PARTICIPATORY PLANNING FOR INFORMAL SETTLEMENT UPGRADING IN FREEDOM SQUARE, GOBABIS
SDI-AAPS PLANNING STUDIOS

June 2014
Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN), the network of women led saving groups in alliance with the Namibia Housing Action Group (NHAG) their support organisation, facilitate community driven processes in Namibia and linkages between communities and other actors

Gobabis Municipality is the capital of the Omaheke region. Four informal settlements accommodate 9,200 of the total of 19,101 inhabitants of the town.

Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development, a key stakeholder whose mission is the delivery of services to the satisfaction of all communities through the establishment of an effective, decentralised Regional and Local Government system, housing and physical planning and financing frameworks.

Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) is the international network of country Federations

The Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS) is a network of planning schools across academic institutions in Africa

Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development

Fundacion Alianza Por La Solidaridad

This booklet reflects on the Namibian experiences for building partnerships towards upgrading an informal settlement in the town of Gobabis in the Omaheke Region
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SECTION 1
Stepping Stones towards Settlement Upgrading

The planning of the Freedom Square informal settlement was preceded by three very important rituals, which did not form part of the planning studios as such, but were critical to building bridges for the community and Local Authority to reach a common understanding of the way forward. These include –

- **Enumerations**: Knowing Your Settlement – the Community Land Information Programme (CLIP) which enables the community to come together to discuss their needs and the outcome of their enumeration
- **Exchanges**: Exploring and learning from other local authorities and communities about upgrading as an alternative to relocation
- **Building Partnerships**: Merging partnerships which enable the participatory planning studios to take place in Gobabis and leading to active participation by a multiple layer of stakeholders at local, regional, national and international levels

“Knowing your settlement” paved the way for upgrading

_This studio followed the completion of a city-wide enumeration programme in Gobabis which was facilitated through the Community Land Information Programme._

This programme created awareness amongst the community regarding their development needs, with water and toilets as priorities, and facilitates the interaction of the community and the local authority. The Community Land Information Programme (enumerations and mapping) by the Federation, community, Municipality of
Gobabis and NHAG already covered all four informal settlements with 9,200 people in Gobabis in 2012. A very important component of the programme is the feedback meetings which create platforms bringing together key stakeholders including the whole community, local authority officials and politicians to discuss the enumeration results and share future development plans. The community used this new platform in July 2012 to express their anger and frustration of proposed relocations by the municipality. Subsequently SDFN-NHAG created a learning opportunity about re-blocking and in-situ settlement upgrading for the community and the Local Authority during March 2013 an exchange to the Western Cape in South Africa.

The settlement is situated to the north west of the Epako township, obtaining its colloquial name, Damara Block, due the majority of original residents being Damara speaking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freedom square population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of heads of households enumerated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of occupants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of structures/shacks mapped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average household size</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Locality of Gobabis, Omaheke Region in Namibia
Map: Freedom Square Informal Settlement in Gobabis
Datum: WGS84
Projection: EPSG4326
Scale: 1 : 20 000
The priority needs of the community reflect the lack of sufficient services in the community. Water was prioritized both as the first and second most important development needs, while the toilets were identified as the third development priority.
From the total households enumerated, 52% are employed and 43% unemployed, with 5% not having answered the question on employment. The average monthly income was NAD 295.46.
Monthly Income Groups (NAD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
<th>1-800</th>
<th>801-1600</th>
<th>1601-2400</th>
<th>2401-3200</th>
<th>3201+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Income Groups</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What happens to your refuse?

- 62% Collected by Local Authority
- 26% Burn
- 7% Bury
- 4% No Answer
- 1% Other
Exploring and learning
The decision to upgrade, rather than relocate, the Freedom Square informal settlement was a consequence of an exchange to Cape Town and Stellenbosch in March 2013 with Municipal Councillors, officials informal settlement residents and from the Gobabis, Grootfontein and Keetmanshoop Municipalities. During the exchange, facilitated by SDI, participants were exposed to communities and local authorities using enumeration and mapping information collected by the community to upgrade and plan their settlement. This exchange resulted in two important proposals, namely the re-blocking of the Freedom Square informal settlement in collaboration with the community and the preparation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Gobabis Municipality and the SDFN-NHAG.

Merging partnerships opening the doors for participatory planning
The signing of Memoranda of Understanding created an enabling environment for the community of Freedom Square and these actors—

Gobabis Municipality and the SDFN-NHAG signed an MoU on 15 August 2013. During the MoU signing ceremony it was announced to the community that the settlement will be upgraded and that residents were not to be relocated, but that upgrading would be done through a participatory planning approach involving the community and students from the Polytechnic of Namibia.

