

# **Reception Areas Analyzing the Delivery of Land for Housing in Namibia**

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**Key words:** Informal settlements, Land Delivery, Town Planning, Community Enumerations

## **SUMMARY**

In Namibia, the delivery of housing has been an area of contention for years. Local authorities have for years devised programmes and approaches to deal with the demand for land for housing, especially for the urban poor. As one of Sub-Saharan Africa's smallest countries, Namibia has been reaching high urbanization rates, with 50% of the population now estimated to be living in urban areas. Reception areas were created after independence early 1991 to cater for informal settlement growth and land development. Newcomers without housing were catered for in reception areas until late 1990s. These areas were planned to be temporary spaces to cater for communities needing land for housing. Basic planning processes were applied through layout drafting to provide rudimentary services and to ensure effortless upgrading later. While local authorities serviced and develop land elsewhere in the city, with the aim of relocating households. However, despite its novel aims, the process has created permanent informal settlements presenting challenges for town planning, living majority of households without security of tenure, limited access to services and high anxiety on when the next relocation will take place. This study considers the impact of reception areas on the growth of informal settlements and households and the role of local authorities in delivering land for housing. Almost half of Windhoek's population reside in areas with no access to individual toilets or water connections let alone poor sanitation. The precarious condition of housing makes residents susceptible to the negative effects of climate change. Instead of devising solutions for adequate housing delivery, years go back while authorities continue to play the blame game, mostly towards professional services. A largely qualitative study that adopted a case study design, shows cases of how two settlements in Windhoek were left in limbo after relocation took place. This paper critically examines the informal settlement upgrading process influencing land delivery. The findings show the historical impact of local authority planning on informal settlements. The analysis highlights how for years local authorities have been struggling to meet the demand for housing and the negative impacts of exclusion on communities. The study recommends an improved planning process which involve considering people-centred approaches to ensure fast delivery of services and reduced development fatigue by communities.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As one of Sub-Saharan Africa's smallest countries, Namibia has been reaching high urbanization rates, with close to 50% of the population now estimated to be living in urban areas (NSA, 2017: 45). To meet the demand for housing, local authorities relied on the servicing of greenfield land and, informal settlement in-situ upgrading for low-income urban residents (Gold & Muller, 2001). Local authorities have for years devised programmes and approaches to deal with the demand for land for housing, especially for the urban poor. Reception areas were created after independence in early 1991 to cater for informal settlement growth and land development (Chitekwe-Biti, 2018, 393). These areas were planned to be temporary spaces to cater for communities needing land for housing. Basic planning was applied through layout drafting to provide rudimentary services and to ensure effortless upgrading later. While local authorities serviced and develop land elsewhere in the city, with the aim of relocating households. However, despite its novel aims, the process has created permanent informal settlements presenting challenges for town planning, leaving majority of households without security of tenure, limited access to services and high anxiety on when the next relocation will take place.

Professional services required for efficient land delivery have been blamed for the current housing backlog. Informal settlements are areas occupied without formal permission from local authorities, residents in informal settlements have no formal tenure security, water is access via communal water points and majority have limited to no access to toilets. Informal settlements in Windhoek are not homogenous as the population consists of employed and unemployed households occupying land informally, many either from the internal growth and others as new migrants to the city who reside in shacks (Niikondo, 2008). However, it is perceived that the poor and low income constitute most occupants within these informal settlements. Some areas have a form of permission to occupy, where the local authorities issue certificates. In 2020, the City of Windhoek handed over 1300 occupation certificate, acknowledge the right for residents to reside in informal settlements<sup>1</sup>. In Africa urban poverty is one of the biggest challenges facing countries and that currently 56% of Sub-Saharan Africans are residing in informal settlements in 2015 (Zerbo, Delgado & Gonzalez, 2020: 46). This figure is alarmingly high for Namibia, with a population of 2.5 million were about 40% of the urban population has been estimated to reside in informal settlements (Scharrenbroich & Shuunyuni, 2020). Majority of dwellers do not have access to sanitation, water and tenure security. The level of tenure security has been high in areas where no eviction threats have been made by local authority (Mabakeng,

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<sup>1</sup> The City of Windhoek last week issued certificates to 730 Otjomuise residents acknowledging their occupation of municipal land. <https://www.namibian.com.na/205541/archive-read/More-Windhoek-residents-get-land-certificates>

2018). The precarious condition of housing makes residents susceptible to the negative effects of climate change (Satterthwaite et al., 2020).

