is managed by SDFN/NHAG and financed on a revolving basis by current residents whose payments fund future homeowners. Contributions are also made by private donors and by the Namibian Government through the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development (UN Habitat, 2005). In order to qualify for

loans, Freedom Square residents were required to have a minimum of N\$3 000 in their savings accounts and approval from their savings group members (NGO 2, personal communication, June 11, 2022).

**Chart 3** Resident Interview Question: Plans to Build a House



Several interviewees had constructed houses with multiple rooms, including living spaces, bathrooms, kitchens and bedrooms, and a majority expressed a desire to eventually build a house (see Chart 3). As of June 2022, 37 building permits had been issued for the construction of homes, with 17 of those permits issued nine months before legal tenure was granted in March 2021 (NGO 3, personal communication, June 19, 2022). None of the residents mentioned an economic benefit resulting from property ownership, including selling or renting property or using property as collateral for a loan.

Although most residents continued to live in shacks, there were noticeable

improvements that had been made since upgrading. Plots were defined by gardens and fences, and evidencing pride of ownership, yards were clean and free of debris and solid waste.



Photograph 2: Garden in Freedom Square

Changes in economic status using income and employment data were explored using the 2015 and 2021 databases provided by Shack Dwellers International (SDI)/NHAG. The 2015 database provides income and employment information for approximately 700 residents, while the 2021 database contains data for 1 086 residents, with no link provided to crosscheck households in the two databases. In addition, the databases provide inconsistent data categories, so that only employment and income levels could be compared.

As seen in Table 1, nearly all residents of Freedom Square earned below N\$5 000 per month in 2015 and 2021.

**Table 1** *Income Levels*

Income Level	2015 % of total	2021 % of total	Increase/Decrease from 2015 to 2021
N\$ 0 – 5 000	97.2%	96.1%	-9%
> N\$ 5 000	2.7%	3.9%	44%

**Table 2** *Employment Status*

Employment Status	2015	2021	Increase/Decrease from 2015 to 2021
Employed	56%	58.6%	4.6%
Unemployed	36%	31.3%	-13%
Pensioner	N/A	10%	N/A

Unemployment figures showed a slight decrease from 2014 to 2021; however, as is the case with the income figures, unemployment data rely on the same SDI/NHAG databases of 2015 and 2021. Although unemployment appears to have reduced between 2015 and 2021, there is no evidence that these conditions were precipitated by the residents' tenure security status. Other factors may have contributed to changes in these figures, including the fluctuations in the population between 2012 and 2022, when certificates were issued.

Residents were asked about employment status, but were not questioned about income. Three of the 14 residents were employed, three stated that they were unemployed and looking for work, with the remainder providing no response to the question.

### *Social justice*

The FLTS process is complex and bureaucratic, with Regulations that do not reflect the language used in the 2012 Flexible Land Tenure Act – an opinion shared by an NGO representative during interviews (NGO 1, personal communication, June 18, 2022). In spite of this complexity, the FLTS was successful in Gobabis, as evidenced by the fact that all 1 086 households are eligible to receive title to their land. During this study, several factors

were observed that contributed to the success in Gobabis:

- Municipal officials have offices that are located within a 10-minute walk of Freedom Square. This proximity to the settlement and its accessibility plays a factor in awareness on the part of local authorities and prepares them for anticipating and solving issues as they arise (Municipal Official 3, personal communication, June 16, 2022). In addition to municipal officials, an NGO representative is tasked with ensuring that each resident is aware of the steps to be taken to obtain the certificate.
- The sense of agency and empowerment expressed by residents depended to a great extent on the support of SDI/NHAG. The ability of SDI/NHAG to engage with stakeholders and sustain a high level of participation was evidenced by the continuation of participation in community savings clubs after tenure security had been achieved.
- Gobabis residents have been involved in the upgrading process since 2012, when the first enumerations took place. Between 2012 and 2022, residents participated in spatial planning, infrastructure

installation, and the planning and layout of recreational areas (Delgado et al., 2020). During this study, residents were observed installing water and sewerage facilities, evidence of continued participation and self-organisation. Interviewees indicated that self-participation

has contributed to a sense of community when they described Freedom Square as a friendly and safe environment (57% of respondents described Freedom Square as “friendly” and 71% described it as “safe” when asked to describe the settlement).

**Table 3** *Resident Interview Question Regarding the Characteristics of the Neighbourhood*

Indicator	Friendly Neighborhood	Safe Neighborhood
Positive	8	10
Negative	1	2
No Answer/Neutral	5	2

Although these factors contributed to the success in obtaining legal tenure security, additional studies would be needed in order to determine the strength of the relationship between these factors and the success of the FLTS.

Despite its success in Freedom Square, access to the FLTS is not distributed equally throughout Namibia. In addition to Gobabis, pilot programmes have been completed in Oshakati and Windhoek (Delgado et al., 2020), with the latter being the smallest pilot with fewer than 200 plots (NGO 1, personal communication, June 14, 2022). There is additional demand in Windhoek, as reported by another NGO representative (NGO

4, personal communication, June 21, 2022). Residents of this settlement are currently waiting for a response regarding their FLTS re-blocking plan submitted in October 2021, which is evidence of unequal access to the FLTS system within the country.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This research explores the relationship between obtaining tenure security and a change in livelihoods in an informal settlement. During the study, a higher level of social capital was observed as residents described the upgrading process that led to tenure security. It was clear that daily life was greatly improved, with access to water and sewerage, and defined roads and plots that provide

privacy and a sense of safety. Having a defined spatial layout for the settlements made for fewer intrusions of neighbours onto individuals' property and increased their levels of personal safety. Access to water and sewerage improved sanitation and also contributed to a cleaner environment.

The residents of Gobabis achieved tenure security with the support of NGOs, namely SDFN/NHAG, but mainly through sheer persistence and their own hard work over a ten-year period. They achieved their goal of land ownership in spite of the hurdles placed before them by the legislation, its minefield of regulations, and their own country's history of colonialism and apartheid. In order for the FLTS to make similar opportunities available to other communities, changes will be required to streamline the process and to make local governments more responsive to the needs of their constituents. When that happens, FLTS will have the potential to provide all Namibians with the sense of security and pride of ownership which are currently enjoyed by the residents of Freedom Square.

In addition to improvements in daily life, residents expressed pride in having legal ownership of a plot, and the realisation that this ownership would provide a more secure future for them and their children. Residents used

the terms 'pride' or 'proud' and also referred to the fact that they had a piece of paper with identifying information, including names and ID numbers, as evidence of ownership. They displayed an understanding of that ownership when discussing the potential to build a house and to pass on the land and title to their children.

Social connections among residents were strong and stable, with most respondents describing the community as friendly and safe. Residents had positive relationships with their SDI/NHAG savings group leaders. Contact with local authorities was limited, with most residents relying on community leaders to maintain that relationship.

Economic gains were mostly evidenced through the construction of permanent homes. Those residents with sufficient savings were able to obtain permits and build houses. However they represent a minority of households (37 of 1 086 as of June 2022). Although 64% of those interviewed stated their desire to eventually build a house, none of the residents interviewed mentioned further economic gain to be made by having a title certificate, including applying for loans to start businesses or plans to sell their property to realise a profit.

The SDI/NHAG quantitative data demonstrated very little change in

either income or employment in the period from 2015 to 2021. The settlement experienced rapid growth in the number of households during that period, so that a definitive relationship between economic livelihood and tenure security could not be established. In addition, this study was qualitative, and conducted over a short period, making it difficult to measure changes in economic status.

The complicated regulations and the lengthy process of the FLTS both point to systemic failures to provide procedural justice. In spite of this, residents of Freedom Square were able to secure legal tenure with ongoing support from SDI/NHAG and local officials embedded in the community. In order to provide similar outcomes for informal settlements throughout Namibia, a successful approach could include:

- **A strong partnership between local authorities with SDI/NHAG that includes organisational and financial support:** The ability of SDI/NHGA to engage stakeholders and sustain a high level of participation was evidenced by the continued participation in community savings clubs and community-based installation

of infrastructure after tenure security had been achieved. A nationwide partnership could become the basis of implementing the FLTS on a wider scale and would create more equitable access to land tenure.

- **Improved access to local officials:** If local officials were embedded in the community, as they are in Freedom Square, there might be a greater awareness of not only their daily struggles, but also of their capacity for co-production. This insight might be the catalyst needed for local government to engage and cooperate with these communities.

### Further Study

Since the certificates were issued in March 2021, this study does not provide a sufficient perspective on the economic impact of tenure security. A study of the economic status of Freedom Square residents should be conducted after they have had their certificates for five or more years. After five years, residents are free to sell their property. Will residents build houses? Will they sell or rent their property? Will they apply for loans to start businesses? These are questions that remain to be answered.

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## Organising the Informalised: A Monumental Challenge for Namibia's Trade Unions

*Herbert Jauch*

### **Abstract:**

*Namibia's economic structures, centred around the extractive industries with very limited local manufacturing, were largely maintained after independence. The key sectors in terms of employment such as agriculture, fishing and forestry, accommodation and food services, wholesale and retail trade, and private households are characterised by high levels of informality and below-average wage levels.*

*Namibia's trade unions emerged in the 1980s, some of them with a strong focus on social movement unionism, combining struggles at the workplace with broader struggles for independence and democracy. After independence, the unions' focus was narrowed within a tripartite social dialogue model which encompassed only formal sector workers at larger workplaces in the public and private sectors. Consequently, unions hardly managed to recruit informal and vulnerable workers whose numbers increased as a result of outsourcing and subcontracting.*

*This article uses a qualitative analysis based on secondary data such as the findings of successive labour force surveys. It outlines the structural nature of Namibia's mass unemployment and the trend towards "informal employment". The role of trade unions after independence within the framework of "social partnership" is examined and an argument is made that Namibian trade unions have not been able to deal with the informalisation of work. They will need to look at different organising models and draw lessons from international experiences if they want to reach the large number of informalised workers in a fragmented labour market. This does not only pose practical challenges but requires an ideological reorientation towards community unionism and a labour-led development strategy.*

**Key terms: informalisation; trade unions; community unionism; unemployment; workers' rights**

## Introduction

The growth and size of the informal economy globally is widely recognised and documented. It has grown significantly over the past decades as a result of a mirage of neo-liberal economic policies which systematically reduced the number of permanently employed formal sector workers and increased the number of those in precarious and informal conditions of work. The informal economy now employs over 60% of the global labour force outside agriculture (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2019, p. 13) and in developing countries the number is often significantly higher. In Zambia, for example, the figure stood at 87.9% and in Uganda at 93.7% (Schminke & Fridell, 2021, p. 96). In the face of such widespread informality, African trade unions simply have to broaden their reach beyond the narrow confines of the formal economy if they want to remain (or become) politically relevant.

This certainly applies to Namibia's trade unions as well, although the levels of informalisation are lower (see Namibia Statistics Agency [NSA], 2019). As in most African countries, unions were constituted alongside the North Atlantic model of industrial trade unions and are well represented in the public sector, amongst state-owned enterprises, and amongst the

larger private corporations like those in fishing and mining (Riisgaard, 2022). However, they have hardly reached the vulnerable workers in most sectors of the economy, including domestic and farm workers, security guards and workers in the informal economy. These are the workers who most need strong unions to improve their living and working conditions.

This article provides a qualitative analysis based on the available secondary data on Namibia's economy and labour market such as the levels of unemployment and informality, wages, and unionisation rates. This is followed by a brief description of Namibian trade unions and the legislative and policy framework in which they operate. The relevance of the notions of tripartism and social dialogue are discussed as historical constructs which bypassed the vast majority of Namibia's informalised workers.

The article draws some lessons from international experiences regarding unionisation in the informal economy. An argument is made that organising informal workers is not merely a technical exercise but a highly political question. The conclusion tentatively points to some options and likely obstacles for trade union engagement with Namibia's informalised workers.

## **Namibia's Labour Market – An Historical Overview**

At the time of independence, Namibia's economy was primarily based on resource extraction but it also had strong agrarian features. Mining was the main source of export earnings and the major mines were highly unionised. The mining industry was dominated by transnational and South African mining companies. Mining accounted for some 60% of exports, and 40% of state revenue (Tapscott, 1992). The mining industry served global imperial interests and was characterised by the complete absence of local value addition, or the formation of value chains. Such value chains would have benefited job creation and the Namibian economy through the creation of a manufacturing industry. Minerals were exported straight to production centres in the West, without local beneficiation. Where limited processing occurred, it was capital intensive and therefore contributed little to the formation of an industrial base and significant employment creation (Mbuende, 1986; Jauch & Tjirera, 2016).

The fishing sector was controlled by international and South African interests. Marine resources were ruthlessly exploited, resulting in stock depletion. Fishing accounted for approximately 28% of Namibia's GDP in 1969, but this figure dropped to 4% around independence. It was a

classic case of “resource imperialism” which exploited Namibia's natural resources for short-term profits of (mostly) European companies without any consideration for the long-term sustainable utilisation of the fisheries sector by Namibia (Jauch & Tjirera 2016; Grynberg et al., 2023).

At the time of independence, agriculture supported about 70% of the population and employed almost 20% of the country's total formal workforce.

Extensive stock farming was the dominant activity of commercial agriculture, with beef being the major product. This accounted for 65% of the sector's output value, while communal subsistence farming sustained 250 000 – 300 000 people (20–25% of the population) but its contribution to GDP was not captured in official statistics (World Bank, 1991).

Land dispossession of black Namibians and the 1904–08 genocide during German colonial rule resulted in a scenario where 73% of Namibia's farmlands were owned by some 4 450 white farmers, while more than 100 000 communal farmers had to utilize a mere 27% of the total farmland. The average size of a white-owned farm was 7 836 hectares, 23 times larger than the average black-owned cattle farm (World Bank, 1991). Gottschalk (cited in Jauch & Tjirera, 2016, p. 144) described this

as an “agrarian counter-revolution” which prevented pastoralists from remaining self-sufficient. They were forced to take up wage employment while the rural “homelands” became places for mainly old and sick people, women and children.

At independence, Namibia’s manufacturing sector contributed only a small share to the GDP (4–5%) and employed only about 9 000 people, some 5% of those in employment. Only those working at larger manufacturing companies like Swavleis, Hartlief or the breweries were members of trade unions. About 70% of all goods produced in Namibia were food products, while the rest consisted of wood products, textiles, furniture and transport equipment. Manufacturing firms were concentrated in a few urban centres and were mostly small-scale, employing only a few workers. With the exception of small artisan and cottage industries, most manufacturing firms were owned by whites (Sparks & Green, 1992).

### **Emerging Trade Unions**

The Namibian labour movement played a prominent role during Namibia’s liberation struggle. Workers endured highly exploitative and discriminatory practices during colonial rule as exemplified by the contract labour system, locally known as *okaholo*, which transformed and disrupted social structures

(Hishongwa, 1992; Ndadi, 2009). The anger and frustration amongst migrant workers resulted in several strikes without the presence of trade unions. Migrant workers became a central component of the anti-colonial struggle and constituted the backbone in the formative years of SWAPO (South West Africa People’s Organisation, now SWAPO of Namibia) (Jauch, 2018).

Inside Namibia, the industrial unions and Namibia’s oldest trade union federation, the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) emerged from 1986 onwards and provided workers with an organisational vehicle through which they could take up workplace grievances as well as broader political issues, which were always seen as linked to the economic struggle. In the 1980s, the NUNW operated as a kind of social movement union and formed alliances with students and churches around the demand for political independence and social justice (Jauch, 2009; Jauch, 2018). This increased the union’s popularity and relevance beyond its membership, an aspect which is relevant to the recruitment of informal workers as discussed below.

### **Legacies of Colonial Economic Structures on Employment in Post-colonial Namibia**

The lack of structural economic changes after independence resulted in the continuation of a very small

manufacturing base and high levels of unemployment, as reflected in Table 1 below. Formal sector jobs are concentrated around mining, fishing, government administration, and the retail sector. The vast majority of the population makes a living from agriculture and informal economic activities.

Given the long-term and structural nature of Namibia’s unemployment crisis, the broad definition (being available for work, even if the person is no longer actively seeking work) reflects Namibia’s economic realities more accurately. The figures below are based on this broad definition and show that women and young people are most severely affected by unemployment.

**Table 1** *Broad Unemployment Rate 2000–2018 (15–64 Years)*

	2000 (%)	2004 (%)	2008 (%)	2012 (%)	2018 (%)
Total	33.8	40.6	51.4	28.5	33.4
Male	28.3	33.8	43.6	23.6	32.5
Female	39.0	47.6	58.6	33.2	34.3
Urban areas	31.3		65.3	28.5	33.4
Rural areas	35.9		36.5	28.4	33.5
15–19 years	67.0	72.0	83.6	56.4	69.6
20–24 years	59.1	61.3	67.4	48.5	57.0
25–29 years	42.8	45.1	53.3	33.6	42.3
30–34 years	31.3	36.6	46.0	24.9	32.5

*Source: Labour Force surveys*

Table 1 suggests that there was a significant drop in unemployment between 2008 and 2012. The decline can be attributed to methodological changes in calculating unemployment rather than actual employment creation (Mufune, 2014). In 2012, the NSA still used the international standard definition of being employed to mean at least one hour’s work for profit, pay or family gain in the seven-day reference period ahead of the interview. However, the 2012 survey probed the

question of family gain further with several new questions, including work done on one’s own home, farm, plot, garden or cattle post; growing farm produce; looking after animals; fetching water; collecting wood; producing any goods for household use; catching fish, prawns or other wild animals for household consumption, etc. (Jauch & Tjirera, 2016). Thus, a large number of people in rural areas were classified as employed, unlike in the 2008 survey.



Table 2 shows the sectoral distribution of employment in Namibia between 2000 and 2018 in rounded figures. It points to the continued importance of agriculture,

the very limited employment created by mining, the growing employment created by accommodation and food services, and the significant number of domestic workers.

**Table 2** *Employment by Economic Sector (15–64 Years) (2000–2018)*

Sector/employment	2000 (%)	2004 (%)	2008 (%)	2012 (%)	2018 (%)
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Agriculture & fishing	31	23	16	24	23
Mining & quarrying	2	3	3	2	2
Manufacturing	5	9	6	5	6
Utilities (water, sewerage, waste)	1	0	2	1	1
Construction	5	1	7	7	6
Trade (wholesale and retail)	9	5	15	13	11
Transport, storage & communications	3	18*	5	7	5
Accommodation & food services	2	4	3	5	11
Financial services	1	2	3	2	2
Real estate & business	9	19*	4	6	0.1
Public admin, education, social work, health, defence	16	4	21	15	13
Other services	17	11	14	13	3
Services rendered by household employees					10
Arts, entertainment and recreation					1
Unspecified	1	1	0	0	0

Source: Labour Force surveys

The main sectors in terms of employment are agriculture, fishing and forestry (accounting for 23% of the employed); accommodation and food services (11.4%); wholesale and retail trade (11.1%); private households (9.9%); education (6.5%); and construction (6.2%). More than half of all employed persons are employees

(55.4%) while 13.9% are own account workers and 13% are subsistence farmers (NSA, 2019). Almost a third (31.6%) of all employed persons are vulnerable and are faced by precarious working conditions. These include the subsistence farmers, own account workers and contributing family workers.

However, vulnerability even reaches a significant part of those classified as employees. Over half of them are on permanent contracts (53.8%) while 32.7% are on “unspecified duration contracts” and 13.5% are on “limited duration employment contracts”. Only 39.3% receive paid annual leave, while 36.9% receive paid sick leave (NSA, 2019, pp. 64–72). In terms of incomes, three quarters (75.5%) of those in paid employment receive a monthly wage income of less than N\$1 353 (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2019). These figures point to a large overlap in terms of vulnerability and working conditions between the economy and the informal economies. There is no clear binary separation between the two – rather, informal employment is found in both.

### **The Informal Economy and Informal Employment**

In the absence of a universally accepted definition for the informal economy, various countries have adopted country-specific definitions which suit their specific conditions. *The Namibian Informal Economy Survey* (Republic of Namibia, 2001, p. 5) adopts the definition provided by the 1993 ILO International Labour Conference of Labour Statisticians, which defined it as “units/enterprises which typically operate at low level organization, with little or no division between labour and capital as factors

of production ... expenditure for production often is not distinguished from household expenditure”. All the economic activities operating outside the recognised institutional framework are classified as informal.

Neither Namibia’s Labour Act (11 of 2007) nor the Labour Force surveys draw a distinction between employment in the formal and informal economies. Instead, the surveys draw a distinction between formal and informal employment. Formal employment is defined by the provision of some form of social protection (pension scheme, medical aid or social security). In 2018, 57.7% of the employed population were not covered by any form of social protection and were thus classified as “informally employed” (NSA, 2019).

There are no current data on Namibia’s informal economy as national surveys were only conducted in 1993 and 2001, followed by a third survey in eight regions in 2016. A study into Namibia’s informal economy by the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) in 2006 found that more than half of the operators in the informal economy in Namibia were women, while a gender analysis on the nature of business and occupation revealed that there was a distinct division of labour. For instance, women dominated retailing businesses whereas men dominated manufacturing and repairs.

The study also found that young people dominated the informal economy. This was to be expected: the high youth unemployment rate reflected their inability to find work in the formal economy, and they were in effect forced to turn to the informal economy for survival. Most of the interviewed informal economy operators indicated that poverty, unemployment and the need to make a living were the reasons which drove them into the informal economy (Mwilima, 2006).

A 2015/16 case study showed that employees in the informal economy earned an average monthly salary of N\$1 554.95. Over half earned between N\$1 000 and N\$2 000 per month and a third earned less than N\$1 000. These salaries are all below the World Bank poverty line for middle income countries like Namibia. Informal economy workers endured long working hours ranging from 9 to 13 hours per day. Less than 40% had sick leave and less than 30% annual leave. Female workers enjoyed few benefits, with only 34% getting sick leave, 27.6% annual leave and 24.6% maternity leave, despite the legal provisions of the Labour Act (Republic of Namibia, 2017).

In general, informal economy workers experienced long working hours, low salaries, no overtime pay, no employment contracts, and no benefits

such as medical aid, paid maternity leave and paid sick leave. The vast majority were not registered with the Social Security Commission (SSC) thus rendering them more vulnerable during times of sickness and pregnancy. However, operators provided some benefits to their employees in the form of food, transport or housing allowances and assistance during times of difficulty (Mwilima, 2006; Republic of Namibia, 2017).

The rate of informality amongst women stood at 61.2% and in rural areas it reached around 80%, with Kavango West and Ohangwena regions having the highest rates. In terms of economic sectors, the highest levels of informal employment were found in private households (91%), agriculture, forestry and fishing (87.6%), accommodation and food services (68.6%) and construction (65.3%) (NSA, 2019).

The high levels of precariousness amongst Namibian workers are confirmed by a closer analysis of sectors of employment and average monthly incomes. The sectors which account for the majority of Namibia's employed people (61.8%) are characterised by incomes which are significantly lower than the national average of N\$7 935 per month. These include agriculture, forestry and fishing, with an average monthly income of N\$3 393; accommodation and food services (N\$2 819);

wholesale and retail trade (N\$4 019); construction (N\$5 441); and private households (N\$1 387) (NSA, 2019).

Namibia's Human Development Report of 2019 pointed out that two-thirds (65.2%) of the country's employed people are in paid employment, which translates into a mere 18.6% of Namibia's total population. Even more disconcerting, only 14% of the Namibian population earn a monthly wage income of more than N\$1 353 (NPC, 2019).

### **Post-colonial Labour Regulations and Informal Labour**

After independence, the Namibian government reformed the colonial labour relations system and moved towards a new system of “social partnership” governed by the Labour Act (6 of 1992), as amended by the Labour Act (11 of 2007). Narrowly defined tripartite consultations and collective bargaining were seen as core components of this system, as the government believed that the living and working conditions of Namibian workers would be improved through a combination of successful economic policies and trade union engagement with the private sector. The government defined its own role merely as that of a “referee”, trying to create a level (and enabling) playing field for collective bargaining between business and

labour (Jauch, 2007). From the outset, this arrangement bypassed vulnerable and informalised workers.

Namibia's industrial relations model which underpins the Labour Act is the particular model which became dominant in northern hemisphere industrialised countries and was then widely promoted and transplanted across the world through the ILO and its tripartite structures of social dialogue. This model was premised on a formalised full-time employment relationship which had developed in the North Atlantic region during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As this model was transferred to developing countries, it only covered the large public sector and parts of capital-intensive private production such as mining. As a result, trade unionism in developing countries was often limited to the select few (Riisgaard, 2022).