Polytechnic of Namibia and SDFN-NHAG signed an MoU on 27 February 2012 whereby the parties agreed to work together to create and promote inclusive pro-poor urban settlements while exposing students to work in informal settlements. This agreement enabled collaboration with the Department of Land Management, now
incorporated into the Department of Architecture and Spatial Planning. The Department is a member of the Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS).

**AAPS and SDI** signed an agreement in 2010 to promote collaboration between planning schools and country based SDI-affiliates with the aim to promote initiatives, plans and policies that will result in pro-poor and inclusive cities and towns in Africa.

**Fundacion Alianza Por La Solidaridad** channelling finance from the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development has a four year project agreement with SDFN-NHAG to financially and technically support the national Community Land Information Programme, working towards social and environmental improvements in the informal settlements in Namibia.

**UN-Habitat and the Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development (MRLGHRD)**, representing the Government of Namibia, signed an MoU on 29 September 2013 to work together to improve the living conditions of the urban poor in Namibia through a Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme. SDFN-NHAG are members of the Namibian Country Team responsible for implementing the programme. The Mayor and Property Manager of Opuwo Town Council with some community members from the region also attended the second studio for re-blocking, in preparation for the implementation of the programme in their town.
SECTION 2
The Studios - Learning and Implementing Participatory Planning

One strong feature of the studios is that these forums are taking place where the people are:

“A tree is the most professional office of the community”
(Rosalinda Hendricks, Federation Member)
The studio sets the necessary conditions for ‘forums for interaction’ to take place. These will be platforms for actors in the production of space to interact with inhabitants and students through a set of dynamics geared to exchange. The aim of this is to set clear the inhabitants’ priorities, which professionals, public servants, and other service-providing actors need to understand, while professionals, public servants and other service providers bring their expertise on board.

(Namibian Proposal for Planning Studios prepared during the Urban Land Planning Workshop in March 2013)

STUDIO 1 - Site analysis
The various collaborations between the SDI and AAPS, SDFN-NHAG and the Polytechnic of Namibia, and SDFN-NHAG and the Gobabis Municipality, resulted in the first studio, held from 13 to 16 September 2013 fitting into the second year town planning students’ module for a site analysis exercise in preparation for layout design.

The four day studio started off with an introduction of the students to the community and the presentation of the enumeration information by the community.

After the introduction, community members from the nine blocks demarcated for the enumeration exercise were divided into groups with the students to carry out the site analysis, focusing on mapping the following:

- Water drainage in the settlement
- Plot layouts and structures in the different blocks
- Identification of protected trees
• Land/structure use
• Refuse/dump sites
• Sites considered as hazardous
• Available services (communal water taps and toilets, and electricity distribution boxes)

Community members teamed up with the students to identify the use of the structures in the nine blocks, employing local knowledge to clarify the accessing of services in and outside the blocks and explaining the circulation routes for pedestrians and vehicles (which include donkey carts) in the settlement.
The information obtained by the teams was mapped and presented to the wider community, before it was shared with the municipal officials and councillors.
Impact of the First Studio

Students and community members share their experiences on the site analysis exercise in Freedom Square.

Lorraine, a community member: “The site analysis brought light to how I see my surroundings. I learnt how to use a GPS as we were doing the mapping. I also got to see which areas are suitable to build my house on and which not to avoid flooding during the rainy season”.

Rufus from Block 2: “The students gave us cooperation during the mapping exercise. Usually we just hear of GPS, but didn’t know how to use it. Through the exercise I learnt how a GPS works to update our information of the people that moved”.

Nina from Block 6: “Through the exercise I learnt more about my community and their needs. Community members who did not participate in the exercise were very grateful that I assisted the students. I learnt about the different trees in the settlement and how we should not cut the protected trees. It was a wonderful experience; I had the opportunity to see my house on the aerial photograph. People in our block are very excited and ready to start saving – we selected a tree under which we will have our meeting on Saturday”.

These reflections demonstrated a turnabout in a community which a year earlier, during the enumeration feedback session in June 2012, was very agitated and uncooperative to participate in presenting or discussing their own data. They changed from making demands to people empowered to contribute towards their own development. The experiences during the four days not only developed new skills within the community – like learning to work with a GPS and reading maps – but also significantly raised environmental awareness.
Furthermore, confidence was built among the unemployed youth and new leadership emerged in the process. Participants in the exercise also became determined about being involved in their own development and started planning to strengthen their social networks through the formation of saving groups. Discussions about saving rituals took place amidst the mapping exercise and presentation of the maps. Community members eager to start saving groups arranged with the SDFN facilitators to establish groups and to meet in the settlement. This was a shift in the local organisation of saving groups in Gobabis, as they previously had to meet at the plots where the first Gobabis groups built their houses. The forming of the saving groups was encouraged to enable future participation in development. They right away grasped that although not being able to immediately start with construction, they can start to prepare themselves – 19 saving groups with a total number of 690 members and have managed to save USD 6,700.00 in six months.