This paper provides an analysis on the informal settlement situation in Windhoek, with a focus on the influence of reception areas on the internal growth of settlements. It further highlights how the slow pace of implementing layout plans can lead to further growth and a permanent challenge of addressing tenure security. The paper concludes with recommendations on ways to improve planning for informal settlements focusing on fit-for-purpose methods.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Land & Housing Delivery in Windhoek/Namibia**

Kuma, (2014: 1) noted that land delivery consists of sequence of processes, activities, policies as well as legal and technical capacities in terms of distribution and access to land by individuals, corporate entities and groups that are in need. Moreover, the process in land delivery involves increasing the interest and rights in land to the greater society while ensuring fairness and equity in the land distribution (Kuma, 2014: 1). Meanwhile, housing delivery is defined as the quantitative and qualitative provision of mass housing for citizens at low-cost prices (Ugonabo, Egolum, & Ogbuefi, 2019: 29). Housing delivery is further defined as the totality of efforts non-pecuniary and pecuniary commitments, that lead to the development of the built environment and decent living spaces for human beings (Olatunji, 2006: 1).

Namibia's persisting land and housing challenges stem from its colonial period under the German and South African administration (Remmert & Ndhlovu, 2018: 12). As a result of the colonial and apartheid era in Namibia, there exist inequality in terms of land distribution (Ulrich & Meurers, 2015: 1). Namibia is one of the most unequal countries in terms of housing affordability (Wilson & Wood, 2019: 3). Under the apartheid administration informal settlements were strictly controlled and regulated (Remmert & Ndhlovu, 2018: 13). There were restrictions on settling in urban areas (Lankhorst, 2010, 203) and the right to own land much less to construct own housing in urban areas which were limited to white households (Remmert & Ndhlovu, 2018: 13). The influx control measures in the late 1970s were ended by the Namibian Government at independence, this allowed people to settle and move freely into towns (Remmert & Ndhlovu, 2018: 13). In the years that followed, townships became formalised and overpopulated with most amenities and services lacking which were available in the suburb areas. Post-independence, Namibia was confronted with high informal settlement formation with majority of the citizens living in poor housing conditions in under-developed townships (Weber & Mendelsohn, 2017: 11). Between the year 2011 and 2016, Windhoek experienced a population increase from 325 858 to 384 191 and it has been estimated that by 2040, the population will have doubled in size to approximately 840 000 (Maseke & Liseli, 2022: 2). As more people are migrating from rural areas to cities the sudden increase in the urban population will continue to put pressure on the demand for urban land and housing.

Currently, there is a housing crisis in Namibia, the portion of affordable housing is very small. The current demand for affordable land and housing has exceeded supply and the present formal housing market does not meet the needs of the low-income segment in the country (Remmert

& Ndhlovu, 2018: 6). The proliferation of informal settlements in Windhoek over the last years presents evidence to the persisting challenges of urban land and housing provision. Traditionally, the Namibian government managed the land and housing provision in urban areas, but in the recent years this practice has been made difficult by the wide demand and supply gap in urban housing especially in the low-income segment. According the former Mayor of Windhoek, (Kazapua, 2015: 2) what limits housing provision especially for the low-income segment in Windhoek also relates to the acute shortage and high cost of servicing land as well as the lengthy process involved in land allocation. The Namibian government implemented several programmes, policies and strategies over the past decades to deal with the increasing housing backlog (Weber & Mendelsohn, 2017: 37). Moreover, too few affordable houses were constructed under the programmes implemented. However, studies have shown that, the past policies and strategies were not successful in addressing the needs of the low-income groups in Windhoek which constitute more than 40% of the Namibian population in urban areas (Maseke & Liseli, 2022: 2). If the government fails to resolve the land and housing issue faced today, it could cost Namibia many more years before it could address the current land and housing challenges.

