

Sustainable Development Goals and Tenure Security in Namibia

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•ÅSE CHRISTENSEN WITH THE launch of the new NDP5, it is clear that the government keeps focusing on sustainable development and putting a lot of attention on poverty alleviation and inequality in access to basic services.

The NDP5 is aligned with the sustainable development goals, the Southern African Development Community's regional integrated strategic plan, Vision 2030 and the Harambee Prosperity Plan (HPP). Furthermore, a number of land and housing projects have been launched – the Mass Housing Programme (MHP) and the Massive Urban Land Servicing Project (MULSP).

The MHP has so far mainly catered for the provision of housing to middle-income people, and it is still to be seen whether the continuation of the project will also focus on low-income earners. MULSP committed to servicing 200 000 plots countrywide.

In a Namibian urban context, we experience a high rate of rural-to-urban migration, and to Windhoek alone, the in-migration rate is around 4% per annum. The urban population in Namibia has increased by 14,1% over the 20 years from 1991-2011, with large regional differences. The sustainable development goals (SDGs) have a number of goals and targets that are directly related to poverty alleviation, tenure security, urban development, and land governance. Hence, the current international development agenda is highly relevant to the Namibian development agenda. The quality of urban settlements is dependent on the rules and regulations in place, as well as proper implementation.

The installation of basic services without surety of who is going to pay for the services provided, including consumption, is a risky investment for national, regional, and local governments. It only makes sense to instal services while at the same time also providing, as a minimum, a basic and initial tenure security to people. To the best of my knowledge, the state does not have any current plans to provide free of charge freehold title to all low-income and informal settlers. With the current national financial crisis, I consider it out of the question to expect something along those lines in the near future.

In Rwanda, they managed to record around 10 million parcels over a five-year period. Obviously, this was not possible within the freehold system due to high costs, slow registration processes and weak institutions. Therefore, an alternative and more flexible approach was selected. All private land was registered by applying a first-time systematic registration approach, based on general boundaries, with the aim of creating a complete public record of landholdings. This alternative approach provided an initial level of tenure security, protecting people from forced eviction without compensation. It can then be upgraded when need arises and/or economic affordability allows. The average cost was US\$6 (around N\$79) per parcel.

In Namibia, we also have a flexible and alternative land tenure system. It is the flexible land tenure system (FLTS), and the act was passed by parliament in 2012. It is designed specifically to provide tenure security to urban low-income and informal settlers. It provides basic, and much-needed, protection against forced eviction without compensation. The two new title forms entail the right to transfer rights, and the landhold title also allows for the mortgaging and establishment of servitudes.

FLTS is also supposed to, over time, empower the persons concerned economically. To the best of my knowledge, it will only make sense to provide initial tenure security by applying the FLTS, while at the same time installing basic services, and allowing people to improve their housing conditions. It is worth mentioning that the UN-Habitat is considering the FLTS as innovative, and one of the pro-poor land tenure systems in developing countries which provides the most solid legal framework and foundation for further development.

* The HPP, MHP and MULSP talk about service and housing provision;

* SDGs talk about urbanisation, housing, inequality and tenure security;

* FLTS provides tenure security to urban low-income and informal settlers;

So, implementing the HPP, MHP and MULSP with the FLTS as a tool will make us able to achieve the housing and tenure security goals of Vision 2030 and the SDGs.

It calls for good planning and coordination of the HPP, MHP, and MULSP. And it calls for close cooperation between the responsible ministries and local authorities, and other stakeholders. If properly organised and coordinated, it will make a tremendous improvement for the middle- and low-income people currently residing in informal settlements. In Namibia, it is still doable, although we have to deal with it now before it gets out of control due to the high urban migration rates.

So, maybe we need to nudge the relevant institutions to put it first on the agenda and accelerate the delivery of tenure security to urban low-income and informal settlers. In my opinion, this is the best way we can address inequality and provide a solid foundation for further development of the country, and ensure that we reach the set goals of the Harambee Prosperity Plan, Vision 2030, and the SDGs. Experience from Rwanda shows that it is indeed possible.

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