

‘Surviving like a Bird’: Livelihood Coping Strategies in an Informal Settlement of Windhoek, Namibia

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Abstract

This study was done to investigate different types of sustainable livelihoods in an informal settlement of Windhoek, Namibia, and to identify and describe the coping mechanisms of these households. The study used mixed research using descriptive and exploratory designs. Quantitative data was collected using questionnaires, while qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with seven heads of households. A sample of 150 households was randomly selected to allow representation of the population. The descriptive statistic approach was used in the analysis of data, using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS version 23). Qualitative data analysis was done through thematic content analysis of transcribed data. The study revealed that people migrate to the city in search of employment. The most important factor for determining a positive lived experience in the informal settlement was whether a person has employment or not. Furthermore, a strong reciprocal social link between rural and urban areas has been found. The practice of residents in urban areas who send part of their remittance to rural areas has a positive spin-off on the rural economy, where the majority of migrants hail from. It was also established that rural households in the rural sending areas contributed agricultural produce to sustain the livelihoods of these urban informal dwellers. The most precarious and vulnerable group was singled headed unemployed elderly women, a clear indication of the gendered nature of poverty. Based on the study findings, various types of livelihoods and coping strategies have been identified from the study, namely rural-urban food transfer, informal sector activities, social network and remittance.

Keywords: Sustainable livelihoods, Windhoek, informal settlements, coping strategies, Namibia

Résumé

Cette étude a été réalisée pour étudier différents types de moyens de subsistance durables dans un village informel de Windhoek, en Namibie, et pour identifier et décrire les mécanismes d'adaptation de ces ménages. L'étude a utilisé une recherche mixte utilisant des plans descriptifs et exploratoires. Les données quantitatives ont été collectées à l'aide de questionnaires, tandis que les données qualitatives ont été collectées au moyen d'entrevues approfondies avec sept chefs de ménage. Un échantillon de 150 ménages a été sélectionné au hasard pour permettre une représentation de la population. L'approche statistique descriptive a été utilisée dans l'analyse des données, à l'aide du logiciel statistique pour les sciences sociales (SSPS version 23). Une analyse qualitative des données a été effectuée par une analyse thématique du contenu des données transcrites. L'étude a révélé que les gens migrent vers la ville à la recherche d'un emploi. Le facteur le plus important pour déterminer une expérience positive dans l'établissement informel était de savoir si une personne avait un emploi ou non. En outre, un lien social réciproque solide entre les zones rurales et urbaines a été trouvé. La pratique des résidents des zones urbaines qui envoient une partie de leurs envois de fonds dans les zones rurales a une retombée positive sur l'économie rurale, d'où la majorité des migrants sont originaires. Il a également été établi que les ménages ruraux des zones rurales d'envoi fournissaient des produits agricoles pour soutenir les moyens de subsistance de ces habitants informels urbains. Le groupe le plus précaire et le plus vulnérable était les femmes âgées sans emploi dirigées par une seule personne, ce qui indique clairement la nature sexospécifique de la pauvreté. Sur la base des résultats de l'étude, divers types de moyens de subsistance et de stratégies d'adaptation ont été identifiés à partir de l'étude, à savoir le transfert alimentaire rural-urbain, les activités du secteur informel, le réseau social et les envois de fonds.

Mots-clés: *moyens de subsistance durables, Windhoek, établissements informels, stratégies d'adaptation, Namibie*

1. Introduction

Poverty has been thriving in many developing countries in the world, with many people living on less than one US dollar per day. Africa is no exception to this notion, as many African states have been reported to experience severe poverty in the past and current years (Soudien, Reddy and Woolard, 2019). In many African countries rural areas are much poorer in terms of livelihood income and private assets compared to those living in urban areas. As a result, many people migrate to cities in search of greener pastures, and this leads to the formation of informal settlements (Newaya 2010). According to the Habitat report (UNHSP 2012), more than half of the current world population (7 billion) live in urban areas and this population is anticipated to double by 2040. This expected growth will consequently lead to the formation of more informal structures in urban areas. The number of informal settlement dwellers is projected to increase to 2 billion by 2030 if no solemn actions are taken (United Nations 2012).

Decentralisation and infrastructure development are sustainable solutions in improving unplanned structures in sub-Saharan Africa (Ricci 2011).

In Namibia, approximately 700 000 persons (about a third of the country's population) are reported to be living in shacks (less-formal houses) that are found in the informal settlements, and nearly 46% of this population have no access to proper sanitation facilities (Namibia Housing Action Group 2012). Statistics have shown that informal settlements in Namibia have increased from 235 in 2009 to 246 in 2015 (Namibia Housing Action Group 2012). The alarming rate of informal settlement formation is due to an increase in rural urban migration, higher rentals in urban areas, poverty/growing inequality and the lack of former colonial planning and infrastructure to cater for such a rural to urban trajectory. In fact, this is in line with the key arguments in a recent book of Hlumelo Biko (2019) with the inspiring title of *Africa Reimagined: Reclaiming a sense of abundance and prosperity*, in which he indicated that migration, urbanisation and employment are the three most serious challenges for Africa for the decades to come.

