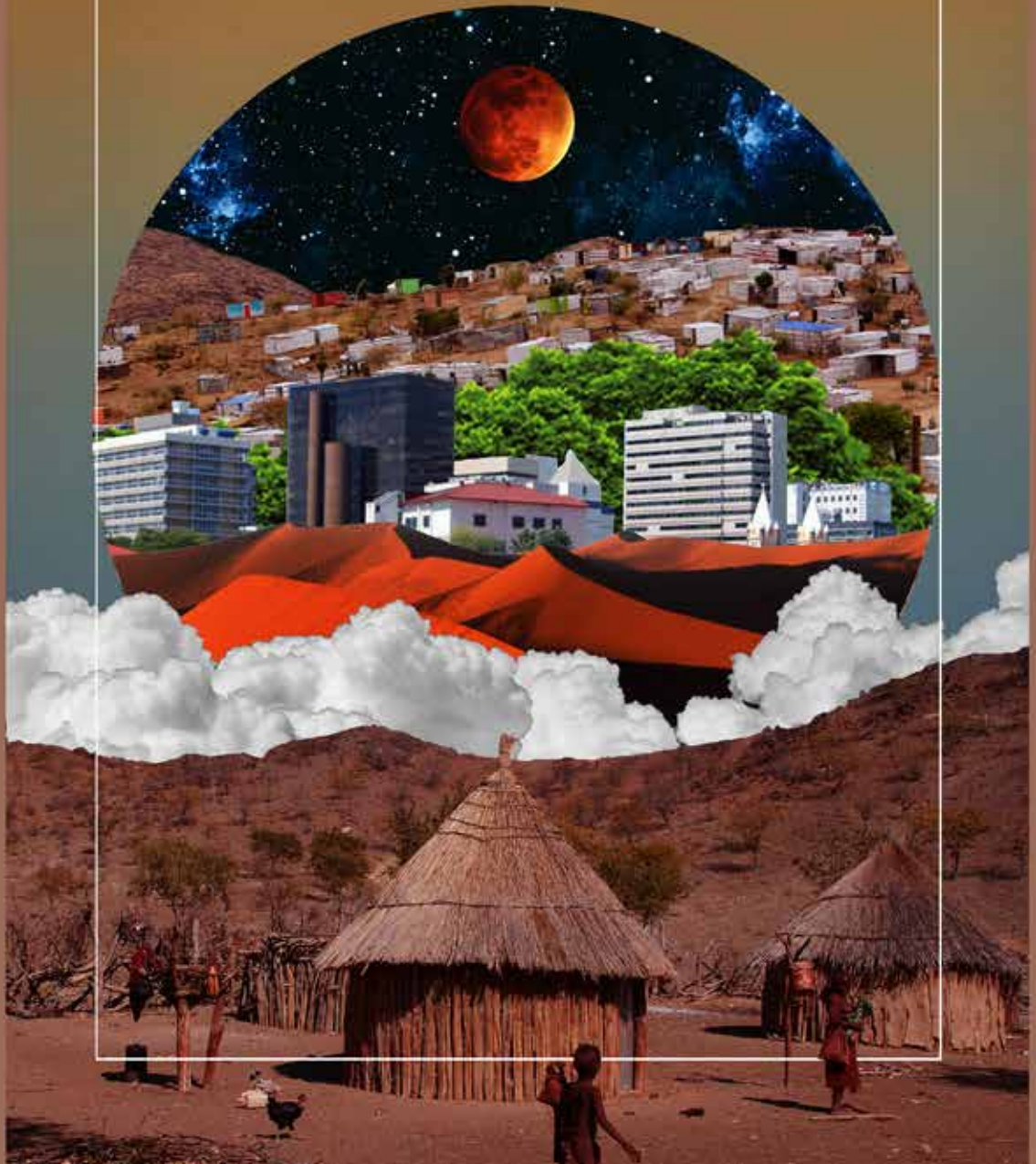




Namibian
Journal
of Social
Justice

Namibia's Housing Crisis in Perspective



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Publishers: Economic and Social Justice Trust