## **2.2 Informal settlements and Land Tenure**

Informal settlers mainly earn their income from low-paying jobs, and some are employed on a temporary basis (World Bank, 2002). The informal sector is seen as the most dominant sector for informal settlement residents, comprising of diverse informal populations ranging from teachers, drivers, students, domestic workers, soldiers and policies officers (World Bank, 2002). The challenge many permanent dwellers have with investing in their residential structures besides finances is the lack of formal permission to construct their own housing. This is hindered by the settlement having no clear direction from authorities in terms of a formal layout, plus a lack of service infrastructure and no clear tenure security.

To date, many governments have moved from evictions to more focused approaches on upgrading of informal settlements (Khalifa, 2015), such as in-situ upgrading, self-help and relocation to improve the living conditions of the residents. Namibia has followed suit, although an incidence of eviction occurred in 2017 where the Katima Mulilo town council demolished structures in an area identified for upgrading<sup>2</sup>. After public outcry, this prompted the Government to issue a directive to all local authorities to avoid evictions. When local authorities implement resettlement, communities are to be actively involved. Upgraded informal settlements can result in social cohesion by providing security of tenure, local economic opportunities and improvements of income for the urban poor (World Bank, 2002).

Majority of informal settlements worldwide are excluded from city developments, this also includes slums which in this paper are identified (UN-Habitat, 2016). Since informal areas

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<sup>2</sup>Katima Mulilo Town Council Defends Demolishing of Houses – Says It Warned Residents  
<https://economist.com.na/29124/general-news/katima-mulilo-town-council-defends-demolishing-of-houses-says-it-warned-residents/>

emerge due to unplanned occupation, people living in informal settlements have no recognised streets or officially recognised addresses. Therefore, based on their nature, informal settlements are excluded from developmental plans of local authorities. The Development and Upgrading Policy of City of Windhoek incorporates informal settlements within its development structures, presenting different planning areas that are to be assisted through various stages of upgrading (City of Windhoek, 2019).

In 2021, the government implemented the informal settlement upgrading project in partnership with the National Housing Enterprise and City of Windhoek<sup>3</sup>. The aim of the project was to deliver housing to 1200 affordable brick houses to occupants who already have title deeds to the property they occupy. This project was limiting in the informal settlement, since it only caters to those with access to title deeds could benefit from the project. Local authorities in Namibia have started using land recordation approaches to issue certificates of recognition to residents occupying land informally. Land recordation enables local authorities to analyse and identifying occupants in informal settlements through the link of household's data to the parcel/structure they occupy. They now focus on identifying the who occupies the informal structure with the spatial part is a secondary activity within their planning processes. Residents in reception areas have been recorded and issued with numbers, some also have access to water tokens and rental agreements with the municipality.

### **2.3 The Reception Areas Approach in Windhoek**

Apart from flat land in the south of Windhoek, most available land is now developed, and current formal and informal development is also taking place on the fringe of hilly edges in the north and northwest of the city. Between 1991 and 1994, the City of Windhoek (CoW) established so called 'reception areas' to accommodate poor in-migrants temporarily, with the objective to relocate them to permanent areas once they were available (Nghikulwa, 2008: 23). Section 91(A) of the Local Authority Act No. 23 of 1992 gives power to municipalities and town councils to set aside reception areas. It states that "(1) a municipal council and a town council may in its local authority area set aside reception areas for the construction and erection of informal housing structures or buildings. (2) for the purposes of subsection (1) "informal housing structures or buildings" means structures or buildings of a temporary nature which is not a dwelling house, incremental house or initial self-help dwelling as contemplated in the National Housing Development Act, 2000" (Republic of Namibia, 1992: 92).