This particular model of labour relations altogether excluded informal economy workers. The ILO tried to address this “representational problem” by suggesting that workers' and employers' organisations should extend their membership to people in the informal economy. In other words, they should be incorporated into existing social dialogue structures as reflected in the ILO's “transition into formality” approach. A second approach was to extend tripartite

structures into a “tripartite+” arrangement to enable people in the informal economy to be represented separately. This is advocated for by organisations like WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) (Riisgaard, 2022).

Namibia’s Labour Act covers almost all workers (except the police, prison service, army and intelligence service) and encourages collective bargaining as the vehicle to improve working conditions. This model is based on a recognisable employer-employee relationship and excludes the informal economy, where most are own-account workers and only some have employees. The Labour Act entrenched basic workers’ and trade unions’ rights, set out the procedures for protected (legal) strikes, and provided protections against unfair labour practices. Protected strikes require adherence to a lengthy procedure which includes collective bargaining based on an agreed bargaining unit between employers and unionised employees; the reaching of a deadlock in negotiations; the declaration of a dispute of interests; and (failed) conciliation by the office of the Labour Commissioner. This cumbersome process can work in formal and highly unionised settings but it is virtually impossible to follow in small or informal workplaces.

Collective bargaining is essentially confined to larger formal sector

workplaces in the mining and fishing industries, the civil service, state-owned enterprises, and fairly large private retail and tourism businesses. Improvements in living and working conditions only benefited the workers in those sectors, while the vast majority of Namibia’s working people – the under- and unemployed, informal sector workers, casual workers, domestic workers, etc. – remained outside the realm of collective bargaining and trapped in poverty. Even in sectors where minimum wages were formally introduced, like those for farm workers, construction workers, domestic workers and security guards, workers remained exposed to highly exploitative practices, and unionisation rates remained low.

### **Unionisation Rates – Who is Covered by a Trade Union?**

Namibia has 44 registered trade unions and three trade union federations (Office of the Labour Commissioner, 2023) but none of them have made significant inroads regarding the recruitment of vulnerable and informal workers. There are no accurate trade union membership figures; the figures provided by trade unions themselves differ substantially from those in the Labour Force surveys. The three trade union federations have between four and 15 affiliated industrial unions, with the bulk of union membership concentrated in the public sector, the



*Trade union have organised workers in the formal sector but have hardly reached those in the informal economy. Photos: Valentino Nyambali (left); Herbert Jauch (right)*

mining and fishing industries, and large retail companies. The NUNW claims a combined membership of around 85 000, the Trade Union Congress of Namibia about 62 000, and the Namibia National Labour Organisation about 8 000 (Jauch, 2018, updated in April 2023). Combined, this amounts to about 155 000 union members, equivalent to about 34% of Namibia's 451 701 employees and equivalent to 21% of the country's 723 742 employed persons. However, the 2018 Labour Force Survey found only 82 688 union members, 11.4% of all employed persons. In urban areas the unionisation rate was more than double that in the rural areas. The sectors with the highest rates of unionisation were education (53.6%), mining and quarrying (40.8%), and health and social work activities (30.7%). The lowest unionisation rates were found in private households (0.2%), construction (4.2%), and

accommodation and food services (4.2%) (NSA, 2019).

### **Outsourcing, Subcontracting and Labour Hire as Challenges to Union Organising**

The challenge of precarious employment was exacerbated by postcolonial neo-liberal economic policies. Forms of outsourcing, subcontracting and labour hire allowed companies to concentrate on their "core business" while outsourcing other services. This broke up bargaining units and reduced trade union representation to the "core workers", while the outsourced workers lost trade union representation and job benefits.

Sub-contracting through labour hire as a third-party employment constitutes a very exploitative form of labour brokering. These labour hire

companies merely supply labour to their clients (companies). Through outsourcing arrangements, companies evade responsibility for the workers from whose labour they benefit.

Following demonstrations against labour hire companies in Walvis Bay in 1998, trade unions argued that labour hire was a new form of the dreaded contract labour system and that it should not be allowed to exist in an independent Namibia. A study commissioned by the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation revealed that client companies use labour hire workers for various reasons. These include, to reduce the impact of strikes by permanent workers; to achieve flexibility; to cut costs; to avoid labour problems and having to deal with trade unions; to concentrate on their “core business”; and to be able to replace “unproductive” workers (LaRRI, 2006).

The biggest problems experienced by labour hire workers were the lack of benefits, low wages and job insecurity. Labour hire workers were paid less than permanent workers for the same kind of work and a significant portion of their hourly earnings (15–55%) was retained by labour hire companies as their fee. The use of labour hire became increasingly common and it undermined the job security of workers, especially in the lower skills categories.

It accentuates the division between core (permanent) and peripheral (casual) workers (LaRRI, 2006).

Although trade unions achieved success in having labour hire outlawed in the Labour Act of 2007, Namibian employers took the matter to court. The High Court upheld the ban on labour hire in its ruling of 1 December 2008 (Isaacs, 2008) but on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 2009, the Supreme Court of Namibia struck down the ban on labour hire agencies and decided that the government must instead try to regulate irregular work. The Supreme Court argued that the ban on labour hire violated the right to practice “occupation, trade or business” (IndustriAll, 2010).

In response to the Supreme Court ruling, the Namibian Parliament passed the Labour Amendment Act (2 of 2012) which states that clients of labour hire companies must not employ labour hire workers on conditions that are worse than those of other (permanent) employees. The law also states that labour hire workers may not be employed during strikes and that they are entitled to all the protections granted by the Labour Act, including the right to join trade unions and participate in its activities.

Overall, Namibia’s trade unions have been unable to deal with the increasing

informalisation of work. They have hardly reached vulnerable and informal workers and are still largely limited to formal “core workers”. Most collective agreements cover permanent staff only. This was exemplified at the City of Windhoek, which has a long-standing recognition agreement with the Namibian Public Workers Unions and regularly negotiates conditions of employment. However, these agreements do not cover the city’s ward contractors who have been employed on successive short-term contracts for decades. They earn far lower wages and enjoy far fewer benefits than permanent staff, and openly expressed their disappointment with trade unions, whom they accused of failing to address their concerns (Ndjavera, 2023; Karuuombe, 2023).

### **Challenges in Organising the Informalised**

Most of Namibia’s informal economy businesses have no employees, and those who do, have just one or two (Republic of Namibia, 2017). Likewise, domestic workers tend to operate in isolation, as do workers in small retail outlets. This makes them highly vulnerable to victimisation (including through retrenchment) which acts as a deterrent to becoming a union member. The industrial trade union model that underpins the Namibian Labour Act and the current operations of trade unions is not suitable for

reaching and representing workers at such workplaces. Unions will thus need to consider how they can deal with these structural impediments when approaching informalised workers. This poses challenges not only at a practical level but also at a conceptual and ideological level. Organising informal workers is not merely a technical question of organising skills and strategies, but a highly political one that touches on the definition of workers, the understanding of what constitutes the “labouring classes”, and what could be a pro-labour development strategy (Riisgaard, 2022; Schminke & Fridell, 2021). This section will briefly discuss the practical as well as the political aspects which affect organising amongst informal workers.

In general, trade unions can either extend their organising scope and review their strategies and approaches to reach workers in the informal economy (and vulnerable workers generally) or informal workers can organise themselves into their own organisations such as the Self-employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in India, which represents 2.5 million informal economy workers. SEWA is a union, a women’s movement and a cooperative movement which has created various support programmes for its members such as savings and credit schemes, health care, child care, insurance, legal aid, capacity building,



and communication services (SEWA 2020a; SEWA 2020b).

The cooperation between such informal economy organisations and trade unions can be mutually beneficial and result in improved standards of living, working conditions and social protection for those in the informal economy, while trade unions can increase their negotiating power and reach in terms of unionisation.

The ILO's trade union guide on how to organise informal economy workers points to various practical lessons learned from many years of organising attempts in the informal economy. Unions are confronted with various practical challenges such as whom and how to recruit – individuals, or rather informal economy associations? There is also the question of how to represent informal workers within union structures, what membership dues they should pay and how these can be collected. Further challenges are to identify meaningful services and benefits to be offered, and how to ensure democratic practices in informal economy associations affiliated to trade unions (ILO, 2019).

Trade unions cannot simply extend their traditional methods to cover workers in the informal economy. However, they realised that there is a need to give a voice to the most vulnerable working people, that

collective action is required beyond the narrow formal structures of the economy, and that democratic and representative membership-based organisations are needed to bring about changes and to achieve success in a hostile environment (ILO, 2019).

The first challenge for unions is to come to terms with the highly diverse nature of workers and economic units in the informal economy. This includes wage workers, employers, own account workers and contributing family members, micro enterprises and even some larger enterprises. In some cases, there is an employment relationship, in others there is none, or it is not recognised. The main categories of the informal economy workforce are owners/employers with few workers; own-account workers who are self-employed and sometimes working with family members; and paid workers in micro-enterprises who are working under harsh conditions. The first category presents a potential negotiating partner for unions, while the second category mostly needs access to credit, skills and amenities. The third category requires union interventions to improve exploitative and often dangerous working conditions, referred to as “decent work deficits” by the ILO (ILO, 2019, p. 19).

These divergent needs mean that besides defending labour rights and

decent work, trade unions need to develop business opportunities and assist members to get loans and business skills in order to attract members in the informal economy. The forms of organising may also vary according to the specific circumstances. Informal economy workers can be directly integrated into existing unions, or they can be incorporated via informal economy associations, or such informal associations can be recognised as trade unions, and then affiliate to trade union federations. In Ghana, for example, the national trade union federation, the Trades Union Congress (Ghana), created the Union of Informal Workers' Associations with the mandate to organise different informal economy associations into its fold. The Union of Informal Workers' Associations thus serves to unify informal economy workers and has observer status at the structural meetings of the Trades Union Congress (Ghana). A similar approach is followed in Zambia, while in Zimbabwe, the Chamber of Informal Economy Associations is affiliated to the Congress of Zimbabwe Trade Unions as an affiliate alongside industrial trade unions (ILO, 2019).

In other countries, such as Nepal, the national trade union organises all workers per sector across the formality-informality divide. All have equal rights within the union structures and all pay the same membership fees.

Trade unions in Benin adopted a very different approach by assisting informal economy workers and associations to form cooperatives to champion their own interests and to support each other (ILO, 2019). Thus, there is no single organising strategy, and unions will have to adopt an approach which holds concrete benefits for members in the informal economy in order to attract and retain them in the union fold.

Potential conflicts exist between formal and informal workers within trade union structures over the question of membership fees and voting rights. Membership fee deductions usually take place at larger formal workplaces but are almost impossible to enforce in smaller, informalised settings. In the Namibian case, this is made worse by a provision in the Labour Act which only compels employers to deduct membership fees in the case of formally recognised trade unions. Such unions represent the majority of members in a bargaining unit and are recognised as the exclusive bargaining agent by the employers.

When recruiting informal workers, unions will have to subsidise them at least in the short-term. Some countries (like Tanzania and Uganda) have explored the option of reduced membership fees for informal workers, with equal rights in the union structures. Others, like Nepal, Fiji and Argentina, followed the

model of equal dues with equal rights, while Sierra Leone coupled the reduced fees received from informal economy workers with reduced rights. The Sierra Leone Labour Congress allocates one delegate per 3 000 members in the informal economy, compared to one delegate for each 1 000 formal sector members at its congresses (ILO, 2019).

In terms of solidarity, the approach of reduced dues with equal rights for informal trade union members is certainly the most progressive one, but it requires the union to convince its formal sector members to avoid tensions and resentment. Also, unions need to build and sustain democratic organisational principles and secure a financial organisational base through

their membership fees. This sometimes means dealing with conflicting demands and expectations to accommodate both formal and informal workers in trade union structures.

### **The Ideological Question: Business Unionism or Community Unionism?**

Besides these formidable practical challenges, trade unions will have to revisit their own orientation and focus when trying to effectively represent the interests of informalised workers. This touches on unions' understanding of the working class which traditionally is determined by a person's position within the means of production. This traditional understanding views the working class as formally employed workers in an



*Trade unions need to organise as social movements to become relevant for informalised workers.*

*Photo: Herbert Jauch*

identifiable employment relationship. Incorporating the many non-standard and informalised employment forms into the concept of the working class will require a broadening of the traditional understanding of what constitutes a worker (Riisgaard, 2022). A broader conceptual definition is that of a “global labouring class” which takes many forms but “shares the common condition of being subordinated to and exploited by global capital” (Selwyn, 2017, p.15, quoted in Riisgaard, 2022, p. 225).

In organisational terms, the concept of representing the “labouring class” would require a shift beyond the traditional shop floor towards social movement unionism where unions become major drivers of societal change in cooperation with other progressive civil society organisations, as was the case with some unions before Namibia’s independence. This approach is no longer visible today, although in 2023, the Trade Union Congress of Namibia took the initiative to work with civil society organisations on the establishment of a Non-State Actors Forum in the country.

The difficulty of moving towards social movement unionism can be explained by two distinct approaches towards trade unionism which Standing referred to as “business unionism” and “community unionism” (cited

in Schminke & Fridell, 2021, p. 97). The former is based on an apolitical understanding of trade unions as service providers. This understanding focuses on the shopfloor and workers as employees and on negotiations over wages and employment conditions. Such unions are managed by a technical bureaucracy and focus on a core constituency of formal sector workers while paying no attention to workers on the periphery. This is the dominant form of trade unionism in Namibia today.

Community unionism, on the other hand, focuses on the “labouring class” as a whole and goes beyond collective bargaining by including “wider political and social struggles against government and employers to attain more for all workers” (Schminke & Fridell, 2021 p. 97). Community unionism is better suited for informal workers whose challenges lie outside the typical employer-employee relationship. It also counters attempts to play off formal workers against the under- and unemployed, which Karl Marx referred to as the “reserve army of labour” (cited in Schminke & Fridell, 2021, p. 97).

The ILO’s decent work agenda is primarily a technical and descriptive approach which does not address the questions why informal work persists and whose interests it serves.

Schminke and Fridell (2021) thus provide a structural analysis which explains the persistence and growth of informal employment as an integral part of global capitalism, driven by two main dynamics: firstly, the informal economy benefits capital as a source of cheap and flexible labour; and secondly, governments want to create attractive conditions for foreign direct investments which is expected to lead to tax incomes and foreign currency reserves. These attractive conditions include the availability of cheap, informalised labour.

The struggle for decent work for all by trade unions will thus clash with the vested interests of both business and government. In terms of their political and ideological orientation, unions will have to confront what Selwyn (2017) termed capital-centred development theory (CCDT) with the alternative concept of labour-led development (LLD). CCDT constitutes the mainstream development thinking which regards capital accumulation as the basis for development. Its vision is guided by elite experts from corporations, state planners and NGOs, while the “labouring classes” are merely seen as objects, incapable of defining their own development. CCDT regards the struggle of the poor for improved living conditions as a barrier to development and prioritises the demands of global capital (Selwyn, 2017; Schminke & Fridell, 2021).

Operating within this framework holds little prospect for achieving improved livelihoods for most workers and Selwyn thus argued that a new vision of LLD will be essential for workers (broadly defined) to become their own agents of development by raising demands and attaining concessions from the state and capital (such as welfare state reforms) and where “labouring class collective actions directly generate meaningful improvements to their and their communities’ livelihoods” (Selwyn, 2017, pp. 10-11).

Without going into the details of this crucial development debate, it is important to point out that LLD looks at development from a labour perspective. It recognises the importance of workers being able to meet their own defined needs and it recognises that these needs are not just wages and benefits but also include social reproductive necessities such as public childcare, gender and racial equality, and safe and secure access to resources such as land, water and housing. LLD is based on a broad understanding of workers as including unpaid women workers, the employed and unemployed in urban and rural areas, informal workers, small-scale peasants, and the emerging middle class. Despite their different specific needs, the common barrier to improved livelihoods are the interests of capital and government underpinning the capital-centred development approach. As an alternative, LLD

must create the space for broad-based political, economic and cultural participation and decision-making as integral components of a democratic developmental process (Selwyn, 2017).

Namibia's trade unions are heavily influenced by the dominant CCDT and limited by its confines, as exemplified by the traditional focus on formal sector workers and collective bargaining. Shifting towards LLD and community unionism presents a major challenge in terms of their organisational, political and ideological orientation. An interesting example is provided by Uganda, where unions were most successful organising informal workers when they adopted the community union approach in line with the LLD ideas. They moved beyond the shopfloor by taking action such as preventing the privatisation of public lands from which informal transport operators used to operate. They also provided autonomous spaces for discussions under repressive conditions, organised union-owned apps to link transport operators with passengers free of charge, and provided credit, day-care services and training. However, this community approach was in constant tension with the traditional business unionism as expressed through the unease among union members in the formal sector, who felt that their dues were spent on informal worker activities (Schminke & Fridell, 2021).

## **Findings and Conclusion**

The informalisation of work currently affects about 60% of Namibia's employed people, who are classified as informally employed. This serves capital's interest in having cheap and flexible labour available without having to bear the costs of social reproduction. For Namibia's labour movement, which is organised in the form of industrial trade unions operating within the confines of the Labour Act and narrowly confined social dialogue, informalisation presents a major challenge. Unions rely on membership fees as their predominant source of income, although some unions have resorted to union investment companies as a secondary source of income. Collecting union fees from informally employed workers is extremely difficult, and unions thus have little financial incentive to organise them.

However, reaching and representing informal and vulnerable workers would increase trade unions' visibility and political influence. This would require unions to move beyond the traditional confines of the industrial trade union and collective bargaining model which is largely confined to the public sector and larger companies in the private sector. Unions would have to consciously tackle the huge levels of inequality and unemployment which cannot be addressed by merely focusing on the wellbeing of formal sector workers, whose numbers are dwindling

as a result of neoliberal policies such as outsourcing and labour hire.

Unions are confronted with various practical difficulties such as whom and how to recruit, how to represent informal workers within union structures, and which meaningful services and benefits unions can offer to informally employed members. Perhaps the biggest challenge for unions is to review their perspective and ideological orientation. The social movement unionism which existed in the 1980s disappeared after independence and was replaced by the business unionism which characterises virtually all unions and federations today. This model is underpinned by a capital-centred development paradigm that is driven by business interests.

Broadening the definition of workers to include all informalised workers beyond those with a recognisable employment relationship is already a daunting task for trade unions, and requires a new approach that attempts to incorporate the interests of formal and informal workers alike. Even more challenging will be the ideological re-orientation away from business unionism towards community unionism and a labour-led development paradigm. This will invariably clash with the hegemonic agenda of capital which is widely supported not only by international financial institutions like

the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, but also by Namibia's political parties, most local economists, the media and the judiciary.<sup>18</sup>

Although there are tentative signs of some trade unions engaging with broader socioeconomic issues, the current divisions between and within unions are further obstacles to uniting the "labouring classes" under a trade union umbrella. Similar challenges have existed elsewhere, and although Namibia's trade unions still have to climb the proverbial mountain, their re-orientation towards community unionism and labour-led development seems to be a precondition for successfully organising across the formal-informal divide.

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<sup>18</sup> See for example the Labour Court judgement in Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union v Lüderitz Spar (HC-MD-LAB-MOT-GEN-2021/00071) [2021] NAL-CMD 20 (30 April 2021) and the Supreme Court judgement of Shoprite Namibia (Pty) Ltd v Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union and Others (SA 1 of 2021; SCR 1 of 2021) [2022] NASC 15 (26 April 2022).

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## Case Study

### *The Livelihood of an Informal Trader in Hakahana, Windhoek*

*Casper Tichatonga Bowora*

In this case study, we delve into the life of Ms Tomas, an urban informal trader operating in Hakahana, part of Katutura, Windhoek. Born in Engela Village in Ohangwena Region in northern Namibia and raised in Hakahana, Ms Tomas has a deep connection to the community and an intimate understanding of its socioeconomic dynamics. Like many residents, she turned to informal trading as a livelihood means due to formal job opportunities being so limited.

Having completed Grade 12 at Jakob Marengo Secondary School in Katutura, Ms Tomas's journey as an urban informal trader began with her pursuit of stable and well-paying jobs in the formal sector. Like many individuals, she aspired to secure formal employment that would provide financial stability and better opportunities for her family. However, Ms Tomas encountered challenges in realising this goal, with limited job prospects and fierce competition in the formal job market.



*Photo: Casper Bowora*

and her family, Ms Tomas decided to explore alternative paths to secure her livelihood. She recognised that formal employment was not readily available, and waiting for suitable job opportunities might lead to prolonged financial insecurity. Motivated by a desire to take control of her financial situation, she made the entrepreneurial decision to engage in informal trading.

The choice to become an urban informal trader was driven by a combination of necessity and entrepreneurial aspirations. Ms Tomas understood that by embracing informal trading, she could proactively generate an income for her family and create a more stable livelihood. This decision required her to tap into her entrepreneurial spirit, leveraging her skills, resilience and creativity to navigate the challenges and uncertainties of the informal trading sector.

Engaging in informal trading provided Ms Tomas with several advantages. Firstly, it offered her a relatively low-cost entry into business, as she could start with limited resources and gradually expand her operations. Additionally, informal trading allowed her to capitalise on the existing market demand within her community. Hakahana, like many low-income neighbourhoods, sustains a vibrant informal economy where residents rely on affordable goods and services provided by local traders.

As a low-income neighbourhood, Hakahana presents both opportunities and obstacles for individuals like Ms Tomas. The informal economy thrives within this community, with various traders operating in sectors such as food, clothing, and household goods. This vibrant informal trading sector provides income and employment opportunities for residents, especially in the absence of sufficient formal job prospects.

Ms Tomas resides in a small two-bedroom corrugated iron shack, paying a monthly rent of N\$700. This modest accommodation reflects the housing challenges faced by many residents in low-income neighbourhoods like Hakahana.

Within this household, Ms Tomas lives with her husband and three children. While her husband is employed in the construction sector, his income is irregular, resulting in financial instability for the family. The unpredictability of her husband's earnings underscores the importance of Ms Tomas's informal trading activities in providing a steady source of income to support the household.

As an urban informal trader, Ms Tomas manages to generate an average profit of N\$120 per day through her trading activities. This income plays a vital role in covering the family's basic needs, including food, clothing,

healthcare, and other essential expenses. Ms Tomas's contributions ensure that the family can meet their daily requirements and maintain a certain level of stability despite the challenges posed by the irregularity of her husband's income.

Living conditions in Ms Tomas's corrugated iron shack in Hakahana present significant challenges for her and her family. The lack of consistent access to clean water, reliable electricity and toilets forces them to resort to shared or makeshift facilities, which are often unhygienic. This highlights the inadequate infrastructure development and limited availability of essential social amenities in the neighbourhood.

She depends on alternative sources, such as communal taps, which can be unreliable and often involve additional expense. The lack of a reliable water supply negatively impacts hygiene practices and overall well-being.

Reliable electricity is another essential service that Ms Tomas' family lacks. Inconsistent access to electricity hampers their ability to meet basic needs, such as lighting, cooking, and refrigeration. It also restricts educational opportunities, as children face difficulties in accessing electronic learning resources. The absence of reliable electricity exacerbates the challenges faced by the family, limiting

their daily activities and potential for socioeconomic advancement.

Ms Tomas operates a small trading business on the streets near her house. She focuses on selling fresh produce and household items, catering to the needs of the local community. This choice of products aligns with the demands and preferences of Hakahana residents, who often seek affordable and accessible goods.

To ensure a consistent supply of goods, Ms Tomas procures her products from local markets and wholesalers. By sourcing from these suppliers, she can access fresh produce and household items at affordable prices. This allows her to maintain competitive prices, which is crucial in attracting customers in a neighbourhood characterised by limited financial resources.

Ms Tomas' working day starts early in the morning, reflecting her dedication and commitment to her business. By beginning her day promptly, she secures a favourable spot opposite the street near her house where she sets up her stall. This location is strategic, as it allows her to be easily accessible to potential customers passing by.

Operating as an urban informal trader on the streets presents both opportunities and challenges. On the positive side, the location provides

visibility and exposure to a wide range of potential customers. As pedestrians and residents move about their daily routines, Ms Tomas' stall catches their attention, increasing the chances of attracting customers and generating sales.