Cover design: Titus Shitaatala

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ISSN: 2026-8882

Printed by
John Meinert Printing (Pty) Ltd
P.O. Box 5688
Windhoek/Namibia
info@johnmeinert.com

Namibia's Housing Crisis in Perspective

Volume 1,

July 2021



Namibian
Journal
of Social
Justice

www.namsocialjustice.org

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Women and Housing: Katutura Case Study

Imelda !Hoebes

Natalia (not real name) is a 51-year-old female head of household who lives in Dolam, Katutura, Windhoek. She and her family live in a corrugated iron structure, constructed in the backyard of the grandfather of her son's friend. Her household consists of 11 people, that is 6 adults and 5 children under the age of 6 six years. Five of the adults are her children from a previous marriage. She has 2 daughters and 3 sons between the ages of 21 and 30. Natalia's family shares the yard with 8 other adults and 10 children who live either in the

main house built with bricks or in the corrugated or other iron houses that house other families. One daughter is 24 years old and has four children. Another is 21 years old and has one child. As a single mother, she raised her children in rented corrugated iron houses. Constantly moving from one place to the next with minimum financial assistance from her ex-husband.

Natalia's highest level of education is grade 12, although she also took an



Photo: Dirk Haarmann

early childhood course without a formal certificate. She works as a domestic worker and earns N\$ 800.00 per month. She used to earn more when she worked for her previous permanent employer in Pioneerspark but was retrenched upon their retirement.

She supplements her wages as a domestic worker by selling chicken offal that brings in N\$30 per week. Her current employer did not pay her during lockdown when she had to stay home for two months; this resulted in loss of income and lowered her living standards. She barely managed to pay her rent of N\$600 and take care of her big family with her disability grant of N\$1250. She receives a disability grant from the government owing to loss of vision in one eye. Her unemployed adult children received the N\$750 COVID relief grants during the lockdown. With that they bought food items and sanitary products for the household. The size of her family means that the food the food did not last long.

The adult children are struggling to find work, partly, because four out of the five dropped out of school after failing grade 10. From time-to-time they do odd-jobs. This does not significantly contribute to household food security. Her daughter got childcare work during the lockdown period. She earned N\$1200 per month for two months. The employer allowed her to live at their house with her

daughter. This meant two people less in the house during that time. Natalia's youngest son is a first-year student at a vocational training centre. He qualified for an NSFAP loan. They are, however, still waiting on the fund to pay. Her unemployed daughters do not claim childcare grants simply because they do not know where to submit claims. Only two of her grandchildren receive regular maintenance support from their fathers. One receives N\$200 per month. The other receives financial as well as material support. The remaining grandchildren and unemployed adult children depend on her income.

Natalia moved to her current house three years ago. She previously lived in the same area. She has been renting backyard spaces since she lost her brick house after her ex-husband lost his job almost 20 years ago. Her current house consists of four rooms which are partitioned with cloths and iron sheets into a kitchen and 3 sleeping areas. All 6 adults sleep, eat, wash and study in that space. The family uses extension cables to get electricity from the main house for lighting. Every tenant contributes towards electricity daily but it finishes almost immediately as no one can afford to buy enough to last all the households for a full day. They mostly use gas for cooking and sometimes fire. There is no running water inside their house but there is a shared water point in the yard. They also have one ablution

facility which is shared between 21 people including children.

Natalia wishes to own a home. She is tired of renting backyard shacks from others. Life in a corrugated structure is very uncomfortable and unhealthy. Every time she sweeps her carpet there is a lot of dust because the shack has no flooring. They cannot install flooring as it is someone else's house and they can be evicted anytime. Natalia made a formal land application to the City of Windhoek at the Katutura offices in 2003. She submitted a computerised application and got a written positive response the same year. The land she was allocated is in Otjomuise. However, since then she is constantly told to wait until the land is serviced. She is worried because others have set up temporary structures on her approved land. Natalia is tired of waiting to occupy her land as she is ageing.