While the local authority service and allocates the land to them in the future, however this noble plan did not always work for majority of informal settlements (Chitekwe-Biti, 2018). As the demand for land bypassed the supply, areas in the end grew, due to the internal growth of the households and the increased urbanisation that results in people needing land for housing (Weber & Mendelsohn, 2017). This challenge is most prevalent in areas where planning is carried out by the local authority with minimal community participation. An easy approach to

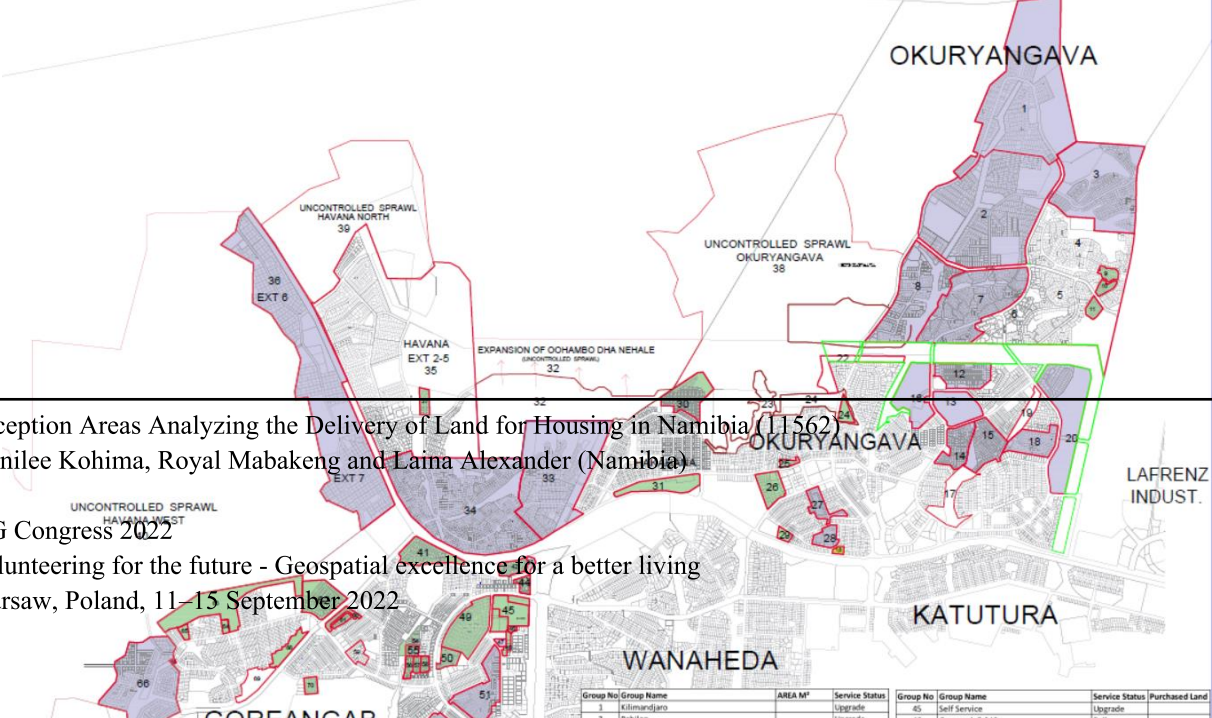
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<sup>3</sup> Feature: Informal settlement upgrading gives hope to Namibian city dwellers  
[http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-10/22/c\\_139459868.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-10/22/c_139459868.htm)

ensure that layout plans are implemented at speed with the community, requires the active engagement of members of the community. Pro-poor land management entails that the poor and low income are included within the development of their own settlements (Kapur, 2018), by way of enumeration and participatory planning. To address the challenges of informal settlements, local authorities need to have a city-wide participatory planning approach, which qualifies as pro-poor land administration. In addition to reduce cost, communities can be engaged in the service installation using innovative design and participation.

Controlled entry to the informal settlements is a strategic intervention aimed at curtailing land invasion by allowing households with genuine need for accommodation, living outside unplanned informal settlements (reception areas) permission to enter informal settlements where space for residential purposes is still available (City of Windhoek, 2021). According to World Bank (2002) the provision of reception areas was a top-down emergency initiative to respond to what was perceived as a temporary nuisance. Although it might have been a well-intentioned initiative at the time, given the approach and provision, it is not surprising that the schemes have turned out to be a major problem that needs to be addressed (ibid., 17). The schemes were designed and implemented (albeit the layout and design were only basic) by city planners and engineers. There was little to no consultation with, or participation of, the beneficiaries during the planning process.

