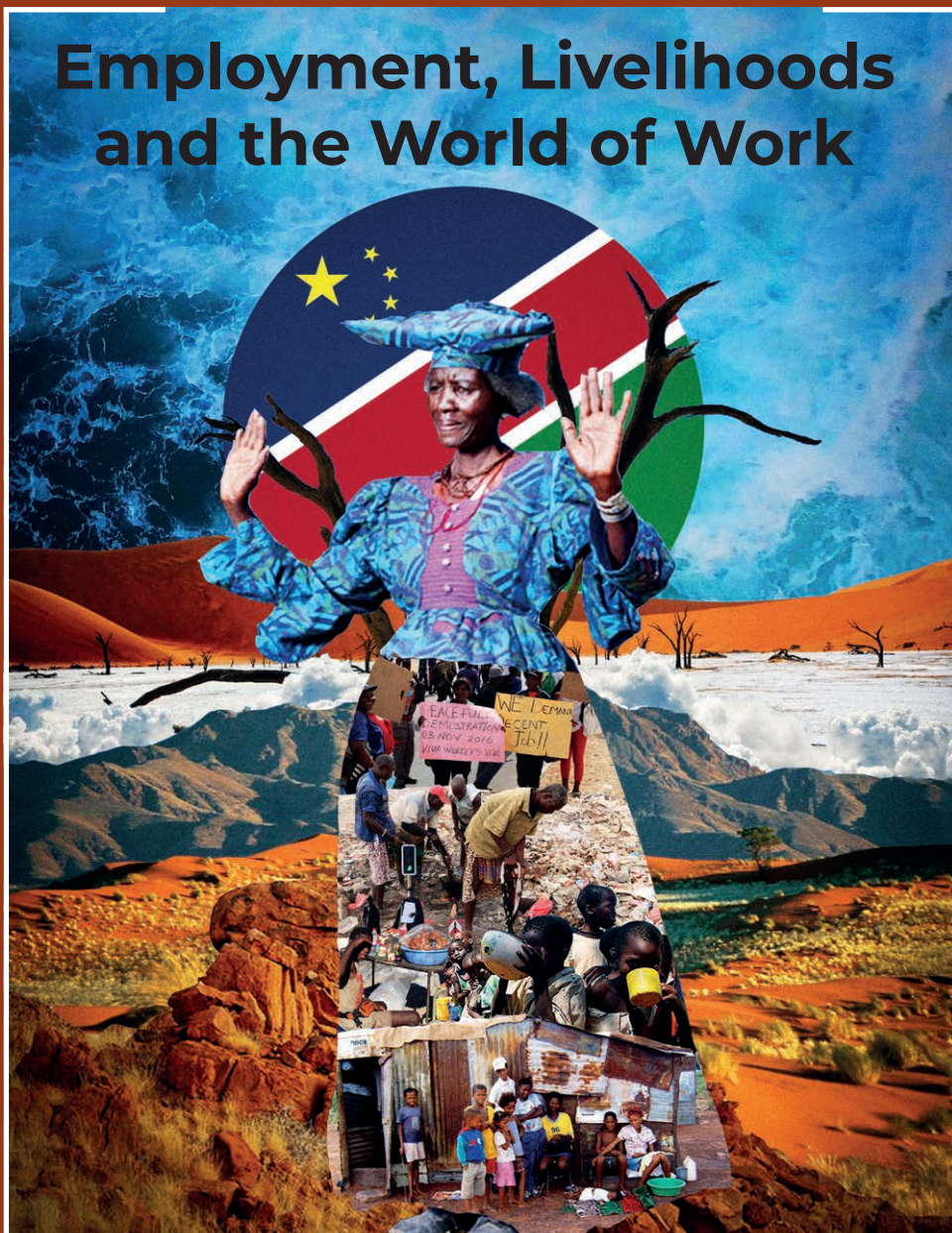


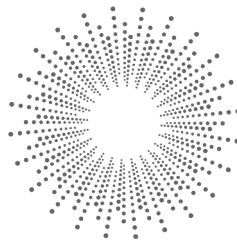
Employment, Livelihoods and the World of Work



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Case Study

Informality in Okahandja Park, Windhoek

Nafimane Hamukoshi

Abstract:

Magdalena Mwatilifange is a 29-year-old woman who lives in Okahandja park, a settlement located in Khomas Region, Namibia, about 10 km north of the capital city, Windhoek. She was born and raised in Onambome, the capital of Okalongo constituency in Omusati Region. She attended Sheetekela Combined School and completed her secondary education. She moved to Okahandja Park in search of better opportunities and a brighter future, but she soon realised that life in the settlement was not easy or comfortable.

