



NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

FACULTY OF ENGINEERING AND
THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT (FEBE)

A Bibliography: The Urban Question in Namibia

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NUST Institutional Research Week 2022

Theme: *Revitalise Social Contract in STEM Education and STI Stewardship*

8 November 2022





Introduction



Source: Elsemi Olwage

- Namibia as 'nature', wide-open spaces, rural, agriculture-based society
- But.....



Introduction

- Strong urban growth rates
- Informal settlements are the main driver of this growth
- Estimated that by 2030, **79% of Namibian homes will be in urban areas**, while 46% of Namibian families will be living in shacks (DWN, 2017)



(Source: NAMPA)



Introduction

***To get national development right,
we must get urban development right.***

See: UN Habitat. 'World Cities Report 2022: Envisaging the Future of Cities'. Nairobi: UN Habitat, 2022. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/06/wcr_2022.pdf



Project Rationale

- Research on urbanisation, urban development and urban socio-spatial dynamics remains **limited and underfunded**.
- A strong need to foster an **urban research agenda**
- First step: A bibliography of existing literature on urban development in Namibia



The Bibliography

- Time frame: 1964-2021
- Divided between pre- and post-independence time periods
- 4 categories of alphabetically organised sources within each time period:
 - Government and parastatal reports
 - International organisational and institutional reports and research publications
 - Namibia organisational and institutional reports and research publications
 - Academic publications: journal articles, books, book-chapters, and theses (thematic)



Project Aims

- Review of what is there
- Highlight changing trends
- Illuminate gaps and opportunities for future research
- Foster dialogue and engagement
- Inform more critical and historically-situated debates
- Establish a digital repository at NUST



Methodology

- October & November 2021: online and institutional archives
- A one-day long virtual and in-person workshop: past and present scholars and urban practitioners
 - How has knowledge production practices on urban Namibia changed over years?
 - What are some of the changing research themes and institutional landscapes?





Key Findings

- Pre-independence
 - **political and economic conditions prohibited large scale urbanisation**
 - separate and segregated development (racial ideology)
 - **1980s a turning point:** the abolishment of influx control measures
 - Still, **limited larger structural transformation**



Key Findings

- Pre-independence
 - Research on urban Namibia limited to **international researchers** and institutions, **government and apartheid-era ethnologists**
 - For example
 - Government
 - National Building and Investment Corporation of South West Africa (NBIC)
 - International researchers
 - David Simon: South African born and UK based urban geographer
 - Wade Pendleton: Social Anthropologist from Berkeley



Key Findings

- Pre-independence research themes
 - Apartheid and colonial urbanisation and planning
 - Desegregation and social transformation (1980s)
 - Social relations, structures and ethnicity
 - Histories of forced relocations
 - Urban political economy (migrant labour, the homeland system, mining compounds, class formation & the Walvis Bay dispute)
 - Housing, especially low-income housing
 - Geographic focus: Windhoek, especially Katutura



Key Findings

- Post-independence (1990-2000s)
 - Process of decolonisation: **Shifting scope of the urban question**
 - Internationalisation
 - Establishment of **key local research institutions**
 - International scholars and PhDs
 - **Collaborations between international and local institutions and projects**



Key Findings

- Post-independence (1990-2000s)
 - Research and Gov Institutions
 - NISER (Namibian Institute for Social and Economic Research/ Multidisciplinary Research Centre (UNAM))
 - NEPRU (Namibia Economic and Policy Research Unit)
 - Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA)
 - National Housing Enterprise (NHE)
 - International PhDs
 - For ex., Bruce Frayne, Inge Tvendten, Elisabeth Peyroux, Olivier Graefe, and Fatima Muller-Friedman



Key Findings

- Post-independence (1990-2000s) research themes
 - Changing urban planning paradigms
 - Post-apartheid socio-spatial transformation
 - Housing and urbanisation
 - Migration (rural-urban linkages and systems of migrancy)
 - Urban food systems and survival strategies
 - Urban governance (securitisation, regulation, decentralisation)
 - Secondary towns: northern urban centres



