

Namibians look to social movement to prompt government action on land reform

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 289 | Thomas Isbell, Ndapwa Alweendo, and Mikhail Moosa

Summary

Access to land is a contentious issue in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, a legacy of colonialism and accompanying dispossession. While neighbouring South Africa has moved toward expropriation without compensation (Ngcukaitobi, 2018; Pather, 2018), Namibia's debate has highlighted the need for urban land and housing to accommodate continuing rural-to-urban migration (Delgado & Lühl, 2018; Remmert & Ndhlovu, 2018).

In 2014, the "social movement" Affirmative Repositioning (AR) captured the attention of young, educated Namibians and placed the issue of unaffordable urban housing squarely on the national agenda (Kambala, Nauyoma, & Amupanda, 2015). Joining what has been described as "the biggest mass action since Namibia's independence" (Becker, 2016), thousands of young urbanites applied for serviced land from municipalities and threatened land occupation if their applications were not processed in a timely fashion (Namibian, 2014; Tjihenuna & Haidula, 2014). As AR grew into a large, mostly online community of concerned citizens, the government agreed to its demand to service 200,000 plots of urban land and make them available for housing (Immanuel, 2015).

Alongside AR, the Landless People's Movement (LPM) has gained political traction in Namibia with a focus on the return of ancestral lands (Namibian, 2017). The LPM was officially approved as a political party in February 2019 and is expected to participate in Namibia's national elections in November 2019 (NBC, 2019).

Namibia's official land policy focuses on resettlement and the transfer of agricultural land under a "willing seller, willing buyer" model (Mumbuu, 2018) that requires economic resources to access land. While the country's second land conference since independence, conducted in October 2018, closed without developing radical new policies, leaders expressed a greater commitment to active redistribution of land and emphasized the importance of urban land (Kuhanga, 2018).

Against this background, this dispatch examines Namibians' views on land and the movements that have challenged disparities in access to land. Findings from Afrobarometer's most recent survey show that Namibians – especially in the cities – consider land a high-priority problem that the government should but has largely failed to address. AR is seen as more effective than the LPM, opposition political parties, or the media in getting the government to take land issues seriously.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2015, and findings of Round 7 surveys (2016/2018) are being disseminated. Afrobarometer

conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Namibia, led by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), interviewed 1,200 adult Namibians between 5 and 27 November 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Namibia in 1999, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, and 2014.

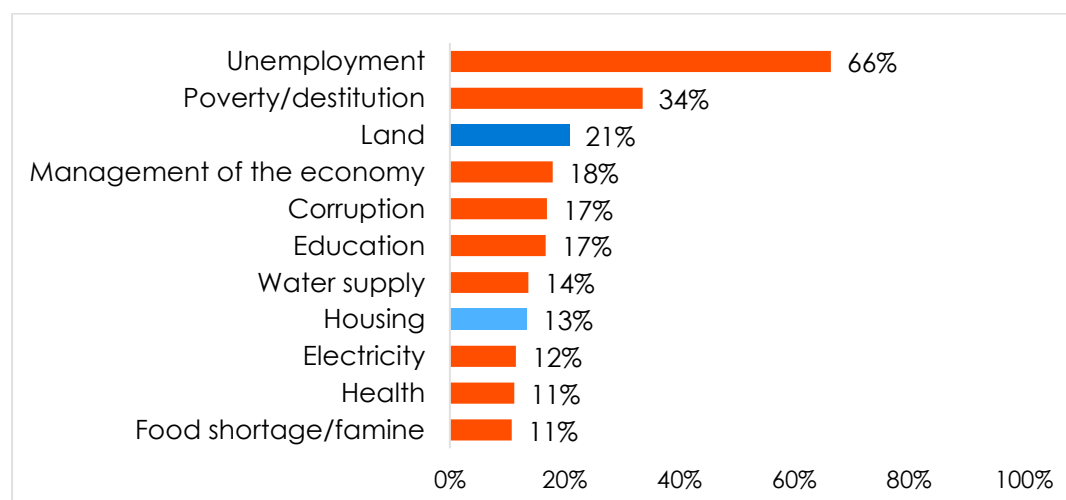
Key findings

- Land reform is one of the three most important problems that Namibians want their government to address. Urban residents especially emphasize the issue of land.
- More than half of Namibians say the government is ineffective in providing serviced land and housing in urban areas (52%) and in redistributing land to those who need it most (56%).
- Almost half (47%) of Namibians – including 63% of those with post-secondary education – say the social movement Affirmative Repositioning (AR) is closest to their views on the land issue, compared to only 10% who align with the Landless People's Movement (LPM).
- The AR movement is also widely seen as most effective in raising land issues with the government (41%). Only small minorities feel that the LPM (12%), opposition parties (8%), and the media (7%) are most effective in doing so.