According to a study carried out by Land, Environment and Development Project of the Legal Assistance Centre (Luis & Moncayo, 2005: 78) during the period 1991-1999, Windhoek developed several formal low-income housing schemes. However, the serviced plots provided were unaffordable to most of the poor. In response to the influx of poor urban migrants, the city developed three reception areas that were intended to be “temporary”. The concept was that people would be resettled in accordance with the ‘Windhoek City Council Squatter Policy’ of the time (ibid., 78), which did not materialise. Instead, what ended up happening was that the areas attracted further settlers even before the sites had been laid out or could be provided with rudimentary services (World Bank, 2002). The shortcomings of the reception area approach led City of Windhoek to develop new policies and strategies for dealing with urban low-income residents, and projects are now being planned and designed in accordance with the new policies, with implementation of first such schemes are about to commence. In 1992 the first reception area (Havana, formerly called Big Bend) was established, followed by Okuryangava Extension 6 (Figure 1) (locally referred to as Babylon and Kilimandjaro) (World Bank, 2002, 7). In 1998 a third Reception area (four blocks in Goreangab) was developed (ibid., 7).



Reception Areas Analyzing the Delivery of Land for Housing in Namibia (11562)

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These areas consisted of tracts of land where earth roads were cut to a rudimentary layout, lifeline water supply was provided and, in some cases, communal toilet facilities were also provided. People settled in shacks of corrugated metal sheeting on plots of 300 square meters, set out in blocks (World Bank, 2002: 7). It proved very difficult to resettle people to these areas and as major land invasions occurred prior to site layout and construction. The WCC was unable to contain growth within the planned boundaries of the reception areas. Eventually, the WCC created an “in-situ upgrading” initiative and decided, along with the target communities in these upgrading areas, to honour the natural settlement patterns and densities that had developed. providing affordable improvement solutions and decrease pressure on the Council to simultaneously develop land elsewhere. The concepts of communal block tenure and shared communal service facilities were used, and communities welcomed the upgrading initiative and shared ownership on a communal block basis.

#### **2.4 Pro-poor Planning Potential for Informal Settlements**

Dissecting pro-poor and planning as separate concepts, begins with understanding urban planning from a land use management and spatial perspective. Urban planning is guided by legislative frameworks that set the trajectory of future development of an area (Galasso et al. 2021: 1-2). In isolation, planning describes how activities are to be translated into space (Yigitcanlar and Teriman, 2015: 342). Activities here include different land uses in space such as commercial, residential, industry etc. (Sowgat, 2012: 1-2). Furthermore, Sowgat states that conventional scientific planning frameworks hinders land uses that are of interest to the public. Moreover, in this regard, planning should be a process of consensus-building with relevant stakeholders to achieve efficient use of space (2012: 34). In addition, planning policies should incorporate social reform and social mobilisation to achieve a more holistic planning approach. Thus, urban planning requires an engagement through spatial decision making with important stakeholders such as the community members who are potentially affected by the development (Konsti-Laakso and Rantala, 2018:1). It is for this reason that concepts such as sustainable urban planning should enhance social and economic progression, gender equality, empowerment, and environmental considerations, in a robust way to have a balanced development outcome (Sowgat, 2012: 13). Likewise, sustainable urban planning should include international frameworks such as the New Urban Agenda, and Africa Agenda 2063 to consider human based planning approaches in achieving poverty eradication, zero hunger, sustainable and inclusive cities, and gender equality to reach social and spatial justice (Grieco, 2015).

Ideally, if planning intends to reduce poverty, then it should focus on strategies that benefit the poor. The concept of pro-poor is predominantly used in the growth-led development world and is not popular in spatial planning literature (Ashley, Goodwin, & Roe, 2001). According to Kakwani, pro-poor specifically aims at development that benefits the poor, for example when aiming for inclusive economic growth, the poor must benefit greatly than the rich in the growth of economic development (2000: 5). Pro-poor planning is thus a planning system that benefits the urban poor or specifically aims to reduce urban poverty. Subsequently, conventional spatial planning approaches are not suitable for emerging livelihood options for the urban poor (Pernia & Kakwani, 2000). A participatory planning approach promotes inclusivity whereby

community members directly affected by poverty can provide their views for an in-depth analysis to achieve poverty eradication (Stratigea, 2016). Pro-poor planning allows for a fit for purpose approach to planning and development. This means that policies and programmes are specifically designed to enhance the livelihood options of the urban poor while simultaneously reducing poverty. A fit for purpose approach promotes socio-economic development that is affordable and sustainable for the urban poor (Rijke, Brown and Zevenbergen, 2012: 75). Therefore, pro-poor planning enhances the ability of policies to tackle all dimensions of poverty, including cross-cutting issues such as gender, equality, and the environment in a robust way (Stratigea, 2016).