Key findings

- Post-independence (1990-2000s)
 - **Urban planning and design:** segregate, separate, formalise and modernise
 - Prevalent social models for housing based on ‘Western’ ideas of the nuclear family
 - A shift towards **participatory planning** approaches and focus on informality
 - Namibia Housing Action Group (NHAG)/Shack Dwellers Federation Namibia (SDFN)



Key Findings

- Post-independence (late 2000s onwards)
 - **Urgency** and immediacy of ongoing urban growth, especially of **informal settlements**
 - New generation of **Namibian and Namibian-based scholars**
 - Grass-roots urban development and housing organisations
 - Growing institutional landscape
 - **Social movements, ex. Decolonising Space Group**
 - Establishment of alliances and networks between academia, government, civil society, communities



Key Findings

- Post-independence (late 2000s onwards)
 - Research Institutions
 - Integrated Land Management Institute (ILMI) at NUST
 - First undergraduate architecture and urban planning programme and Department of Architecture and Spatial Planning (NUST)
 - Other
 - Legal Assistance Centre (LAC)
 - NHAG/SDFN
 - Development Workshop Namibia



Key Findings

- Post-independence (late 2000s onwards)
 - Participatory informal settlement upgrading
 - Informality
 - Urban land
 - Socio-spatial and urban knowledge co-production between residents, planners, government, academics, and other practitioners have thus emerged as crucial thematic areas for urban research during the last decade.



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The paper available on: <https://ilmi.nust.na/namibia-urban-bibliography>

Made possible in the context of the **NUST-GIZ**
**Grant agreement on “Sustainable and inclusive
urban development”**

Land, Livelihoods and Housing Working paper

Working paper No. 14

Date: March 2022

A Bibliography: The Urban Question in Namibia

Elsemi Olwage

1. Introduction

Namibia is shifting towards becoming an urban based society, with strong urban growth rates during the last two decades. Although rural homes, land and linkages remain crucial, it is towards the urban and peri-urban settlements that people gravitate and where the most lives are lived, and livelihoods sought and created. This urban growth is accompanied by growing demands for serviced land and infrastructure, tenure security, housing, sanitation, and transport – and by complex, creative, and contested shifts in demographics, economies, ecologies, relations, and public life. For one, urban growth is entrenching existing inequalities in urban landscapes still wrestling with colonial and apartheid socio-spatial legacies and segregation, high rates of unemployment, poverty, and insecurity. At the same time, it is generating new forms of exclusion, including unequal access to information and communication technologies and food security, and the privatisation of urban public space and land. Despite these developments, research on urbanisation, urban development and urban socio-spatial dynamics within Namibia remain limited, somewhat unknown, and largely underfunded.

The aim of this bibliography is to provide an overview of existing literature on urban development in Namibia, to highlight the changing trends in urban research and knowledge production, and to illuminate the gaps and opportunities for future research. Moreover, in creating this bibliography we hope to further foster dialogue and engagement between disparate and past and present scholars and urban practitioners, and across the disciplinary boundaries and silos. And lastly, given the trends towards urban growth, this bibliography can inform more critical and historically-situated debates and discussions on how we imagine, know, live, perceive, manage, and plan this growth – including in relation to concerns for inclusion, sustainability, equality, co-production and decoloniality. The bibliography is by no means exhaustive. It does however introduce seminal and current publications and the main institutions driving past and present urban research.

Further information

NUST Library Special Collections » Login ? Help Preferences

Urban Question in Namibia

Documents Titles Authors Subjects Recent Additions



The Urban Question in Namibia: a Bibliography

This bibliography provides an overview of existing literature on urban development in Namibia, to highlight the changing trends in urban research and knowledge production, and to illuminate the gaps and opportunities for future research. Visit the Integrated Land Management Institute's Web site for a broader overview on this Project

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Thank You.

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