Land as an important problem

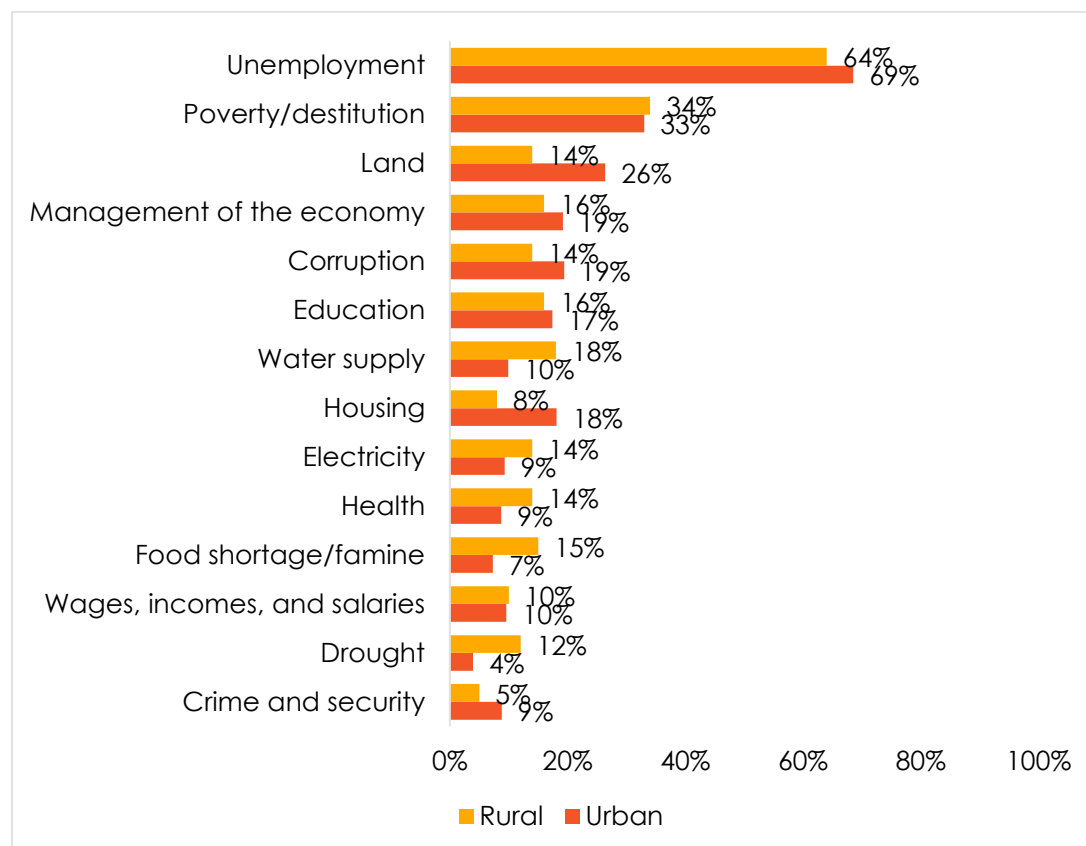
Land is the third-most-important problem that Namibians say their government should address, cited by one in five respondents (21%) as one of their three priorities. Only unemployment (cited by 66%) and poverty (34%) take precedence over land, which ranks ahead of management of the economy (18%), corruption (17%), and education (17%). In addition, 13% of respondents prioritized housing (Figure 1). Urban residents are almost twice as likely their rural counterparts to cite land (26% vs. 14%) and housing (18% vs. 8%) as high-priority problems (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Most important problems | Namibia | 2017



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Up to three responses per respondent were recorded.)

Figure 2: Most important problems | rural vs. urban | Namibia | 2017

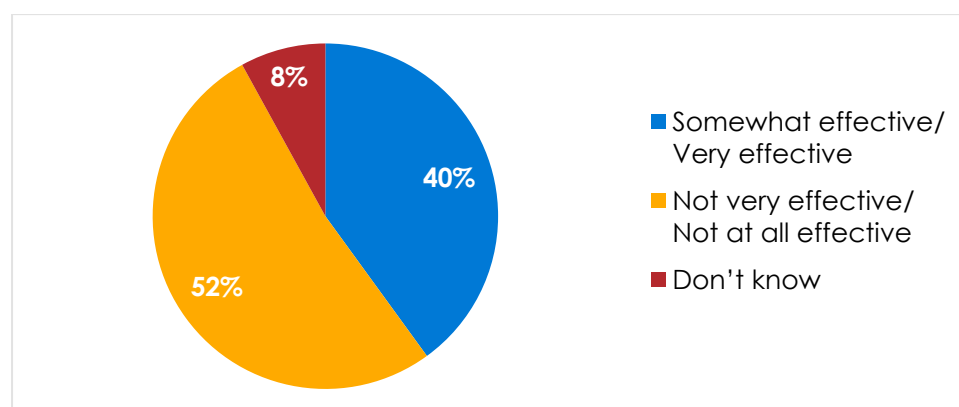


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Up to three responses per respondent were recorded.)