During the lockdown, she placed buckets of water for family to wash their hands. Natalia encouraged everyone to wash their hands regularly. They, however, do not always have soap. Sometimes the women and children use empty tins to relieve themselves at night because they are afraid of walking to the ablution facility at the other end of the house. None of the grandchildren attend school. The six-year-old was not enrolled for pre-primary discontinued due to financial problems. Natalia cautioned her adult children to stay home to avoid Covid-19 infection. Due to overcrowding at home, they prefer to hang around in the streets or visit friends. Her house is very small and it is very difficult to keep social distance. They share sleeping areas including beds and generally every space in the house is occupied.

Groot Aub Case Study 1

Jermine April

Elizabeth (not her real name) is a 56-year-old woman who has lived in the Oshakati location in Groot Aub since 2004. She lives with six (6) other people in one household. She shares the house with four (4) primary school children and her two adult daughters. All three of them are unemployed. Her oldest son currently works as a shepherd at a farm in the southern Namibia. Her oldest daughter used to work as a domestic worker in Omeya. In 2018, her employers moved to the coast, leaving her unemployed. Elizabeth's youngest daughter worked as a waiter at

a restaurant in Windhoek but lost her job due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Her son sometimes helps her but this is not enough. Elizabeth supports her family by doing odd jobs. She washes and irons laundry for people in her community. Some who refuse to pay for her services. Some only pay N\$30.00 to N\$ 50.00 per wash-load which is not equal to the work she puts in. She described the situation as follows:

“I wash laundry for people but you know how people are, my dear. They promise you they will pay



Photo: Jermine April

but tomorrow they give excuses. I washed for someone last year but they haven't paid me since then. I wrote that debt off because there is nothing I can do about it... Those who pay me only give like a thirty or fifty for so much clothes that I wash and sometimes iron”.

Elizabeth and her family were severely affected by the COVID 19 lockdown. Her oldest daughter helped her with her part-time jobs. However, during the lockdown, she found it hard to earn an income because her services were no longer required.

Elizabeth once lived in the Damara location, Katutura, Windhoek with her husband who has since passed away. After the loss of her husband, she could no longer afford the mortgage payments on her house. She was forced to uproot and relocate to Groot Aub. She built a one-bedroom shack with corrugated iron sheets; however, this is not spacious enough to accommodate her entire family. All seven members of the household sleep, eat and wash in that one bedroom. Elizabeth cannot afford to buy beds and the house has no foundation. They therefore sleep on the floor. She described the situation as follows:

“As you can see, my dear, this is all we have. I don't own much. This is the only bedroom we have. The one you see there is the fireplace. That mattress on the floor belongs

to my daughter. She shares that single mattress with her daughter. I sleep on this old thing. I don't even want to call it a bed. I share this one with two kids. My other daughter makes a bed here that she shares with her son”.

During the rainy season, the roof of her shack leaks and the water floods into her house. They have their own pit latrine at the back of the shack. However, the women complained that it caused infections.

“My dear as you can see for yourself, there is no flushing toilet in here. I'm sure you saw the small establishment outside when you arrived. That is the latrine we are using. It does not flush. My daughters and I got vaginal infection from using it but what can we do? We have no choice. We cannot go to the bushes; it's not safe especially at night”.

There is no running water in the house. Elizabeth and her family collect water from their neighbours. This is sometimes a challenge. Some neighbours sometimes refuse to give her water. Some demand some sort of payment. The shack has electricity but the family makes use of fire wood to cook in order to save money. Electricity is an expensive commodity for Elizabeth and so the family sometimes also uses candles.

During the lockdown, the children were all at the farm and it was difficult to send school materials there. Their work booklets were not completed on time. The family once received a COVID relief parcel from the government that contained of six (6) bars of soap and a water container. They used the soap to wash their hands. It finished quickly as they are a large household and now no longer wash their hands with soap, only with clean water.

“These children went to the farm. It was during the lockdown. We got papers from the school but how could we send it to them? We waited for the kids to return but they did not do some of the work... Yes, we received water containers and soap. I think there were six bars of soap. Yes, they were six. We

finished the soap. We used them for bathing and washing hands but they did not last. The container is very helpful. We are storing water in it”.

