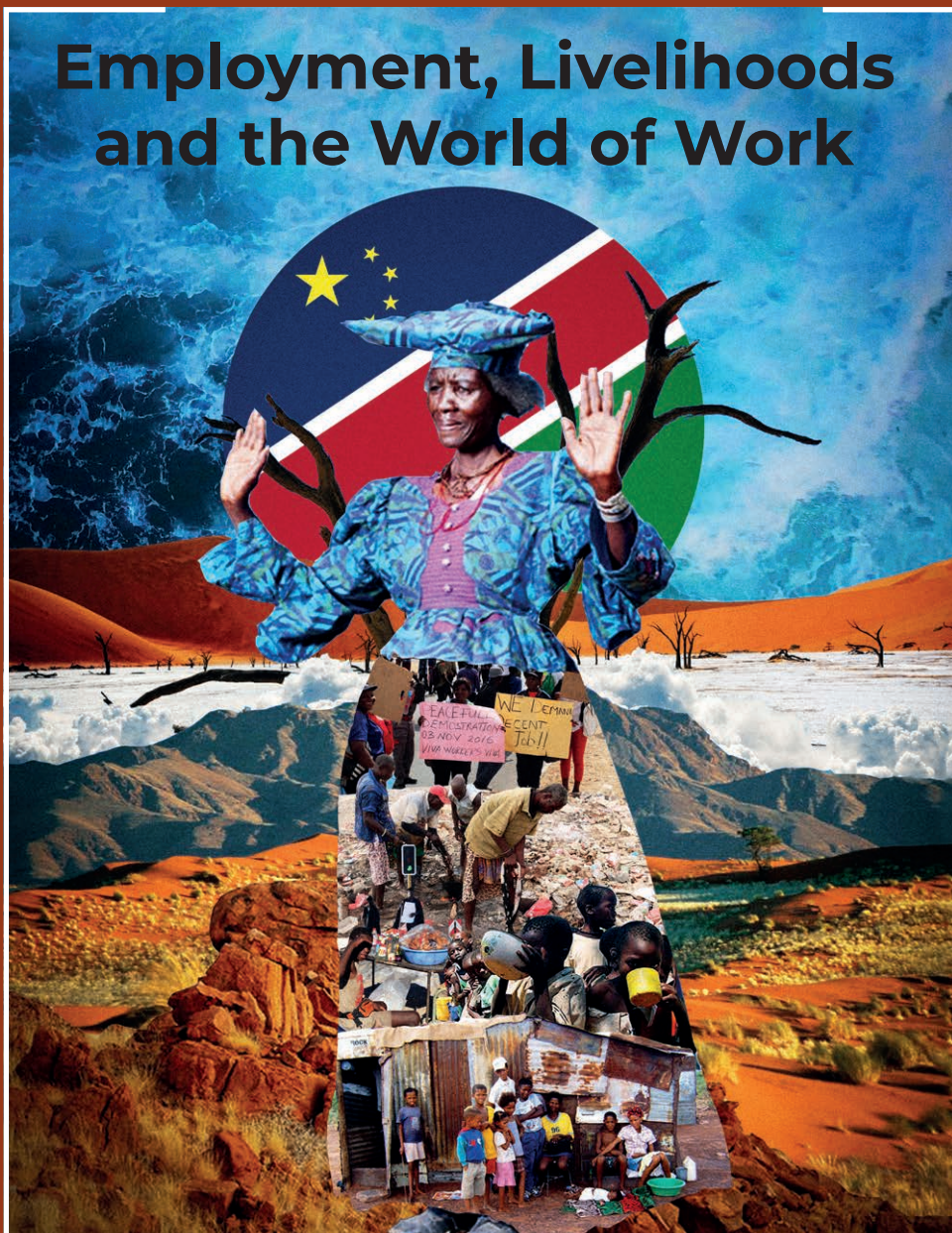


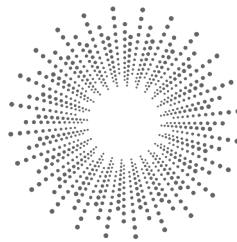
# Employment, Livelihoods and the World of Work



# **Employment, Livelihoods and the World of Work**

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## Opinion Piece

### *Turning Katutura into a Transformative Namibian Social and Energy Powerhouse*

*Andy Gheorghiu*

#### **Background**

In June 2023, Andy Gheorghiu, a Germany-based but internationally operating campaigner and consultant for climate/environmental protection and energy policy travelled to Namibia, where he met members of the local Economic and Social Justice Trust in the capital Windhoek. While visiting the township of Katutura, he witnessed the harsh economic reality of a post-apartheid democracy, but also identified its substantial transformative potential.

#### **Katutura: “The place where people don’t want to live”**

The township of Katutura was created during the apartheid regime of South African colonial rule in 1961. The black population of Windhoek, nowadays Namibia’s capital, was forced to move from an area known today as the Old Location, to Katutura, which means “The place where people do not want to live” or “We do not have a permanent habitation” in Otjiherero, the language of the Herero people.



*Katutura, Windhoek, June 2023 (© Andy Gheorghiu)*

The initial township had brick houses, but these days houses, businesses, shops and pubs are tin shacks which often lack reliable access to water, sanitation and electricity.