Providing land and housing in urban areas

More than half (52%) of Namibians say the government is “not very effective” or “not at all effective” in providing serviced land and housing in urban areas. Four in 10 respondents see the government’s efforts as “somewhat” or “very” effective, while 8% say they don’t know (Figure 3).

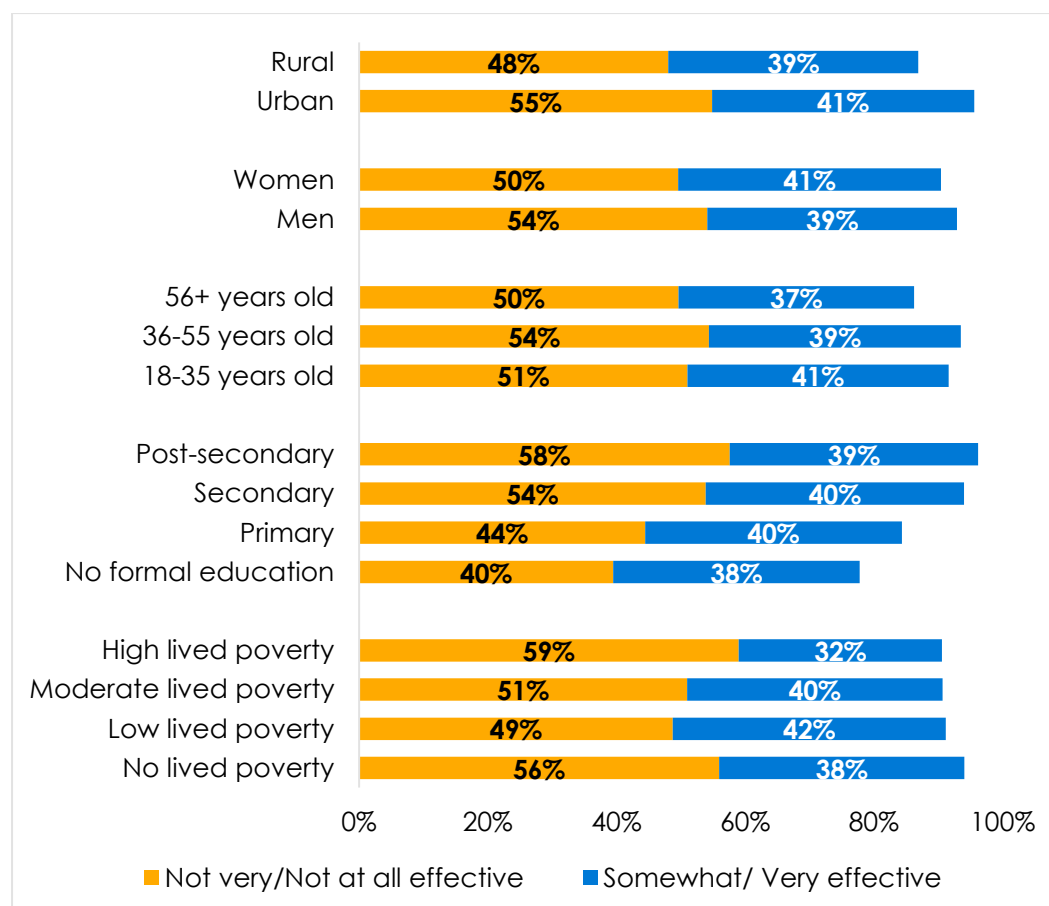
Figure 3: Government effectiveness in providing serviced land/housing in urban areas | Namibia | 2017



Respondents were asked: How would you rate each of the following, or haven't you heard enough to say: Government effectiveness in providing serviced land and housing in urban areas?