According to the 2011 population and housing census report, the Khomas region¹, where Windhoek is located, had more than 40% of the residents who were born elsewhere (Namibia Statistic Agency 2012). This figure confirms the increase in migration of people to the city. The population of Windhoek, according to the 2011 census, was estimated to be 325 858 people, and this represents a 30.2% increase since the 2001 census (250 262) (Namibia Statistic Agency 2012). This significance in the population growth has exerted pressure on service delivery to the City of Windhoek. Subsequently, this has led to the development of the informal settlements, and consequently a lack of basic amenities such as clean water, electricity, proper sanitation access to adequate health care and decent education for the people living in such areas. This mushrooming of informal settlements has resulted in unsustainable livelihoods among the inhabitants because of poor services, and therefore a call for urgent interventions (Taukuheke 2010). A study by Gukurume (2012) in Zimbabwe highlighted that the inequalities in service deliveries between urban formal and informal settlements are a sign of the colonial legacy that is backdated to colonial racial discriminatory service delivery policies. In spite of these inequalities, provision of basic infrastructural amenities to human settlements remains fundamental if we are to improve sustainability of the informal settlements' dwellers' livelihoods.

The high migration of people to Windhoek is triggered mainly by the hope of employment opportunities and a better life. It is reported that 60% of the population of Windhoek live in the informal settlements at the outskirts of Katutura (the location

1 Khomas is one of the 14 regions of Namibia. Windhoek, the capital of Namibia, is also situated in the Khomas Region.

that was created for black people during the apartheid era) and Otjomuise² (Namibia Statistic Agency, 2012). Within the above context, Katutura alone represents 20% of the city's land and it is mainly for the poor people (Frayne 2004). This is a clear testimony that the affluent minority communities (40%) in Windhoek occupy the bigger part of the city's land.

1.1 Problem statement

In Windhoek, poverty is especially predominant in the informal settlements where poor people live (Taukuheke 2010). People migrate to the city with the hope of finding employment only to find themselves in grave situations, with no employment and sometimes with no food (Newaya 2010). The extent as to how people in the informal settlements survive hardship is not fully understood. For this reason, there appears to be a gap in the understanding of the sustainable livelihoods and the coping mechanisms used by people living in the informal settlements. In development thinking today, understanding the assets and capabilities of local communities are vital for more appropriate development planning. Focusing on a needs-based approach alone is not good enough, since, in essence, it is a deficit approach that could feed dependency and entitlement. This has resulted in the planning vacuum within the government and local authority responsible for planning of the poverty alleviation programmes. Thus far, of all studies on poverty that have been conducted in the country (Newaya 2010 & Taukuheke 2010), very few of them had clearly assessed the sustainability of the livelihoods and coping mechanisms of inhabitants of the informal settlements. Furthermore, there are no clear policies on the alleviation of poverty and improvement of sustainable livelihoods in the informal settlements. The key purpose of this study is to explore and describe the livelihoods of the people in an informal settlement.

1.2 Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to investigate the different types of sustainable livelihoods in the informal settlement of Windhoek and to explore the coping mechanisms of these informal households.

1.3 Significance of the study

The researchers are of the opinion that this research will contribute to an understanding of the urbanisation of poverty in the informal settlements as a developmental area

2 Otjomuise is one of the post-independence settlements in Windhoek established by the government of Namibia through its National Housing Enterprise to address the need of housing.

that is not sufficiently studied. Its significance is equally vital in overcoming urban development challenges facing growing cities such as Windhoek. This research will generate information that will assist in the development of strategies that will help in the formulation of policies geared toward poverty reduction and supporting sustainable livelihoods in the informal settlements of Namibia.

2. Research methods

The study used mixed research methods, namely quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data was collected through the use of questionnaires to collect the socio-economic and demographic data of the residents of Babylon informal settlement. A qualitative methodology was also chosen for this study, as it provides in-depth understanding about the problem (Pope and Mays, 1995). Qualitative methods were employed through in-depth interviews with the heads of the households and the analysis of the literature to unpack issues around sustainable livelihoods. Babylon is also the most recent informal settlement in Windhoek, where little information on the settlement exists. This research used a case study design because it gives an in-depth understanding of a particular area and also presents real-world practice (Brandell 2010). The case study design was also appropriate for this study as the focus of the study was on one particular community. However, aspects of the the study could be replicated where new informal settlements are on an exponential increase in Namibia since the reliability and validity of this study are high because it builds on similar studies in Namibia and South Africa.

2.1 Population

In this study, the population included all adult males and females aged 18 years and older who are regarded as residents of the Babylon informal settlement. It is presumed that participants aged 18 years and older are mature enough to understand the nature of the survey and provide trustworthy information. The second study population was the heads of households in Babylon informal settlements, whereby the head of the household (older than 18 years) was selected for the interview. The researchers also decided on 18 years as respondents of a minor age would pose significant ethical research barriers.