**Students experienced bottom up planning with the community**

**Eunice:** “Awesome”, during the exercise I learnt that it is important to strengthen the community; this experience helped me have a different perspective on informal settlement residents, that they have a willingness to see change in their surroundings”.

**Hilaria:** “Previously I believed that working with the community is difficult. The exercise showed me that it’s an easy process and a planner’s job should not be desk bound. I hope to work in more informal settlements”.

**Adriano:** “Working in the local vernacular helps open participation and saw that the community do want to stay in an ordered manner to bring services closer and facilitate security of tenure”.

Martha: “Advocacy”, planning I believe works better when consulting the community. Bottom up planning is better than the conventional planning approach as planners get to know the needs of the community and plan according to their priorities.

Eva: “There is always the belief that informal settlers are not willing to participate in their own development, but this exercise showed me a different picture as there were community members who actively participated. I call them the brave hearts, as we worked the whole day and they stayed with us until the end. Planning from the office is not as important as planning with the community”.

A new relationship developed between the community and Local Authority as community members gave feedback on their experiences to the key officials of the Municipality on the Monday at the end of the studio. Each block was represented at this meeting and committed members continued to represent their blocks in the follow-up and preparatory meetings for the second studio. Active participation by the community members enabled the development of an Upgrading Team from the community that can ensure that the planning become practice in their settlements.

STUDIO 2 - Participatory layout design
Following the first studio the community was anxious to embark on the second studio. These studios have increased in importance considering the introduction of the Mass Housing initiative of the Government of Namibia; SDFN-NHAG proposed the participatory planning process of communities to be a cornerstone for informal settlement upgrading. The second studio took place from 7 to 10 March 2014, involving the same
group of town planning students from the Polytechnic of Namibia that participated in the first studio during
September 2013, now doing layout planning as third year town planning students. The learning during this
studio was not limited to academic participants but included officials from the Ministry of Regional and Local
Government, Housing and Rural Development, the Opuwo Mayor and Property Officer representing team
members from the UN-Habitat Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme, a Community Development official
from the City of Windhoek, and officials from the Gobabis Municipality. Federation members and an NGO staff
members form the community organisation Resource Centre (CORC), as well as Federation members from all
regions of Namibia, also participated in the weekends activities.

During the opening session of the second studio in the settlement, the students presented the proposed
layout plans in the form of posters based on the findings of the site analysis. The CEO of the Gobabis Municipality
welcomed the participants, stressing the importance of settlement residents and the Municipality to start doing
their homework to prepare the settlement for the Mass Housing Development Programme that will benefit the
settlement in the coming months.

"The site analysis helped the community to look at improving the settlement. We have to change the
living standards in Freedom Square. We wanted water, toilets and electricity and land. During the
feedback discussions with the Municipality, it was indicated that water lines can be extended in the
settlement. Waste management was also an important issue that was identified by the residents. Since
the last studio, we have more people migrating into Freedom Square and settling with family members,
but not alot of new shacks are being built”.

Rufus Mbathera, community participant as part of the Freedom Square overview of the previous
studio during the opening session
The community experienced flooding the Friday night and requested a visit to the affected areas. A walk through the settlement therefore preceded the planning session by inspecting the recently flooded area, which was indicated on the map using GPS. The town planning lecturer explained the drainage pattern on the settlement map, which the community needed to consider when looking at the drainage pathways and proposed road layout for the settlement.

Thus for the design, participants had to take the current roads and water catchment areas into consideration. During the site analysis of the first studio, community members discussed how the water runs southwards from Block 9, which is on higher ground, down to Block 1 and 2. One of the barriers to the natural flow of rain water in the settlement was the embankment built by the Municipality to prevent cars from taking a shortcut through the area. This blocked the natural flow of the water, causing the water to collect at the lower parts in Block 1. This it was identified as a huge problem as the area is occupied by households which are normally flooded during the rainy session. During the previous studio community members also talked about the seasonal migration that takes place within the settlement when relocating houses to avoid flooding. As it was a very heavy rainy season, the damage caused by the rain was evident and some households already relocated their structures.
Sanitation options were explained by the Gobabis Community Development Officer, when sharing the Local Authority's experience an alternative sanitation in Kanaan, the informal settlement bordering on the north-eastern side of Freedom Square. Due to a high water table in the area and the absence of proper management the dry sanitation installed in Kannan was not found to be feasible.
The need for major access routes, social spaces and stormwater management and the needs of the elderly were discussed within the various smaller block groupings formed during the site analysis (first studio). The initial exercise considered the entire settlement to establish a broader development framework. Some groups were eager to first verify some structures in the blocks, whereby the need was emphasised to start focussing on ways individual block design will fit into the larger settlement. Community members indicated major access routes and roads, meeting areas, hazards and major flooding areas in the settlement. Each group presented their outcomes on the bigger settlement map.