Negative assessments of government effectiveness in providing serviced land and housing in urban areas are more common among urban than rural residents (55% vs. 48%) and increase with respondents' education level, ranging from 40% of those with no formal education to 58% of those with post-secondary qualifications. The poorest respondents¹ are more likely to criticize the government on land and housing (59%) than their better-off compatriots (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Government effectiveness in providing serviced land/housing in urban areas | by socio-demographic group | Namibia | 2017



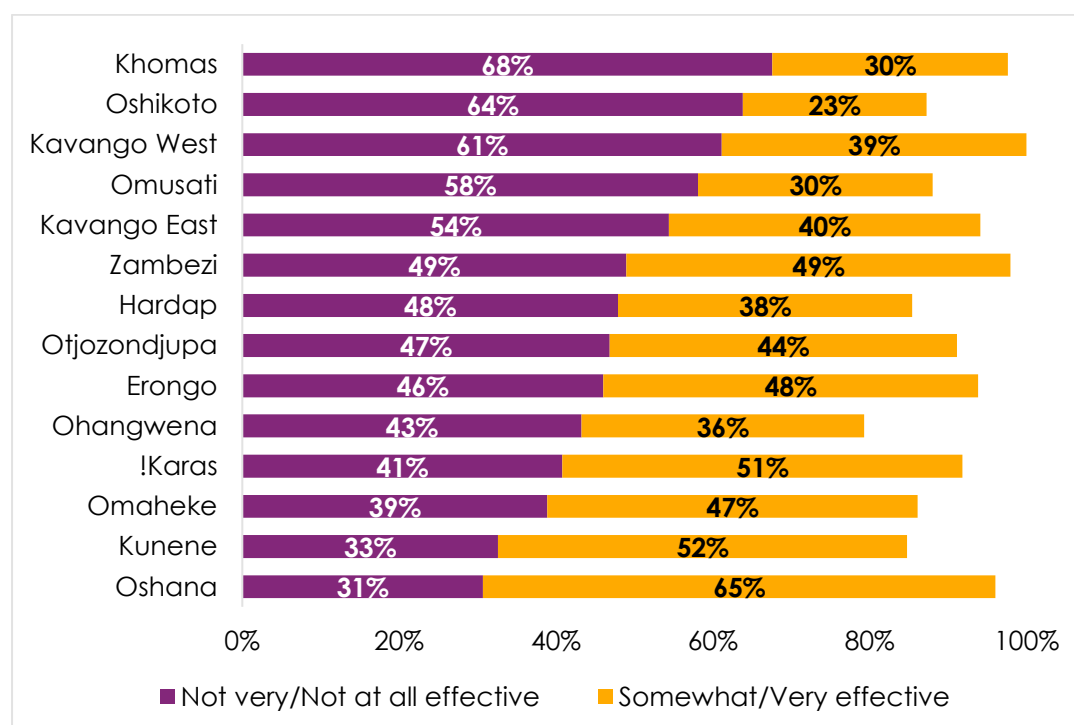
Respondents were asked: How would you rate each of the following, or haven't you heard enough to say: Government effectiveness in providing serviced land and housing in urban areas?

Perceptions of the government's effectiveness in providing land and housing vary widely by region.² Residents in Oshana (65%), Kunene (52%), and !Karas (51%) are most likely to see the government as effective, while majorities disagree in in Khomas (68%), Oshikoto (64%), Karango West (61%), Omusati (58%), and Kavango East (54%) (Figure 5).

¹ Afrobarometer assesses lived poverty based on responses to the following questions: "Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?"

² Reflecting their share of Namibia's total population, small sample sizes in some regions produce results with very large margins of error. Regional results should be interpreted with caution.

Figure 5: Government effectiveness in providing serviced land/housing in urban areas | by region | Namibia | 2017

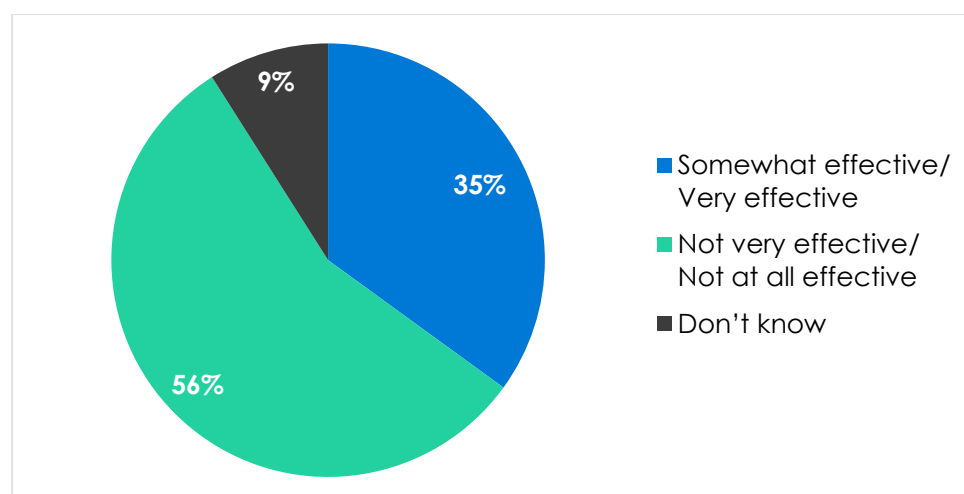


Respondents were asked: How would you rate each of the following, or haven't you heard enough to say: Government effectiveness in providing serviced land and housing in urban areas?