2.2 Sampling and data collection

This study used a probability simple random sampling technique to select a representative sample from all households in Babylon. Since all household structures in Babylon have house numbers, the house numbers were listed and entered in a Microsoft Excel sheet. A sample of 150 households was randomly selected to allow for

representation of the population. The house numbers were not clustered or selected in a particular interval since simple random sampling was applied. Shacks that were found to be in the same plot without numbers were considered to be part of the same household and only the indexed/numbered shacks were considered in the study. A questionnaire was then administered to the eldest residents of households who are older than 18 years on selected plots.

For the qualitative method, systematic sampling was used selecting every 20th house. The researcher continued to select participants until the point of redundancy or saturation was reached. This point was attained when new interviews no longer yielded new information and all potential sources of variation had been adequately explored (Ellesberg & Heise 2005). A total of seven heads of households were selected for in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide.

The study made use of two data collection methods, namely in-depth interviews and questionnaires. For qualitative data, interviews were conducted with the head of the household and arrangements were made with them regarding a convenient date and time prior to the interview. The interviews were conducted only by the researcher and the interviews were done in English and Oshiwambo since the vast majority of new settlers were Oshiwambo³ speaking. Only seven in-depth interviews were conducted, as saturation was reached by then. The interviews were recorded on audiotape and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were taken to keep track of what was done in the field and document important information from the interview that could not be recorded by audio tape recorder, such as non-verbal cues and this helped to validate data. The themes that were raised from the qualitative interviews were: Rural-urban food transfer; Informal sector activities; Social networks and remittance; Types of livelihoods; and Role of government in community development.

To collect quantitative data, questionnaires were administered to the respondents in the households. The aim of the questionnaire was to collect the demographic information, socio-economic conditions, employment status, livelihood patterns as well as coping strategies employed by residents to overcome poverty in the households. Since the interviews took place during working hours, two call backs were done during weekends to each household that was vacant during the week, but no response was obtained from 27 households. This gives a total of visited households as 123. Two research assistants were trained in the completion of the questionnaire survey.

3 The Oshiwambo language consists of several dialects, Oshimbalantu, Oshindonga, Oshikwambi, Oshingandjera, Oshikolonkadhi, Oshikwaluudhi, Oshimbandja and Oshikwanyama. However, Oshikwanyama is the dialect which most Oshiwambo speakers are familiar with and which was used in the survey. At the time of obtaining the sample frame from the Windhoek City officials they informed us that the vast majority of residents are Oshiwambo speaking according to their records.

2.3 Data analysis

For qualitative data, data analysis was carried out concurrently with data collection to note new emerging issues that need clarification for further interviews. Manual analysis of data through thematic content analysis was done by the researcher. Collected data was transcribed verbatim to ensure that no information was lost prior to data analysis and translated to English by the researcher.

The data analysis followed the five steps of thematic framework. Firstly, after each interview, familiarisation of data was done by listening to the recorded tapes, studying the field notes and reflective notes, and reading the transcribed data to list the ideas. The main ideas that emerged were then recorded. Secondly, the main issues, concepts, categories and sub-categories derived from the data were grouped together and then a code assigned to each group category using a colour highlighter. Thereafter, the main ideas that were identified were grouped into five major categories, namely: rural-urban food transfer; informal sector activities; social networks and remittance; types of livelihoods; and role of government in community development. The comparison between raw data and the established data was done to identify new ideas or categories. At the end of each subsequent interview, data was charted and checked for any similarities or differences with the existing themes. Finally, the derived themes were grouped together, summarised and illustrated with quotes, thereby giving meaning to the analysed data.

Quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) data analysis software (Version 23). Frequencies and proportions were used to describe categorical data, and means and standard deviations were used for continuous data. Descriptive statistics and elementary inferential statistics were applied to analyse the data. The frequency of a particular response to a question was calculated in percentages and the data was illustrated using bar charts, pie charts and tables. Univariate and bivariate correlations and cross-tabulations of independent with dependent variables were also done. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

In order to promote rigour in the study, the research inquiry criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used. Credibility was achieved through member checking with the participants. Validity was ensured by cross-culturally translating the questionnaires into the local language. In order to ensure face and content validity, the questionnaire was piloted before the main study. To improve reliability, two research assistants were trained prior to data collection and the researcher checked all the questionnaires in the field for completeness. Conformability was used through audit trials and transferability was used through the use of quotations and description of participants to illustrate findings.

2.4 Ethical consideration

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economics and Management, University of the Free State. Permission to conduct the study was sought and granted by the Namibia Ministry of Health and Social Services. Confidentiality of the participants was ensured by using individual coding numbers for both quantitative and qualitative data prior to the interviews; all participants were given participant information sheets in the participant's preferred language explaining the purpose of the research. Written consent was obtained from all participants once they had agreed to participate and they were informed that they can withdraw from the study at any time. To ensure anonymity, identifiers were removed from the transcripts and audio tapes. The participants were notified that participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time during the study.

2.5 Limitations of the study

The findings of this study were limited to the Khomas region and in particular the Babylon informal settlement. In addition, this study was limited to participants who could speak English and Oshiwambo, since these are the most spoken languages in the study area. Therefore, participants who could not speak these languages were excluded from the study, which could mean that valuable information that could have been derived from these people is not contained in this report.