“We should put ourselves in the shoes of the elderly, they should point out the routes they use to go to town, clinic or to the shops, so that when the roads come, they maintain the current movement routes in the settlement” *Student participant*
Urban agriculture was raised by Block 8 and 9 on the northern edge of settlement and Block 1 and 2 in the south western corner, when considering the planning for the establishment of community gardens, in response to the natural flow of water in the settlement. In Block 9 this will act as a catchment area for water flowing from the high part of the settlement located on the foot of the hill, and in Block 1 & 2 the garden will be located on the lower side of the settlement prone to flooding. The produce from the garden will be used to feed the elderly and the orphans in the settlement.

The location of shebeens in the settlement caused heated debates covering aspects of registration, ongoing noise through all hours of the day and night, while acknowledging it as a source of income and hence the need for suitable locations.

Reblocking and layouts continued on Sunday in the teams comprising community members, town planning students and professional staff according to the demarcated blocks in the settlement. Due to threatening weather conditions it was decided to move the “community office under the tree” to the Epako community hall after lunch. All was amazed that even more community members turned up to complete the designs for their blocks. Each group presented its layout in preparation for presentation at the official closing session on the Monday morning.
The second studio was concluded on Monday in the presence of various dignitaries, including the Ambassador to Spain, Regional and Local Authority Councillors, while the keynote address of the Deputy Minister of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development was delivered by the Acting Director of Housing, Habitat and Technical Services Coordination. The community presented their layouts and designs to the guests.
“You, as members of the community, are key in the successes of the programme, without you it would not be possible. You are the ones that guide the process with the support of the implementing agencies”

Spanish Ambassador, Her Excellency Diaz Orejas
Future sustainability through income generation and recycling: Community shares experiences with South African visitors.

Sunday morning started off with a frenzy of discussions and demonstration of income generating projects, with the focus on bead making using paper and urban agriculture and planting of herbs. Maureen informed participants of the many herbs that can be used for healing – mint in tea, cinnamon and lavender to help with sleep. “All these different types of herbs can be planted in a small space in your yard”.
SECTION 3
Reflections on Participatory Planning

The common planning approach is the norm with local authorities is which to inform the community on the plans of the Municipality for developments in settlements, consultants are hired and plans are drawn up. This in the end side-lines the community inputs and their dreams or desires and their advice on how they can assist. Power is placed in the hands of the local authority and residents usually have to comply. Studios are giving life to the bottom up planning process which ensures that community needs are taken into consideration. The ideas of the plan comes from the bottom of the planning process, from the community that is to be planned, and goes to the top, to the local authority and government who in turn have to approve the plans. Studios also give a clear look into the community’s abilities and willingness to bring change to the settlement. In Freedom Square this was reflected in the community’s enthusiasm and drive during the design process. The studio highlights the clear understanding that informal settlement residents are an important element in the development process, with enough knowledge and understanding of their settlement to contribute positively to change. Having the local authority present in the exercise gave time for proper engagement on the community development office’s role in the settlement, discussion on the management of the public taps, to the process for shebeens to be registered where tackled.

The great hope of the studio is the future change in the mind-set of planners, as this are the country’s future Town and Regional Planners, professionals that will be at the helm of planning. Participatory planning for the students presented them with an opportunity to plan with their clients and not for their clients. This agreed with Maureen from the Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDUP) from South Africa saying that “you cannot plan for us, without us, instead plan for us with us”.
“People living in the formal sections of Gobabis did not have the opportunity to plan for the location of their houses or the accessibility to shops, they just bought the plots and settled there. Here we have a great opportunity to decide on the location of our services and the way our settlement will look like in the future” - Hannelie
“Although the landscapes of these two towns differ, I learned a lot. I have to teach my people the process followed with community during this exercise. We are very proud of communities who take steps to make a change in their lives. Other local authorities should learn from Gobabis Municipality. Priority number one is to plan and survey before we decide where to put the houses. The line ministry should take note”

His Worship Kavari, Mayor of Opuwo
“The priority of my office is to support housing through programmes such as the Mass Housing Development Program and Gobabis was selected as one of the 27 towns for the pilot project of mass housing. Community participation and the community preparing for the upgrading of the settlement is very important, as funds are available from Government through the Mass Housing initiative”

Mr. Merrow Thaniseb, Acting Director for Housing, Habitat and Technical Services Coordination, MRLGHRD
Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN) & Namibia Housing Action Group (NHAG)