However, street trading also poses challenges, such as competition and environmental factors. Ms Tomas may face competition from other informal traders offering similar products. To stand out, she employs strategies like maintaining product quality, offering competitive prices, and providing excellent customer service.

Furthermore, working on the streets exposes Ms Tomas to the elements and potential security risks. Weather conditions like extreme heat or rain can impact her working conditions and complicate the preservation of her goods. She must also be mindful of security concerns and take necessary precautions to safeguard herself and her stall.

Another challenge that Ms Tomas faces is police harassment. Informal traders often operate in a legal grey area, lacking formal licenses or permits. This puts them at risk of harassment or the confiscation of their goods by authorities. Ms Tomas faces occasional encounters with law enforcement officials who may view her trading

activities as illegal or non-compliant with regulations. These encounters disrupt her business operations and threaten her livelihood.

The absence of designated trading spaces and a regulatory framework is another obstacle faced by Ms Tomas. Informal traders often lack access to designated areas where they can conduct their business activities legally and safely. The lack of formal recognition and regulation for the informal economy means that Ms Tomas and other traders constantly have to adapt and relocate their stalls, disrupting their operations and making it difficult to establish a stable customer base.

In conclusion, the case study of Ms Tomas, an urban informal trader in Hakahana, sheds light on the experiences and challenges faced by individuals engaged in informal trading in low-income neighbourhoods. Ms Tomas' journey as an urban informal trader showcases her resourcefulness, determination, and entrepreneurial spirit in creating a sustainable livelihood for herself and her family. Faced with limited job opportunities in the formal sector, she ventured into informal trading as a means of income generation to attain economic stability. The irregular nature of the income of her husband in the construction sector contributes to the family's financial

instability, making Ms Tomas's earnings from informal trading even more crucial.

However, Ms Tomas faces challenges such as intense competition, police harassment, and the lack of designated

trading spaces and regulatory frameworks. These hurdles require supportive policies and measures that recognise and empower informal traders, allowing them to operate in a regulated and secure environment.

## Case Study

### *Informality in Okahandja Park, Windhoek*

*Nafimane Hamukoshi*

#### **Abstract:**

*Magdalena Mwatilifange is a 29-year-old woman who lives in Okahandja park, a settlement located in Khomas Region, Namibia, about 10 km north of the capital city, Windhoek. She was born and raised in Onambome, the capital of Okalongo constituency in Omusati Region. She attended Sheetekela Combined School and completed her secondary education. She moved to Okahandja Park in search of better opportunities and a brighter future, but she soon realised that life in the settlement was not easy or comfortable.*

#### **Informal Living**

Okahandja Park is one of the informal settlements that emerged in the 1990s as a result of rapid urbanisation and migration from rural areas. It has a population of about 30 000 people, most of whom live in shacks made of corrugated iron, wood and plastic. The settlement faces many challenges, such as lack of basic services, infrastructure, sanitation, and health care and education facilities. The residents of Okahandja Park depend on various sources of income, such as informal trading, casual labour, recycling, and



*Photo: Casper Bowora*

social grants. Initiatives which have been implemented to improve the living conditions of informal settlements like Okahandja Park include the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia, which runs a savings scheme and provides housing loans and land tenure security for its members, and the Community Land Information Programme, which maps and registers the plots and structures in the settlement.

### **Informal Work**

Magdalena works at a tuckshop, a small shop that sells basic goods such as bread, milk, sugar and soap. She earns a meagre income that is neither steady nor reliable, since she only gets paid for the days she shows up at work. She has no contract or benefits, and she can lose her job at any time if the owner decides to replace her or close down the shop.

She shares the small shack in which she lives with three relatives. Their financial contributions are uncertain or negligible, as they also struggle to find work or earn enough money. This means that despite the precarious nature of her income, Magdalena is the sole breadwinner of the household, or at least the one with the least unstable income. She has to provide for their food, water, electricity and other needs.

Because Magdalena does not get any paid leave, has no job security, and can easily lose her position, she does

not have the option of taking a break from her work, even in the event of an emergency or a crisis that demands her attention. She has to work hard every day, regardless of how she feels or what she faces. She has to deal with various challenges and risks at work, such as long hours, low wages, poor working conditions, harassment by customers or competitors, theft or robbery, and fire or accidents.

### **Discrimination and Access to Services**

Magdalena cannot afford to pay for transportation to her work, so she walks long distances on dusty roads or paths under the scorching sun or in the cold rain every day. She has to avoid traffic accidents and animal attacks on her way. She faces discrimination and violence at the hands of some people who do not respect or appreciate her work or presence.

She also faces the challenge of poor sanitation, as there are no toilets available in her area. She has to resort to the alternative of using the bush or the river bed, which are both very risky and unpleasant. She lives in a country where sexual harassment, rape and murder are rampant, so she does not feel safe or comfortable when she goes to relieve herself. She often has to carry a weapon (knife) with her for self-defence, and has to endure the smell and sight of human waste and garbage around her.



She has to cope with infections and diseases that can be caused by poor hygiene or contaminated water.

The only other option she has is to use a bucket in the shack, even in front of others, which is unhygienic and unsanitary. She also has to empty and clean the bucket regularly, which is a tedious and unpleasant task. She has to bear the stigma that goes with using a bucket as a toilet and endure the lack of privacy and dignity that it entails.

Despite these hardships, she is studying nursing at I-care. However, she cannot afford to pay for her education, even though she has been saving up since last year. She wants to become a nurse because she has a passion for helping others and improving their health and well-being. She believes that nursing is a noble and rewarding profession that can make a difference in people's lives. She hopes that by becoming a nurse one day, she can also improve her own life and the lives of her family and community.

She has to study hard to pass her exams, which are not easy, and balance her studies with her work and household responsibilities, which are not light or simple. She has to overcome many obstacles and challenges that could hinder or discourage her from achieving her goals, such as a lack of resources, support, guidance and opportunities.

She has to face many pressures and live up to her own expectations, and those that family members, friends, teachers and her employer have of her.

She visits the Maxwilili Clinic, a public health facility that provides basic health services to the residents of Okahandja Park for medical services when she or her relatives are sick or injured, or when she needs to get vaccinations or check-ups. She appreciates the clinic for its availability and affordability, but she also recognises its limitations and shortcomings, such as the shortages of equipment, staff, medicines and space. She sometimes has to wait for long hours or even days to be attended to, or she has to travel to another clinic or hospital that is far away.

To sum up, Magdalena Mwatilifange is precariously employed. Besides poor living conditions, she is also plagued by many problems and hardships. Her job is casual and insecure, and her income is meagre and unreliable. She has no employment benefits like paid sick leave. Due her location on the outskirts of the city, she finds it difficult to pay for transport, which impacts on her access to quality health services. She is a woman who embodies the challenges and opportunities of the urban poor in Namibia, facing discrimination and exclusion, but deserving of recognition and assistance for her efforts and the goals she cherishes.

## Trapped in Poverty and Informality: The Effects of Climate Change-Induced Migration on Women in Urban Settlements in Windhoek

*Bruno Venditto, Christian Nekare and Ndumba J. Kamwanyah*

### **Abstract:**

*Increasingly, scholarship suggests that climate change amplifies gender inequalities, therefore affecting men and women differently. Although there is an understanding that Namibia's changing climate patterns pose a threat to people's livelihoods, no study has been carried out on how climate change-driven migration, gender inequality and urban poverty intersect.*

*Considering rural Namibia's extremely high vulnerability to climate change, this study explores the lived experience*

*of climate change-induced migration of women in Windhoek's informal settlements. A hybrid methodological approach was used in the review and analysis of existing literature on climate change, migration and urbanisation. The literature review was supplemented with face-to-face semi-structured interviews carried out with women participants with a migratory background residing in the informal settlements in Windhoek. A second set of interviews with rural women participants residing in the northern regions, where the impact of climate*



*Photo: Valentino Nyambali*

*change is visible, was also carried out. In this way, we were able to investigate (through the participants' narratives) the vulnerability to climate change and the presence (or absence) of direct correlation with movements to the urban areas.*

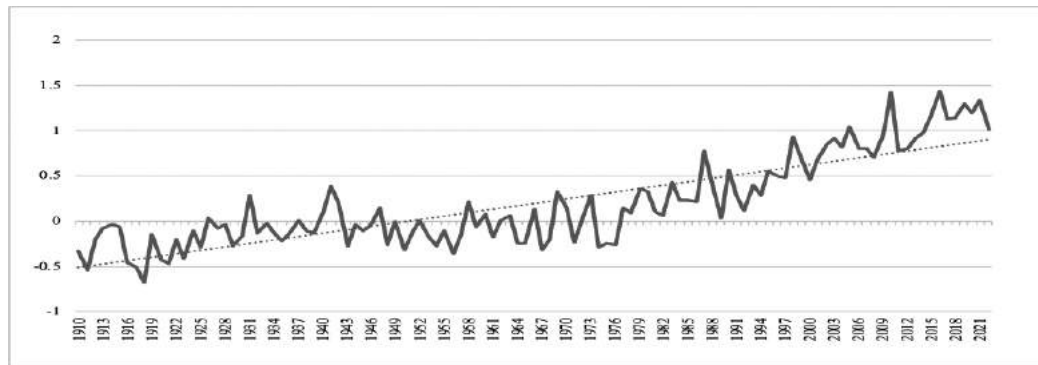
*The findings indicate that climate change is diminishing viable opportunities for women in rural areas, therefore negatively affecting their agency and ability to provide and care for themselves and their families, and forcing them to migrate to urban areas in search of better opportunities. In urban areas, they are further exposed to other vulnerabilities due to the lack of formal and permanent employment; poor remuneration for those formally or informally employed; unavailability of insurance coverage in the event of destruction to their property by fire or flood; and the lack of electricity, water and sanitation services. The study recommends that rural areas, with appropriate structural intervention, could be transformed into hubs of climate-smart economic growth to prevent rural-to-urban migration. On the other hand, more efficient urban management is an urgent priority. There is a profound need for a proactive approach (at local and national levels) to meeting the needs of people moving to the urban areas so as to curb and regulate the proliferation of informal settlements in Windhoek, as well as in other urban settlements.*

**Key terms: climate change; urban migration; poverty; informality; Namibia**

## **Introduction**

A commonly held belief is that global warming occurs naturally, and at a slow pace (Venditto, 2021). On the contrary, however, anthropogenic actions are warming the earth faster than has been observed throughout history (NASA, n.d.; National Research Council, 2020; Hausfather, 2017). The global mean temperature in 2022 was about 0.86°C above the 20th century average of 13.9°C, making the year 2022 one of the warmest years since the earliest records on global warming in 1880 (National Centers for Environmental Information [NCEI], 2022; Trisos, 2022). While concentrations of major greenhouse gases – carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O) – continued to increase throughout the recorded period, the 10 warmest years have all occurred since 2010. The year 2022 also marked the 46<sup>th</sup> consecutive year with temperatures above average in Africa (Figure 1) (NCEI, 2022). Although the least prolific contributor to global warming, compared with many other geographical areas, the African continent is extremely exposed to climate variability, including heatwaves that have become more frequent and long-lasting (Trisos et al., 2022).

**Figure 1** African Yearly Variation in Temperature (1910–2021)



Source: Authors' elaboration from NCEI (2022)

Increasing temperatures are threatening people's livelihoods, leading to the worsening of the existing conditions in most parts of Africa.<sup>19</sup> The outcomes of such natural disasters are more vulnerabilities, especially for women and girls, in the form of health insecurity, food and water insecurity, and population displacement due to migration.

Focusing on southern Africa, the World Meteorological Organization report revealed that in 2020, the region recorded precipitation below the long-term 1981–2010 average (World Meteorological Organization, 2021). With average rainfall in Africa predicted to further decrease and evapotranspiration to rise, the vulnerability of rainfed agriculture resources in the region is going to increase (Mercandalli & Losch,

2017), further increasing stress on communities and households due to exhausted fonts of livelihood. A large part of the population lives below the poverty line<sup>20</sup> while depending on agriculture-based activities that are weather-sensitive, such as rainfed agriculture, livestock herding and fishing. In this way, climate change serves as a threat multiplier that exacerbates existing conditions of poverty and vulnerabilities on the continent (World Food Programme, 2021).

Moving away from climate-sensitive areas can be an effective strategy of adaptation and agential power. Contrary to popular belief, however, people rarely move beyond national borders when deciding to migrate. Instead, they tend to move to cities within the country or national borders

<sup>19</sup> In 2020, southern Africa recorded precipitation below the long-term 1981–2010 average (World Meteorological Organization, 2021).

<sup>20</sup> Calculated at US\$ 1.90 a day in terms of 2011 purchasing power parity.

(Boas et al., 2019). This is confirmed by the World Bank's *Climate Risk Country Profile: Namibia* (World Bank, 2021), which suggests that climate change is a powerful driver for internal migration. Still, migration is a complex phenomenon that is caused by a multiplicity of overlapping dynamics, including, as stressed by Kaczan and Orgill-Meyer (2020), the availability of the financial resources required to migrate, leading to more studies in recent years questioning the effects and intensity of climate change on human migration and its automatic correlation with temporary rural to urban migration (Mueller, 2020; Grace, 2018; Awil et al., n.d.). Therefore, the simple fact that changes are happening in the climate patterns does not automatically prove that there is a biunivocal correlation between the two events (Ober & Sakdapolrak 2015; Hoffmann et al., 2021; De Sherbinin et al., 2022). If anything, it's difficult to attribute migration to one driving force. Doing so fails to consider the full spectrum of reasons why people decide to migrate from one area to another (Wodon et al. 2014; Venditto, 2018a). What is clear, though, is the reality that the worsening of the natural environment – accompanied by poor governance, poverty and social tension – can reinforce the existing migratory patterns in any country (Caruso & Venditto, 2011; Venditto, 2018b). This is particularly true for

the African continent where climate change is experienced alongside weak governances and deteriorating socio-economic conditions (Mpandeli et al., 2020). As a result, Africa's rural population is expected to relocate to urban areas in search of a better quality of life, further affecting the natural urban population growth on the continent (Henderson et al., 2014; Serdeczny et al., 2017).

A growing body of evidence also links environmental/climate change to women being extremely and adversely impacted in comparison with men and other vulnerable groups (Patience et al., 2020; Md et al., 2022; Chindarkar, 2012). However as noted by Furlong et al. (2022, p. 2), this condition is not based “on the inherent female nature or women's intrinsic vulnerability” but is determined by the resources available, and the legal and cultural norms which ultimately hamper women's agential powers. Having acknowledged this nexus, let's also point out the gap in this discourse, namely that there is a tendency to conceptualise women as a homogenous overpowered group. On the contrary, given the right environment, women can be, and are agents of change. They already know what's good for them, their communities and their societies. They are more than capable of expressing their agential powers, as stated by Demetriades and Esplen (2008, p. 2): “Abstracting women

from their social realities eclipses the relational nature of gendered power and the interdependency of women and men, and paints a distorted picture of women's vulnerabilities, choices and possibilities.”

Our approach in this study is to avoid presenting women as people without agency/power, stuck in the vulnerabilities and repercussions of climate change while allowing their men, as presumed breadwinners, to migrate to urban areas in search of work. In the context of our analysis, new trends indicate that an increasing number of women, like men, move away from rural areas, for a number of different reasons (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020; Caruso & Venditto, 2020), environmental degradation being one of them. However, the very agency/power that propels them to move in search of better livelihoods (Venditto, 2019) becomes an illusion once they arrive in their new urban environment. As a result, the socially and structurally constructed socioeconomic constraints determining women's vulnerabilities in rural areas appear again in the urban environment, trapping them in the same negative situation. These vulnerabilities are intersected in nature, including walking long distances in search of water or firewood, gender discrimination, health and safety inequalities, sexual violence, human trafficking, psychological violence, exploitation

and increasing workloads (World Food Programme, 2021; Soliman et al., 2022).

Most of the new rural migrants end up settling in the most degraded informal settlement areas, land that is often unsuitable for development and habitation, such as steep slopes subject to landslides, flood-plains, and environmentally contaminated areas, such as landfills (Davis, 2006). In informal settlements, houses are constructed with sub-standard materials and are located in close proximity to each other, without electricity, access to clean water, or sanitation (Gómez et al., 2008). In such environments, women are particularly vulnerable to falling in the same vicious cycles of gender roles similar to those in the rural areas. On the other hand, as noted in *Gender inequality and urban informality* (Climate & Development Network, 2014), female-headed households in urban centres are often worse off because women cannot benefit from the remittances they would have received had they remained in the rural areas, and they usually end up having lower incomes than male-headed households. Additionally, women in urban areas are more likely to be supporting those left behind in the villages with remittances.

Shifting our attention to the Namibian context, we are conscious of the challenge to establish the linkage of

how climate change, especially climate-linked migration, affects the daily lives of Namibians, in particular women. In Namibia, however, the impacts of climate change are expected to worsen due to increased hot and cold extremes, changing seasonal rainfall, frequent heatwaves, and longer dry spells. Crop yields are also decreasing and livestock losses have become more common, while food insecurity and food prices have increased, and waterborne diseases have become almost normal (United States Agency for International Development [USAID], 2020; Food and Agriculture Organization, 2023). The environment is the primary source of social welfare and social functioning for most of Namibia's 2.6 million population (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2022; Namibia Statistics Agency [NSA], 2014b). Additionally, Namibians who live in rural areas largely depend on rainfed agricultural and water resources for their livelihoods; we therefore hypothesise that, all other economic conditions remaining the same, the more severe the climate change, as described above, the worse the impacts will be on those in rural Namibia. This is a situation that is likely to accelerate Namibia's urbanisation process, as the changing climate patterns could drive more and more people from rural peripheries to towns in search of employment and better living conditions.

The current level of urbanisation in Namibia is 54.4%, up from 28% in 1991; by 2041, with the population projected to increase to 3.4 million, it is projected that 2.3 million people (67.6%) will be residing in urban centres, compared to 1.1 million in the rural areas (NSA, 2014b). Broadly speaking, Namibia's rural-urban migration has had some relatively positive effects on intergenerational poverty reduction, especially for the population in rural areas (Venditto et al., 2022). Many migrants in urban centres of Namibia still maintain a strong foothold – culturally, socially, economically – in rural areas, and contribute to the development of these areas through both social and financial remittances (Venditto, 2019). Due to the complex nature of migration in Namibia, data about the number and nature of migrants in the country are sparse, as is information about the impact of climate change. Although wide sectoral responses to climate change are gaining momentum in the country, climate-linked migration is still severely under-recognised and understudied. Statistical projections, however, reveal that human mobility in the country is likely to intensify further, resulting in many future urban migrants settling in dense, informal spaces that are poorly serviced, vulnerable and inadequately demarcated, and posing a serious threat to urban governance and the general livelihoods of residents.

This paper aims to revisit and draw lessons from existing findings on the nexus of climate change, migration and urbanisation, and apply them to the Namibian case as additional scholarship which can be used in understanding how climate change shapes the livelihoods of women migrants in the urban environment.

### **Human mobility in Namibia**

The major movement of people within Namibia over the last one-and-a-quarter centuries commenced under German rule, being initiated by the forced migrant labour regime instituted in 1907 and fully utilised by the South African administration from 1915 to 1971. As a result, thousands of native workers, mainly from the northern areas of the country, were displaced and uprooted from their families and their birth places to the coastal towns in the south, the central areas, and the capital, Windhoek (Hishongwa, 1992). This was forced migration aimed at addressing the productive needs of the colonial economy rather than the specific needs or preferences of the migrants (Venditto, 2019). When this contract labour system was abolished, the movement of black residents inside the country was still limited and monitored by the colonial administration. Even when many racist laws were dismantled in the period prior to independence, the presence of military and security forces through

intimidations and harassment made it difficult for freedom of movement. Only with the end of colonialism in 1990, people were free to move and to reside anywhere in the country. Such internal movements were often associated with the need to improve the socioeconomic status of the individuals involved. Despite some progress in reducing poverty, reflected in the major socioeconomic indicators<sup>21</sup> (Phiri & Odhiambo, 2015), the results have been mixed and uneven across Namibia's 14 regions. Inequality still persists, while job creation continues to stagnate and unemployment remains high, particularly among those living in rural areas.<sup>22</sup>

Before specifically examining human mobility statistics, we must note that in Namibia the main source of data collection concerning internal and, to a more limited extent, international migration is the National Census, which is conducted every 10 years. Lack of funds and the COVID-19 epidemic led to the postponement of the 2020 Census, and, as a result, the most recent comprehensive set of primary data on migration still emanate from the 2011 Census, with secondary elaboration from the 2015/2016 Namibia Household Income Expenditure Survey and the 2016 Namibia Inter-Censal Demographic Survey. While acknowledging that

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21 In 2009, the World Bank up-ranked Namibia to the upper middle-income group.

22 33.4% in 2018 (NSA, 2019).



Namibia's statistics on migration are incomplete, outdated or nonexistent, we should observe that the Migration Report (Oliver, 2016) indicates that 707 000 residents migrated between 2010 and 2011 to constituencies other than those of their births, while at the same time 41 000 residents migrated to different regions. This implies that human mobility from rural to urban areas in 2011 could have varied between two and 34% (NSA, 2013).

Crosschecking these figures with other available data, we observe that the *1991 Namibia Population and Housing Census* indicated that 28% of the population resided in urban centres. This proportion increased to 33% in 2001, and again by a rate of 49.7% in the latest national census carried out in 2011 (NSA, 2013).

Such increases cannot be explained only by the natural urban growth rate, considering that the total fertility rate declined over the same period from 4.1 to 3.9 (NSA, 2014a). In fact, in the absence of the 2020 census data, using NSA population projections we can note that the urban population further increased by a staggering 54.4% between 2011 and 2022,<sup>23</sup> (Table

1), even though the fertility rate had declined by 18% (to 3.22 births per woman in 2022) over the same period (MacroTrends, n.d.).

**Table 1** *Population Variation 2011–2022*

	Rural	Urban	Total
2011	1 215 914	900 163	2 116 077
2022	1 206 368	1 389 669	2 596 037
Growth	-0.8%	54.4%	22.7%

Source: World Bank (2023); NSA (2014b)

Given the limited capacity of the economy to absorb additional workers, urbanisation brings with it several constraints on urban planning and on the new urbanites. Newcomers/migrants typically settle in areas that are poorly serviced (sometimes without any facilities) with weak forms of urban governance (Scharrenbroich & Shuunyuni, 2022). More frequently, they settle in places located near open drains or in low-lying areas where land is more affordable but extremely exposed to natural disasters. In addition, those settling there often have problematic relationships with local government, in part because they live in informal settlements and are typically engaged in semiformal or informal activities. Ultimately, due to low socioeconomic status, informal residents end up having scarce resources, with limited access to affordable housing and basic services, and insufficient access to basic amenities. Many migrants are self-employed or employed in informal

23 In 2019, the urban population surpassed the rural one. Currently the Namibia Statistic Agency (NSA) estimates that the urban population represents 54.4% of the total population and it is projected to increase sharply in the future, to 61% and 72% by 2030 and 2050, respectively (Namibia Statistic Agency, 2014b; Mulama, 2015).

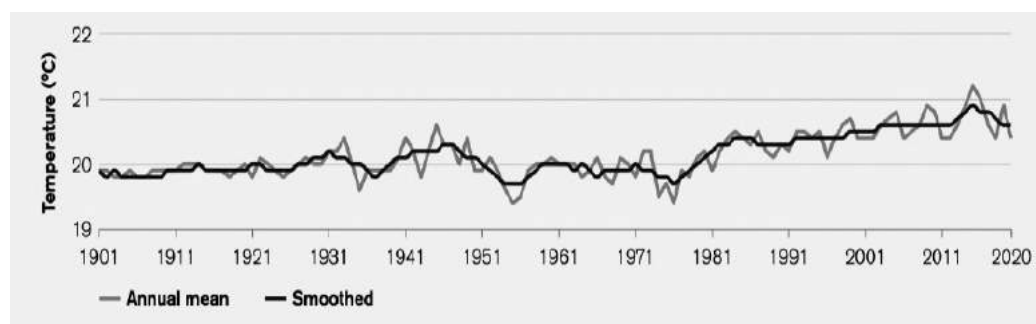
activities or precarious jobs with low wages and without social protection (International Labour Organization, 2014). As a result, the urban informal settlements are spaces of vulnerability, where social, environmental and health fragilities intertwine with structural factors, rendering the lives of the residents difficult. In Namibia, more than 40% of the total population and approximately 80% of the urban population live in shacks and/or rented rooms in informal urban settlements (Scharrenbroich & Shuunyuni, 2023). This is evident in the capital, Windhoek, which currently hosts approximately 35% of the country's urban population (World Population Review, n.d.) with an average of 50% of its population living in informal settlements (Steffen, 2022).