Since the study focused on one informal settlement in Windhoek and on a small sample, the findings from the study cannot be generalised to informal settlements country wide. However, the findings can be a representative of what can be found in similar informal settlements in Windhoek and the lesson learnt could be interpreted by others within their own context. The recommendations may not be relevant to any other areas in Namibia apart from Windhoek where the study was conducted.

3. Findings

3.1 Demographic characteristics of respondents

A total of 123 household questionnaires were completed, yielding a response rate of 82%. According to the data collected (see Table 1), the results show that the majority of the respondents were males (56.1%) compared to females (43.9%).

Table 1: Demographics of respondents (n=123) by number and percentage

Gender	N	%
Female	54	44
Male	69	56
Marital status		
Single-headed households	90	73
Married	16	13
Live-in partner	15	12
Widow	2	2
Age		
18-35	85	69
36-55	34	28
56 and above	4	3
Educational level		
No schooling	7	6
Primary	80	65
Secondary	31	25
Tertiary	5	4
Unemployment level		
Employed	31	25
Unemployed	92	75
Main type of employment		
Informal traders	22	71
Domestic work	4	13
Office work	3	10
Security guards	2	6

The results further indicate that the majority (73%) of households sampled were single-headed households, married (13%), live-in partner (12%) and widowed (2%). The fact that three quarters of the population are single-headed households already rendered these households vulnerable, since there is no partner to take co-responsibility for maintaining the livelihood. The age distribution of the respondents shows that the households sampled were in the age range of 18 to 35 (69%), 36 to 55 (28%), and 56 and above (3%). The mean age was 26 to 35 years. Typical of many migrant communities, these are young communities, as the pioneers who moved away are often the ones that can 'afford' the risk of migration. This is consistent with similar findings on Namibia's informal settlements which indicated that these informal settlements have fairly young populations. The youth broad unemployment rate is also 45%, the highest for any age cohort, which means that one out of every two young people under the age of 35 years is in search of a job (See Namibia Statistics Agency, 2019).

Education is an important personal asset, a key indicator of human capital and it also determines the socio-economic and demographic profiles of the informal settlement community. A very small proportion of household heads (4%) had a post-secondary qualification (see Table 1). The results show that larger proportions of females (5.6%) have tertiary education than males (2.9%). A non-significant negative correlation between education level and gender ($r = -.014$, $p = .875$) was found. When age was correlated with education level, a significant negative correlation was found ($r = -.379$, $p < .0005$). This means that the older the respondents, the less educated they are, and the younger the respondent, the higher the level of education is.

Respondents were asked about their employment status and the type of work that they do. The majority (75%) of the respondents are unemployed, while 25% are employed (See Table 1). This is not surprising, since informal settlements are reported to have high levels of poverty. On the main type of employment, 22% work as informal traders, 4% do domestic work, while 3% and 2% do office work and are security guards, respectively. On average, more males (35%) were employed than females (17%). When respondents were asked to specify their type of work, a number of responses were given. Most respondents work as day care teachers (28%), while the lowest response (3%) work as nail technicians, carpenters and hairdressers⁴. A negative significant correlation was found between gender and income ($r = -.382$, $p = .001$). Generally, female residents of Babylon earned significantly less income than males do. A correlation coefficient of $-.382$ means that gender explains 38.2% of the variance in income of people in informal settlements such as Babylon. These findings are in line with the findings of the Labour Force Survey of Namibia (Namibia, Statistics Agency, 2019:53) and which indicated that more females tend to derive their livelihood incomes from informal employment than males. In fact, according to the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation (2017), 70% of the informally employed were women.

4 These figures are not reflected in the included Tables.

3.2 Rural urban migration and reason for coming to the city

Table 2: Migration patterns to Babylon, Windhoek

Place of origin	Frequency	Percent
Oshana	25	23.8
Omusati	20	19
Ohangwena	22	21
Oshikoto	18	17.1
Kavango East	8	7.6
Kavango West	4	3.8
Erongo	4	3.8
Omaheke	2	1.9
Otjozondjupa	2	1.9
Total	105	100.0

The results indicate that the majority of the respondents are immigrants to the city and only 11% were born in Windhoek. Table 2 indicates the frequencies of the place of origin of the respondents. The study shows that 81% of the respondents originated from rural North West regions/Owamboland, 11% from rural North East and West regions, 4% from Erongo, and 2% from Omaheke and Otjozondjupa. This correlates with the recent findings of the Namibia Labour Force Survey (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2019:67) which indicated the highest youth unemployment rates for four regions (i.e. Kavango East with 62%, Kunene with 53%, Ohangwena with 51% and Oshikoto with 50%) are all regions in the Rural North East and North West of Namibia. Various reasons were raised by respondents on why they came to the city. Table 3 below represents the reasons why respondents moved to the city. The study revealed that 57% (n=60) of the respondents came to the city to look for jobs, 12% (n=13) moved with family, 11% (n=11) moved because of better services in the city, 8% (n=8) came for tertiary education, 6% (n=6) transferred with work, while 2% (n=2) came for better healthcare. These pull factors all related to a perceived better living standard for the informal settlers in Windhoek, the capital of Namibia. The Namibia Statistics Agency (2016:107) also indicated that the regions of Kunene, Kavango East, Zambesi and Omaheke had the highest poverty levels compared to the rest of the country.