Providing land to those who need it most

As on the question of urban land and housing, a majority (56%) of Namibians say the government's land resettlement program is "not very effective" or "not at all effective" in redistributing land "to those who need it the most" (Figure 6). Only about one in three (35%) think the program is at least "somewhat effective," while 9% say they "don't know."

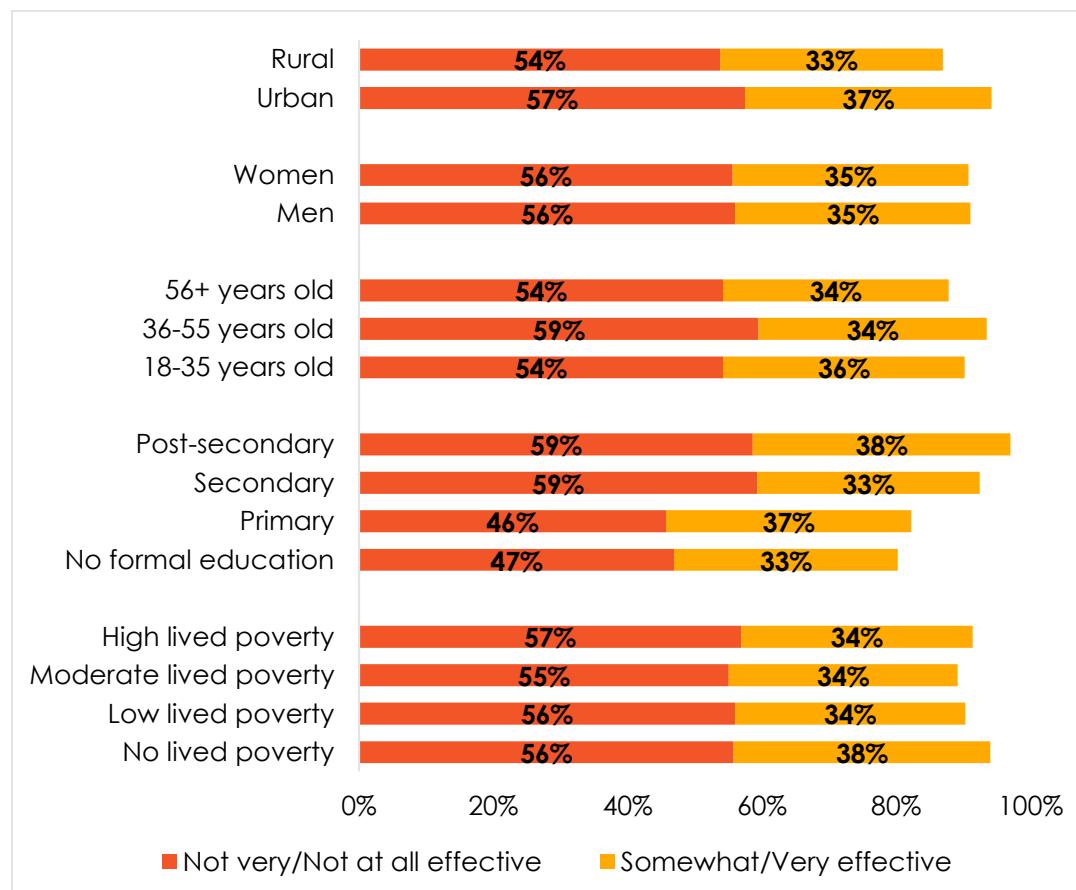
Figure 6: Effectiveness of government land resettlement program | Namibia | 2017



Respondents were asked: How would you rate each of the following, or haven't you heard enough to say: Effectiveness of the government's land resettlement program in redistributing land to those who need it the most?

Namibians with at least a secondary education (59%) are more critical of the government's land resettlement program than those with primary (46%) or no formal schooling (47%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Effectiveness of government land resettlement program | by socio-demographic group | Namibia | 2017



Respondents were asked: How would you rate each of the following, or haven't you heard enough to say: Effectiveness of the government's land resettlement programme in redistributing land to those who need it the most?