### **Climate Change in Namibia**

Namibia's complex climatic biomes makes it challenging to record and communicate climate trends. The country is, however, faced with the same vulnerabilities as the rest of the African continent, exacerbated by the continent's development challenges due to poverty; limited institutional capacity; lack of access to capital, markets, infrastructure and technology; and low levels of resilience to natural and human-made disasters.

Located between the Kalahari and the Namib deserts, Namibia ranks second in aridity after the Sahara; and only 8% of the land area is sub-humid. The remaining 92% is defined as hyper-arid (22%); very-arid or arid (33%); or semi-arid (37%) (van Rensburg & Tortajada, 2021; Shikangalah, 2020). Due to shortages in surface water, the country relies heavily on groundwater reserves which are subject to low recharge rates from rainfall and periodic ephemeral floods. As indicated by the Namwater Hydrological Services, "... of the rainfall received, 83% is evaporated, 14% is lost through transpiration, 2% is run off in the rivers and 1% seeps underground" (Namwater, n.d.); the country can thus be described as water stressed, as water has always been a scarce resource.

There is clear evidence that the country's temperatures have followed the global trend with warmer temperatures in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, generally 1.0–1.2°C warmer than at the beginning of the century (Dirkx et al., 2008). As indicated in the 2021 World Bank's *Climate Risk Country Profile: Namibia* (World Bank, 2021), increases in temperatures have been observed, with a significant surge in the frequency of days with maximum temperatures above 25°C, and above 35°C, since 1960.

**Figure 2** Namibia Yearly Variation in Temperature (1901–2020)

Source: (World Bank, 2021)

On the other hand, there are no obvious trends in the amount of rain that falls, but there is rather the tendency for a shorter rainfall season, with a longer dry season (World Bank, 2021).

The University of Notre Dame's ND-GAIN Country Index,<sup>24</sup> which provides an immediate snapshot of a country's vulnerability to climate change and its readiness to improve its resilience, ascribes a score of 45.8 to Namibia, ranking it at 109 out of 192 countries in 2021 (Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative, 2023). Flooding and drought have, however, recently

stricken the country, with droughts occurring from 1980–1984, 1992–1993, 2012–2013, and in 2019 – one of the toughest droughts in the last ninety years (Menestrey Schwieger, 2023; Shikangalah, 2020). The productive sectors were particularly hard hit, and their output declined sharply; the government declared a state of emergency that lasted until March 2020.

Household members in the villages from the affected areas were able to temporarily cope with the effects of these droughts, thanks to remittances from those who had moved to the urban centres either during the drought or beforehand (Menestrey Schwieger, 2023). While this indirectly confirms that mobility is one of the coping strategies for distress conditions, it is also important to assess the effects of such induced migration on the life of the migrants in the urban areas.

<sup>24</sup> The ND-GAIN Country Index summarises a country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges in combination with its readiness to improve resilience. It aims to help governments, businesses and communities better prioritise investments for a more efficient response to the immediate global challenges ahead. The ND-GAIN Index range is from 1 to 100, with lower scores indicating high vulnerability to climate change, and higher scores indicating that a country is better able to face climate change (Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative, 2023).

## Methodology

This work employs a hybrid methodological approach, combining critical analysis and existing literature on climate change, migration and urbanisation. In-depth interviews were carried out with two sets of participants to assess the effects of climate change-induced migration on women in urban settlements in Windhoek.

A qualitative research approach has been chosen for this study since it is best suited if one aims to comprehend the meaning and dynamics of social or individual human problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), as well as to recognise factors that may be tested and describe situations which would not have been accurately interpreted using quantitative study (Kothari, 2010). The participants' narratives were crosschecked with the literature findings to assess and explore similarities/dissimilarities that emerged in the existing body of evidence, which allowed us to generate new information and concrete interpretations of the observed phenomena.

Overall, 21 participants were identified; some were purposively selected through contacts the researchers had with people who had moved to Windhoek to yield cases that were information rich. The remaining participants were recruited among their acquaintances via a

snowballing technique in which initial participants identify and refer other possible participants via chain referrals (Palinkas et al., 2013; Crossman, 2020).

Table 2 provides the synoptic characteristics of participants in the northern regions, while Table 3 provides those of the participants in Windhoek.

The first set of participants (Table 2) consists of 13 women with a migratory background selected from urban informal settlements<sup>25</sup> (Figure 3) in the capital, Windhoek.

Their narratives have provided a rich set of information to understand the women's vulnerabilities and the challenges experienced in the new urban environment.

The second set of participants (Table 3) was made up of eight rural women residing in the northern regions, in the areas where the impact of climate change is relatively more significant in consequence of the importance of household agricultural activities and the flood-susceptibility of crops (Omusati, Kavango East, Kavango West, and Ohangwena regions).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Participants were from Samora Machel, Moses I!Garoëb and Tobias Hainyeko constituencies.

<sup>26</sup> The participants resided in the following constituencies: Mashare and Ndiyona in Kavango East, Kapako in Kavango West region, Eengela and Ohangwena in Ohangwena Region and Oshikuku, and Elim and Etayi in Omusati Region.

**Figure 3** *Participants' informal settlement location*



1= Omugulugwombashe, 2= Kilimanjaro, 3= One Nation, 4= Okahandja Park, 5= Okuryangava, 6= Ombili, 7= Babylon, 8= Greenwell Matango, 9= Goreangab

Source: Own elaboration from Google Maps

In this case participants' narratives have allowed us to investigate their vulnerability to climate change and the existence, or the absence, of direct correlation with movements to urban areas.

Separate questionnaires were prepared for the two sets of participants, and a thematic analysis was carried out to interpret the participants' narratives,

without a predetermined coding scheme (Nowell et al., 2017). In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted using an interview guide with open-ended questions in line with the study objectives. The interview guide was developed by the research team based on existing literature on the nexus of climate change and migration. The recorded information was transcribed verbatim in Microsoft Word; where

necessary, the transcripts were translated into English. All interviews were audio recorded with participants' consent and backed by field notes. Transcripts were read and reread to familiarise researchers with the data, and codes were developed; themes and subthemes were formulated and backed with participants' quotes. An inductive approach was applied in which the theory is generated after data have been collected, and are analysed accordingly (Abbott & McKinney, 2013).

All participants were selected based on their availability, willingness to participate, and ability to communicate; consent was obtained to record the interviews, which were conducted in the language common to the participants and translated into English by the authors. Sampling saturation was followed to determine the sample size (Guest et al., 2020); face to face interviews with rural women were conducted between the 15<sup>th</sup> of February and 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2023, while those with the migrant women in Windhoek, in April 2023, in locations convenient to the participants.

## Findings

This section is articulated into two sub-sections. Firstly, the characteristics of the two sets of participants are described, followed by the findings that emerged from the narratives of the rural

women who migrated to Windhoek, and those of the participants identified in the rural areas in the northern regions. In this way, it was possible to assess both the experience of migrant women living in the urban areas and the prominence of climate change as a factor in rural women's decisions to migrate (or not to migrate) to an urban area.

### *Participants' characteristics*

A large proportion of the participants had arrived in Windhoek in the last five years, although a few had moved to town more than 20 years previously. This gave us the opportunity to assess the similarities and dissimilarities emerging from the participants' experiences covering such a large timespan.

The average age of the participants in Windhoek area was 35.8 years; only three participants had completed Grade 12, while the rest had either failed at Grade 10 level or had dropped out of school before completion. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, there appears to be a direct correlation between the level of education and the type of economic activities the participants were engaged in, with the majority working as small traders in the informal sector, while those with a higher level of education were employed in the formal sector.

**Table 2** *Synoptic Characteristics of Participants Living in Windhoek*

	Age	Education level	Region of origin	Arrival in WHK	Location in WHK	Adults in the household		Activity	
						M	F	Form.	Info.
1b	41	G10 (fail)	Kunene	2018	Kilimanjaro	6	1		1
2b	31	G10	Ohangwena	2017	Ombili	2	2	1	
3b	27	G10 (fail)	Kavango W.	2018	One nation	1	2		1
4b	28	G9	Kavango W.	2018	Babylon	5	2	unemployed	
5b	25	G10	Kavango W.	2018	Ongulumbashe	1	1	1	
6b	35	G12	Kavango W.	2018	Okahandja Park	3	4	1	
7b	43	G12	Omusati	1999	Okuryangava	0	4		1
8b	48	G3	Kavango W.	2006	One nation	4	3		1
9b	46	G4	Kavango W.	2002	One nation	4	6		1
10b	38	G9	Kavango E.	2015	Ongulumbashe	5	3		1
11b	30	G12	Oshikoto	1996	Goreangab	1	1	1	
12b	40	G8	Ohangwena	2015	Greenwell Matongo	3	0	1	
13b	34	G10	Oshana	2018	Okahandja Park	2	4	1	
Avr./ Total	35.8					2.8	2.5	6	6

The number of adults living in the participants' households was relatively large, with an average of 5.4 adults, and little difference between the sexes.

The majority of the participants were located in newly informal settlements (Fig. 3) grown in the last ten years from older and more established settlements. Those who arrived more than 20 years ago lived in those areas that have more services and facilities. Most of the participants resided in places lacking electricity and proper sanitation facilities. They cooked on

gas or charcoal; access to water was via a central communal tap

The women's average age in the second set of participants was 65 years, with the oldest being 88 and the youngest 37. This average partly reflects the ageing of the population in rural areas, whereas younger people who are fit to work have relocated to urban areas, leaving their young children in the care of their elderly parents. This observation is in line with the Namibian Inter-censal Demographic Report 2016, which states that "...

urban areas have a larger proportion of working-age population (15-59 years) and a much smaller proportion of the

elderly people. The pyramid for the rural areas shows the opposite” (NSA, 2017, p. 48).

**Table 3** *Synoptic Characteristics of Participants in Rural Areas*

	Age	Education level	Region of origin	Household members	Utilities		Productive activities	
					Power	Water	Field	Livestock
1a	82	G3	Omusati	10	No	Since 2011	Yes (no crop rotation)	Yes (3 alive after drought)
2a	81	G6	Omusati	8	No (small solar panel)	Yes recently	Yes (no crop rotation)	No (all dead after drought)
3a	37	G10	Ohangwena	7	Yes	Yes	No (not enough rain)	Yes (few after drought)
4a	88	None	Ohangwena	7	Yes	Since early 90s	Yes	Yes (moved to Angola)
5a	70	G1	Kavango East	11	No	No	Yes	No (all dead after drought)
6a	65	None	Kavango East	4	No	No	Yes (crop rotation)	No (all dead after drought)
7a	55	G10	Kavango West	1	No	No (from the river)	No (depends on the rain)	No
8a	43	G10	Kavango West	16	No	No (from the river)	Yes	Yes

The majority of the participants did not have a high level of education. However, they did understand the climate change concept in their own way, associating it with the fact that harvests were not as large as they had been in the past because of lower rainfall, and droughts lasting longer, with these factors eventually negatively affecting their well-being.

### The urban women’s narratives

Four main interpretative lines emerged from the narratives of the migrant women in Windhoek which helped to identify the themes in terms of which the investigated phenomena were conceptualised and explained: i) climate change; ii) lack of economic opportunities; iii) struggling in some ways; and iv) family and institutional support.



### *Climate change*

What clearly emerged from the participants' narratives is the association of climate change with weather variations.

*"In Oshiwambo we don't have a word of what you asking or explaining [climate change]." (P 11b)*

Lack of rain, drought, and plants or animals dying are initially described as the direct and prime motives driving them out of the village to the urban area. In this there are no differences between the responses of the women interviewed in the rural areas. They identify a worsening of the weather causing a deterioration of living conditions over the years as a reason for moving.

*"... the land in the village is very small and when it does not rain the water is very far to fetch, the plants die and there is nothing for the animals, so there is not enough food for us there, this is what is forcing me to come here and that is why I come and send money home." (P 2b)*

This description is mirrored by the observations of participants 3b and 8b:

*"... the quantity of mahangu has been reduced, that is why people are looking for jobs in town, or domestic jobs, rather than stay there [in the rural homestead] with the kids." (P 3b)*

*"I come from a place with a lake, the water is now less and it smells and the drought these years have worsened and so people at home in the village will expect more help from me." (P 8b)*

Participant 6b's narrative presents the same pattern of events:

*"...before we had many goats in the household, now because of the drought we have to buy food for them otherwise they die, in time, the production of mahangu has diminished because there is lack of rain. I had to come to support those left in the village, my mother and the small children, to buy food, and uniforms." (P 6b)*

### *Lack of economic opportunities*

When further probed, however, the respondents highlighted the structural challenges of deprivation in rural areas which are ultimately exacerbated by climate change. Participant 13b and 11b shifted attention to the lack of job opportunities in the rural areas:

*"I left because I needed to come and get work that will give me some money to take care of my children and my relatives' homes. ... Works are in towns. No work in the village and a lot of people are just drinking at kambashu [self-constructed zinc-and-wood house] because [there is] nothing to do." (P 13b)*

*We have had good and bad weather for centuries... I left because there were no works to do there.” (P 11b)*

A similar situation is described by participant 1b (migrated from Opuwo (Erongo Region) and arrived in Windhoek in 2018):

*“...there is not job, no electricity in the village, we are suffering and I need to provide food [and] uniforms for the children there.” (P 1b)*

Such feelings are echoed by other participants, in particular a woman from Sauyema (Kavango East), who also arrived in Windhoek in 2018:

*“I dropped out of school because my parents could not pay and I had to find a job to help at home ...\_I was staying at home, there was nothing to do there... but if there had been an opportunity, I would have not moved.” (P 4b).*

Participants 4b and 7b offer still other perspectives on the problem of the low productivity of the land:

*“... people are no more cultivating because the land is near to the city and people go to live there.” (P 4b)*

On the other hand, she also states:

*“... people are getting selfish ... those who receive government support do not share with the others, for*

*example those who received pipes for watering their [vegetable] gardens ask people to go and work for them but do not pay, so people are still with no money and job and have to move away.” (P 4b).*

The availability of water is a recurring motivation for migration:

*“I would like to go back to the north but the water is very scarce; that is why the government should help with boreholes so we can cultivate.” (P 7b)*

Participants 13b and 11b, who moved to Windhoek in 2018 and 1996, respectively, give an additional motivation for migration, a further indication of the complexity of the migratory phenomenon:

*“I have four children but no husband. I first moved to Oshakati but I could not find work, so I moved here to stay with my uncle while looking for work in 2018. I was first selling kapana [small pieces of meat cooked on a barbecue and sold on the street] to make some money to send back home for my children and my mother who is taking care of them. Later, I worked in a shebeen [informal liquor shop] but the pay was not good. Luckily, late last year I found this work. It does not pay that well but I can't complain. I am happy that I am getting something for my kids and family back at home.” (P 13b)*

Participant 11b also indicated that climate change was not a motivating factor:

*“My parents moved because they were employed at the Ministry of Safety and Security in 1994, the job was the main reason why they moved to Windhoek. ... Every holiday or whenever my parents had leave, they were going back to the village to cultivate, during the years I did not witness any significant change in what was produced.” (P 11b)*

#### *Struggling in some ways*

The theme of struggling in some ways emerges as a common perspective among the participants to indicate the daily hardships experienced since they arrived in Windhoek. Struggles and suffering were experienced by both those engaged in informal trading activities and those in formal or semi-formal employment. Natural hazards emerged as a major form of distresses experienced in the urban area:

*“Every time it rains hard the kambashu is flooded.” (P 8b)*

*“This place last year was destroyed by strong wind, and when it rains it gets flooded.” (P 5b)*

*“My kambashu was destroyed by the fire.” (P 1b)*

*“I live in an area which is constantly under the risk of floods.” (P7b)*

Although living in a proper brick house with electricity and running water, participant 11b stated that:

*“I had many friends that throughout the years had their shacks burned out and flooded.” (P 11b)*

Security issues and, as indicate in section *Family and institutional support* below, the lack of institutional support, was also a reason for concern:

*“... the place is not a secure place, almost every January we are visited by botsotsos [thieves/criminals].” (P 2b)*

As result the participants agreed that struggling in the urban area is similar to their struggling in the rural villages:

*“Here sometimes we do not have enough food for ourself and we have to pay the rent.” (P 5b).*

*“Where we live there is no electricity, and water is accessed through the municipality tap, I cook on charcoal.” (P 2b)*

All but one of the participants indicated that the expectations they had before moving to Windhoek have not been met.

*“I came here with the big expectation to get something good because my boyfriend was working, but I did not, I do not have my own business and I am working for someone else.” (P 5b)*

*“I wanted to be a nurse, I started to work as an assistant in a pharmacy, but you stay with people who take advantage of you, I lost the job and that is when I started to sell things in the market.” (P 7b)*

However, despite struggling and in most cases not fulfilling their expectations, none of the participants expressed a willingness to return to their places of origin:

*“We are going to eat what is there [in the village]? I can go and visit when I have enough money, but not to live.” (P 3b)*

*“Yes, we came to struggle in Windhoek, but it is better than to struggle in the village because there is nothing to do there and we will suffer more.” (P 1b)*

*“Even if it is difficult to live here, we are not going back. I do not want to depend on my parents at home. Staying here it is difficult but sitting at home and looking at my parents with nothing is even worse, here we are struggling but we manage to bring food at the table.” (P 5b)*

### *Family and institutional support*

The level and type of support provided by both the participants’ families in the rural areas and national and local institutions in urban areas was the fourth theme that emerged from the women’s narratives.

As expected, in most cases the decision to move to urban areas was endorsed by the family members, and most of the participants could count on the direct or indirect assistance of relatives or networks of friends during the initial period of their stay in the urban area:

*“First when I went to Oshakati my mother gave me money to travel. She gets money from the pension. But I did not have a family in Oshakati. I stayed with people from my village. It was difficult but what can we do, we grew up together so we had to help each other. Later my uncle sent me money to come to Windhoek in Okahandja Park [a settlement to the north of Windhoek]. My uncle helped but not enough because he is a kapana boy.” (P 13b)*

*“Initially I lived with my sister, then I moved out and built my own kambashu, but it burned down, and I moved to my brother’s erf, where I build a new kambashu.” (P 1b)*

*“I stayed with my aunty who had a kambashu, then she died and the place was sold, so I moved out, but I do not have a place where to build mine so I am renting now.” (P 2b)*

*“I first stayed with a family friend, now I am renting.” (P 10b)*

*“I was called by my brother and I am staying with him now.” (P 3b)*

*“My sister was here first, so when I come, she already had her kambashu house. She took me in. It’s a kambashu with no electricity, toilet or water, but at least I had my sister and she knows the area. She helped me to look for jobs and gave me some money to use for the taxi.” (P 12b)*

Diverging from what one would have expected based on similar studies (Frayne, 2004; Pendleton et al., 2014), all participants indicated that they do not currently receive any form of assistance from the family in the rural areas:

*“I used to get some food from the village but since drought has increased, I am not receiving anything now.” (P 6b)*

*“I do not receive any support; my mother’s land is small and very little is produced now.” (P 10b)*

Most of the participants confirmed that their relationships with institutions are complex and often hostile.

*“[There is] no electricity in our kambashu because the municipality said we live in an area where electricity is not appropriate to put. When I asked to explain how so, she said it’s an omuramba [down-steep/drainage channel] area where rain water goes through.” (P 13b)*

*“The municipality does not want us to stay there and I am always afraid that they will remove us. We moved three times so far. But now at Greenwell it is better because we rent the place from the legal owner.” (P 12b)*

The majority of participants indicated that to get their own plot on which to build one or two rooms is the biggest challenge they face, and that it keeps them in poverty, as they receive little or no assistance from the municipality to address this problem.

Similarly, very few participants indicated that they are receiving children support or other grants. This applied even to those who had registered their children with the municipality and Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security.

*“... the municipality does not do anything to help us, I have also registered my children for grant support, but I have never received any assistance from the government.” (P 7b)*

*“I went to the land committee [local councillor] and I explained what I wanted and they sent me to the municipality but no one could help me ... Government people should come and see how we live, our life is very difficult.” (P 1b)*

*“I went to ask at to the municipality about how to get some land but did not get any answer. I also registered my children at the local council to get the grants, I registered since 2018, but did not get any support, they told me to go and enquire at the Ministry, there they said that the [registered] children are a lot and that I have to wait. ... I want to register for Harambee,<sup>[27]</sup> but because I work, they said that I cannot get anything, but still my pay is very little.” (P 2b)*

*“I did not register my children because I am working. The councillor said I am not entitled to receive any form of assistance.” (P 6b)*

It is evident from the participants' discourse that the lack of institutional support contributed to the hardships experienced in the urban environment.

### **Rural women's narratives**

The main interpretative theme that emerged from the narratives of the rural women participants revolves around climate variation versus services

available, which echoes the theme that emerged from the women who had migrated to urban centres. This theme helped us to better understand the underlying motives behind the drive to migrate, and indirectly, the extent of correlation with climate change.

#### *Climate variation versus services available*

Although most of the participants did not directly refer to climate change, all had their way of understanding the concept and acknowledged that variations in meteorological events (rain, wind, high temperatures, etc.) are having an impact on their livelihoods through crops and agricultural production, and are therefore impacting central pillars of food security.

*“In the past five years, our harvest has been negative, our denser forest is disappearing, temperatures are higher than before. Strong winds have become common in the area, ... our brick house got destroyed, including the shop of our neighbour ... we were fortunate that no one was harmed.” (P 5a)*

Participant 6a expressed the same idea:

*“The wind pattern has also changed; vegetation has become highly disturbed, leading to more disease among animals. We found ourselves in hard times now.” (P 6a)*

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<sup>27</sup> The Harambee Prosperity Plan is a targeted Action Plan to accelerate development in clearly defined priority areas, which lay the basis for attaining prosperity in Namibia (Russmann, 2021).

Participants also recognised that rain patterns have changed, and although as indicated by the World Bank (2021), in quantitative terms, the long-term rain patterns in Namibia do not show an overall reduction of the amount of rain; however, there have been changes in the timing and length of the rainfall season, and in the face of a scarcity of productive assets and a lack of public services such as water and electricity provision, the changes ultimately do have an impact on crop yields.

*“Many things have changed, flood is not experienced anymore as in the past, our animals have died because of drought.” (P 1a)*

This sentiment was echoed by other participants:

*“Years back there was enough water, but as for now it doesn’t rain as much.” (P 2a)*

*“The soil has gotten old too and rainfall is limited.” (P 6a)*

However, studying the rural participants’ narratives makes it clear that, as in the case of those who did move to Windhoek, poor harvests resulting from variable rainfall or climate change are not the only type of hardship that they endure:

*“We cook with firewood which is collected far in the forest, there is no*

*current water and we fetch it from the river.” (P 7a)*

*“We walk about five kilometres to fetch the wood to cook and the water we take from the river.” (P 8a)*

*“I use firewood for cooking, only now we got water but before I used water from the oshanas [ephemeral pans].” (P 2a)*

*“There’s no electricity in the village, I cook with firewood, water only arrived in 2011, before I got water from the wells.” (P 1a)*

## Discussion

The findings from interviews with urban and rural women are in keeping with critical climate migration narratives (Randal, 2013). These narratives point to the fact that preexisting negative infrastructural and employment conditions, together with a lack of assistance from the government, accelerated land vulnerability, thereby exacerbating the effects of climate change and causing rural people to migrate to urban areas. This suggests that climate change is a relevant, but additional threat to rural livelihoods and is therefore a co-factor leading to migration to urban areas. In the description of these events, the participants’ narratives were very similar to those observed by Afifi et al. (2012, p 47) when interviewing Somali farmers in an Ugandan refugee camp: a combination of factors, including “a

lack of support from the government”, “drought” and “war”, caused them to move.

On the other hand, the findings corroborate what has been emphasised in the literature on migration, that the most immediate migration driver is the need to improve the wellbeing of the family and/or individuals, over and above economic motives. We posit that when climate change negatively increases vulnerability in natural resources, further threatening individual livelihoods, with support from an absentee government not forthcoming, the choice made is to move to greener pastures in urban areas where employment opportunities and better economic conditions are believed to exist.