Table 3: Reasons for coming to the city

Reasons for coming to Windhoek	Frequency	Percent
To look for a job	60	57.1
Better services in the city	11	10.5
Tertiary education	8	7.6
Transferred with work	6	5.7
Moved with family	13	12.4
For better healthcare	2	1.9
Total	105	100.0

3.3 Availability of basic services

The study shows that 98% of the sampled households are made of corrugated iron and only 2% of the households are built with drums that are gathered from dumping sites. In the study area, communal water taps are available and residents use a pre-paid water system where rechargeable cards are loaded before they get water from these communal water taps. No single resident in Babylon has a private water supply/tap next to their dwelling or in their plots. The tariffs for water in formal and informal Katutura Windhoek are the same (N\$15.45 per Kilolitre⁵). On average, a household in Babylon spends approximately N\$80 on water recharge per month.

With regard to electricity, all respondents (100%) indicated that they do not have electricity in their households and in the entire location. Electricity is only available at the community centre. This is not surprising, because access to electricity generally goes hand in hand with the type of housing in the area. Since there are no improved housing structures in the study area, there is no electricity in the households in the entire location. Electricity is only available at the community centre. However, there are many informal settlements with electricity, so informality does not exclude the possibility of having electricity provided.

The results indicated that waste removal services is available in the location whereby the municipality collects garbage once a week. Refuse is collected at various refuse sites in Babylon and not at households like in the formal locations. Only 5.9% of the total number of sampled households indicated that there is a fire brigade in their location which was not observed by the researcher.

5 The N\$ and US \$ exchange rate was 0,068 in September 2019. This renders an amount of 1,05 USD per kilolitre.

Respondents were asked about the assets in their possession that assist them in coping and reducing vulnerabilities. The most common assets that are owned by respondents are mobile telephones (98%), radio (52%), television (17%), modern furniture (24%), bank account (72%)⁶ and chairs and table (87%). Only 16% of the sampled households have indicated owning refrigerators. Regarding transport, 15.4% own cars, 4.1% own bicycles, and 0.8% own motorcycles. Furthermore, respondents were asked if there has been any change in their belongings since moving to Babylon. Of these, 66% responded that their belongings stayed the same, 25% indicated that it decreased and the remaining 9% reported that it increased.

3.4 Land ownership and lived experience

All households (n=123) that were sampled indicated that they occupy municipality land. Respondents further indicated that the whole Babylon location's land belongs to the municipality and the residents are waiting for the allocation of private ownership of ervens (erfs) by the municipality as the municipality promised to upgrade their location.

Interesting findings emerged from when respondents were asked if they own land in other parts of the country; 35% of the respondents indicated that they own properties in other parts of the country compared to 65% who do not own any property outside Windhoek. It was remarkable to note that all the respondents who own properties outside Windhoek are from the northern regions. Eighty-four per cent of these people are from Owamboland (Oshana, Omusati, Ohangwena, Oshikoto), while 16% are from the two Kavango regions (Kavango East and West). On sources of energy, the study showed that 50.4% use gas, 36.6% use paraffin, and 28.5% make use of fire wood.

Participants were asked to share their lived experience in Babylon by indicating whether they think they made a good decision moving to the study area or not. Forty-two percent of the respondents specified that life in Babylon is not as good as they thought, 33% said yes it is as they thought it will be; 15.4% responded that it is far below what they thought it will be, while 9.6% said that it is even better than what they thought. Lived experience was correlated with various independent variables as follows: No significant correlations were found between age and lived experience; and gender and lived experience. Additionally, a negative significant relationship was found between employment and lived experience ($r=-.216$, $p=.016$). It indicates that people with employment have a significantly more positive lived experience than those without a formal job

All the households sampled (n=123) indicated that they have access to communal flushing toilets in their location. However, some respondents, from the in-depth

6 A bank account is significant since most employers prefer for safety and traceability reasons to pay by electronic transfers and not in cash.

interviews, indicated that most of these toilets are out of order and some people make the toilets their private properties as they lock the toilets by claiming that people make them dirty and they do not clean them. As a result, some people end up using the riverbeds and bushes for ablution especially at night.

The following insertion supports the above statement:

“some people in this location are so selfish they make toilets as their own because they say we make the toilets dirty and we don’t clean them, so they put up their locks at the toilets, we end up using those (pointing to the river bed next to the house) riverbed and bush”

3.5 Households coping strategies

Households in the study area employ various coping mechanisms in order to cope with poverty and decrease vulnerabilities. These strategies include remittance from relatives who live in both urban or rural areas and sharing of consumer goods between neighbours. In terms of having a good lived experience in Babylon informal settlement, it seems that having a job or not (employment status) is the most important factor that will determine whether an informal settlement dweller will have a positive life experience or not. However, this finding does not validate the notion that one could still struggle to cope irrespective of having a job or owning private assets as the full psycho-social condition of the respondents were not tested. It seems from the quantitative research that the typical households that struggle the most to experience life as positive were single-headed unemployed female households, mostly also with low education levels. This is consistent with the findings of the National Household Income and Expenditure Survey (2015/2016) (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2016) where the incidence of female-headed households were 19.2% compared to 15.8% of male-headed households.