The inclusion of community members in informal settlement planning and development contributes to a more inclusive settlement upgrading process that is both sustainable and just. The community-managed participatory process of informal settlement upgrading in Surabaya, a city in Indonesia evidence of pro-poor participatory planning worth exploring. This process brought basic infrastructure and services to the city and provided affordable housing and livelihood opportunities for the poor (Das & King, 2019). Initiatives such as social housing are designed to provide housing that is suitable and affordable for low-income citizens, wherein planning policies are designed for the urban poor (Ya Ping, 2012: 424). In this way this initiative aims to directly reduce poverty in urban areas by providing affordable housing options (Adams, 2018).

### **3. METHODS**

The study is largely qualitative based on desktop review of literature and secondary data on the two case study areas sourced from the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN) who are supported by the Namibia Housing Action Group in their activities towards empowering the urban poor. The SDFN has a robust approach to collecting data on urban informal settlements through the Community Land Information Programme. To date, the SDFN has profiled over 300 informal settlements and carried out enumerations in those informal settlements. Data from the SDFN and the literature review were thematically analysed and has been used to highlight the plight of informal settlement residents and the need to for government to focus attention on the conditions of informal settlements to tenure security.

### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings show the historical impact of local authority planning on informal settlements. Our analysis highlights how for years local authorities have been struggling to meet the demand for housing and the negative impacts of exclusion on communities. Reviewing data on housing programmes and emerging initiatives on upgrading informal settlements, the study highlights how slow delivery of projects leads to development fatigue, residents being trapped in household debt, exclusion, and a growing informal land market in informal settlements. This study considers the impact of reception areas on households and the role of local authorities in delivering land for housing.

#### **Case of Tweetheni and Ehangano Windhoek**



In 2009 the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia finalised the Community Land Information Programme, informal settlement profiles involving Enhangano and Tweetheni. The settlements formed in 1992 (SDFN-NHAG, 2009), situated between Okahandja Park and Golgota. The land is under the ownership of the Municipality of Windhoek. In 2009 about 602 households occupied the area with a total population of 3306 (SDFN-NHAG, 2009, p. 8). The profiling revealed that houses are constructed with corrugated iron sheets, and initial service provision included five prepaid communal water taps and eight communal toilets. There was no electricity in the settlements until 2018-2020 when some structured were connected (Ikela, 2018: online). In 2012 enumerations in the settlement indicated that there are 837 households with 63% (n = 528) of occupants as tenants. It is important to note that data for Tweetheni and Ehanganano were collected together and thus combined for this study as be presented in Table 1.

*Table 1: Enumeration Data from Study Areas on Occupation*

<b>Occupant Status</b>	<b>Number</b>
Owner	309
Tenants	528
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>837</b>

The situation in Tweetheni and Enhangano has changed with the number of structures having increased. The layout designed by the City of Windhoek in 2011 is still proposed to be applied in the area (see Figure 2). The formal layout clearly demarcates the plots and street access for all households. Since 2011, the layout has not changed while the settlement has evolved over the years. Figures 3 and 4 show the growth of the Tweetheni and Ehanganano over the years from 2004 until 2020.