A growing number of Katutura residents are forced to live in tin shacks, creating a severe housing crisis and social injustice that is addressed and debated in the *Namibian Journal of Social Justice Volume 2* (Edwards-Jauch & Kamwanyah, 2022). These informal settlement structures are increasing, especially in developing countries, including those in Africa. According to research by the Department of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development, University of Pretoria, South Africa, 40% of Namibia's 2.41 million population were living in

shacks in 2018. According to the 2011 census (Namibia Statistical Agency [NSA], 2013).

Given Windhoek's fast pace of population growth in recent years, these numbers are now likely to be even higher. No one can deny the precarious living conditions of people (mainly black) in a place where they – still – lack a permanent dwelling. However, this place also demonstrates huge transformative potential.

First of all, Katutura is far cleaner than a number of grubby areas in Berlin. Secondly, people are really trying to make the best of a situation that is uncomfortable and at times almost unbearable. I saw businesses, shops, pubs and fast food outlets reflecting the pride of people who refuse to lose their



Katutura, Windhoek, June 2023 (© Andy Gheorghiu)

dignity. Thirdly, the most abundant free energy source of the world, the sun, blesses the city of Windhoek with an annual average of 3 610 sunshine hours (Weather & Climate, n.d. a), which is roughly 9.9 hours of sunshine per day, more than twice Berlin's average (Weather & Climate, n.d. b) and even higher than that of Los Angeles (Weather & Climate, n.d. c) in the "sunshine state" of California. This extensive sunshine obviously provides huge potential for solar power development.

### *Namibia's climate risk profile and vast renewable energy potential*

The World Bank Group in 2021 analysed and outlined the Climate Risk Profile of Namibia. Among other nations, it highlighted it as "highly vulnerable to seasonal variability and long-term climate change," adding that "increasing vulnerability is expected to result in cumulative impacts across the country's social, economic, and environmental structures."

At the same time, the country's potential for renewable energy is yet to be harvested. According to *Global Photovoltaic Power Potential by Country* (Energy Sector Management Assistance Program [ESMAP], 2020): "Namibia has the highest average practical PV power potential of all countries, and it is twice as high compared to the United

Kingdom, a country with one of the least generous conditions for PV."

German Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)) collated statistics for Namibia (GIZ, 2020) in *Sector Brief Namibia: Renewable Energies*. According to this report, due to Namibia's unusually high annual solar radiation, PV systems in Namibia could produce twice as much electricity as similar systems in Germany. Yet, at present, the electricity rate is at only 56%, and 60% of that power is being imported, mainly from South Africa. In rural areas, only 35% of the population has access to electricity, and nationwide some 300 000 households have no access to electricity. Namibia plans to expand its power plant capacities to over 1,600 MW by 2035 – with over 700 MW (or 60%) coming from planned renewable energy (GIZ, 2020). Currently, the country has an overall power plant capacity of 516 MW – with a peak demand of over 600 MW.

### **Shipping Containers and the Sun – Transformative Powers for Katutura and Namibia?**

Repurposed shipping containers are being used as accommodation units for construction workers or labour camps, and they're also increasingly trendy as affordable and alternative homes.

These living containers are quite modular and there are online instructions on how to construct your individual housing by using an old shipping container, which are cheaper than fabricated living containers that can be acquired on order. Available plug & play photovoltaic systems can be mounted quickly and easily on every container, and could power the living container and perhaps also feed centralised or decentralised grids.

The sun shines on average almost 10 hours/day in Windhoek, and Katutura. For comparison, the ten-hectare solar project Outapi in northern Namibia (Climate Partner, n.d.) produces 9 000 MWh of energy per annum. In a possible future, fully equipped living

containers could replace the existing tin shacks in the township of Katutura, potentially even producing enough energy to feed Windhoek's electricity needs.

This raises the question: Why adopt living containers instead of “proper” brick houses? Opting for living containers would be a relatively cheap and faster way to replace tin shacks quarter-by-quarter in Katutura. This, in turn, would improve the living conditions of thousands of people in Windhoek.

Sunshine is therefore plentiful, and the people of Katutura seemed to me ambitious enough and ready for the challenge of an initiative that could end



*Katutura, Windhoek, June 2023 (© Andy Gheorghiu)*



up being a transformative and powerful flagship project for other townships. People could tackle the housing and energy crisis while simultaneously providing social and climate justice.

Looking ahead, political will and investment are key to unlocking a solar future for Namibia, the world's number one country in terms of its photovoltaic potential (ESMAP, 2020). One consideration would be to make it mandatory for companies seeking licenses for large renewable energy projects to pay into a state-managed fund which would help finance such projects. A country such as Germany that aspires to being global climate

leader should support Namibia by providing expertise, technology, and funding. Germany already supports Namibia in urban planning in the area of green hydrogen production (German Embassy, Windhoek, 2023) – aimed at feeding Germany's heavy industry (Rheinisch-Westfälisches Elektrizitätswerk Aktiengesellschaft [RWE], 2022). The country should stand by its commitment to “projects in sustainable urban development, vocational training, climate change adaptation, as well as the protection of biodiversity and improved water supply” (RWE, 2022) to help Katutura become a transformative Namibian social and energy powerhouse.



*Katutura, Windhoek, June 2023 (© Andy Gheorghiu)*

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