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Community-Led Housing and Land Solutions at Scale in Namibia

Submitted By: Namibia Housing Action Group and the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia

Organization Type: Civil society

Website: www.shackdwellersnamibia.com

Practice Details

Country(ies): Namibia

City(ies): 29 cities

Start Year: 1998

Ongoing: Yes

End Year: N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Housing Affordability & Financing
- Housing & Informality
- Housing Policy, Legislation & Governance
- Housing Data & Monitoring

Relevant SDGs:



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Problem & Context

Similar to other African countries, Namibia faces a severe housing crisis. Nearly 50% of its population now lives in urban areas, and about 40% of urban residents stay in shacks in informal settlements without secure land rights, basic services, or decent housing. Rapid population growth, high land prices, and planning systems that exclude the poor make formal housing unaffordable for low-income families. Most government housing programs target middle-income earners, leaving the poorest behind. Namibia is the second most unequal country in the world, with an income inequality score of 59 according to Rand Merchant Bank's Where to Invest 2024 report. Poverty has worsened, with the number of people living in poverty increasing from 410 in 2016 to 852 in 2023. The lack of flexible land systems, limited community participation, and scarce funding have led to unplanned informal growth. The SDFN–NHAG partnership is spearheading people-centred housing initiatives.

Solution Developed

TThe Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN), supported by the Namibia Housing Action Group (NHAG), leads a women-focused, community-driven housing process. The model is built on five pillars: community savings and data collection, partnerships with local authorities, incremental housing using the Twahangana Fund, capacity building through training and peer learning, and advocacy that has influenced policies like the Flexible Land Tenure Act. Over the past three years, SDFN and NHAG have addressed gaps left by the Mass Housing Programme by delivering affordable homes led by communities. Their work shaped the 2023 National Housing Policy, which now recognises community-led housing as central to delivery. In 2025, they secured N$137 million to build 3,016 homes, with 1,000 already underway. Through initiatives such as "Buy a Brick" and the Twahangana Fund, they continue linking savings, land access, and innovation to achieve inclusive and resilient housing.

Implementation

The solution centred on forming savings groups, collecting community data, identifying land, negotiating with authorities, and building affordable houses through savings, loans, and subsidies. Communities designed layouts and helped monitor construction, ensuring quality and ownership. The In Situ Upgrading (UIS) model, showcased in Karibib, costs just US$2,016 per home, nearly eight times cheaper than the NHE model (US$16,249). Community labour contributes up to 20% of inputs, proving that SDFN and NHAG's approach delivers durable, low-cost housing for the poorest households.

In 2025, SDFN and NHAG secured N$137 million from government to build 3,016 homes, with 1,000 already under construction. Community savings remain central, supported by private partners through the "Buy a Brick" campaign and long-term backing from FNB Namibia, Ohorongo Cement, and the Pupkewitz Foundation.

Since the late 1990s, this partnership has expanded nationwide, signing 17 agreements with local authorities. With support from government, NUST, and private partners, the community-led housing model has become Namibia's most significant low-income housing initiative, combining shared planning, finance, and technical collaboration.

Enablers & Obstacles

Key factors in this success include strong community savings groups, long-term partnerships with authorities, and community-led data collection, which improved planning and negotiations. The Twahangana Fund provided timely finance, while the Flexible Land Tenure Act (2012) and the Revised National Housing Policy enabled scaling up. Decentralised management and NHAG's technical support ensured effective implementation, supported by government subsidies and loans of N$40,000–N$60,000 repayable over 11 years at 0.5% interest.

Challenges such as slow government processes, limited land, uneven local support, and political changes slowed progress in some areas, but advocacy, MOUs, and peer learning strengthened cooperation and helped overcome obstacles.

Results & Impact

The initiative has built over 8,000 houses for low-income families across Namibia, supported by 29,000 savers in 900+ groups who have saved over N$40 million. Partnerships with 17 local authorities and loans from the Twahangana Fund of over N$407 million have enabled households to build and improve homes incrementally. Communities have repaid N$114.7 million, showing sustainability, while government contributed N$169 million, private partners N$53 million, and external funders N$27 million. Women, making up 80% of savers, lead planning, finance management, and policy engagement. Over 35,000 people have moved from unsafe shacks to secure homes with services. Communities report stronger unity, confidence, and participation, with better health and school outcomes for children. The initiative also creates jobs, strengthens local planning, and supports climate-resilient, incremental development.

Replication & Scale Up

The SDFN–NHAG community-led housing model in Namibia combines savings groups, participatory planning, incremental construction, and joint financing to provide low-income households with secure, affordable housing. It has reached thousands of households, inspired similar initiatives in Southern Africa, and proven scalable and sustainable, with over N$114.7 million repaid to the Twahangana Fund. Strong community organisation, government support, and private and external partnerships ensure flexibility, local ownership, and long-term impact.

The SDFN–NHAG community-led housing model can be scaled up by expanding savings groups, strengthening participatory planning, and increasing access to incremental loans. Multi-

stakeholder partnerships with government, private sector, and external funders ensure resources, land, and technical support. Its flexibility allows adaptation to local conditions, climate, and cultural needs. Replication across towns and Southern Africa demonstrates the model's transferability, cost-effectiveness, and potential to reach more low-income households.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice has been fully adopted into formal policy frameworks and legislation, and is being implemented at scale with institutional support.

The SDFN–NHAG community-led housing model is now embedded in Namibia's National Housing Policy, formally recognizing savings-based, participatory approaches as central to low-income housing. Supported by N$169 million in government funding, municipal collaboration, and NHAG technical guidance, over 3,000 houses are under construction. Loan management, quality monitoring, and community organization ensure scalability, sustainability, and active participation of low-income households in housing delivery.

Lessons & Takeaways

While Namibia's community-led housing initiatives have successfully delivered affordable homes, improvements are needed to enhance efficiency, equity, and sustainability. Key areas include faster land acquisition and servicing, streamlined approvals, and better coordination between national and local authorities. Accelerating these processes ensures communities can start construction sooner, maintain momentum, and provide low-income households with timely, well-serviced housing, while preserving the model's community-driven approach.