Representing people's views on land

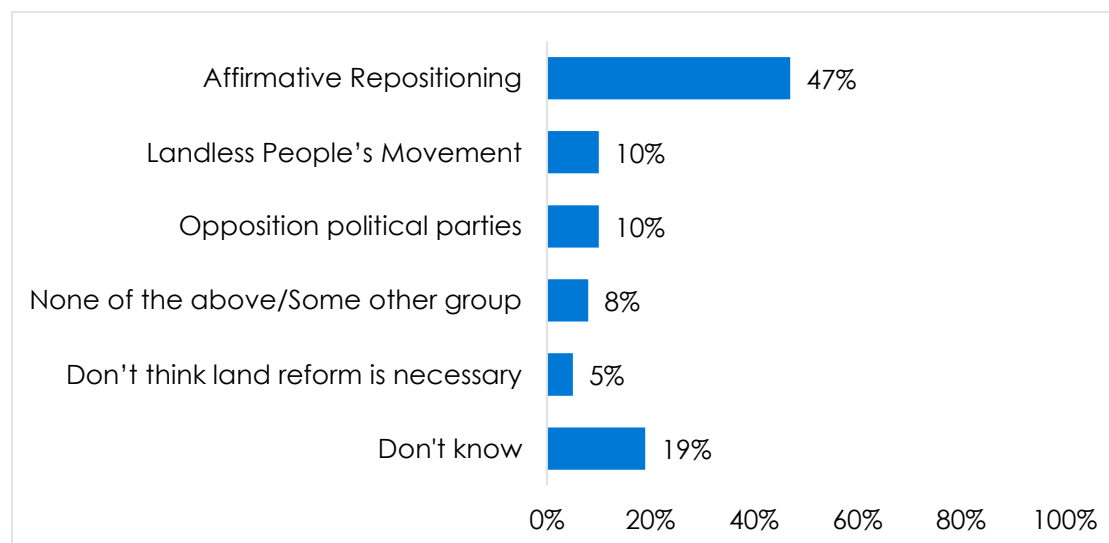
Asked which group best represent their personal views on land reform, almost half (47%) of Namibians choose Affirmative Repositioning (AR), far ahead of the Landless People's Movement (LPM) (10%) and opposition political parties (10%). Almost three in 10 say that they "don't know" (19%) or that none of these groups represents their views (8%), while only one in 20 (5%) say that land reform isn't necessary (Figure 8).

The AR appears to capture best the views of urban residents (52%), younger Namibians (50% among 18- to 35-year-olds), the more educated (63% among those with post-secondary qualifications), and those with low or no lived poverty (49%) (Figure 9).

By contrast, the LPM's strongest showing, at 15%, is among respondents with high lived poverty and those with no formal education.

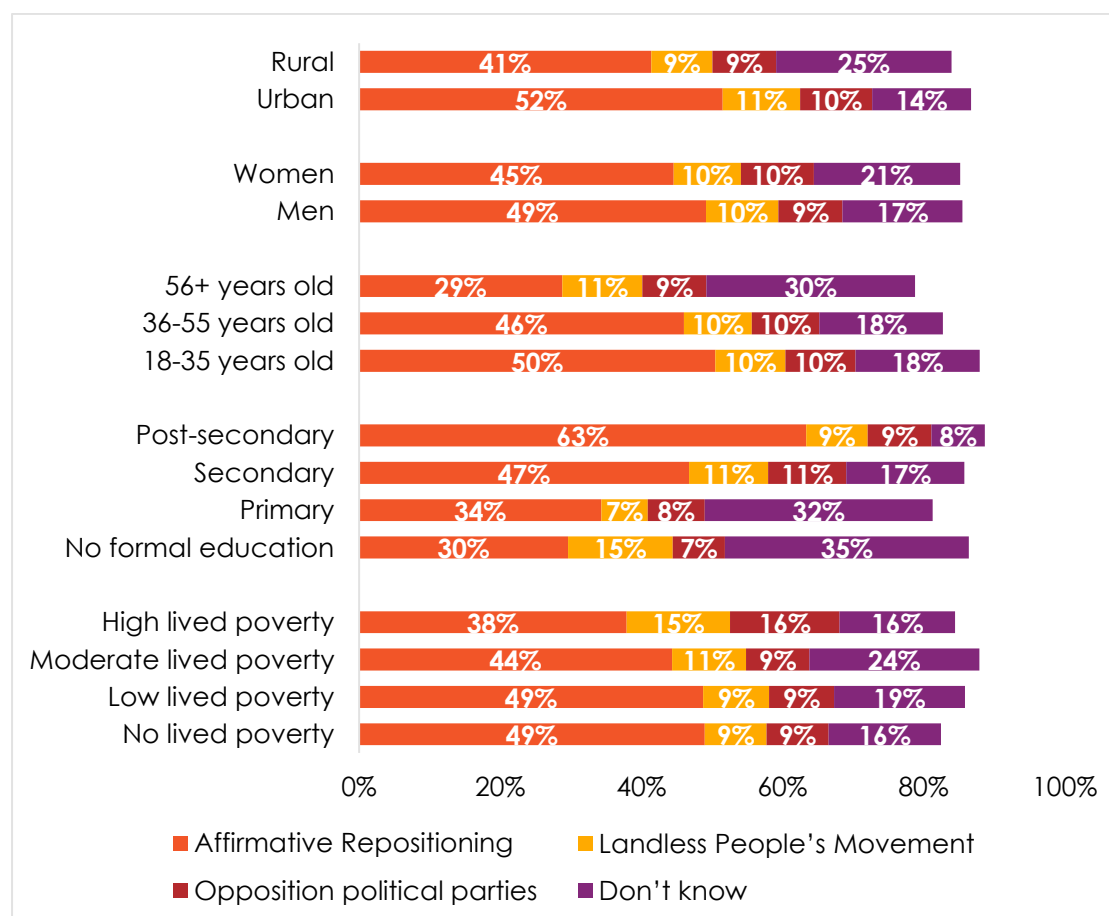
Meanwhile, substantial proportions of rural dwellers (25%), the elderly (30%), and those with primary (32%) or no formal education (35%) say they "don't know," suggesting that debate on land issues may not be fully reaching these demographic groups.

