



Integrated Land Management Institute (ILMI)
Land, Livelihoods and Housing Programme 2015-18

The Integrated Land Management Institute is a centre of the Faculty of Natural Resources and Spatial Sciences (FNRSS) at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) committed to develop reputable and multidisciplinary research and public outreach activities in the field of land, administration, property, architecture and spatial planning.

The Land, Livelihoods and Housing Programme 2015-18 aims at deepening and expanding the focus on these three key issues in Namibia. The programme was developed to guide ILMI's activities by organising it in four aspects: institutional, environmental, fiscal and spatial processes.

Participatory land delivery processes in Gobabis: the case of Freedom Square.

Summary

The project in question refers to the case of 'Freedom Square' in Gobabis, which is a cooperation between the Municipality of Gobabis and the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN), the Namibia Housing Action Group (NHAG), the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), and other international parties.

The project is motivated by an agenda of 'inclusive cities': through close collaboration with existing residents in the area, the process of land delivery is expedited and turned into an exercise of making inhabitants drivers in the improvement of living conditions.

This document outlines a number of qualitative observations based on the experience of the speaker, Braam Harris, from the Department of Architecture and Spatial Planning, as well as a discussion with other stakeholders that were present during the presentation.

This is the document of a Brown bag meeting that took place on 18 August 2016; 12h30-14h00 at the Seminar room, Department of Architecture and Spatial Planning, NUST.

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The experience of the speaker is based on participation as NUST tutor in a studio that had as focus the case of Freedom Square.

The account contains contributions by the attendants to the discussion, some of which were also participants in the project.

Interventions from attendants are marked in *italics*.

Presentation

The project in question started as a collaboration between the Namibia Housing Action Group (NHAG), the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN), and the Municipality of Gobabis.

Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), having SDFN as local member, also was a stakeholder in the process.

Key to the project was to make clear the responsibilities of each party; there were no 'informal' relationships.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between SDFN/NHAG and the Municipality of Gobabis.

Another MoU was signed between NUST and SDFN/NHAG. The benefit for NUST was 'real-life learning', or getting 'feet dirty' in reality.

The scheme is also now currently being expanded to Karibib.

The main agenda is that of 'inclusive cities'.

The initial site under discussion is called 'Freedom Square', and is located in the northern areas of Gobabis.

One of the key points is that the inhabitants of the area will not be relocated, but will be upgraded where they are.

The engagement of NUST started through a course in Town and Regional Planning programme, who started by doing a situation analysis, profiling, and mapping of the structures.

NUST is part of the Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS), which is a network of 55 schools in the continent. About 20 of these schools have already done similar exercises in their own countries.

One of the main objectives is to include marginalised communities in urban development.

Currently UN-Habitat is supporting three projects with such approach (through their Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme) in Namibia: Aroab, Opuwo, and Walvis Bay.

Synergies of the different stakeholders are key in this respect. They ministries that should be involved are the Ministry of Land Reform (MLR) and the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development (MURD).

The participatory processes dealt with in Gobabis are new, and still need to be consolidated for them to be 'scaled-up'.

While the project departs from the premise that the community ought to be the driver of the process, there are many institutional variables that are at play in such process.

In Gobabis, the project is extending to other informal settlements.

Discussion

Another key component was the self-enumeration exercise that, while not specific to the case of Gobabis but a national exercise, allowed for inhabitants to start participating and to start the discussion with Local Authorities (LA).

In some cases the priority was not 'land' per se, but water.

In some cases, LA were reluctant to the concept so it was arranged for some to travel to Cape Town to see some of the achievements of the SDI members based there in this respect. They came back and they were able to advise Council about the concept.

The exercise of re-blocking went very fast. The planning process suffered a delay, but this was due to a mis-match between timelines of NUST students and the 'real' project.

It is a challenge to harmonise the university's academic calendar and the 'people's processes'.

It can also be said that this exercised has influenced the curriculum of the participating Department at NUST.

The process also tries to align as much as possible with the Flexible Land Tenure (FLT) Act.

The MLR is currently trying to institutionalise the FLT process.

Another key component that made the project quick is that they avoided the process of establishing a new township, which is a lengthy process.

Regulations of the FLT will not be complicated per se, but the Act has to align with the Namibian Constitution, therefore the actual regulations might need to become more complex.

From the FLT perspective, Freedom Square was a perfect site in views that the community participation was already on going; therefore making it easier to establish a Land Rights Office.

Each settlement has its own history and politics.

Another settlement, Kanaan, was a reception area and plots measured an average of 150m²; hence the challenges of re-blocking were increased.

There is also potential for future structure plans to see what can be done, and embed such participatory processes in the future development of towns and cities.

There was also the presence of police mentioned in the process, however this was only to avoid new settlers coming into the area as it is usual for people to rush into areas that are rumoured to be 'formalised' soon.

When the structure numbering and mapping, and enumeration processes started, some residents called their friends and family with the intention for them to also benefit from the process.

Did the water situation improved?

Water is still a pressing need, and the distance from the communal water taps is still considerable.

Government is also critical of dry toilets, which exacerbates the water situation.

In most cases, water is the priority. The issue of sanitation didn't feature much. However, when the topic of sanitation comes up, the talk is invariable of flushing toilets.

Smallingerland, a Dutch twinning city donated dry toilets to Gobabis. However, when the toilets were installed, there was no management structure created around them, so very quickly they became dilapidated and today inhabitants don't use them.

Regarding electricity, this is seen as a way to improve livelihoods. However, once the electric infrastructure is being installed, inhabitants get a message that 'they can stay'.

In some cases, the installation of electricity is an electoral promise.

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