*Figure 2: Layout plan prepared by the City of Windhoek for the formalisation of Tweetheni, here plots are demarcated, provision of bulk infrastructure is made and streets are clearly layout.*

Figure 3: Google Earth images of Tweetheni (2004-2011)

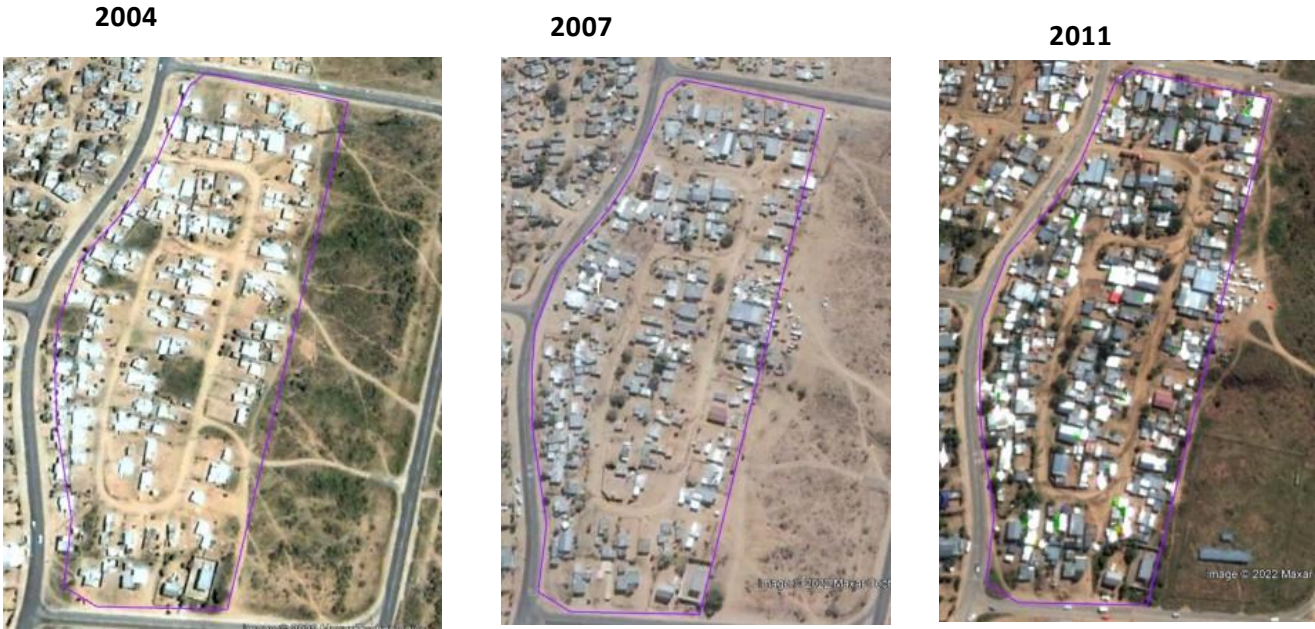


Figure 4: Google Earth Images Tweetheni (2014-2022)



The delivery of sustainable housing programmes is often delayed by lack of municipal capacity in terms of availability of funds, political will, and the shortage of critical staff to implement the programmes. Too often, effective implementation of programmes requires partnering with other players in the form of sound coordination between various government institutions, donor

agencies, civil society, NGO's and private sector to shift exclusion into integration. A fit for purpose approach explored in this paper emphasized the need for planning policies and programmes to be inclusive and flexible. Pro-poor approaches such as social housing are designed to accommodate poor residents and while simultaneously reducing urban poverty and improved standard of living.

## **5. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION**

Informal settlements have become the new reality for most developing countries including Namibia. Despite several efforts made to prevent their growth, the rapid increase in informal settlements continues to emerge with new challenges which makes it very difficult for planning authorities to contain. One of the limitations is the complex nature of informal settlements which makes it very challenging for planning authorities to relocate informal residents to greenfields. The principle of upgrading programmes should not just be around participation but should also include community empowerment through self-help initiatives. Complex policies and approaches that are blueprint for urban planning are predominantly used in developed countries. However, these prove to be futile in developing countries. Thus, while considering factors such as resource availability (human and institutional), technology and investment, a fit for purpose approach should be adopted to meet the needs of the urban poor sustainably. The efforts on address the housing crisis of Namibia's low-income urban residents, the focus should shift from the provision of housing towards the provision of affordable land. The construction of houses should be left to the residents, allowing them to build at their own pace, with minimum obstacles and maximum encouragement. Government and local authorities should supply land with at minimum of cost and maximum speed. Gaining control over informal settlement growth should be a priority for any town in Namibia, which requires the adoption of fit-for purpose approaches towards the supply of properly planned and affordable low-cost land.

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