KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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MINISTER OF URBAN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

ON THE OCCASSION OF THE HIGH LEVEL ROUND TABLE ON

SCALING UP COMMUNITY DRIVEN ACCESS TO LAND AND SHELTER

14 FEBRUARY 2019, STATE HOUSE
- Director of Ceremonies;
- Madame Monica Geingos, First Lady of the Republic of Namibia and Chairperson of the Board of Governors of the Urban Poor Fund International;
- Hon. Paulita Wie, Deputy Minister of Urban Affairs from Liberia
- Hon. Derek Klazen, Deputy Minister of Urban and Rural Development, Namibia
- Hon. Laura McLeod-Katjirua, Governor of Khomas Region;
- Your Worship Cllr Muesee Kazapua, Mayor of Windhoek;
- Esteemed Representatives and members of Slum Dwellers International and Shack Dwellers Federations of Namibia, Liberia, Kenya and Zimbabwe;
- Representatives of the Government, Civil Society, Academia and the Media in attendance;
- Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to be here to partake in the Round Table discussion on the relevant topic of “Scaling up community-driven access to land and shelter”. In this regard, I am very grateful to Madame Monica Geingos, our First Lady and Chairperson of the Board of Governors of the Urban Poor Fund International for the kind invitation.

I also recognise and extend a warm welcome to all the esteemed delegates who are here to share their experiences and expertise on the topical issues of access to and affordability of land and shelter.
Director of Ceremonies
Distinguished delegates

According to the United Nations World Urbanisation Prospects of 2018, 55% of the world’s population lives in urban areas and this is expected to increase to 68% by 2050. This urbanisation trend is largely occurring in Africa and Asia.

Namibia’s 2016 Inter-Censal Demographic Survey indicates that 48% of the country’s population lives in urban areas. While urbanisation is generally associated with development and poverty reduction, rapid urbanisation also presents a number of challenges, such as the growth of the urban poor and the mushrooming of informal settlements.

The Namibian housing sector is principally characterised by:

- Firstly, the ugly phenomenon of informal settlements, which are threatening to become a permanent feature of the Namibian urban landscape;
- Secondly, the high cost of conventional housing and provision of basic infrastructure and services;
- Thirdly, limited financial support and credit facilities for the poor and ultra-low income groups; and
- Fourthly, the demand for housing and serviced land way outstrips the supply.
The mushrooming of and poor living conditions in informal settlements in our country is worrisome to the Government and has prompted His Excellency the President to declare informal settlements, which is home to thousands of the urban poor and low income earners, as a humanitarian crisis, and the President has called for urgent corrective action.

Due to various challenges that they face in accessing land and shelter which is within their affordable levels, the poor and low income earners are often forced to illegally occupy vacant public or private land, which is not planned and lack of basic services such as water, electricity, roads as well as proper sanitation and housing. Without security of tenure and access to basic services, it is difficult for informal settlement dwellers to construct and own decent permanent living structures and they end up living in Insafe makeshift structures and under unsanitary conditions.

Madame First Lady
Esteemed delegates

Our presence here today is a re-affirmation of our shared recognition of the right to a “decent and affordable home for all” of our people as well as our resolve to harness our collective wisdom and effort to face this challenge head-on in the spirit of harambee – pulling together in the same direction.
Indeed solutions to our housing and urban land challenges cannot be left to the Government alone, but is a collective responsibility for all of us – the Government at all levels, the private sector and the citizens including the community that is in need of these basic infrastructure and services.

Since independence, the Namibian Government has designated housing as one of the key development priorities and an important vehicle for addressing poverty and inequality as well as for social and economic advancement and political stability.

The Government’s commitment towards inclusive access to land and decent shelter dates back to 1991 when the National Housing Policy was adopted, which policy was reviewed in 2009. The revision was particularly necessitated by the need to provide for contemporary issues such as:

- The inseparability of housing from municipal service infrastructure;

- The recognition of and more support to the critical role of people housing processes in addressing the housing backlog in general and in meeting the housing needs of the poor and low income groups in particular; and

- A decentralised yet integrated approach to land and housing development.
Based on the above-mentioned policy stance, the Government set out to ensure an enabling environment for an inclusive and people-centered approach to land and housing development characterised by a greater emphasis and support for the involvement of low income communities; the recognition of necessity for demand-driven and incremental installation of individual services and construction of houses within the framework of appropriate standards; provision of concessional funding towards shelter development especially for the low income groups as well as grant funding to regional councils and local authorities for the installation of bulk service infrastructure.

As a clear demonstration of its commitment towards a people’s centered approach to housing development, the Government took the following measures:

- The enactment of the National Housing Development Act, 2000 which established Housing Revolving Funds under the administration of regional councils and local authorities with seed capital from the Central Government and with the object of providing concessional loans to low income earners to acquire, construct or improve their residential accommodation. The positive impact of the Government-funded decentralised Build Together Programme is widely recognised.

- The Central Government, through the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development, continues to provide grant funding to local authorities and regional councils to scale up the provision of
serviced land, sanitation and housing. These areas continue to get prominence in national development planning and resource allocation;

• To specifically address the challenges of tenure insecurity in informal settlements, the Government has passed the Flexible Land Tenure Act (Act No. 4 of 2012) as a legal tool specifically designed to facilitate land ownership and consequently proper housing for informal settlement dwellers by enabling them to secure tenure security in a simplified way and taking into account their level of affordability (without involvement of conveyancers). The system is already being piloted in Gobabis, Oshakati and Windhoek, and will be rolled out to other towns in due course.

• In order to expedite land delivery, the Government has passed the Urban and Regional Planning Act, 2018 (Act No. 5 of 2018) which provides to short processes of approval of township establishments and sub-division of land as well as pro-active spatial planning and development of towns and regions.

• The other measure that we have embarked on is the recognition of the critical role of community-based group saving schemes such as the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia as a viable and sustainable solution to informal settlements and the provision of affordable housing.
This saw our decision to provide grant funding to the Federation since 2002, which totals some N$ 54, 7 million. We also continue to advocate and support the Federation to secure land from local authorities on concessional terms. This support and our partnership with the Federation will continue in the coming years.

- In addition to the above, we also recognise important role of private investment and public and private partnerships in housing and land delivery.

Director of proceedings, Esteemed ladies and gentlemen

It is my conviction that the housing challenge is not insurmountable if we, Government, private and the community pull our resources and efforts together and develop inclusive, equitable and innovative strategies. As our President always says and I quote: “Inclusivity spells harmony. Exclusivity spells conflict” end of quote.

Through an inclusive and people-centered approach to land and housing development we can scale up the provision of and improve access to land and shelter for all of us. This means we must look at the needs of our people who live in both urban and rural areas.

I would like to conclude my Address with a quote from Robert South and I quote: “Problems can become opportunities when the right people come together”.
Once again thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to share my perspectives, and I wish you fruitful deliberations.

I thank you for your kind attention.