Informal Living

Okahandja Park is one of the informal settlements that emerged in the 1990s as a result of rapid urbanisation and migration from rural areas. It has a population of about 30 000 people, most of whom live in shacks made of corrugated iron, wood and plastic. The settlement faces many challenges, such as lack of basic services, infrastructure, sanitation, and health care and education facilities. The residents of Okahandja Park depend on various sources of income, such as informal trading, casual labour, recycling, and



Photo: Casper Bowora

social grants. Initiatives which have been implemented to improve the living conditions of informal settlements like Okahandja Park include the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia, which runs a savings scheme and provides housing loans and land tenure security for its members, and the Community Land Information Programme, which maps and registers the plots and structures in the settlement.

Informal Work

Magdalena works at a tuckshop, a small shop that sells basic goods such as bread, milk, sugar and soap. She earns a meagre income that is neither steady nor reliable, since she only gets paid for the days she shows up at work. She has no contract or benefits, and she can lose her job at any time if the owner decides to replace her or close down the shop.

She shares the small shack in which she lives with three relatives. Their financial contributions are uncertain or negligible, as they also struggle to find work or earn enough money. This means that despite the precarious nature of her income, Magdalena is the sole breadwinner of the household, or at least the one with the least unstable income. She has to provide for their food, water, electricity and other needs.

Because Magdalena does not get any paid leave, has no job security, and can easily lose her position, she does

not have the option of taking a break from her work, even in the event of an emergency or a crisis that demands her attention. She has to work hard every day, regardless of how she feels or what she faces. She has to deal with various challenges and risks at work, such as long hours, low wages, poor working conditions, harassment by customers or competitors, theft or robbery, and fire or accidents.

Discrimination and Access to Services

Magdalena cannot afford to pay for transportation to her work, so she walks long distances on dusty roads or paths under the scorching sun or in the cold rain every day. She has to avoid traffic accidents and animal attacks on her way. She faces discrimination and violence at the hands of some people who do not respect or appreciate her work or presence.

She also faces the challenge of poor sanitation, as there are no toilets available in her area. She has to resort to the alternative of using the bush or the river bed, which are both very risky and unpleasant. She lives in a country where sexual harassment, rape and murder are rampant, so she does not feel safe or comfortable when she goes to relieve herself. She often has to carry a weapon (knife) with her for self-defence, and has to endure the smell and sight of human waste and garbage around her.

She has to cope with infections and diseases that can be caused by poor hygiene or contaminated water.

The only other option she has is to use a bucket in the shack, even in front of others, which is unhygienic and unsanitary. She also has to empty and clean the bucket regularly, which is a tedious and unpleasant task. She has to bear the stigma that goes with using a bucket as a toilet and endure the lack of privacy and dignity that it entails.

Despite these hardships, she is studying nursing at I-care. However, she cannot afford to pay for her education, even though she has been saving up since last year. She wants to become a nurse because she has a passion for helping others and improving their health and well-being. She believes that nursing is a noble and rewarding profession that can make a difference in people's lives. She hopes that by becoming a nurse one day, she can also improve her own life and the lives of her family and community.

She has to study hard to pass her exams, which are not easy, and balance her studies with her work and household responsibilities, which are not light or simple. She has to overcome many obstacles and challenges that could hinder or discourage her from achieving her goals, such as a lack of resources, support, guidance and opportunities.

She has to face many pressures and live up to her own expectations, and those that family members, friends, teachers and her employer have of her.

She visits the Maxwilili Clinic, a public health facility that provides basic health services to the residents of Okahandja Park for medical services when she or her relatives are sick or injured, or when she needs to get vaccinations or check-ups. She appreciates the clinic for its availability and affordability, but she also recognises its limitations and shortcomings, such as the shortages of equipment, staff, medicines and space. She sometimes has to wait for long hours or even days to be attended to, or she has to travel to another clinic or hospital that is far away.

To sum up, Magdalena Mwatilifange is precariously employed. Besides poor living conditions, she is also plagued by many problems and hardships. Her job is casual and insecure, and her income is meagre and unreliable. She has no employment benefits like paid sick leave. Due her location on the outskirts of the city, she finds it difficult to pay for transport, which impacts on her access to quality health services. She is a woman who embodies the challenges and opportunities of the urban poor in Namibia, facing discrimination and exclusion, but deserving of recognition and assistance for her efforts and the goals she cherishes.