A salient characteristic of the living condition of the women participants in the urban environment is the level of precarity in which they live after moving to Windhoek, as if they are trapped in poverty and informality. With little or no information on their rights, in the event of an external event such as the destruction of the dwelling where they are living or the ending of financial support from a spouse/partner, all that the person has accumulated since arriving in the city is jeopardised. For the migrant, this is like going back to square one. It confirms similar studies indicating that urban migrants are

very vulnerable since they do not have any form of insurance against natural or man-made disasters or any other hazard (Pauvert et al., 2017).

Looking specifically at the socioeconomic challenges that affect the livelihoods of the women living in informal settlements in Windhoek, as also observed by Pendleton et al. (2014) a decade ago, hunger remains one of the main challenges they face. In the case of our migrant women’s sample, this is exacerbated by the lack of formal, full-time employment, as well as the poor remuneration received by those who are formally employed. This observation highlights the fact that the idea that food insecurity is mostly a rural condition is actually incorrect. Currently, food insecurity in the urban informal areas is generally associated with social challenges, for example the lack of facilities such as electricity and water supply and sanitation, as echoed in the findings of Zulch et al. (2023) in informal settlements in South Africa.

On the other hand, what also emerged was that the participating women (in both rural and urban contexts) seek self-reliance. Most indicated that they were engaged in subsistence and income-generating activities such as selling *kapana*, *oshikundu* and *marovhu/omalodu* (traditional home brewed drinks), or wood to generate extra income for their



families. Closely related to the women's self-reliance is their resilience. Their narratives strongly suggest that they are not just sitting at home and waiting for handouts from local authorities or the government, or for support from their husbands/partners or male relatives, although they do complain about the lack of official assistance. Instead, they go out seeking jobs in both the informal and the formal economy. They contribute to the household income, in most cases are the breadwinners and family heads, and support children and relatives back in the rural areas from which they migrated. All these point to their agency/power to progress beyond difficult circumstances. As narrated by participants:

*"... I joined a women's cooperative and I started to sell vegetables in the market." (P 10b)*

*"[In the village] I used to sell oshikundu to make more money so that we could buy food." (P 12b)*

*"... there were no jobs [in Windhoek] so I started my own activity." (P 1b)*

*"I lost the job and that is when I started to sell things in the market." (P 7b)*

*"So I was first selling kapana to make some money ... later I worked in a shebeen." (P 3b)*

Consideration should be given to the question: How can local government in both rural and urban settings enhance women's resilience by capitalising on their energy, creativity and ingenuity through policy, programmes, service delivery and the creation of other opportunities?

Finally, the importance of networks of families, relatives and community members was identified as a critical factor that empowered most of the interviewees, providing the much-needed support in the new urban setting. The members of the family (uncles/aunts, sisters/brothers, parents, partners/spouses) and even acquaintances whom they knew from when they were living in the rural areas helped them to settle in and, in some cases, supported them financially, emotionally, psychologically and by any other available means until they were on their feet and able to find a job (informal or formal), or commence with income-generating activities. This also calls for a robust response from local government to strengthen social networks as a service delivery mechanism to the urban newcomers. It could also be offered as a national priority in rural areas to enable families and communities to be strong sources of support, in line with the notion of "ubuntu", and to support the perception of the wellbeing of community from the perspective of "we-ness". In short,

the community is strong when no one is left out and forced to suffer or struggle on her/his own.

## Conclusion

The size of the sample does not allow us to draw unequivocal conclusions regarding a change in the direct or unique correlation between migration and the many social forces that are influencing women living in poverty in both settings (rural and urban) of our study. Climate change is certainly one factor that is exacerbating the vulnerabilities of the research participants in our study. With more severe weather patterns (such as prolonged drought) in rural areas, crop and food production are impacted, forcing more rural people to abandon their rural lives and migrate to urban towns in search of alternative opportunities. What is clear from this study is the revelation that climate change-driven patterns are limiting (if not destroying) the self-reliance, resilience and persistence of women in rural areas. However, the findings also suggest that when women arrive in their new urban environments, policies that are biased against the self-reliance, resilience and persistence of those newcomers, or the lack of policies that support them, further hinder women's livelihoods. The demolition of shacks, ineffective service delivery, the lack of reliable public transport, the lack of crime prevention, and poor child

care facilities, amongst others, all further render the new urban residents vulnerable.

The study recommends that both local and national government address the factors leading to these women – in both rural and urban settings – being trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. This could be realised by creating reliable avenues for urban residents to transfer money through remittances back to the rural areas from which they migrated; by enhancing agricultural productivity in rural and urban settings; by providing access to clean water and sanitation in both rural and urban settings; and by facilitating the smooth transition from cooking on fire to solar-based technologies. Building social infrastructure such as child care facilities, parks, and playgrounds, as well as training and retraining of unemployed and underemployed women in the sectors where they are most likely to be employed, are all measures that could address the identified vulnerabilities. Finally, in view of the participants' narratives regarding the difficulties they experience in accessing social grants, a revision of the grant delivery mechanism should be considered. In this regard, implementing social protection measures (such as the proposed Universal Basic Income Grant<sup>28</sup> and

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<sup>28</sup> The proposal for a Basic Income Grant in Namibia was made in 2002 by the Namibian Tax Consortium (NAMTAX), a government appointed commission. The debate about a Basic Income Grant in Namibia is based on the proposal made in 2005 of a monthly cash

unemployment grants) could be part of a proactive institutional approach to managing people's vulnerabilities and indirectly addressing the impacts of climate change in both rural and urban areas.

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# Keeping the Fire Burning: How Migrants Rejuvenate Relations with Spouses at Home: The Case of Gwanda District, Matebeleland South Province, Zimbabwe

*Emelder M. Tagutanazvo and Vupenyu Dzingirai*

## **Abstract:**

*The way diasporans practise conviviality and have continued to work and energise their stays abroad has been noted. What has less been observed in the literature is how these diasporans manage to maintain ties with spouses left behind. Using the case study of Guyu-Chelesa, a small irrigation community in south-eastern Zimbabwe, this paper examines how migrant husbands maintain connections with spouses who are struggling to survive in their absence. To investigate strategies used by migrant spouses to sustain their relationships, data was collected using key informant interviews. A light touch survey was also used to identify the range of information communication technologies used in maintaining spousal bonds. This paper observes that migrants and their spouses employ different platforms of information and communication technology in situations of prolonged separation. These platforms were critical in rejuvenating spousal relationships. The paper recommends a recognition of information and communication technology as key in retaining spousal bonds when separation becomes prolonged due to migration.*

**Key terms:** information and communication technology (ICT); migration; strategies; remittances; spouses

## **Introduction and Background**

Migration has always been an historical element that shaped population dynamics in different geographical spaces (Acedera & Yeoh, 2018). Currently, migration has become a major driving force in the globalised society (Crush et al., 2012). Typically, migration in Africa takes two forms, namely short-term and long-term migration (Dzingirai et al., 2015). In the former, migrants practise short-term-circular migration, frequently linked to seasonal labour (Rahim et al., 2021). In this situation, family structures of such migrants remain largely untransformed (Zimmermann, 2014). In the latter, migrants become permanent settlers in the host communities. They are almost always unable to return to their families for long periods of time because of what Francisco (2015) termed 'legal consequences' deterring

family reunification. Today there is an increasing number of people in the diaspora who fit into this latter category, unable to return home at least as often as they would wish. This is the group that this paper is concerned with.

The way these diasporans have continued to work and stay in the diaspora has of course been observed in the literature (Sevoyan & Agadjanian, 2015; Tong et al., 2019). It is generally agreed that these migrants experience disruptions in their lives. The major problem relates to social life: how to live amidst strangers (Mushonga & Dzingirai, 2020). Scholars are now in agreement that migrants who are scattered from loved ones at home attempt a range of convivial activities – ranging from urban to religious associations – as a means of adaption in a new place (Hyman et al., 2008; Sevoyan & Agadjanian, 2015; Tong et al., 2019). There is no longer any dispute among scholars that these activities make a great deal of difference in assisting the migrants to survive what Dzingirai & Nyamwanza (2020) term ‘rough neighbourhoods’.

This research sought to understand how migrants employ technology to overcome the effects of distance in their relationships. The preliminary finding of this paper is that migrants remain proactive and innovative in these disorienting and unfamiliar places.

They increasingly utilise information communication technologies, particularly social media platforms, to assist them to remain in the memory of spouses. These migrants are very much alive, and work for relevance and presence in the lives of those they left behind.

Key themes that emerged from the findings emphasised the role of information and communication technology (ICT) as a mode of dynamising family life and a means of maintaining family ties. This ICT has also been successful as a mode of communicating affection, connecting spouses and keeping the ‘flame ablaze’ (Hillyer, 2021). ‘Transformed intimacies’ was also a phenomenon that emerged from the use of ICT by migrant spouses, who also demonstrated how their spouses could practically become ‘virtual’ (Li, 2021). The conclusions are built from Zimbabwe’s Gwanda District, where amidst other drivers of migration, husbands migrate as of ‘rite’ (Tagutanazvo & Dzingirai, 2022) to neighbouring countries such as Botswana and South Africa, where they work in mines and other difficult places to underline their identity and transition in life. Their migrant work helps them to accrue assets and to improve their living standards. In the process, these migrant husbands effectively leave their assets, farmlands and homes in the custody of their wives.

ICT has been successful in emancipating women in decision making as one of the positive consequences of the feminisation of migration. Tagutanazvo and Dzingirai (2022) provides that due to consistent sharing of remittances with the migrant's maternal parents, women now own homesteads at the migrant's natal homes, a practice which is not embraced in the mainstream African culture. In addition, spouses of migrants get consulted for their opinions on critical issues at family and community levels because of their ability to contribute meaningfully towards development. In the process, women attain vertical-upward social mobility.

This technology has also been able to build stable networks and affirm connectedness between migrant spouses. This study contributes to a topic that is in the limelight of scholarly work, namely how migrants maintain relationships with their own through the use of ICT. Going forward, there is a need for reforms that allow people to move freely across borders, playing out their roles in-person without the need to have 'virtual partners'. In the section below we describe the study area, with its rich history of migration that continues to this day (Zimmermann, 2014).

## **History of Migration in Gwanda**

Located in Zimbabwe, Gwanda is a semi-arid district in the south-western part of the country. In this province, migration is not a new phenomenon. During colonial times, migrants trickled to South Africa, attracted by the highlife of gold and diamond mining towns (Maphosa, 2004). The movement of labourers to South Africa was initially temporal and short-term (Rahim et al., 2021). Then, the purpose of migration was to raise money needed to acquire a wife, as well as to build a home (Collins, 2017). Migration increased after independence in 1980 as Gwanda District faced high levels of unemployment due to the economic meltdown that was exacerbated by the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (Peberdy, 2007). This first wave of migration was supported by the immigration policies that allowed flexible movements of migrants back to their countries of origin. Those migrating did so to acquire money for food as well as the technologies of luxury: radios, TVs and toys. The rate of migration increased sharply after 2000, and immigration laws were tightened to control mass movements. Furthermore, alarmed by migration and crime in the country, South Africa has recently banned such illicit movements, so that entry into the diaspora is through 'border jumping', or illegal migration. This criminalisation of migration has

unintentionally stabilized mobility so that migrants stay for long periods in the diaspora, perhaps going home only during the Christmas season (Rahim et al., 2021).

Before 2000, only men in Gwanda had migrated (Maphosa, 2004). Women did not migrate, their role being to look after homes and relatives. Nyikahadzoi et al. (2019) note that men physically brought money home from the diaspora, at least during the early migration when policies were flexible enough to allow for circular migration, and this would constantly rejuvenate spousal relationships. In the current decade, because of economic and political changes in southern Africa, these men no longer have the freedom to come back home and physically connect with their spouses. Quite how these spouses in Gwanda, separated as they are by migration, maintain or rejuvenate relationships is an intriguing matter that this paper deals with. But before this, we sketch the theoretical framework of the paper.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study utilised the transactional theory founded by Malinowski (Firth, 1951) and perfected by Bailey (1969) as the framework that guided the analysis process throughout the research. This theory has proved useful in handling

micro-level and subtle processes in human relationships.

According to Bailey (1969), actors will seek to use institutions to advance their individual interests. For instance, regarding moments of resource scarcity, Bailey states: “Reasoned self-interest is the prime human motivation: interests are rationally pursued by rational dealers in the pursuit of rewards” (Bailey, 1986, p. 436).

This paper views the ‘spousal unit’ as an existing institution, and ICT as a means used by spouses that have been coercively separated for too long, to fulfil their individual interests. Furthermore, Bailey shows that in institutional or societal contexts, the individual shamelessly puts pressure to advance his or her individual interests by any means: “The individuals put pressure on the resource provider to give them their due share even if this means that fellow members will go short within the team to increase their own share in the distribution of scarce spoils” (Bailey, 1977, p. 61).

Thus, spouses can use any means to access and remind their migrant significant other to express their passion when they are distant and also to remind them to provide for their household needs (Dzingirai & Mangwanya, 2015). Transactionalists

such as Hammarstrom (2010) maintain that individuals have interests, and that as part of realising their interests, these individuals make use of normative strategies such as the use of passionate words using ICT. These individuals also use pragmatic strategies which might include the manipulation of means and ICT platforms to express romantic feelings and as a means of surveillance (Phillips, 1967). In short, Cheater (1999) stresses that people have agency. However, this theory has its own weakness. For instance, deceit is unrealistically emphasised when in some cases it is quite limited and controllable.

Data collection methods used to harness the strategies that are used by migrant spouses to keep the fire burning are presented below.

## Methodology

The research adopted a mixed methods approach. A questionnaire was used in a light survey to capture quantitative data on the range of ICT and platforms used by the spouses, as well as strategies used by migrants to maintain marital bonds. The tool was brief, taking 30 minutes to administer. Also, the tool was translated into the local language so that respondents knew what they were responding to. The questionnaire was administered to 100 women who were irrigation plot holders in villages under Chief

Nhlamba in Gwanda District. The women were purposively selected from the following six villages: Sengezani, Paye, Sezhubane, Bethel, Ntanye and Nhlamba. This number comprises half of the plot holders in the study area. The number of participants from each village was guided by the principle of proportionality. Tools such as Google Forms were used in the analysis of the data since they have the capacity to analyse mixed methods data.

Interviews were also used as a complementary method to harness data on the effect of technology on the quality of relations. Altogether 49 interviews were conducted with purposively



*Photo: Emelda Tagutanazvo*

selected women who owned plots in the selected villages under Chief Nhlamba. A total of 45 interviews were targeted in accordance with the watering register for the week. An additional four interviews came as a result of late comers who did not arrive at their appointed times, but who came later when their time slots had already been occupied by four newly selected participants. The late comers were eventually also incorporated in the interviewing process. This led to the number of participant interviews increasing to 49. The interviews, which lasted approximately 15 minutes each, included interviews with migrants' wives. Through the perceptions of the migrants' wives, it was possible to capture how both spouses used ICT to maintain and enhance their relationships. Although data analysis was a continuous process from the start, the data from interviews were transcribed and translated for them to have meaning that can be universally understood. This qualitative data were analysed in-situ; content analysis of the data was also performed, even after being entering on the Google Form for the purpose of systematic ordering of themes.

During analysis, word categories were used to guide the theme identification process. The following key themes were identified: affection communication; communication tool; communication strategy; modes of

keeping relations intact; and transformed intimacies. To maintain anonymity, the names that appear in this paper are pseudonyms.

In the following section, the paper examines how migrant men use different technologies and arts to retain intimate ties with their wives at home.

## Findings

### *The technologies to maintain ties*

The observation that migrants maintained contact with their loved ones is largely demonstrated in this study. This is evidenced by the overwhelming response from the wives confirming that these migrants did communicate. While 4% of these rural women reported that their migrant spouses were not communicating, 17% of these women confirmed that their migrant spouses communicated monthly, 31% daily, and 48% weekly. Migrants are thus clearly connected with their spouses back at home. The summary of frequencies of the measured parameters is indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1** Summary of Information Technologies Used and their Impact on Intimacy

Communication parameter	Percentage
<b>Frequency of communication</b>	
No communication at all	4
Communicated often	17
Communicated daily	31
Communicated weekly	48
<b>Types of ICT used</b>	
Kambudzi <sup>29</sup>	58
Smart phone	36
Computer tablet	2
None	4
<b>Platforms of communication used</b>	
Texts	42
Voice calls	28
Voice messages	20
Videos	10
<b>Purpose of using ICT</b>	
Sending gifts	81
Communication	19
<b>Relationship status</b>	
Happy	69
Not happy at all	31
<b>Level of intimacy when using ICT</b>	
No Improvement	6
Improved	94

<sup>29</sup> A non-smart phone, so cheap and common that it is compared to goats (*mbudzi*) in the area

The dominant pattern is that communication is linked to remittances. Each time migrant men send remittances, they used this opportunity to talk to their loved one, as reported by one migrant wife:

*Often times when my husband sends remittances through mukuru.com [an online payment app], he would make sure that the message has been delivered. At the same time, we take that opportunity to share our*



*deepest desires for each other as well as reminding each other of other family needs that would require our attention in the near future.*

The migrant men often talked to their spouses to find out whether the remittances had indeed reached them in good order. The process works both ways, with wives often communicating with their migrant husbands when they needed support from them. But how did these spouses connect?

The migrant men used different modes of ICT, inclusive of phones, which most participants referred to as the basic communication medium. The more popular phone which everyone in the study desired to have is *kambudzi* (see footnote above). Over 58% of women in the study area have this basic technology.

The reasons spouses value *kambudzi* as a communication tool are diverse. An informant put this thus:

*My kambudzi phone does not have other applications. These types of phones are the ones mostly available, they are the familiar ones, cheap to use and the most affordable and accessible phones. So, I have no option.*

The informant above perceives the *kambudzi* as a necessity and a basic

communication tool. Some other people value this rather primitive phone for its reliability. Where smart phones are not affordable, the *kambudzi* is always in action, according to one informant:

*I do not have a smart phone. The ordinary phone that I have does not have other applications but it is reliable, efficient and convenient.*

Not every spouse has the *kambudzi* – some rural women use smart phones. Owners of these smart phones tended to be spouses of well-to-do migrants who had a reputation for remitting substantial amounts.

Roughly 36% of women use smart phones, praising them for creating different interfaces with spouses. These types of phones are said to have a wide range of applications, ranging from voice calls and text messages to WhatsApp texts, voice calls and video calls, and the ability to generate animations:

*The smart phones allow us to talk to our beloved in different ways. We talk through video calls, we Whatsapp, we text, we send pictures. We even make voice calls. These phones help us to access our migrant spouses through different ways which brings excitement and exciting dynamics to our relationships.*

Computers and tablets are rare technology types in the rural context, being owned by roughly 2% of respondents. It is reasonable to assume that they are owned by women whose spouses have formal, lucrative jobs in their destinations, as narrated:

*Smart phones are very few in this area. Any woman who has a smart phone has a spouse working abroad, and not just working away from home but must have a good source of income.*

The modes of ICT discussed above have their shortcomings. Often these shortcomings are beyond the control of the villagers. Indeed, in many ways the shortcomings are national in character. One woman whose husband has been in the diaspora for six years narrated:

*We sometimes have challenges when using these phones due to electrical power cuts which are driven by load-shedding and natural disasters. Some of us do not have alternative charging facilities.*

In the same vein, the wife of a migrant commented:

*ZESA [the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority] is a problem here. Sometimes the power utility can leave us days on end without electricity and that affects our phones.*

Electric power is an issue that has both domestic and private impacts, leaving women suddenly cut off from husbands. As a strategy to ensure continued communication, these participants resorted to battery banks to give them power till the grid was restored. Participants also made use of solar energy. In the section below we describe how spouses use these mobile technologies to keep their relationships alive.

### **Modes of communicating affection**

#### *a) Using text messages to keep relationships alive*

The majority of spouses (42%) send text messages. According to one woman:

*I make sure I have text bundles so that we can plan over the phone. I make sure I update my husband on all home activities so that he feels to be part of the home even when he is away.*

Another respondent added:

*Most of my conversations with my spouse is done through text. I use text message more often than voice calls.*

This method is preferred because it allows longer, uninterrupted and private conversations with migrant

spouses, as narrated by another participant:

*Text messages can be received and replies can be sent back even when one is in a public environment. It does not require one to be secluded from people to get the message or to respond back.*

Text messages are also preferred because of their affordability, as indicated by one participant:

*Text messages are very cheap when converted to bundles. This allows for lengthy conversations.*

The above remarks reflect the convenience that is brought about by using text messages even when one requires privacy in a public setting. However, the ongoing use of the text messages become controversial, especially when it is done by wives. One woman who has suffered such prejudice had this to say:

*Continuous texting give rise to suspicion among the in-laws. They suspect that the woman will be talking to other men suggesting an extra-marital affair.*

Instead of gluing the relationship between spouses, texting then carries the risk of engendering suspicion in certain contexts, especially where those who witness the texting do not

have the background of the call. On the whole, though, texting is effective in energising relationships.

#### *b) Calling as a mode of keeping the flame alive*

Some spouses use phones to call rather than to text. In the short survey, voice calls were used by 28% of those who owned cell phones. This strategy is selected for its ability to draw the other person closer, regardless of distance. This technique allows direct conversation and natural expressions of intimacy. The use of voice calls was supported by the narration below:

*The voice call is better; you feel like you are interacting directly with the person. Voice calls easily replace the absent spouses, brings our spouses closer and their presence becomes a bit more real.*

Another respondent alluded to the usefulness of using voice calls in spousal relationships:

*For the uneducated and the aged, voice calls are the commonly used method of communication. This is because it does not require much dexterity in using a phone. It is simple and straight forward.*

The above narrations indicate the popularity of this mode of communication, especially amongst

elderly women. But even this mode of use is not without its own problems: in-laws almost always suspect that when excusing themselves to a private space to receive an intimate call, daughters-in-law are gossiping about them. Indeed, one concerned participant put it thus:

*After my calls my in-laws would be keen to hear what I said. They think I would be gossiping about them with their son. They show it by their facial expressions and in some cases, they ask follow-up questions to the conversations.*

Those not using voice calls as their basic strategic platform for enhancing their marital relationships have their own reasons for their choice. The majority of those not resorting to calls cite network problems. This is clear from a young wife's remark:

*I do not use voice calls frequently because there is poor network ... and it takes time to understand each other anyway. Sometimes the conversation is cut short due to the high cost of voice calls. Mobile phone calls are also very expensive.*

The wives face these network challenges passively and accept whatever comes their way. They investigate alternatives, with some buying additional sources of mobile connectivity and switching channels

as necessary. Their doing so shows the extent to which they value voice-based communication.

### *c) Using voice notes to keep connected*

Spouses who send voice notes make up 20% of those with cell phones. One of the participants specified voice message as one of her strategies as follows:

*I sometimes use informal voice notes or audios where I record myself talking so that he hears my voice. I record the children playing. I also add some non-verbal cues in our conversations such as voice intonations.*

This method is preferred because it is a less artificial and distant way of communicating one's presence in a relationship:

*Men use voice notes to maintain a homely and more realistic conversation. I also do the same, keeping my spouse interested in talking to me. In some cases, I use exaggerations to increase anxiety on the migrant so that they keep sending more notes to me.*

To emphasise the use of voice notes, Guyu's women reported that sometimes the spouses send them up to three voice notes a day as a way of showing

interest. These women indicate that they respond to all these voice notes without delay to remove all possibility of mistrust developing. Nevertheless, this method of communication is only feasible for wives with secluded spaces (their own rooms) where they can afford to record even intimate words without intrusion. One respondent expressed this point well:

*This method becomes a challenge where bedrooms are shared with children or when the rooms are adjacent to those of the in-laws. It becomes difficult to record sexually suggestive messages with the fear of being heard by children.*

Clearly, not every voice note is effective, nor is every situation ideal.

