



RETHINKING AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN BOTSWANA:

A COLLABORATIVE PATHWAY TO INNOVATION AND INCLUSION

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This white paper examines the ecosystem of policies concerned with enabling the attainment of housing in Botswana and responds to the key question:

How can the government, the private sector, and communities collaborate to deliver affordable housing innovatively in Botswana?



Botswana stands at a critical juncture in its development journey. The nation's long-standing commitment to land ownership and housing access, once a point of pride, is under strain from changing socio-economic realities. While housing has traditionally been addressed through government-led supply-side policies, the current system is proving inadequate. Rapid urbanisation, rising costs, outdated policies, and institutional fragmentation have created a housing deficit that leaves too many citizens especially the youth and low-to-middle-income households without viable pathways to secure, dignified shelter.

In response to these evolving housing challenges, the **Architects Association of Botswana (AAB)** proposes a bold, design-led framework for inclusive urban development. Rooted in a **tripartite collaboration between government, private sector, and communities**, the model repositions architecture as a strategic tool for spatial transformation capable of advancing economic resilience, environmental sustainability, and social cohesion. Central to the proposal is the creation of a **Botswana Housing Innovation Lab**, a national platform for experimentation, co-creation, and adaptive policymaking. This vision is anchored in understanding the nature of Botswana's housing realities, where affordability, serviced land access and fragmented policies, remain persistent barriers to inclusive urban development.

The approach emphasizes participatory planning, incremental development, and the integration of local knowledge, while promoting climate-responsive construction and youth-led cooperatives to localize housing value chains.

THE SCALE AND NATURE OF THE HOUSING CHALLENGE

Affordability remains the sector's most acute constraint, particularly for most single-income households in urban centres. According to Statistics Botswana, three in four urban households rent, and home ownership nationally has fallen to around 50%.

This affordability crisis is compounded with inadequate housing stock, with around 39.7% of households living in inadequate or insecure conditions, whether in substandard rentals, overcrowded family homes, or unplanned settlements lacking basic services. The 2022 Census highlights intense population

growth in peri-urban areas such as Mogoditshane, Oodi, and Tlokweng growth that outpaces Gaborone yet remains underserved by infrastructure.

Despite 71% of Botswana's land being tribal and theoretically accessible to all citizens, weak policy implementation, inconsistencies across land boards, and infrastructure bottlenecks hinder effective allocation and use. Longstanding issues such as land hoarding, illicit transactions, and poor urban planning have left many in prolonged queues for serviced plots, often leading to informal and unregulated land use investment.

THE CENTRAL PROBLEM: FRAGMENTATION AND MISALIGNMENT

At the heart of the crisis is a fragmented and outdated policy framework. The National Housing Policy, last revised in 2000, is misaligned with today's urbanisation patterns, land pressures, and economic disparities. What emerges is not only inefficiency but also a lack of coherence in how housing is planned, financed, and delivered, leaving critical gaps between policy intent and on-the-ground outcomes.

This disjointed system has translated into interventions that are poorly adapted to the lived realities of citizens. Past programmes have shown that top-down, one-size-fits-all models often fail to respond to diverse household needs and community contexts. In effect, fragmentation at the policy and institutional level cascades down into housing products that are misaligned with demand, deepening inequities rather than alleviating them.

Recognising these patterns points to the urgent need for a more integrated and inclusive approach. Addressing fragmentation requires not only policy reform but also institutional coordination, innovative financing, and participatory design processes that engage communities directly. By shifting from siloed interventions, Botswana can begin to generate solutions that are both scalable and responsive.

To move past these challenges, housing must be seen as more than just the provision of physical units. The AAB therefore proposes, a shift needed toward a design-led tripartite model that connects government, private sector, and communities in co-creating solutions.

THE TRIPARTITE COLLABORATION MODEL

GOVERNMENT

Leading policy reform to integrate housing finance, land allocation, and infrastructure delivery under a single coordinated framework. Ensuring serviced land is released in synchrony with housing projects, and incentivising private and community participation through tax measures, low-interest loans, and blended finance mechanisms.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Mobilising capital, innovation, and operational expertise through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). Embedding architectural and urban design principles into policy-making to ensure housing is not only functional but culturally resonant and environmentally responsive. Encouraging innovation in construction materials, alternative finance, and mixed-income models.

COMMUNITY

Engaging as active stakeholders in planning and implementation. Reviving cooperative and traditional practices such as motshelo and mafisa to enable incremental self-build models. Promoting bottom-up design processes that incorporate local knowledge, climate-adapted building methods, and culturally embedded spatial arrangements.



This framework treats housing as an interconnected ecosystem involving transport, services, public spaces, and economic opportunity. Within such a model, innovation; whether through design, financing, or community engagement becomes the key driver for unlocking sustainable housing solutions that are inclusive, affordable, and resilient.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INNOVATION THROUGH BROAD-BASED SUSTAINABILITY

Broad-based sustainability provides one of the strongest levers for change. For housing to be truly effective, innovation offers a pathway to transform the sector. Innovation that is inclusive, context-sensitive, and sustainability-driven. The focus is not only on *what* is built, but also *how* it is built, with *whom*, and its broader social, cultural, and environmental impact.

By embedding sustainable methods in construction, training local labour in green building skills, and integrating sustainability into education, housing becomes a driver of jobs, skills development, and climate resilience. Affordable, climate-responsive design and materials further expand opportunities. Using locally available resources such as adobe, compressed earth blocks, fly ash blocks, or thatch can reduce costs, improve thermal comfort, and lessen dependence on imported materials. Passive design strategies such as orientation, shading, and natural ventilation, offer long-term energy savings and enhance liveability, making quality housing more affordable and sustainable.

Equally important is drawing on Botswana's rich traditions of building and community life. Courtyard layouts (lolwapa), shared spaces (kgotla), and incremental housing approaches reflect resource-efficient, culturally resonant practices that can be adapted to meet modern performance standards. By blending indigenous knowledge with contemporary design, housing solutions can be both innovative and rooted in identity.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE HOUSING ECOSYSTEM

Botswana's housing challenge is not simply a matter of supply, it is a test of governance, inclusivity, and long-term vision. The path forward lies in moving from fragmented, reactive measures to a holistic housing ecosystem built on collaboration between government, private sector, and communities. Botswana can pioneer a housing delivery model that is affordable, resilient, and uniquely its own.

'HOUSING, IN THIS VISION, IS NOT JUST SHELTER, IT IS INFRASTRUCTURE FOR DIGNITY, PRODUCTIVITY, AND A RESILIENT FUTURE.'

KEY STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Policy Reform & Institutional Integration** - Update the National Housing Policy, harmonise agency mandates, and establish a central oversight mechanism to synchronise housing delivery with infrastructure provision.
- 2. Youth-Driven Cooperative Housing Prototype** - Deploy scalable, modular technologies such as Habiteria Interlocking Block systems up to 36% cheaper and 10 times faster to build than traditional masonry implemented by trained youth cooperatives. Link these to vocational training pathways and local manufacturing to stimulate secondary industries.
- 3. Botswana Housing Innovation Lab** - Create a national platform for collaborative experimentation in housing policy, finance, design, and delivery. This hub would prototype and test scalable, culturally grounded solutions, drawing on global best practice but rooted in Botswana's own socio-economic and environmental realities.



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