Figure 8: Which group represents citizens' views on land reform? | Namibia | 2017



Respondents were asked: And which of these groups most closely represents your own views regarding the best approach to land reform in Namibia, or do you think that land reform is not necessary?

Figure 9: Which group represents citizens' views on land reform? | by socio-demographic group | Namibia | 2017

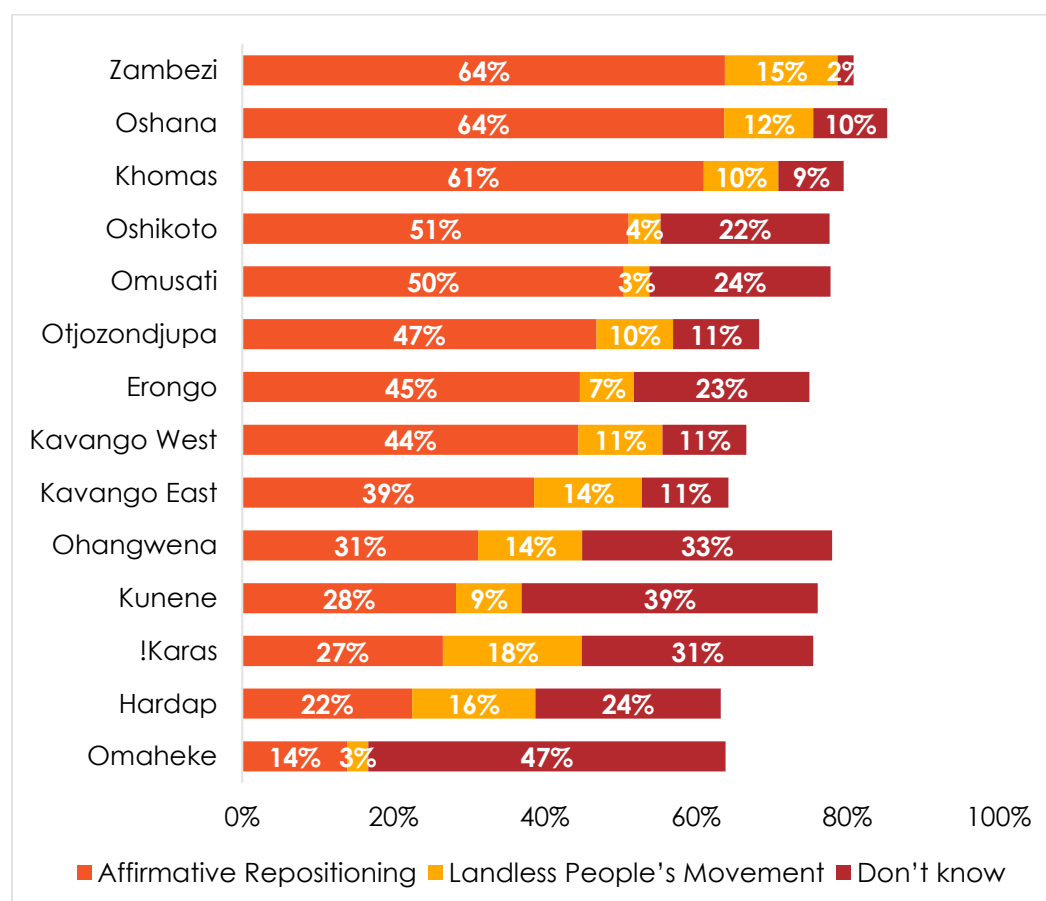


Respondents were asked: And which of these groups most closely represents your own views regarding the best approach to land reform in Namibia, or do you think that land reform is not necessary?