#### *d) Using video calls to remain connected*

Some spouses (10%) make video calls. Migrants and their spouses chose to do so because of a video call's personal and sensational impact on the receiver:

*I prefer using visuals such as night video calls because it is romantic. Doing so fills up our senses.*

Some of the participants referred to the impression that could be made in such a video call. For instance, one participant noted:

*I would make sure that I wear my best dress to make sure the video comes out well and also as a thankful gesture to my husband who would have bought the nice clothes for me.*

Another participant added:

*I would wear suggestive clothing that shows my intimacy to my husband. This clothing is inclusive of miniskirts, tightfitting and body-exposing clothes. This would keep my spouse excited. I believe that these visuals add some excitement to the men and they enjoy the visual [aspects] as spices to conversations.*

Some of these videos would be recorded, with restless gestures being projected as a sign of lovesickness, as reported by the woman below:

*In some of the videos a lot of gestures are expressed to show intimacy. In some cases, I throw a kiss, hug the pillow, and express suggestive moves. I show myself to be full of interest and passion.*

The potential social risk associated with videos of this nature is that they can come into the wrong hands. One woman provided an indication of how this could happen:

*Often times I feared that children or my in-laws might mistakenly stumble on the videos since phones can be*

*shared at home, and this might result in a lot of embarrassment on my side. My father in-law broke his phone and requested to use mine to call, but just that one call changed our respect for each other [because] he mistakenly opened the video which was sent by my husband assuming there was important information to be relayed. He stumbled on the nudeness of my husband and suddenly he returned my phone showing displeasure and anger.*

#### e) Sending gifts

Rather than call, some spouses believe in sending gifts. One of the most prominent gifts is remittances. The majority of the participants indicated that they receive remittances. These are received through e-money platforms such as Mukuru and EcoCash, which are phone-based remittance platforms, as reported:

*I receive remittances through the phone. A message pops into the phone as a sign that some money has been sent.*

Another informant narrated:

*Even during droughts and famine we can survive here in Chivi, we do receive remittances through Mukuru or EcoCash frequently. We use this income to provide [for] the needs of the household and this cushions poverty.*

To complement this strategy, the wives, on the other hand, use ICT to remind the migrants to remit. Those sending technology-based gifts do so at different times. Some send around Christmas, others around Easter, and others, on birthdays. In any case, the timing is made to underline the sender's commitment.

It would be incorrect to limit remittances/gifts to cash. Some of the enticing gifts are virtual, as indicated by this participant:

*We sent each other pictures, stickers, jokes, emojis, project developments. In times of hardships, he sends bible messages, words of wisdom and calming messages.*

Another participant indicated:

*At first, I was worried because now my spouse's usual visits were prohibited by COVID-19. I thought we were not going to enjoy Valentine's day, but now because these smart phones are so artistic, I celebrated Valentine's in style ... receiving flowers from my spouse through the phone that were so beautiful that even if he was around, he would not have been able to buy such beautiful ones for me. Phones actually add more romance to our relationship by creating exciting and beautiful gifts for our loved ones.*

Both material and virtual gifts are used as a strategy because they present tangible hope for the wives left behind. It is the hope created by this strategy that keeps the relationship's fire ablaze.

The next section highlights the effects of this communication on the quality of relationships.

### **Technology and Transformed Intimacies**

This section attempts to answer the question of what the ICT-based connection does to the quality of the relationship. In a few of the cases, the use of ICT proved not to be helpful. For example, one woman reported the extent to which she had been abandoned by her husband for six years without any form of response to her continuous attempts to call. She said:

*Phones are not the ones that glue relationships, it is the condition of the heart of the person towards their spouse that determines the quality of the relationship. In my case I used to call my husband on a weekly basis, the weeks turned into months and now it has been six years without hearing his voice, but I do have a phone. He prefers sending relatives only to deliver the requirements of the household or [to attend] to the needs of the children, not to me anymore.*

For the most part, however, the connection through mobile ICT

keeps the relationships alive. Roughly 69% of the sample investigated rural women alluded to the fact that their relationships with their migrant spouses had changed, but in a more positive way. Only 31% of the women were not happy with their transnational spousal relationships. This stability suggests that ICT tools used to communicate make spouses less lonely, as reported:

*I keep myself entertained by the pictures, videos and audios that he sends. I am not lonely, though I miss the physical touch.*

Another woman expressed herself well in showing the marital empowerment that is brought about by ICT:

*My husband has an update always of what is happening back home. This makes it easier for him to make critical decisions regarding our home.*

The above narration expresses how phones give spouses a voice in marital affairs and how the partners are able to keep track of issues at home and make decisions even while absent.

It was also reported that ICT gives partners a sense of belonging to each other, as expressed by one woman:

*I don't feel his absence that much, he is always there in the phone. I talk to him whenever I feel like it.*

Ninety-four percent of the participants indicated that they were experiencing improved levels of intimacy with their migrant spouses as a result of their use of ICT. In support of this, one woman remarked:

*I can now present myself in ways that he accepts. I can talk to my spouse without fear. It is easy for him to accept my ideas on media. Media hides emotions, moods and offers plenty of privacy. We talk without fighting. We used expressions and romantic words without being shy. We express our feelings openly compared to when we see each other face to face. We rebuke each other even when we are apart. Things can be done without constant and unnecessary consent. Technology has created a digital husband who can't physically beat me up. I can now express my sentiments to him without fear. He in turn uses appealing words to me that he cannot use when facing me directly. When he is at home, he wakes up and goes to the beer hall. I am left alone at home with no one to talk to, but technology has erased the carefree man and erected a caring husband who monitors my whereabouts often in a loving way, and I feel loved.*

Most women felt that ICT creates a lovable husband, a more intimate and caring partner, a harmless friend and a present companion who could talk to his wife at any time of the day.

## Conclusion

There is a tendency among scholars to present migrants as socially connected in the diaspora where they are located, as supported by Mushonga and Dzingirai (2020). These scholars also suggest that the same migrants are distinctly cut off from their homes, as argued by Dzingirai and Nyamwanza (2020). The data from this study suggest that migrants are indeed linked in the diaspora, being members of neighbourhood or religious associations. The study shows migrants to be strongly connected to the people they left behind (Acedera & Yeoh, 2018). They are in constant touch with their spouses. Consistently with the literature from outside the African continent, the data show this connectivity to be driven by technology, in particular mobile ICT. Through these media, migrants are able to do two things: firstly, they are able to send gifts to their loved ones, underscoring their commitment to people they left behind – a point now illustrated in Asian studies on migration (Li, 2021). Secondly, male migrants in the diaspora are also able to communicate their loyalty and commitment to the spouses they left behind by sending Whatsapp messages and, in some cases, recorded videos to their loved ones. Wives do the same, often sending audio notes at night. Through these media, the migrants are able to be 'virtual spouses'. They become present in the marriage, even though they



are absent. They make daily transactions and share family secrets, as if neither party is absent. Such virtual presence is obviously not ideal. Indeed, there is evidence that media remain inadequate in transactional relationships. From the data presented above, however, there are more pointers to suggest that ICT is a good substitute for the absent spouse. Across time and distance, promises are renewed, and relations are kept aflame. This is consistent with observations in other continents, where wives and migrant spouses are able to survive the stress caused by necessary separation (Hillyer, 2021).

While evidence from this paper supported the view that ICT has been used to improve intimacy, this is contrary to the views expressed by Phillips (1967), Ducey (2010) and Horst (2006), who argue that the technology itself has been used as a tool of surveillance by spouses, and that they have undermined intimacies in the process. Moreover, ICT has put a spotlight on existing inequalities in society, as different spouses experienced different levels of intimacy depending on the type of ICT that they had access to. This has created conditions conducive to further discrimination (Yeoh et al., 2005; Nusarath, 2021).

The findings presented in this paper are subject to the limitation that the research only delved into spousal relationships, and not into broader

familial or parental relationships. In concluding that technology facilitates connectivity in necessary separations, the recommendation is not that the present world order is good, simply because spouses have some sort of interface between themselves. Ultimately, people in relationships need to meet face to face to avoid the development of 'stranger relationships', where those involved no longer fully understand and empathise with each other. However, ICT, though imperfect, provides vehicles through which relationships can survive, and even thrive.

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## Opinion Piece

*Inclusive and Universal Access to the Internet and Digital Technologies:  
The Right to Access Public Goods and Improved Livelihoods in Namibia*

*Dickson Kasote*

Access to the internet and digital technologies is increasingly recognised as a human right for all citizens, not just a preserve of the elite or privileged strata of society. It is a necessity in today's digital economy, with an estimated 70% of new value created over the coming decade expected to be based on digitally-enabled platform business models (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Sustainable and inclusive development demands that technological development be inclusive and socially just. It is a lever to access employment, public services, productive assets, financial services, skills and education, and enable entrepreneurial ventures and income-generating activities. In other words, it grants access to public goods and is the basis of livelihoods. Inclusive access to information and communication technology (ICT) and the digital platforms and services it underpins can improve the quality of life and livelihoods of all citizens, including the youth, women and girls, people with disabilities, and other systemically excluded groups.

The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 9: "Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation" (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.) entails significantly increasing access to ICT and providing universal and affordable access to the internet. ICT serves as a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable development, while ensuring universal access to the internet unlocks the transformative potential of ICTs for all citizens. As highlighted by Souter, MacLean, Akoh, and Creech in their 2010 study, sustainable development is inconceivable without global communications and knowledge exchange. The closer we consider today's communications channels, the more aware we become of the paramount importance of the Internet to the flow of information and knowledge around the world.

The African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms acknowledges that internet access has increased rapidly across the African continent (AfDec, 2014). Internet access grants a

voice and visibility to millions who use social media and digital platforms to engage in political, governance, social and economic issues.

Namibia's internet penetration rate is still limited, and stood at 51.0% of the total population in 2022 (Datareportal, 2022). This is still one of the best internet penetration rates in Africa, but there is a rural-urban divide, as internet access in Namibia is mainly concentrated in urban areas. The major towns in Namibia generally have very good broadband speed available that allows easy access to services and information. In rural areas, as shown by various reports, access to the internet and ICT is marginal. Some rural areas have limited or no access to the internet. Class divides also translate into digital divides. Low-income households and some individuals in informal settlements in major urban areas often have no or limited internet access.

Equity concerns around universal internet access are not just limited to affordability. Connectivity should also be meaningful. Achieving meaningful connectivity is dependent on:

- **The right speed:** Users need sufficient download speeds to access multimedia and other applications that constitute a full internet experience.
- **An adequate device:** Users should be able to both produce and consume content online. Mobile-only access is not the same as access via a laptop or desktop, because a full physical keyboard is better suited to content creation and productivity.
- **Enough data:** Lack of data should not stand in the way of individuals fully using the internet-based applications they consider important.
- **Regular connection:** If a user can only connect to the internet once in a while, it is less likely to be a meaningful tool for them.

Digital platforms can be leveraged to secure employment, access services, and improve livelihoods. Although information on the application of digital technologies for livelihoods promotion in Namibia is scant, we can learn from examples elsewhere.

Climate change is affecting Namibian communities in various ways, including flooding of habitats, inability to grow food due to protracted droughts, and other unprecedented natural phenomena that threaten to increase the number of 'climate refugees'. In some cases, communities are caught unprepared for climate-related disasters despite early warning systems and other mechanisms that

are in place to reduce disaster risks. A significant cause of this, amongst others, is a lack of access to information – a situation which could be addressed by promoting universal internet access.

ICT has been employed in community-based disaster risk management in the group of countries collectively referred to as ‘small island developing states’, and in other African countries, and has proven to be effective in promoting the involvement of potentially affected communities in disaster risk management at the local level. This includes community assessments of hazards and the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of local action for disaster risk reduction (UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, n.d.), enabled by the provision of internet-based real-time information. This has been credited for improving the chances of surviving the impact of climate change for community members and promoting climate adaptation.

Agrarian communities with internet access are learning new climate-smart agricultural methods and accessing drought-resilient crop varieties that can help them adapt to the devastating impact of climate change on food security and livelihoods – and ultimately on peace. For instance, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization disseminates easily followed videos on

different digital platforms, educating communities on crops such as millet that are drought tolerant and resilient in harsh conditions that can be adopted to ensure yields during droughts. Advancing access to digital technologies and the internet can improve livelihoods and promote inclusive and sustainable development especially for women, as studies have shown that women produce 70% of Africa’s food (Odiwuor, 2022).

Namibians, just like citizens of other countries who have access to the internet and are digitally literate, are using digital technologies in business and in the search for employment. Platforms such as LinkedIn, a business and employment-focused social media platform with more than 900 million users, have revolutionised job searching and hiring across sectors. Websites and social media platforms such as Facebook are being used to engage with clients and advertise vacancies, so that potential employers can quickly find job seekers and vice-versa on these platforms.

Other areas in which ICT is being used is in education and skills development. The internet is a source of equitable, quality education and lifelong learning. For example, Rwanda’s Smart Classrooms initiative, which provides students with hands-on learning, is contributing towards

the country's transformation from an agriculture-based economy to a knowledge-based one.

ICT is being used to advance access to healthcare services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, AI (artificial intelligence) was used in some advanced healthcare systems to detect infection, monitor treatment, track individuals, forecast cases and mortality rates, develop vaccines, and help scale down the workload of healthcare workers (Chandra et al., 2022). Some of these uses of technology can be leveraged in Namibia to improve healthcare services. The first step could be to ensure that every citizen, irrespective of their locality and socioeconomic status, has access to the internet and is thus able to receive information on healthcare services available to them. This will be one critical step towards ensuring a healthy livelihood for all.

Although Namibia has one of the best internet penetration rates in Africa, it still has far to go to achieve the goal of universal access. Meaningful access is still constrained by high costs, inadequate devices, low broadband speeds, and limited or no internet coverage. The urban-rural and social class divides that predicate so many forms of exclusion also shape internet access in the country. Inclusive, universal and meaningful access to the internet and ICT is a basic right that,

when realised, will enable improved access to information, income generating capacities, job searches and health services. It is therefore imperative that Namibia achieves its goal of universal broadband access by 2025, as set out in the Harambee Prosperity Plan II.

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## Case Study

### *Livelihood and Living Conditions of a Female Communal Farmer*

*Claudius Riruako*

#### Introduction

This case study examines the experiences of Albertina (not her real name), a communal farmer in Namibia's Ohangwena Region, as she navigates the challenges and opportunities of agricultural practices and family livelihoods in a communal setting. It explores her background, the nature of her farming activities, the obstacles she faces, and the innovative strategies she employs to achieve sustainable agriculture.

#### *Subsistence farming*

Albertina, who is 34, and her husband Shiwedha, 47, are communal farmers in the village of Ohalushi, Ohangwena Region. Although the region is known for mixed farming, the family only grows crops, as they do not have cattle. They own five chickens. They are totally dependent on rain-fed agriculture as they do not have the irrigation infrastructure or water for irrigation. They grow crops like *mahangu* (millet) and beans which they fertilise with cattle manure. The



*Photo: Dirk Haarmann*

farming is completely organic for they do not use fertilisers or any chemicals on the crops. They do not have tractors so they use a donkey for ploughing. The horticultural growth cycle takes three to five months.

### Employment and income

She starts work in their fields at six in the morning and continues until around one in the afternoon. Her main responsibilities include sowing, weeding, harvesting, storing of *mahangu* seeds, and pounding of *mahangu*. This she does in addition to her domestic work in the house that includes cleaning, cooking and child care. Her husband is responsible for clearing the land. They share the tasks of ploughing, sowing and harvesting. When they get sufficient rainfall, they harvest enough beans (they sell only if they are fresh) so they pack them into small portions for sale.

Albertina also earns a small and fluctuating income of between N\$ 50 to N\$100 per day from the sale of traditional whisky (*ombike*) that she brews. Her husband, works as a casual worker for a construction company where he digs trenches. His work is sporadic. If he manages to work for a full week, he earns around N\$200 per week. Her son is currently unemployed, but during the rain season he works as a cattle herder for a neighbour where he receives N\$200 per month.

### Education

Due to pregnancy, Albertina dropped out of school in Grade 8. She did not receive a second chance to continue her education. Her husband lacks any formal qualifications or vocational training. This makes it difficult for him to find a permanent job.

Albertina has three children who have all attended the local primary school, and her two youngest children are still there. Her eldest son failed Grade 11 in 2022 and was unable to proceed to Grade 12 or to university. The family's financial situation prevents them from sending him to a vocational training centre to acquire additional skills.

### Challenges Faced

#### *Land availability and soil quality*

The family resides in a communal area where land is allocated by the local chief. Due to high demand, the family could only access a small piece of land with a low soil quality. Due to overploughing, the soil has lost nutrient content and fertility.

Farmers like Albertina struggle to find suitable land and must learn more about soil management to sustain their families. They have not accessed fertilisers, agricultural training or agricultural extension services to assist

them to adopt agricultural practices that lead to greater crop yields and improved soil quality.

### *Land titles*

The land belongs to the community and is administered by local headmen and chiefs. Lack of formal land titles in communal systems hinders them from securing land. The question of title deeds causes disputes in the community and with the government. The size and quality of land procured depends on the proximity to the headman and the chiefs, for they decide if a farmer can occupy a piece of land or not. The current land they occupy was given in her husband's name. Albertina does not independently have access to land.

### *Climate change*

The family is vulnerable to climate variability, all the more so to that brought about by climate change. The area has been getting dryer. Protracted droughts have devastating effects on rain-fed agriculture. During 2022–2023, they did not harvest anything at all because their crops failed as a result of the drought.

### *Water scarcity*

Limited access to water is a challenge. Farmers rely on communal boreholes, which may not provide reliable water

for crop irrigation. This limits crop yields and the types of crops they can produce, and also results in lower crop yields. The water extracted from the borehole is only for animals and for domestic use like cooking, cleaning and bathing, but not for irrigation.

### *Access to finance*

The limited availability and high costs of seeds and farming inputs further impact farmers' productivity and profitability. Their limited financial resources restrict their ability to invest in farming equipment and modern farming techniques.

### *Infrastructure and services*

The family of six resides in a traditional a two-bedroomed hut with no running water or sanitation. Inadequate road infrastructure limits their capacity to access markets and farming inputs. The family travels 20 kilometres to access the nearest healthcare facility which, like other public healthcare facilities, is overcrowded and understaffed.

### *Nutrition*

The family's nutrition is marginal. They mostly eat *mahangu* (millet) porridge with wild spinach, which is one of the most affordable meals. Foods like meat and rice are more expensive options and rare treats they have once

or twice a month. Despite being food producers, Albertina and her family only eat once a day. The daily meal is served at night. During the day, children collect *eenyadi* (indigenous berries) to eat. They do not have enough fertile land, skills, fertilisers, quality seeds, skills or farming equipment to increase crop yields and food production.

#### *Water and sanitation*

The family collects water from a community tap 500 meters away from the home. Due to limited access to clean, potable water, they preserve it for drinking, cooking, laundry and bathing. The family has no indoor plumbing and an outdoor shack is used as a bathing facility. The house has no running water. They decant water from the collection drum into the wash basins. They have no ablution facilities, and use the nearby bushes to relieve themselves.

#### **Conclusion**

The case study of Albertina and her family in Ohalushi highlights the primary livelihood issues that Namibians living in rural areas encounter. Inadequate living conditions – insufficient nutrition, poor housing and sanitation, and many more – cause health risks and reduce the family’s general well-being. Access to basic services and job opportunities is further hampered by a lack of affordable educational options in rural areas.

## Case Study

### *The Right to Say No to Mining when it Destroys Livelihoods, the Environment and Cultural Heritage Sites*

*Lucy Edwards-Jauch and Herbert Jauch*

#### Introduction

Mining is seen as the backbone of the Namibian economy and has shaped its structure since German colonial rule. Not much has changed since then. Namibia remains an exporter of raw materials, and over 88% of mining operations in the country are owned and controlled by foreign companies (Nambinga, 2021).

In recent years mining has increasingly encroached upon the small patches of land reserved for indigenous black Namibians after

their ancestral lands were dispossessed during the 1904–1908 genocide. The South African colonial administration took over the territory under a League of Nations mandate in 1920 and intensified this dispossession to resettle their own impoverished white farmers in the territory.

While trying to eke out a living on marginal land, disenfranchised communities are once again subjected to dispossession and displacement. They feel a sense of outrage and betrayal that this is happening in a



*Community members are outraged by the destruction caused by mining companies*

*Photo: Herbert Jauch*

democratic and independent Namibia. With unbridled lawlessness, mining companies dispossess indigenous communities of their land, water sources and public infrastructure. They violate Namibian laws and the rights of indigenous communities with impunity. Communities suffer income and livelihood losses, environmental destruction, and the loss of cultural heritage sites. They are often left with little recourse because the institutions mandated to protect their rights and interests fail to do so, and often side with the perpetrators.

The Otjohorongo communal area in Dâures Constituency in Erongo Region stands out as a microcosm of social, economic, administrative and environmental injustices perpetrated in the name of “development”. Community members and activists are forced to use their own meagre resources to fight for their legal entitlements. Their plight amplifies the weaknesses of our democracy, for the rule of law seems not to apply to the moneyed and powerful. The interests of influential individuals and groups seem to trump the collective interests of entire communities.



*The mining site at Otjohorongo remains unrehabilitated. Photo: Herbert Jauch*

## Background

Members of the Otjohorongo community invited us to visit their area to witness what mining is doing to their livelihoods and their environment. There is a sense of outrage amongst community members, for as people who had historically suffered colonial genocide, land dispossession and the loss of livestock, history is repeating itself, and they are once again being dispossessed of common resources that support their livelihoods. After a colonial genocide that exterminated 80% of the Ovaherero people, survivors are being comprehensively dispossessed of their ancestral land. When they attempted to reclaim these ancestral lands, they were relocated to marginal land by the South African authorities who administered Namibia under a League of Nations mandate after Germany lost her colonies. These marginal areas became reserves for small-scale farmers. Otjohorongo, an area comprising 330 000 hectares, was declared such a reserve in 1925 (Werner, 1993). Members of the community primarily make their living from livestock farming. Land access and rights, including access to natural resources, are governed by customary practices. Traditional authorities (chiefs, headmen and traditional councillors) still play an important role in the allocation and cancellation of customary land rights (Werner, 2021).

## *Mining in the area*

Granite Mining started about 15 years ago with different companies operating in the area during different periods. These included Best Cheer Investment Namibia (PTY), who stopped mining in 2020. They removed their operational equipment overnight and left the area without any rehabilitation after they became aware that the community was preparing a case against them for environmental damage to heritage sites. Ongejama Mining CC stopped mining in 2021 after the community blocked the renewal of the Environmental Clearance Certificate (ECC), also due to damage caused to heritage sites. While the company removed all operating equipment from the site, it is still guarded by a caretaker, while the company tries to convince the Traditional Authority (TA) to support its application for renewal of the ECC. Two other companies, Dimension Stone Mining and Ekungungu, operated in the area where most cultural heritage sites are located. They continued operations into 2023 despite a report by the National Heritage Council stating that the Environmental Impact Assessment did not consider the heritage component as required by the Environmental Management Act (7 of 2007) and its Regulations (promulgated in 2012), as well as the National Heritage Act (27 of 2004) and its Regulations (2005). Once they were reported for operating with an expired ECC, operations ceased, but



they left behind destroyed mountains and grazing areas that have still not been rehabilitated.

The community is concerned about how these companies will be held liable for the environmental destruction and livelihood losses they have caused. There is a nebulous web of owners and operators that is steeped in secrecy. In some instances, formal license holders are Namibian citizens, but operations are run by foreign nationals, mainly Chinese. The community is of the opinion that the Namibians (from outside the Otjohorongo area) are fronting for these foreign companies. This requires further investigation and more transparency. There is also the suspicion that the same company may be using different local proxies to obtain licenses. In some instances, mining started without community consultations or Social and Environmental Impact Assessments, as required by law.

The authority to make decisions regarding mining licenses is dispersed across different agencies and ministries. Community members have to go through tedious and costly procedures to access information and lodge complaints, as they are fobbed-off by one agency after the next. For example, TAs may authorise entry into the area (often without proper community consultations). The

Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) gives environmental clearance and the Ministry of Mines and Energy issues mining licenses. There is a complete lack of transparency and accountability, and the community is left asking many questions that are often simply ignored by the authorities.

### *Information, consultation and consent*

In 2018 and 2019, community meetings were convened by environmental consultants. Only a few community members were invited, and there was no full disclosure of the social and environmental impacts of mining. Because the law is not clear on what constitutes community consultations or how they ought to be conducted, the process is open to abuse. There was no response to community questions about the validity of mining licenses. Instead, the TA referred the community to the Ministry of Mines and Energy. The TA sees itself as the custodian of the land and interprets this as ownership and control over the land. Internal conflicts within the TA are exploited by mining companies, who employ divide-and-rule tactics and back one faction against another to gain their support and do their bidding. The experiences of the community suggest that the TA does not support their attempts to hold government officials and mining companies accountable.