Elizabeth is worried about her grandchildren's safety. They live near the main road and the children play in the streets. Elizabeth cannot wait to turn sixty so that she can receive the government old-age pension. She also wants to register her grandchildren for the grants with the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare. Elizabeth never applied for any formal housing. She received this piece of land when she moved to Groot Aub. Elizabeth saw her housing conditions as poor. She hopes to get a proper house in the future.

Groot Aub Case Study 2

Jermine April

Martha (not her name) is 47 years old and lives with her three children and two grandchildren in Rooirand location, Groot Aub. Her grandchildren are aged 1 and 2. Her teenage daughter is currently pregnant. Her oldest daughter (22 years old) works at a local Chinese-owned shop where she earns N\$700.00 per month. Martha works as a domestic worker in Kleine Kuppe suburb in Windhoek. She commutes from Groot Aub to Windhoek daily and leaves Groot Aub at 5:30 am every morning to get the bus to Windhoek. Despite safety and security concerns, she is forced to stand at the side of the main road to get transport to work. It is unsafe for a woman to wait for the bus alone, especially during winter when the mornings are dark and cold. Martha earns N\$1700. 00. This is not enough as she supports her children and her grandchildren. Most of her income is spent on transportation, diapers for grandchildren, toiletries and food. Martha is concerned that she may not be able to help sustain her teenage daughter and the unborn child.

“My youngest daughter is pregnant. I fear I will not be able to help my daughter when the baby comes. I only get paid N\$1700 and my oldest daughter gets N\$700. I cannot expect my

daughter to help me because she is supporting her two children. They are her children. I pay N\$1000 for transport. That takes most of my pay! I sometimes help my daughter with diapers which I buy at PEP Stores. I buy those food combos from Metro. It helps us a lot”.

Martha has been living in Groot Aub for about 4 years now. She lived with her boyfriend at a farm near Gobabis but moved to Windhoek when he passed away in 2012. In Windhoek, she lived at her previous employer's house whilst her children lived with her sister in Groot Aub. Her previous employers dismissed her when they learned of her HIV status. They accused her of hiding her status during the initial interview and accused of her of intentionally trying to harm the employer's family.

“They fired me on the spot. They said that I was trying to infect the whole family! The woman said it was not safe for her children to be around me. I cried. That was the only source of income I had. I walked away.... No, I didn't report them. I prayed and moved on”.

After the loss of her job, her cousin offered her a shack in Groot Aub into which the family moved. This

is a relatively small shack with no bedrooms. They have no toilet, no electricity and no running water. All family members bath, eat and sleep in that one room. They use a 20 litres container to relieve themselves and dispose of their human waste in a nearby bush. Elizabeth sleeps on the double bed with two grandchildren and one daughter. Her son and youngest daughter share a single bed. The family collects water from their neighbour. They use a paraffin lamp or candles when the paraffin runs out. They either cook over an open fire or a mini gas stove.

“We use that container to do our business. Behind this shack there is a small bush. We empty the container there. It is very uncomfortable because sometimes you get a running stomach now the family has to wait outside when it is dark, you sit outside and wait to use the container... We are still waiting for the city of Windhoek to give us electricity. We

use candles most of the time but if we have money, we buy paraffin for the lamp”.

During the lockdown, Martha had to live-in with her employer. This helped her to save money as she no longer had to pay transport costs. Martha's main concern was the safety of her grandchildren. There is no fencing around her shack and her grandchildren play in the streets. She sometimes worries that her son and teenage daughter do not wash the hands of her the grandchildren. Martha and her daughter received N\$750.00 Emergency Income Grant from the government during the COVID lockdown. She used this money to pay off small debts whilst her daughter bought food for the family. In 2016 she applied to the Town Council for her own land and electricity. To date, this has not yet yielded results. She is worried that her cousin may want to move back into the shack and the family will be homeless.