The majority of respondents (60%) reported that they receive staple food from their relatives who live in Owamboland/North West and North east regions of the country. However, some respondents from northern regions (Owamboland and Okavango) stated that due to the drought situation that has been in the country since 2013, the supply of food has now reduced because there are no more surpluses. To survive, people in the rural areas of North West Namibia (Ovamboland) and North East Namibia (Kavango East and West) largely rely on subsistence farming of field crop such as mahangu⁷, maize and beans, unlike the people in the southern parts of the country who rely on livestock farming because of the rocky and mountainous areas that they inhabit.

Below is a transcript from one of the respondents that substantiates the findings above:

“My mother use to send me mahangu and beans whenever I do not have enough food to eat and every time I go home I come back with a bag of mahangu but now it is difficul because of the drought at home [referring to Owamboland]. It is not easy anymore, my family used to send

⁷ Mahangu is a local crop one makes flour from.

me mahangu flour but with the drought we are experiencing, it is not possible anymore. If they send me the little that they have, what will my children eat at home⁸

The study results demonstrated that 50.4% of rural households send food or other goods to their relatives in the informal settlement at least once a month, while 49.6% do not send anything. The study further revealed that there is a strong neighbourhood link among residents of Babylon as demonstrated by 95% of respondents who indicated that they have a good relation with their neighbours. Eighty-five percent indicated that they receive consumer goods, 13% receive money and 3% receive durable goods from their neighbours. Other respondents specified that they receive other forms of assistance such as assistance with water card (75%) and to look after their houses (15%).

This is supported by the in-depth interviews with the following quotes:

“My neighbours are very good people, they always helping me with their card for water when mine is finished and when I am having no money to recharge or on weekend when the place to recharge the card is closed”

Some respondents, however, had different views about assistance from neighbours and relatives, as shown below:

Aaye [no], I don't get anything from them, how can they help me if they also have their children who are in school”

The results further show that Babylon residents believe that it is important to receive money or other goods/remittance from relatives in order to survive in their households. This is evident from the 49.6% who ascribe to this notion of receiving goods from relatives as opposed to 15.5% who said it is not important and 4% were found to be neutral.

3.6 Types of livelihoods

Informal trading has been found to be the main sources of livelihood in the informal settlements, as 88% of the respondents make a living from informal employment. The most recent Labour Force Survey of Namibia (Namibia, Statistics Agency, 2019:53) indicated that 57.7% of the employed population of Namibia are in informal employment. It seems that households in informal settlements are significantly more dependant on informal employment than the national average. It is also important to note that there are many more types of informal employment than just selling things such as family care, taxi driving, accommodation, mending clothes, shoe repairs, etc.

“I do not have a formal job; I just survive on selling things here and there, mainly meat at the open market in Okahandja Park because we do not have an open market. Sometime the business is good as one can make about N\$1700 profit per month but other times I make less

8 “My children at home” refers in this instance to the children of the respondent who remained in the rural areas under the care of their grand parents.

when there is no meat at the farms”.

Informal credit has also been found to contribute significantly to the livelihood of the people in the informal settlements during difficult times. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that they get informal credit from other people in their community. This demonstrates the strong social link and how important social interconnectedness is in the event of difficulties among the people of informal settlements.

The following insert supports the above statement:

“I just have to survive like a bird and see where to get food except stealing. Sometimes I call my former bosses to ask if I cannot even go and clean their yards so that I can at least get some money to buy food. If they say no then I just stay here with friends and see if they get something and we share or even get a loan of N\$100 and give it back when I get. If all that fail then I just have to watch the fire at night”.

Even though the use of formal credit is being widely practised in many parts of the world, it is not a common practice in Babylon. The study shows that only 4.1% of the people in the study area cope through formal credit during difficult times. The study further indicates that only a few of the respondents (22.8%) are sometimes forced to sell some of their belongings because they need money. This means that selling one's belongings is not a common practice in Babylon.

Inserts from in-depth interviews support the above statistics, while other quotes oppose it:

“I have livestock in Owamboland; I sometimes sell some to provide for my family. How can I sell my things, what will I have tomorrow if I sell them? It is even against my culture to sell my things just like that. I just have to survive like a bird”

4. Discussion

Overall, the results indicated that the informal settlement population in Windhoek is predominantly male. This skewed gender distribution can be attributed to the migration of male populations who usually leave rural areas to go and make a living for their families in urban and peri-urban areas. Namibia also has a long colonial history of decades of male migration to places of work prior to 1990. The majority (75%) of the respondents are unemployed, while 25% are employed. This is not surprising, since informal settlements are reported to have high levels of poverty. High rates of unemployment and lack of education also conflated the socio-economic challenges further in these informal areas (Ndiweni *et al.* 2014). However, Alcock (2015) and Fourie (2018) indicated the importance of the informal sector in many of the high density or township areas of South Africa, as an important safety net for livelihood incomes.