In response to community complaints about mining in the area, Deputy Environmental Commissioner Caroline !Garus-Oas visited the mining site in October 2022. She witnessed the environmental destruction and compiled a report. Although the community repeatedly requested a copy of the report, they have not been granted access to it. This is in conflict with the Access to Information Act (8 of 2022) that requires officials to make information available proactively, expeditiously, and free of charge.

In March 2020, an environmental consultant employed by one of the mining companies claimed that the mining company was only involved in exploration activities and not in actual extraction because they did not have a mining license. Community members however saw large granite blocks trucked out of the area to Walvis Bay

for export to China. Questions about who granted permission to extract and transport granite without licenses and permits remain unanswered. The community also questions the independence of environmental consultants who conduct environment impact assessments, as they are paid by the mining companies. This raises doubts about the objectivity, reliability and accuracy of their assessments.

The issue of how community consent is obtained requires further investigation. There are concerns about the fraudulent use of attendance lists to contrive consent. These lists are at times undated, and people who attend information meetings have concerns that their signatures, which ought to simply denote attendance, are used to construe consent, when this is in fact not the case.



*The Otjohorong community feels abandoned in their quest for justice. Photo: Herbert Jauch*

### **Destruction of Livelihoods**

The mining operations are taking place in the midst of the community's winter grazing land. The community relies on livestock farming, and grazing is of paramount importance. The local track to the grazing area has been appropriated for the exclusive use of a mining company and is blocked by big granite boulders. This effectively blocks access to grazing areas. A caretaker, appointed by the company refuses the community access to their own land. In addition, fine dust generated by cutting and grinding processes cover the area like blanket of snow on windy days. The fine dust deposits cause respiratory

problems as it settles on vegetation that is ingested by livestock. Some cattle also get lost in the mining area as the traditional passages are blocked. This has resulted in the death of some cattle for which no compensation was received.

Community members want to preserve the environment and heritage sites for future generations and to develop sustainable agriculture and tourism projects. As a result of mining operations, some of these sites have been destroyed, and some are inaccessible.



*The fine dust created by cutting and grinding poses health risks. Photo: Herbert Jauch*

### *Water*

The mining company drilled its own borehole next to the community borehole. This was done despite the Minerals (Prospecting and Mining) Act (33 of 1992) explicitly stating that this can only be done with the permission of the Environmental Commissioner. It is not clear if such permission was sought or granted. The company has depleted scarce water resources in the area because its mining operations required a constant water supply to cool the blades used to cut the rocks. The community had to pay for water from the company borehole, and when the company ceased mining operations, it closed the boreholes within the mining area with cement.

Natural waterways, for example a stream, was simply blocked with earth to provide a road for the transportation of granite blocks. During the rainy season this stream used to fill a community dam downstream. The company refused to build a bridge over the stream to allow for the natural water flow, so the dam is no longer fed.

### *Environmental destruction*

Namibia's Environmental Management Act (7 of 2007) establishes the office of the Environmental Commissioner, with environmental officers to control activities that may have significant effects on the environment. In the case of Otjohorongo, mining was allowed to continue despite the environmental



*The mining companies blocked community access to the water hole. Photo: Herbert Jauch*

destruction, with no thought given to rehabilitation.

As a result of the open cast mining used for extraction, there are now over 10 huge unprotected mining pits that were cut into the pristine mountains. They pose a danger to humans and animals as there are falls of several metres into these unfenced pits. Tracks from chemicals used for mining are visible down the mountain leading to water holes and the stream below. The company has left large boulders, considered waste and unsuitable for export, strewn all over the area. The community used the mountains for walking and hiking, but the boulders block access to these recreational sites, as well as to cultural heritage sites.

The community has to travel about 75km to the town of Omaruru to visit the hospital and to purchase supplies. The mining company has used this road for its heavy trucks, causing damage which has not been rehabilitated.

Community members are not informed when blasting will take place and thus experience noise pollution during blasting, which also distresses livestock.

A large oil pond is partially concealed by granite boulders that were dumped in and around it. The community fears that the oil will find its way into water supplies.

### *Rehabilitation of the environment*

The Environmental Management Act (7 of 2007) explicitly states that a person who causes damage to the environment must pay the costs associated with the rehabilitation of damage to the environment and to human health. It is not clear why this law was not enforced in Otjohorongo. The mining sites remain unrehabilitated while the community calls for rehabilitation have been ignored. It is not even certain if the damage is reversible, and if the open mining pits that were cut into the mountain can ever be rehabilitated.

### *Destruction of a cultural heritage sites*

The entire mountain is home to centuries-old rock paintings and engravings. It is also a repository for archaeological artefacts. Some of the engravings have already been damaged or destroyed. The company has even been so brazen as to attach a notice board to a rock with ancient engravings. This occurred despite stakeholder meetings with officials from the National Heritage Council of Namibia, the Ministry of Mines and Energy, and the MEFT in February 2020 during which a joint monitoring archaeological assessment was recommended. A final report was produced in October 2020 and a second stakeholders' meeting was convened in November 2020 which resolved that



*The large pit constructed for rehabilitation was left unused by the mining company.*

*Photo: Herbert Jauch*

that all the Environmental Clearance Certificates and Mining Licenses in the area be withdrawn.

### **Local Benefits?**

The promised job benefits and increased incomes to the community have never materialised. There were no legally binding agreements in terms of which the community could hold companies to their promises. Only about eight members of the community were employed in the mine, mainly in low paying jobs, for example as cleaners. All other company employees were brought in from outside the community, and no skills were transferred to community members.

The companies did not source any inputs or services from the community to stimulate local economic development and income generation. The promised social investments in education and infrastructure did not materialise. Only when the community questioned the lack of legal compliance did one of the companies assist with fixing the roof of a school hostel. The community is of the opinion that this was not in proportion to the wealth the company extracted from resources in the community.

*Governance, oversight and enforcement failures*

Mining in Otjohorongo has been riddled with governance failures at various levels. There was a lack of oversight and law enforcement by agencies tasked to do so. In terms of the Traditional Authorities Act (25 of 2000), TAs are tasked with promoting the welfare of their respective communities. They should also ensure that the natural resources of the community are used on a sustainable basis and that cultural sites are preserved. This patently did not happen, and thus far, the TA has not been held accountable for this dereliction of duty.

In terms of the Environmental Management Act, the Minister of

Environment, Forestry and Tourism should ensure compliance with the Act, and the Environmental Commissioner is responsible for issuing ECCs and inspections to monitor compliance with the Act. Community members question how ECCs could have been issued to some of the companies, and how such massive environmental destruction could have occurred without any monitoring and enforcement of the Act.

The Minerals (Prospecting and Mining) Act directs the Mining Commissioner to take into account the need to conserve and protect the natural resources in, on or under the land to which the application relates, and any adjoining or neighbouring land. The Commissioner can also



*Mining caused large-scale destruction in Otjohorongo. Photo: Herbert Jauch*

cancel registration certificates in cases of noncompliance. It is therefore not clear if and how the office of the Mining Commissioner exercised this mandate in Otjohorongo and how it allowed noncompliance and environmental destruction to continue over such a long period.

### **Community Demands**

The community demands their right to prior and informed consent to mining operations on their communal land. It demands the rehabilitation of the damaged area by the mining companies. This rehabilitation must benefit the community in the form of jobs and the provision of bricks, and crushed stones and the construction of tarred roads. The community further wants:

- Access to information: They want to see the environmental assessment reports, environmental management plans, ECCs, mining and prospecting licenses and transport permits. Thus far, the MEFT has refused to provide some of these reports because some officials claimed that they are not public documents.
- Direct community representation in all discussions relating to mining plans and social responsibility projects (rehabilitation, etc.):

Communities must be alerted to all aspects and repercussions of mining operations; consultations should not be limited to the TA. Community views and demands, as expressed by elected and accountable representatives, must be required for the approval of any licenses being issued.

- Financial transparency: The community should have access to financial information, specifically the financial and banking accounts of the TA and its members, to ensure that inducements have not been exchanged for mining consent.
- Ownership of left over granite slabs: There should be clarity about who owns the hundreds of granite slabs that were mined and left behind after the expiry of the ECC. The community should also have access to the waste and machinery left behind by the companies, which is currently strewn across the landscape.
- Justice and accountability: Those who through either gross incompetence, dereliction of duties or collusion allowed violations of the law and crimes against the environment to take place should not enjoy impunity, but should be brought to book.



- An end to mining: Mining activities in Otjohorongo should end, and that those negatively affected by past mining should be resettled.
- Amendments to the law: The law should be amended and explicitly define communities' rights to consultation, participation, decision-making, and benefit-sharing.
- Full disclosure: The impact of mining should be fully disclosed, and the right to say "no" to mining if it harms communities' collective interests and the environment should be enshrined in law.
- Benefits: Where mining is permitted, the community wants legally binding agreements on the benefits to which they are entitled in terms of jobs, skills development, training, income streams and infrastructure development.

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## Opinion Piece

### *Green Hydrogen: Reality or Fantasy?*

*Bertchen Kohrs*

A worldwide hydrogen hype has started. The champagne of the energy transition – that's what enthusiasts like to call green hydrogen (GH<sub>2</sub>) because it is rare, and expensive. Others call it the magic weapon for the decarbonisation of our planet, the saviour of the climate. GH<sub>2</sub> is also being called the energy source that will usher in a new industrial revolution. But scientists warn that GH<sub>2</sub> may not be the silver bullet that will solve all climate problems.

Actually, what is GH<sub>2</sub>? Hydrogen (H<sub>2</sub>) is the lightest element in the periodic table. Produced from renewable sources, it is suitable for energy storage, as it can be used as an energy source in the place of fossil fuels. Under normal conditions, H<sub>2</sub> takes up too much space to be suitable as a fuel. However, H<sub>2</sub> can be compressed – under 700-times atmospheric pressure, H<sub>2</sub> reaches an energy density of 1.5 kWh per litre, which is about one-



Source: <https://economist.com.na/65568/education/unam-to-open-green-hydrogen-institute/>

ninth the energy density of gasoline (Hossenfelder, 2022)

H<sub>2</sub> is a colourless gas. The only by-product of burning hydrogen is the creation of H<sub>2</sub>O – water. However, the production of H<sub>2</sub> requires an energy source, and that is where (part of) the problem lies. A hydrogen colour-scale is used to classify the ecological consequences of the production of H<sub>2</sub>. The most commonly utilised is **grey** hydrogen, which is produced from natural gas like methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) or coal by expelling, but not capturing, the greenhouse gases it contains (the other part of the problem). Namibia annually imports about 40 tons of climate-harmful grey hydrogen from Sasol in South Africa. **Blue** hydrogen is also made from natural gas or coal, while the resulting CO<sub>2</sub> is sequestered and stored in the ground. **Pink** hydrogen is made with energy from nuclear power – an energy source that is fraught with environmental risks. **White** H<sub>2</sub> is naturally occurring, and research is in full swing to develop methods of capturing it safely and cost-effectively (Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), 2021).

**Green** hydrogen, the “type” of H<sub>2</sub> at issue here, is supposedly climate-friendly because it is generated using 100% renewable energy. How environmentally responsible and

climate-friendly H<sub>2</sub> really is depends on how it is produced (whether or not resulting greenhouse gases are sequestered) and the source of energy used in its production. Green hydrogen is also no longer “green” if it is blended with hydrogen from other sources.

Namibia wants to contribute to solving the global climate crisis while achieving the desired level of prosperity for the Namibian populace – a pressing goal in light of the poverty and inequality afflicting the country. The Gini-coefficient is a statistical measure of a population’s income distribution, with higher numbers (on a scale of 0 to 100) equating to greater inequality of income distribution. After 33 years of independence, Namibia’s Gini-coefficient of 59.1 (measured in 2015) (World Bank, n.d.) is still the world’s second highest, despite improving from 63.3 in 2003. The 2023 unemployment rate is still in the order of 50%. (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2021)

By 2030, Namibia aims to reduce national CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 90% and become independent of expensive electricity imports from neighbouring countries. With the production of GH<sub>2</sub>, Namibia sees new opportunities for its modest economy. The government hopes to make Namibia one of the world’s most important locations for GH<sub>2</sub> production.

The Minister of Mines and Energy, Tom Alweendo said in an interview, “As the world moves towards net zero emissions by 2050, Namibia’s vast natural renewable energy resources offer a unique opportunity to produce the energy of the future – green hydrogen. Our past collaboration with Hyphen has proven that better results are guaranteed when partners work together on a shared vision. For us, the time for planning is over, now it’s time for implementation. We now have a clear opportunity to be at the forefront as a continental centre for green hydrogen production.” (Allgemeine Zeitung, 2022)

During the bidding process, 4 000 km<sup>2</sup> of land was allocated for Phase 1 in the Tsau ǀKhaeb National Park, formerly known as the Sperrgebiet, for the gigantic project. International and regional bidders applied. A Green Hydrogen Council was formed and, with Cabinet consensus, Hyphen Hydrogen Energy (Hyphen) was selected in November 2021 as the preferred bidder for the project. Hyphen is a consortium of Enertrag, a German company based in Brandenburg, and Nicholas Holdings, an infrastructure investor in sub-Saharan Africa. In May 2023, Hyphen was finally awarded the contract (Hyphen Hydrogen Energy, Undated).

Production is estimated at 300 000 tons of GH<sub>2</sub> and 1.7 million tons

of ammonia (NH<sub>3</sub>) per year, to be generated from 5–6 GW of renewable energy, of which 3 GW will be used in electrolyzers. (Hyphen Hydrogen Energy, 2022)

According to the government, the total investment amounts to US\$10 billion, which is roughly equivalent to Namibia’s gross domestic product. Some describe the project as an economic tsunami for Namibia.

In March 2022, a cooperation agreement was signed between Alweendo and the German Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, Dr Robert Habeck, about the hydrogen industry. In November 2022, the President of the European Commission, Dr Ursula von der Leyen, and the President of Namibia, Dr Hage Geingob, signed an MoU at COP27 in Egypt on the establishment of a strategic partnership between the European Union (EU) and Namibia with regard to sustainable raw materials and renewable hydrogen. During the visit of Habeck in December 2022, Geingob signed a document of intent to supply GH<sub>2</sub> to Germany. “There would hardly be a better place in the world to produce GH<sub>2</sub> using wind and solar energy,” Habeck said at a press conference. He further said that negotiations would be conducted on an eye-to-eye and respectful level, and not a top-down one, as in the past.

## **Many unsolved questions**

The green energy project has raised many questions. How realistic are the expectations? And how do Namibians feel about the fact that valued domestic resources are to be exported, while the country imports up to 70% of coal-produced dirty electricity at high cost? Will Namibia be supplied countrywide with electricity? And will the electricity cost be affordable for all? Will Namibians participate in the promised fortune? Or will the profits disappear into the pockets of a few? Will Lüderitz and possibly Aus be capable of accommodating and providing for the influx of 15 000 workers and their families, or will a new town with all the necessary infrastructure have to emerge? Will the recruitment of workers be just and 90% local as promised? What will happen to the workers when the hype is over? Will Namibia enter into a new dependency of the former colonial power, Germany? Who will determine the GH2 strategies – Namibia? Germany? Hyphen? Or will the strategies be developed jointly? Will the future demand for GH2 remain stable? Or will the market one day be saturated, and Namibia be left alone with all the infrastructure? How will the project be financed? How will corruption that usually accompanies large projects be prevented? These and many more are unsolved questions that have yet to be addressed – but will they be addressed?

There is still no infrastructure for this huge project. The legal framework and regulations for the production, transport, storage and use of GH2 have yet to be fashioned. 15 000 workers will be required during the four to five years of the construction phase, and 3 000 highly skilled workers will be necessary in the production phase. Ninety percent of the workforce should be local people. Although the workers required for the construction phase are locally available, specially qualified workers and scientists must be trained for the highly technical aspects of the construction work, and for the GH2 production phase. Such training will indeed contribute positively and provide income for thousands of families as long as GH2 is generated in Namibia.

## **Manufacture of GH2**

The manufacture of GH2 will require many wind turbines and solar panels, a desalination plant (which will simultaneously supply local people with clean drinking water), electrolyzers to produce H<sub>2</sub>, plants to liquify the hydrogen for transport, pipelines to South Africa, mainly to Sasol in Secunda and to Cape Town, railway lines, etc. The energy loss will be substantial, and increase with each transformation, as will the costs.

GH<sub>2</sub> is produced from water by electrolysis. Water molecules are split

into hydrogen and oxygen. For a good quality of water, a desalination plant must be constructed. Normal drinking water is not suitable, as it contains various minerals that would interfere with the process. Nine kilogrammes of seawater are required to produce one kilogram of GH<sub>2</sub>. Current electrolysis technologies leave behind a caustic solution that should not be disposed of into the sea. The desalination process also produces a highly concentrated toxic residue called brine. The noxious waste from both desalination and electrolysis must be disposed of safely. (For more information on desalination: Desalination - Wikipedia)

GH<sub>2</sub> must be generated in a carbon-neutral manner from renewable resources. However, during the construction of the plants, the fabrication of solar panels and wind turbines, the transport of GH<sub>2</sub> and NH<sub>3</sub> over long distances, CO<sub>2</sub> will be released into the air. Additionally, the escape of H<sub>2</sub> during production, storage, transport and use cannot be entirely prevented; H<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere is 11 times more harmful to the climate than CO<sub>2</sub>. (Blain, 2022)

## **Transport**

GH<sub>2</sub> is stored in high-pressure containers. For safe transport, it must be cooled to minus 250 degrees Celsius and liquefied – a costly and energy-intensive process. GH<sub>2</sub> can also be

converted to green ammonia (NH<sub>3</sub>) by absorbing nitrogen from the air and as such transported safely by ship to other venues. In the country of destination, NH<sub>3</sub> can either be used directly or reconverted into GH<sub>2</sub> and nitrogen. Each step requires appropriate facilities, which entails energy loss and an increase in cost, particular port and shipping infrastructure. Ammonia does have the advantage of being well-suited for fertilizer production.

Ships capable of carrying GH<sub>2</sub> must be designed and built. So far, there is only one ship of this type, flying the Japanese flag. Currently there are no terminals suited for GH<sub>2</sub> storage. There are still many unanswered questions in both the production and application of GH<sub>2</sub>, especially in the technical field. In addition to financing, there must be a guarantee for long-term customers and solid rates.

## **Application of GH<sub>2</sub>**

GH<sub>2</sub> has the potential to be a valuable, albeit expensive, energy resource that should be used wisely to achieve the greatest possible reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. As an efficient energy carrier, GH<sub>2</sub> can be produced using electricity for later conversion back to electricity. GH<sub>2</sub> should be used where complete electrification is not possible, for example in voracious industries like steel making, cement and glass manufacturing, and chemical production.

In the mobility sector, especially in heavy trucks and transport vehicles, long-range fuel cells powered by GH<sub>2</sub> can be used to replace batteries in electric vehicles. Fuel cells fuse hydrogen and oxygen to form water, creating electricity.

GH<sub>2</sub> can be converted to ammonia, methanol, biodiesel, kerosene and synthetic fuel such as e-fuel, but each step is accompanied by an enormous loss of energy. E-fuel is intended to serve as a substitute for fossil fuels. During production of e-fuel, GH<sub>2</sub> is bound with CO<sub>2</sub> extracted from the air; during combustion, about the same amount of CO<sub>2</sub> is released into the atmosphere, so that the overall CO<sub>2</sub> balance is lower than for fossil fuels. E-fuels are therefore an option for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in transport, especially in long-distance freight transport and in maritime and air transport. A major drawback is the enormous energy loss that occurs during conversion. Only about 13% of the energy input can finally be utilised as e-fuel. (For more information see Green Hydrogen Derivates for Deep Decarbonisation (State of Green, 2023))

### **Other GH<sub>2</sub> projects in Namibia**

One of the main objectives of GH<sub>2</sub> pilot projects is to gain experience in the field of GH<sub>2</sub> production. The lessons learnt can be applied when

setting up the planned GH<sub>2</sub> project in the Tsau ||Khaeb National Park. It seems wise to await the acquisition of know-how before committing to the huge Hyphen project.

#### *Renewstable Swakopmund:*

HDF Energy, a French company, has launched the Renewstable Swakopmund project. Plans are to build an 85 MW solar park and a GH<sub>2</sub> plant based on electrolyzers, fuel cells and 90 MWh of battery storage, a transport pipeline and a hydrogen refuelling station. The site will have a desalination plant employing reverse osmosis, for which a water pipeline must be laid. The project was designed in 2021, when Namibia launched the Harambee Prosperity Plan II, aiming to diversify the country's energy mix. Energy will be supplied to the Namibian power grid (HDF Energy, 2022).

#### *Cleanergy Green Hydrogen Demonstration Plant*

Cleanergy Solutions Namibia announced plans to build a power supply line for a GH<sub>2</sub> pilot project in the Walvis Bay region. Cleanergy is a joint venture between Ohlthaver & List and CMB.TECH, a subsidiary of Belgium's Compagnie Maritime Belge, aimed primarily at building a pilot/demonstration plant for GH<sub>2</sub>, a refuelling station, and a GH<sub>2</sub>

training centre. The project will consist of a 5 MW solar park, a 4 MW electrolyser, and an H<sub>2</sub> refuelling station. Demonstration applications in heavy-duty transport are intended. The project is scheduled to start in the third quarter of 2023, or as soon as an Environmental Clearance Certificate (ECC) has been issued (Matthys, 2023).

### *Daures Village*

The Daures Green Hydrogen Consortium has just launched the Daures Green Hydrogen Village, which will produce GH<sub>2</sub>, green NH<sub>3</sub>, and its derivatives. Daures is the largest conservancy in Erongo Region and is home to about 11 350 people. Phase 1 will produce 31 tons of GH<sub>2</sub> and 109 tons of ammonia per year, using 0.99 MW of renewable energy from solar power and wind. The plan is to create an environmentally friendly, completely self-sufficient green village. The energy supply will benefit local consumption on the project site, power a fuel cell plant, and serve research purposes on GH<sub>2</sub>. A huge greenhouse will produce agricultural produce (Movirongo, 2022). It remains to be seen whether the pledges for the people of the Green Hydrogen Village will be accomplished and not only result in quick land acquisition.

### *Purros GH<sub>2</sub> project*

This project by Kaoko Green Energy Solutions is to be based in Kunene

Region, and a port for NH<sub>3</sub> export has recently been mentioned. The green ammonia produced will be exported to China, Europe and South Africa. A feasibility study was due to commence in October 2023 (The Brief, 2023).

## **Environment and Biodiversity**

Unfortunately, the location chosen for the Hyphen Project is the Tsau ||Khaeb National Park, formerly the highly restricted Sperrgebiet, where exceptional endemic biodiversity was able to grow undisturbed. For Phase 1, 4 000 km<sup>2</sup> will be used, while for the proposed Phase 2, an additional 14 000 km<sup>2</sup> of the Tsau ||Khaeb National Park will be utilised.

*Will this unique hotspot of fauna and flora be turned into a huge industrial park?*

Undoubtedly, the project will seriously affect the unique biodiversity of Tsau ||Khaeb, especially during the construction phase, when 15 000 workers will be busy in the area. Heavy machinery and new infrastructure, roads and pipelines, railway lines, and solar and wind power plants will severely threaten the distinctive fauna and flora, which might be lost forever.

Initially the impact on the environment was rarely raised in any of the debates. No environmental activist was consulted; only after



scientists and NGOs had explicitly expressed concerns was the protection of biodiversity included in the agenda.

The legally required feasibility and environmental impact studies, which examine negative and positive impacts on behalf of Hyphen, are still pending. As an I&AP (interested and affected party), one can register at [hyphen@slrconsulting.com](mailto:hyphen@slrconsulting.com). This entitles one to submit objections and proposals and ask questions. Hyphen is required by law to provide information about any development through the consulting firm SLR. This gives the interested public the opportunity and responsibility to follow the project closely and to have a decisive influence before the government either issues or withholds an ECC.

Detailed and independent environmental impact studies, in which citizens, scientists and NGOs should be involved, are important. The Tsau||Khaeb National Park is part of the Namib Desert, which is highly valued for its exceptional biodiversity and rare plants. Scientists and botanists, in particular, fear irreparable destruction being caused if this species-rich area is designated for GH2 production.

The question is justified: Can GH2 be called green and environmental-friendly while unique biodiversity is being destroyed for a temporary and

debatable project? Is Namibia not making too great a sacrifice?