Otjiwarongo Case Study 1

Mandy Mapenzie

Ester is a 37 year old female head of household who lives in the Ombilli informal settlement in Otjiwarongo. She lives in a household of 4 people, one adult and three children. The children are between the ages of 5 and 12 years old. She works as a cleaner at the hospital in Otjiwarongo. Ester does not have any other source of income apart from her job. Most of her income is spent on school fees, books, gas, candles, transport fare, water and food. She gets food such as millet, dried beans and dried meat from her mother in the Omusati region.

Ester moved to Otjiwarongo from the Omusati region to improve her education. She shared the payment of the rent with her then boyfriend for a few years, but moved to the Ombilli settlement in 2016 because she could not afford to pay rent and take care of her children.

"I decided to move from the rental place because I could not afford it and still take care of the children".

In 2016 she bought corrugated iron sheets and set up her own structure. A few years later she decided to take a loan from Letsego to rebuild her structure with bricks and cement. She decided to do this because the corrugated

structure could not protect them from the harsh weather. Due to roof leaks the house flooded. The destroyed many of their belongings.

"Because of bad weather I decided to build a structure from bricks and cement because the corrugated iron structure could not protect us from heavy rain which usually floods, which usually destroyed our furniture".

Building a brick structure was a risk she decided to take because the land does not belong to her, but the Municipality. There is a chance that the Municipality may remove her from the plot. She applied for the plot she is living on but has not received any response from the municipality.

The family has running water but no electricity. Ester and her twelve-year old daughter use a gas stove or firewood to cook. They use candles for lighting. They have a pit latrine outside the house but do not have a proper sewage system.

"We have running water taps in the house but we do not have electricity. The only issue we really have is that we use a pit latrine and do not have a good sewage system".

When the pandemic started Ester was scared that she could not keep her children from getting corona because she works at the hospital. *“Since I clean at the hospital, I was afraid that I could get sick from COVID and could give it to the children too.”* Lockdown was hard on the children because they could not

go to school. It was difficult to teach them at home. Ester being at work and the children staying at home meant she had to buy more food for them to eat. Keeping the children in the house was the hardest because they wanted to play outside. She could not monitor them because she was at work during the day.

Otjiwarongo Case Study 2

Mandy Mapenzie

Maria is a 40 year old female head of household who lives in the Ombilli informal settlement in Otjiwarongo. She lives in a household of three people, 2 adults and one child. She sews clothes for a living. She does not have a fixed monthly income and has no source of income. Her brother is currently looking for a job, so Maria is responsible for paying school fees, water, food, oil for the sewing machine and candles.

Maria moved to the Ombilli informal settlement in 2005 from the Northern part of Namibia to look for a job after she failed grade 12. She lived with her aunt and when she heard that people were settling on municipal land and she decided to do the same. In 2006 she learned how to sew and with the money she made she bought some corrugated iron sheets and set up her own structure.

"I got my income from sewing which I learned in 2006, and I was able to buy corrugated iron to make my small house".

Her house consists of a one-roomed shack which is partitioned into a kitchen and sleeping area. All three family members sleep, eat, wash and study in one room. The family does not have electricity so they use candles and firewood for cooking and lighting.

"We don't have water in the house, but there is a community tap where we fetch water". They use pit latrines.

Maria would like to own her own house and wants to build a proper house so that she and her family can be safe and have enough space. She did not bother to apply for formal housing because she will not be able to pay for it.

"I did not apply for formal housing because I know the little money I make from sewing, will not be enough to pay for it".

In 2006, she applied for the plot she is currently living on but she has had no response to her application from the municipality.

During the lockdown Maria and her family had to make extra trips to the communal tap because they had to fetch enough water to wash their hands frequently. She was always worried that she would get the corona virus because some of the people at the taps did not wear masks or did not practice social distancing.

"Since the lockdown we had to go to the community tap more than usual because we needed enough water to wash our hands,

for the family and for my clients. I was worried that we would get COVID, because the people stood close to one another and some did not wear masks”.

She did not make enough money for the upkeep of her household and did

not receive the N\$750 COVID grant from the government. Lockdown was very hard on the child because she did not go to school. It was difficult to teach the child because she did not understand half of the work the child was given from school.