Single-headed households are believed to be more vulnerable to poverty than other households (Magalhaes and Eduardo 2012). This study reported that there is a large

concentration of single-headed households (73.2%) in Babylon, and further reveals that a substantial number of people have low levels of education, as 60% have primary-level education. This finding has a negative impact on the employability of these people as they may find it difficult to find jobs in the formal sector. However, it is always important to contextualise findings of employment and labour as an issue of the informal/formal employment divide. According to the Namibian Statistics Agency (2016) informal sector was the main employer accommodating 67% of employment while the formal sector only creates 33% of Namibia's employment in 2016.

Household profile consists of the size of the household and the sex of the head of the household. This information is pivotal in the analysis of households, as male-headed households are regarded as better off than female headed households due to the position of women in society. Moreover, houses that are overcrowded are associated with food insecurities and pose health hazards, such as higher risks for communicable diseases (Ministry of Health and Social Services 2010). However, other studies also indicated that higher numbers of inhabitants in a single household coped better as their incomes are aggregated in order to cater for month long needs (Ndiweni *et al.*) The study indicated an average household size of five people as compared to three in the two other studies on Windhoek's informal settlements (Newaya 2010 and Taukuheke 2010). This is an indication that household densities are quite high for the study areas compared to other informal settlements.

Although a non-significant correlation was found between years lived in Windhoek and monthly income ($r=.122$, $p=.289$), the trend in the data indicates that residents who lived longer in Windhoek have better paying jobs than the new residents. This means that it takes new residents time to secure jobs in the formal sector. Moreover, the analysis further indicates that older residents of Windhoek have more networks and better access to the economy than newer residents. It takes time to build social capital in a relocated setting. It seems that those who settled earlier in Windhoek also had lower poverty levels than the new settlers.

The study indicated that the majority of the people in Babylon moved to the city in search of employment. In their study (Indongo *et al.* 2013 and Niikondo 2010), they also found similar results in studies done in informal settlements around Windhoek. This is understandable with a general broad unemployment rate for Namibia of 33.4% (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2019).

This study evidently shows that informal settlements in Windhoek are made from corrugated iron, which is consistent with the findings of Newaya (2010) and Taukuheke (2010). Houses in informal settlements are typically known to be made of poor quality materials. This makes them vulnerable to natural disasters such as rain, fire and strong wind (Newaya 2010). Even though houses in informal settlements are of poor condition, it shows that the residents are trying to provide shelter for themselves and their families instead of depending on the government to provide them with houses.

A household that possesses durable goods is regarded to have a good socio-economic status. Furthermore, various items serve the households with benefits. Items such as a television and a radio in the household will expose the household to inventive thoughts from outside, possessing a car will improve the transportation means to further places, and a refrigerator will improve food storage and freshness (Ministry of Health and Social Services 2014). Even though owning a refrigerator has been regarded as an important asset in some informal settlements in some South African suburbs (Botes *et al.* 2001), only 16% of the sampled households have indicated owning refrigerators that are powered with gas. This low incidence can be attributed to the lack of electricity in the study area.

A great concern was raised by residents that local government needs to provide the community with ervens (erfs) so that they can regain their human rights in order to build houses for their families and have a place that they call home. This, therefore, means that the municipality needs to service land and provide erfs to the residents so that they can improve their shelters (houses) into conventional houses. It was interesting to note that all the respondents who own properties outside Windhoek are from the northern regions. These finding could be explained by the cultural practice in the northern regions, whereby an individual is expected to move out of the family house and find his/her own place to stay once he/she reaches a certain age, unlike in other parts of the country, particularly the southern parts of the country. In the North of Namibia people also have access to more natural building materials like wood from trees, grass, etc. compared to the South due to a different climate i.e. more rain, bushveld type vegetation, etc. making it easier for people to erect their own traditional houses.

According to (Ministry of Health and Social Services 2014) quoting the WHO (2011), cooking with solid fuels such as wood, animal dung and charcoal is regarded as a health hazard that can lead to household members contracting disease due to high levels of fumes inside the house. In contrast, this study shows a high rate of gas use (50.4%), followed by paraffin (36.6%). It is, however, evident in this study that the inhabitants of Babylon are not satisfied with life in their area. On the same note, it is interesting to note that they still believe that they made a good decision moving to Babylon as opposed to living in the rural areas where they came from.

According to the National Income and Expenditure Survey of Namibia, 2015/2016 of the population in Namibia, 17.4% were considered poor as having less than N\$520.8 per month to live from (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2016). Households in the study area employ various coping mechanisms in order to cope with poverty and decrease vulnerabilities. These strategies include remittance from relatives who live in both urban and rural areas and sharing of consumer goods between neighbours. These mechanisms are very common in informal settlements and assist households to survive economic hardships in the city. These findings are coherent with the results of Newaya (2010) who found that 99.1% of the respondents receive food from the rural areas. In addition,

many people survive on the staple food that they receive from rural areas, mainly from Owamboland, as indicated by 54% in this study. Often, poor households in urban informal areas survive on food that is produced in rural areas (Frayne 2007). Rural to urban food transfer therefore plays a pivotal role in reducing vulnerabilities among urban informal settlement households.