Considerable regional variation also marks popular views on who best represents ordinary Namibians on the issue of land reform (Figure 10). While AR is widely seen as most closely representing respondents' views in Zambezi (64%), Oshana (64%), and Khomas (61%), fewer than one in four respondents in Hardap (22%) and Omaheke (14%) feel this way. Large portions of respondents in Ohangwena (33%), Kunene (39%), and Omaheke (47%) say they don't know who represents their views on the land issue.

One explanation might be that AR focuses mainly on access to urban land (especially for Namibian youth), meaning that their presence is mostly felt in urban centers such as Windhoek (Khommas region), Oshakati (Oshana region), and Katima Mulilo (Zambezi region). Conversely, AR's priorities are less aligned with Namibians in areas where access to land for agriculture and livestock are bigger concerns.

Figure 10: Which group represents citizens' views on land reform? | by region
| Namibia | 2017



Respondents were asked: And which of these groups most closely represents your own views regarding the best approach to land reform in Namibia, or do you think that land reform is not necessary?

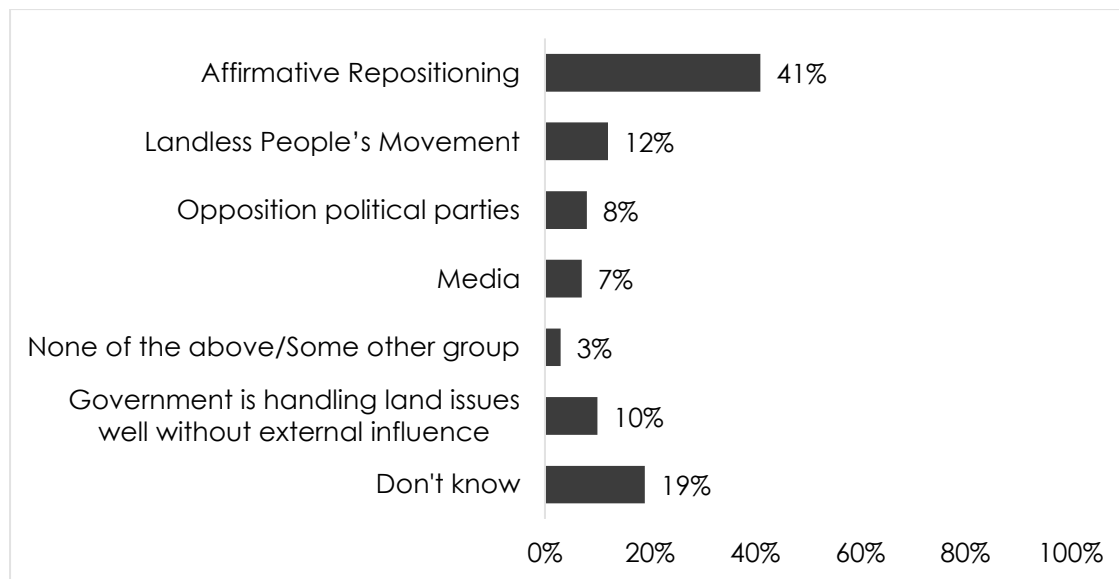
Raising the land issue with the government

When asked which group has been most effective in getting the government to pay more attention to land issues, the AR movement has a clear lead (41%) (Figure 11). The LPM (12%), opposition political parties (8%), and the media (7%) are mentioned far less often. One in five respondents (19%) say they don't know, while one in 10 say the government is handling the issue well without external influence.

As on the question of which group represents their own views, young, educated, and better-off Namibians are more likely to see AR as most effective in getting the government's attention.

The AR wins more positive evaluations among younger Namibians and those with higher levels of education and lower levels of lived poverty. Conversely, approval for the LPM is most common among Namibians with high lived poverty (25%).

Figure 11: Most effective in getting government to pay attention to land issues
| Namibia | 2017



Respondents were asked: A number of groups have been involved in trying to influence the government's approach to land reform. In your opinion, which of the following has been most effective in getting government to pay more attention on land issues, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Conclusion

Access to land is a key concern for Namibians, especially in urban areas, and few citizens believe the government is doing enough to address it. Affirmative Repositioning has gathered the greatest popular support, especially among young and educated Namibians, as a movement that represents citizens' views and is effective in focusing government attention on land reform. If the government is to avoid a crisis, it must take the grievances of AR and its supporters seriously and implement policies to address the housing shortage in urban areas.

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