Finally, an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment that only examines the Hyphen project seems to be insufficient. While preparations for the GH2 project are underway, exploration for oil and gas is taking place, minerals are being exploited, several maritime activities projects are being conducted in the south of Namibia, and probably more plans are in the pipeline, which all have the potential to contribute to accumulated environmental losses. It is therefore recommended that a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) be conducted in order to evaluate the overall impact of all activities on the economic, ecologic, and social effects.

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## Opinion Piece

*Germany's Hydrogen Rush in Namibia: Green Extractivism at its Best*

*Johanna Tunn and Franziska Müller*

Everyone is talking about green hydrogen. Since the invasion of Ukraine, at the latest, the search for the “green gold” has been dominated by debates around energy security, diversification and the imminent decarbonisation of Europe and especially Germany. However, domestic production of green hydrogen would hardly be sufficient to produce the needed quantities from renewable sources, given the small amount of land available in densely populated countries. Furthermore, the strategic urge to remain a traditional hub of steel production and the automotive industry means that a combination of deindustrialisation and decarbonisation is not considered an asset, but rather a no-go. This has resulted in drastically increased interest in producing green hydrogen in remote places and importing it from there, as this is considered to be an indisputable imperative of national energy security. Indeed, no other country in the world has been pushing the (green) hydrogen agenda and its import strategy as hard as Germany, whose “expansive bilateralism” is unique, a fact which is mirrored by a myriad of energy and hydrogen partnerships. Step by step, Germany has intensified its economic

ties with Saudi-Arabia, the Emirates, Mauritania, Brazil, Australia, Canada and, not least, Namibia, so as to create large-scale hydrogen production sites in areas with favourable geophysical conditions, since, so the argument goes, both solar and wind potentials are available there in quantities that could never be accessed domestically for the generation of hydrogen from renewable sources.

However, Germany is not the only country pursuing an expansive hydrogen strategy. The hydrogen rush is a global one which is driven by bilateral state partnerships and multilateral corporations, as well as by private and corporate interests. Over the past two years, many players in the Global North have formulated their own hydrogen strategies, amongst them Australia, the US and many individual European states, as well as the European Union. To govern the drastic demand for (green) hydrogen, these strategies are being implemented through the development of global trading platforms and pricing schemes – the H2Global mechanism being a case in point – which may position European

stakeholders in an advantageous position when negotiating market conditions and the overall governance of the hydrogen economy. Apart from state actors, private corporations have been advancing their vested interests in getting their share of the hydrogen pie.

What is remarkable here is that it is especially the gas industry and many energy-intensive industries that have been pushing the hydrogen agenda – and not only by signing deals and planning huge projects in many countries of the Global South. As Corporate Europe Observatory has shown, it is the gas industry that has been influencing European hydrogen policies, in particular, those of Germany. In accordance with their lobbying, German and other European policies facilitate the production of hydrogen from renewables, as well as so-called “blue hydrogen” that is processed from fossil gas with the application of carbon capture and storage technologies. These processes have not yet proven to be safe or carbon neutral. The application of hydrogen is not only foreseen for sectors that are hard to electrify, but also for the transport sector (for example, e-fuels for motor vehicles and aviation). This will intensify extractive consumption patterns in the global north.

Namibia plays a central role in Germany’s hydrogen strategy. Less than two years ago, at the UN Climate

Change Conference in Glasgow (COP 26), Namibian President Hage Geingob announced plans to redesign the country as a global hub for green hydrogen. In fast forward, the Namibian government issued a tender awarding a 4 000 km<sup>2</sup> area for the production, processing and shipping of green hydrogen in the protected Tsau ||Khaeb National Park. Under the auspices of Hyphen, a joint venture consisting of a private equity company (Nicholas Holdings Limited) and the German project developer ENERTRAG, green hydrogen would be produced on an area thrice the size of New York City. The projected investment volume is a whopping 9.4 billion US dollars, which is not only equivalent to Namibia’s gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020, but also to the total amount of funding that Germany has so far earmarked for the promotion of green hydrogen. The plan is to build solar panels and electrolyzers with a capacity of 5 GW (five billion watts) that will produce around 300 000 tonnes of green hydrogen annually for export to Europe. Within the next years, the Namibian government plans to capitalise on 15 to 20 more Hyphen-equivalent sized projects in the national park. In President Geingob’s (second, and constitutionally final) term, which is coming to an end in 2024, all the strings are being tightened to turn Namibia into a hub for green hydrogen over the next 40 years and to boost exports to European countries.

Via GIZ (the Agency for International Cooperation), the German government has also been significantly involved in the development of the Namibian hydrogen strategy that was published in November 2022. Three green hydrogen hubs were conceived along Namibia's coastline, including the Southern Corridor Development Initiative (Hyphen) in the south of the country and the Erongo Green Energy Hub in the centre, where four further projects financed by the German government are being developed. Within the next years, the Namibian government plans to capitalize on 15 to 20 or more Hyphen-equivalent sized projects. All the strings are being tightened to turn Namibia into a hub for green hydrogen over the next 40 years and to boost exports to European countries.

On a state visit, Robert Habeck, the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, underlined Germany's interest in cooperation in the well-known phrasing of "dialogue at eye level". What reads as a fabulous parade towards a green transformation of the German economy with the integration of Namibian interests on eye level should, however, be viewed with a caution. Meanwhile, social movements, activists and even critical scientists are asking the question: Is green hydrogen a new scramble for Africa?

## **Hydrogen Capitalism at its Best**

The current debate portrays the hydrogen rush and the German-Namibian cooperation as a win-win situation: For Namibia, it means electrification and energy independence from South Africa, while at the same time increasing GDP by a projected 15 to 19 billion US dollars annually, as well as urgently needed jobs. In addition, energy-intensive sectors are to be attracted by the cheap and clean energy, and industrialisation is to be promoted, mainly aiming at fertiliser markets. For Germany, this means the chance to secure exclusive access to cheap green hydrogen and to establish itself in a leading position in a new market and on coveted geopolitical terrain. While the benefits for the German industry are likely to be achieved due to its standing in the international economy and technology leadership, the question remains whether the promises made for Namibia and its people will materialise, or if this remains a marketing strategy with little overall substance besides a tightened territorial grip and enhanced competition for the cheapest production sites. Let's dive into the pledges and have a look at both obvious, structural and rather subtle strategies and risks that are likely to emerge.

## What about Jobs?

The hype around the planned large-scale projects is fuelled above all by the prospect of new jobs. Hyphen promises to provide 90% of the planned 15 000 jobs and an additional 3 000 jobs during the construction phase in Lüderitz to local companies in the construction and service sectors. People are already moving into the townships of Lüderitz in the hope of finding new jobs. Field research results of the authors of this article show that these projects pose a risk in a city with only 15 000 inhabitants. This is especially true with regard to the already existing housing shortage and the lack of sanitary and logistical infrastructure. In addition, the project will only need 3 000 workers after completion, so that, as the South African energy transition also shows, the hope for a substantial job miracle could fail to materialise.

In general, civil society actors complain that Namibia's hydrogen hype is a presidential project. Although they would be essential actors in a just transition, civil society has thus far not been involved in the debate. On the contrary, a recent comment covered by The Namibian newspaper on President Geingob telling civil society not to interfere with the government's decisions is concerning to say the least, and is consistent with what civil society actors we have conducted interviews with in the past year have told us.

Rather than considering their concerns, opening up a debate and involving NGOs, unions, and especially affected people in such processes, high-ranking officials from both governments, law firms, financiers and project managers close deals behind closed doors. The lack of transparency and accountability in procurement have been raised several times, yet major decisions seem to be made without the involvement of Namibian people.

## Ecological Risks

All the proposed projects carry severe socio-ecological risks ranging from water scarcity to the disturbance and pollution of terrestrial and marine ecosystems. In the case of Hyphen, the project runs a high ecological risk due to the extensive use of the Tsau ||Khaeb National Park. Before the area was designated as a national park in 2004, it had been a restricted area for almost a hundred years – the Sperrgebiet – first for the benefit of the German Diamond Company, then for DeBeers. Now Hyphen is estimated to cover about 4 000 km<sup>2</sup>, which is almost thrice the size of New York City. Much of the succulent flora is endemic, and is endangered by climate change as matters stand.

Extensive water use in a desert region characterised by recurrent droughts and water scarcity poses another risk. For example, the Daures project in Erongo,

which is co-financed by the German government, plans to draw on scarce groundwater reservoirs during the first phase of the project. To circumvent the withdrawal of freshwater resources from water-scarce regions, hydrogen projects are euphorically promoting the desalination of sea water for the electrolysis process. The Hyphen project alone will require huge amounts of water. The are plans to procure water through seawater desalination. However, brine production, land requirements and energy consumption through desalination constitute severe risks with regards to water and environmental justices, that are barely discussed in the context of the hydrogen transition. Obvious examples of this include coastal erosion through construction and the endangering marine ecosystems through the residues that are discharged into the ocean. Imagine: for every desalinated litre of water produced through desalination, about 1.5 litres of liquid contaminated with chlorine and copper are produced – and these have to be released somewhere. Globally, around 80% of brine from desalinated water production is released into the seas and the environment.

### **Resource Pool for European Interests**

Current developments further point to the emergence of an enclave economy, driven by the interests

of importing countries – a form of “hydrogen capitalism” from which the Namibian population hardly benefits. Hydrogen capitalism comes with a finance scheme, which may serve as blueprint for several others to come: The SDG Namibia One Fund worth US\$1 billion seeks to attract private green capital, backed by concessional loans from public lenders like the European Investment Bank. At the same time, Germany’s H2Global initiative promotes hydrogen partnerships with exporting countries and seeks to get Germany’s industry on board to decarbonise their production and to act as “first mover” in a new green power game. While northern actors are able to de-risk their African investments thanks to public lenders of the last resort, in the case of Hyphen, it is currently being debated if the Namibian state should take a 24% share in the project. Should the project fail – for example due to a lack of demand or exchange rate fluctuations that do not yield the expected returns – the Namibian state, and ultimately its people, would have to bear these shortfalls themselves, all while Namibia’s national debt is already over 60%. It is understandable that the government is trying to refinance Namibia’s own share through private financiers by means of green bonds via the Namibia One Fund, but such green bonds are often rewarded with little interest in economies of the Global South.

Overall, this indicates how large-scale hydrogen projects are associated with the risk of accumulating even more debt in the form of loans, and exacerbating financial dependencies on foreign banks. This results in a highly financialised green transition which deepens north-south dependencies and limits room for manoeuvre for southern actors. Moreover, it socialises the risks of such large-scale investments and privatises the benefits, mostly for capitalist elites and international investors.

Increasingly, activists and scholars are criticising the colonial tendencies of the burgeoning hydrogen economy worldwide. These manifest in extractivist practices, new financial dependencies, indebtedness and land appropriation, accompanied by legitimisation strategies linked to arguments of climate protection and sustainability. The leading Namibian discourse echoes similar patterns. Here, the questionable strategies of privatisation and the commercialisation of nature in the name of energy security, diversification and decarbonisation, as well as the narratives of progress and modernisation, are being pushed. There is a threat of growing financial and political dependencies, especially given the power of foreign companies over land.

What we are seeing right now is a clear externalisation of costs – while European

countries will ultimately benefit from Namibia's hydrogen economy through the import of green hydrogen, most of the costs will be and are already carried by Namibia – socially, ecologically, and financially. Although the green hydrogen revolution in Namibia raises hopes of jobs, energy security, electrification and potential prosperity, it should be approached with extreme caution. Such large-scale energy projects have usually done little to improve local socioeconomic conditions in the long run, but have rather perpetuated (neo-) colonial dynamics in a structurally uneven world.

Extractive practices and the various resource rushes have a long tradition in Namibia – be it diamonds, mining, oil explorations in Kavango Region, or even the Fishrot Scandal, in which those responsible have to date not been held accountable. Both German Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action Robert Habeck and Namibian Hydrogen Commissioner James Mnyupe have smilingly made light of concerns about a “new energy imperialism”. Both German and Namibian shareholders should take this systemic criticism seriously and face up to it – especially in view of Germany's colonial atrocities and the still outstanding adequate reparations and reappraisal for exploitation, forced labour and the genocide against Herero and Nama people.



## Opinion Piece

### *Turning Katutura into a Transformative Namibian Social and Energy Powerhouse*

*Andy Gheorghiu*

#### **Background**

In June 2023, Andy Gheorghiu, a Germany-based but internationally operating campaigner and consultant for climate/environmental protection and energy policy travelled to Namibia, where he met members of the local Economic and Social Justice Trust in the capital Windhoek. While visiting the township of Katutura, he witnessed the harsh economic reality of a post-apartheid democracy, but also identified its substantial transformative potential.

#### **Katutura: “The place where people don’t want to live”**

The township of Katutura was created during the apartheid regime of South African colonial rule in 1961. The black population of Windhoek, nowadays Namibia’s capital, was forced to move from an area known today as the Old Location, to Katutura, which means “The place where people do not want to live” or “We do not have a permanent habitation” in Otjiherero, the language of the Herero people.



*Katutura, Windhoek, June 2023 (© Andy Gheorghiu)*

The initial township had brick houses, but these days houses, businesses, shops and pubs are tin shacks which often lack reliable access to water, sanitation and electricity.

A growing number of Katutura residents are forced to live in tin shacks, creating a severe housing crisis and social injustice that is addressed and debated in the *Namibian Journal of Social Justice Volume 2* (Edwards-Jauch & Kamwanyah, 2022). These informal settlement structures are increasing, especially in developing countries, including those in Africa. According to research by the Department of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development, University of Pretoria, South Africa, 40% of Namibia's 2.41 million population were living in

shacks in 2018. According to the 2011 census (Namibia Statistical Agency [NSA], 2013).

Given Windhoek's fast pace of population growth in recent years, these numbers are now likely to be even higher. No one can deny the precarious living conditions of people (mainly black) in a place where they – still – lack a permanent dwelling. However, this place also demonstrates huge transformative potential.

First of all, Katutura is far cleaner than a number of grubby areas in Berlin. Secondly, people are really trying to make the best of a situation that is uncomfortable and at times almost unbearable. I saw businesses, shops, pubs and fast food outlets reflecting the pride of people who refuse to lose their



Katutura, Windhoek, June 2023 (© Andy Gheorghiu)

dignity. Thirdly, the most abundant free energy source of the world, the sun, blesses the city of Windhoek with an annual average of 3 610 sunshine hours (Weather & Climate, n.d. a), which is roughly 9.9 hours of sunshine per day, more than twice Berlin's average (Weather & Climate, n.d. b) and even higher than that of Los Angeles (Weather & Climate, n.d. c) in the "sunshine state" of California. This extensive sunshine obviously provides huge potential for solar power development.

### *Namibia's climate risk profile and vast renewable energy potential*

The World Bank Group in 2021 analysed and outlined the Climate Risk Profile of Namibia. Among other nations, it highlighted it as "highly vulnerable to seasonal variability and long-term climate change," adding that "increasing vulnerability is expected to result in cumulative impacts across the country's social, economic, and environmental structures."

At the same time, the country's potential for renewable energy is yet to be harvested. According to *Global Photovoltaic Power Potential by Country* (Energy Sector Management Assistance Program [ESMAP], 2020): "Namibia has the highest average practical PV power potential of all countries, and it is twice as high compared to the United

Kingdom, a country with one of the least generous conditions for PV."

German Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)) collated statistics for Namibia (GIZ, 2020) in *Sector Brief Namibia: Renewable Energies*. According to this report, due to Namibia's unusually high annual solar radiation, PV systems in Namibia could produce twice as much electricity as similar systems in Germany. Yet, at present, the electricity rate is at only 56%, and 60% of that power is being imported, mainly from South Africa. In rural areas, only 35% of the population has access to electricity, and nationwide some 300 000 households have no access to electricity. Namibia plans to expand its power plant capacities to over 1,600 MW by 2035 – with over 700 MW (or 60%) coming from planned renewable energy (GIZ, 2020). Currently, the country has an overall power plant capacity of 516 MW – with a peak demand of over 600 MW.

### **Shipping Containers and the Sun – Transformative Powers for Katutura and Namibia?**

Repurposed shipping containers are being used as accommodation units for construction workers or labour camps, and they're also increasingly trendy as affordable and alternative homes.

These living containers are quite modular and there are online instructions on how to construct your individual housing by using an old shipping container, which are cheaper than fabricated living containers that can be acquired on order. Available plug & play photovoltaic systems can be mounted quickly and easily on every container, and could power the living container and perhaps also feed centralised or decentralised grids.

The sun shines on average almost 10 hours/day in Windhoek, and Katutura. For comparison, the ten-hectare solar project Outapi in northern Namibia (Climate Partner, n.d.) produces 9 000 MWh of energy per annum. In a possible future, fully equipped living

containers could replace the existing tin shacks in the township of Katutura, potentially even producing enough energy to feed Windhoek's electricity needs.

This raises the question: Why adopt living containers instead of “proper” brick houses? Opting for living containers would be a relatively cheap and faster way to replace tin shacks quarter-by-quarter in Katutura. This, in turn, would improve the living conditions of thousands of people in Windhoek.

Sunshine is therefore plentiful, and the people of Katutura seemed to me ambitious enough and ready for the challenge of an initiative that could end



*Katutura, Windhoek, June 2023 (© Andy Gheorghiu)*

up being a transformative and powerful flagship project for other townships. People could tackle the housing and energy crisis while simultaneously providing social and climate justice.

Looking ahead, political will and investment are key to unlocking a solar future for Namibia, the world's number one country in terms of its photovoltaic potential (ESMAP, 2020). One consideration would be to make it mandatory for companies seeking licenses for large renewable energy projects to pay into a state-managed fund which would help finance such projects. A country such as Germany that aspires to being global climate

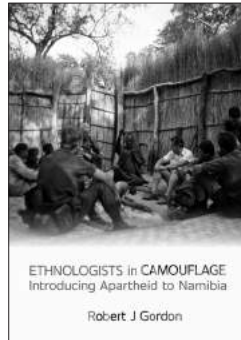
leader should support Namibia by providing expertise, technology, and funding. Germany already supports Namibia in urban planning in the area of green hydrogen production (German Embassy, Windhoek, 2023) – aimed at feeding Germany's heavy industry (Rheinisch-Westfälisches Elektrizitätswerk Aktiengesellschaft [RWE], 2022). The country should stand by its commitment to “projects in sustainable urban development, vocational training, climate change adaptation, as well as the protection of biodiversity and improved water supply” (RWE, 2022) to help Katutura become a transformative Namibian social and energy powerhouse.



*Katutura, Windhoek, June 2023 (© Andy Gheorghiu)*

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## Book Review

*Ethnologists in Camouflage: Introducing Apartheid to Namibia*  
(Robert Gordon)

*Heike Becker*

Namibia was South Africa's testing ground for its ambitious apartheid dreams. South Africa's colonial connection with Namibia, then the mandated territory of South West Africa, is today often either ignored or dismissed, even by historians of apartheid. The Namibian-born and bred anthropologist Robert J. (Rob) Gordon's latest book aims to redress this fault by demonstrating the significance of colonised Namibia for the development of apartheid. The narrative revolves around the role of so-called 'native' experts.

Two threads run through *Ethnologists in Camouflage*. Firstly, the book draws attention to Namibia's colonial roots in South Africa's 20<sup>th</sup> century history. Gordon asks critical

questions about South African imperialism and the political logics and epistemic assumptions of colonial knowledge production. Using deep Namibian case studies, he presents an in-depth investigation of "how people commonly known as 'native experts' helped imagine, shape, and consolidate this colonial enterprise" (Gordon, 2022, p. 1). Most of these experts were anthropologists/ethnographers in the Afrikaner nationalist tradition of the discipline, known as *volkekunde*. This approach was overtly shaped by ethno-nationalist and racist implications, with the aim of separating South Africans along racial and cultural lines. These ethnologists designed studies of singular, unified, and historically persistent groups of people, each demarcated with clear boundaries and

separate cultures. People were classified in terms of race, language and culture, and cultural contact with others in the wider social context was regarded as a threat to naturalised, deep cultural differences between people.

Gordon presents rich historical insights regarding how ‘expertise’, collected through ethnological studies in Namibia, provided the basis for the political aim of ‘grand apartheid’ – the ideology aimed at the establishment of ‘self-governing’ homelands (or Bantustans), each assigned to an ethnic group. Gordon furthermore argues that the Odendaal plan of 1966, which recommended the carving up of Namibia into self-governing homelands, “represents the only serious attempt to implement grand apartheid, the South African nationalist utopia” (Gordon, 2022, p. 13).

Gordon’s second thread discusses the social production of ignorance. He asks, “Why and how did these experts, often highly intelligent, good Christian men, not see, or at least articulate, that their work and recommendations flew in the face of reality?” (p. 2). He addresses the poignant question of looking without seeing with respect to the specific conditions that revolved around South Africa’s ‘dreams’ of apartheid. Ethnologists and other ‘experts’ (sociologists, psychologists etc.) contributed to enhancing, and

sometimes fully inventing, a sense of pivotal difference between people ‘belonging’ to different cultural groups.

Gordon provides rich historical data in a slim volume of just 165 pages. In an incisive introduction, he sets out the aims for the book and positions himself, starting from his school playground experience in high-apartheid Keetmanshoop.

Chapter 1 shows how during the early years of South African rule over Namibia, the administration showed little interest in ‘scientific’ evidence. Rather, they asserted in their reports to the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission that South Africa was best-situated to take care of the ‘sacred trust’ because of the ‘long-term experience’ of more than 200 years they had in dealing with the indigenous population. Attempts at ‘lay anthropology’ were mostly connected with the German settler minority, who used their ostensibly ‘scientific’ approach to justify why the territory should be returned to German rule.

Chapter 2 points out the changes after the mandate was transferred to the United Nations following World War II. South Africa now started bringing ‘experts’ onto the stage of world opinion. A series of German-born ethnologists were appointed to conduct surveys of districts in the ‘Police Zone’,



while the chief ethnologist in the South African Department of Native Affairs took a special interest in the northern regions, the main source areas for contract labour.

The 1960s are the focus of Chapter 3. This decade was central for the scientific fashioning of ethnic difference to justify apartheid on the international stage. Internally, ethnological research became the driving force to prepare the grand apartheid blueprint of the Odendaal Commission report of 1966. A key actor on both the local and international stages was J.P. van S. Bruwer, an anthropologist who was closely connected with apartheid-era power networks, particularly the Afrikaner Broederbond, a secret society of influential male Afrikaner nationalists.

Chapter 4 shifts attention to the WHAM (Winning the Hearts and Minds) campaigns of the South African Defence Force during the liberation war and the establishment of the ethnic-based front organisations Etango and Ezuva. The design of their activities drew again on ethnologists and their 'expertise'.

Chapter 5 finally evaluates the research of the *volkekundiges*. Gordon argues that their labours resulted largely in the production of simplified 'potted knowledge', supposedly relying on 'fact'.

The consequence, however, was that the ethnological studies reified closed systems of thought and rationality. Gordon discusses this further in the conclusion to the book. He refers to closed systems of knowledge as 'schemas', which "are about how one is influenced by emotion, stereotypes, and what one thinks one knows but does not really know" (Gordon, 2022, p. 160). The book closes with the question of how anthropologists can avoid falling into the trap of looking but not really seeing. In a quirky turn, characteristic of Gordon's witty and entertaining style of writing, he recommends that anthropologists are well-placed in the role of 'court jesters', who speak the proverbial 'truth to power' and challenge closed-system thinkers.

Gordon's new book is important reading for Namibians, especially those who want to learn more about how colonialism, apartheid policies and knowledge production reinforced ethnic difference. Although Namibia has been independent for more than 30 years and the ethnologists in camouflage are long gone, the effects of apartheid intellectual epistemologies still reverberate in the politics of ethnicity that raises its head ever so often.

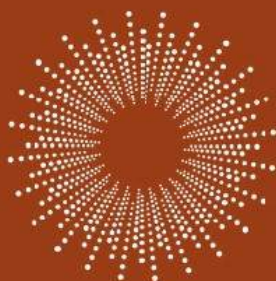
There is little, if anything, critical to say about *Ethnologists in Camouflage*. Gordon's writing is engaging and lively,

and mostly free of academic jargon. The book undermines academic ivory towers and confronts racism and the notion of 'expertise' as the authoritative voice of the 'knowers'. If I could wish for anything more, it would be for more clarity on the subversive powers of the jesters, anthropologists and other critical thinkers, on how to puncture the certainty of absoluteness

epitomised by past and present closed-system thinkers and the rulers they serve.

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