Social capital in the sustainable livelihood approach signifies networks whereby people make social contacts with one another in the community. According to Mazibuko (2013), social networks prevent social isolation and act as a safety net against poverty in the community through local organisations such as social clubs or stokvels. This supports the current study that indicates that the majority of the respondents indicated sending remittance to their relatives and this confirms that there is a strong social link between rural and urban households.

Although membership to community social clubs is regarded as one of the most important coping mechanism of informal households, this study clearly demonstrated a very low figure (11%) of social clubs, indicating that social clubs are not a common practice in the study area.

Due to a high unemployment rate in the country, most people make use of the alternative ways to earn a living. Informal settlement dwellers employ numerous techniques in order to overcome the vulnerabilities that they face. Some measures that the residents of informal settlements use are illegal and not permissible. However, these informal activities are crucial in improving the survival of the households in the informal settlements. Informal trading has been found to be the main sources of livelihood in the informal settlements, as 88% of the respondents make a living from the informal sector. This is also supported by another study (Charman & Petersen 2015).

Even though the use of formal credit is being widely practised in many parts of the world, it is not a common practice in Babylon. This could be due to high unemployment levels as security is needed when you borrow formal credit from the banking institutions. This is supported with the findings of the Namibia Informal Sector Case Study Report (Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation, 2017). It is clear that rural urban networks are a vital coping mechanism for people living in the informal areas. Even though the informal sector is not reliable at times, most households in the current study depend on informal trading for survival to overcome vulnerabilities. This, therefore, means that the informal sector is one of the crucial coping strategies for poor urban households in the informal settlements. A Zambian study concurred with these findings when they found that many people in informal settlements of major towns in Zambia depend on informal activities such as trading petty commodities for survival (World Bank 2018). Findings from a study done in South Africa further support the above where they found that people were surviving on selling meat, cigarettes and other goods on the street (Charman & Petersen 2014). It is clear that the informal sector is not reliable as there are times when there is no income; therefore, people in informal

settlements do multiple jobs in order to supplement their income as indicated in this study. Sending children to rural areas is another strategy that some people in informal settlements do. These findings support the *Zambian study* that found that poor people in urban areas send their children to rural areas in order to overcome vulnerabilities in urban areas (World Bank 2018).

Urban agriculture has been found to contribute to food security and as a coping measure for the people of informal settlements in South Africa and Zimbabwe (Westoby 2014, Mhalanga 2012 & Grobler 2015). However, urban agricultural practice in the study area is not a common practice in Babylon. This could be due to a lack of land and a high cost for water in the city as well as the fact that Windhoek now has for many years water restrictions due to protracted periods of drought, being a semi-arid area.

Provision of shelter to the households is one of the basic fundamental human rights (United Nations Human Settlement Programme 2012). UNDP Namibia decided to focus their recent Accelerator Lab Network on the informal settlements of Namibia. This focus directly operationalise goals 5⁹ and 11¹⁰ of the SDGs in that livelihoods and households in Namibia's informal sector is regarded as the most precarious (Maritz, 2020). A great concern was raised by residents that local government needs to provide the community with ervens so that they can regain their human rights such as building houses for their families and having a place that they call home. This therefore means that the municipality needs to service land and provide ervens to the residents so that they can improve their shelters (houses) into conventional houses.

5. Conclusions

The study revealed that rural urban migration is a never ending process as people continue to migrate from rural to urban areas, chiefly in search of employment opportunities. Whereas this is so, the study showed a notable skewed income disparity in favour of males.

The study indicates that most of the people in Babylon live in deplorable states that expose them to risks and make them vulnerable, which supports the first part of the sustainable livelihood approach that represents the vulnerability context of the framework.

Nonetheless, the analysis demonstrates that even though residents of Babylon are vulnerable, they have assets that assist them in overcoming hardship and improving their livelihood. However, the study revealed that only physical and social capitals are seen as positive. The results indicate a good social link between the residents of Babylon, which strengthens the existing social capital through remittance and rural to urban food

9 SDG Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

10 SDG Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

transfers and consequently eliminating social isolation/exclusion. Physical public assets were observed as positive because residents were provided with some of the basic services such as safe drinking water (piped water), improved sanitation (flushing toilets) and refuse removal, even though they are not sufficient. This is vital since the aforementioned services improve the dignity of the people and their human development status.

Conclusions can therefore be made that not all the assets in the sustainable livelihood framework are available for the residents of Babylon. Therefore, the people of Babylon remain vulnerable and much still needs to be done for the livelihoods of the people of Babylon to be sustainable. The decision-makers and planners in local government should take note of how people in informal settlements are making a living. They should deliberately ask the question how they could support the livelihood coping strategies and survival practices of these marginalised communities for the better. In other words, the planners should make sure in their planning efforts they follow the principles and practices of participatory governance, but also taking into consideration the assets and the needs of communities such as Babylon. After all, these informal settlers deserve more in life than just to survive like birds ...

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