

Beyond Housing Backlogs: Precarity, Permanent Temporariness, and the Lived Experience of Waiting for Housing in Mogoditshane, Botswana

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Abstract

Housing policy has traditionally evaluated performance through quantitative indicators such as housing deficits, delivery backlogs, and the number of housing units or serviced residential plots provided. While these measures are important, they reveal little about the lived experiences of individuals who spend years or decades waiting for access to secure housing. This study argues that housing backlogs are an incomplete lens for understanding urban housing challenges because they obscure the institutional production of waiting and its consequences for everyday life. Drawing on the concepts of waiting, precarity, and permanent temporariness, the paper examines how prolonged waiting for residential land shapes the lived experiences of urban residents in Mogoditshane, Botswana. Using a qualitative case study of Mogoditshane, the study explores how prolonged housing waiting times shape residents' everyday experiences, housing pathways, and perceptions of state institutions. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with residents who had experienced prolonged housing wait times and key informants involved in land administration and housing governance. Findings demonstrate that waiting extends beyond administrative delay to lived conditions through which precarity and permanent temporariness are produced and normalised. Waiting extends beyond administrative delay to become a socio-political condition that produces persistent uncertainty, insecure housing pathways, deferred life decisions, and diminished trust in public institutions. The paper argues that housing policy should be evaluated not only by the number of plots or housing units delivered but also by its capacity to reduce prolonged waiting and its social consequences. The study, therefore, contributes empirical evidence on a more human-centred framework for understanding housing justice and urban governance in Botswana.

1.0 Introduction

Housing shortages are one of the most persistent urban challenges across the global South (Anokye et al., 2026), driven by rapid urbanisation, population growth, escalating land values, infrastructure deficits, and institutional constraints (Nwodo et al., 2026; Rafique et al., 2026; Gunter & Manuel, 2016).

Historically, housing policy and scholarship have evaluated housing systems through supply-centric, quantifiable metrics such as housing deficits, delivery backlogs, affordability indices, and the volume of units or residential plots distributed. While these indicators provide critical measures of performance, they overlook lived experiences of individuals navigating housing precarity, particularly those subjected to prolonged waiting periods. Consequently, this study shifts attention beyond housing supply to examine the governance structures and institutional frameworks that actively shape housing outcomes through waiting.

Dominant literature predominantly frames housing delays as technical or logistical failures arising from inadequate infrastructure (Marutlulle, 2021; Amoatey et al., 2015; McCord et al., 2015), land access constraints (Oladehinde et al., 2023; Sivam, 2002), bureaucratic inefficiencies (Rahmawati et al., 2026; Ezeanah, 2025), governance breakdowns (Greal, 2023; Trangkanont & Charoenngam, 2014), and financial constraints (Amoatey et al., 2015; McCord et al., 2015). However, the socio-political dimension of waiting within housing allocation remains under-theorised. Rather than being treated as an active

social and political condition, waiting is typically dismissed as an inevitable administrative byproduct of supply shortages. Yet broader critical scholarship underscores that waiting is neither passive nor politically neutral; it functions as a temporal mechanism by which state institutions regulate access to resources, opportunities, and citizenship (Buurma-Olsen et al., 2025; van Kempen & Idamir, 2003). As Power and Mee (2020) and Stephens (2020) contend, housing insecurity is an institutional and relational condition produced through governance systems rather than merely an arithmetic imbalance between supply and demand.

In Botswana, housing policy has historically prioritised the allocation of serviced residential land through Land Boards and self-help housing programs over direct state housing construction (Chiguvu, 2022; Mosha et al., 2022; Government of Botswana, 2021; Kampamba et al., 2016; Mosha, 2013). While this strategy initially broadened access to urban land, accelerating urbanisation and institutional friction within land administration have resulted in systemic, decades-long waitlists (Mosha et al., 2022; Kampamba et al., 2018). Onerous institutional procedures and implementation bottlenecks continue to impede allocation efficiency (Malatsi & Paradza, 2024), underscoring the need to critically interrogate the administrative processes that govern land access. Mogoditshane, one of Botswana's fastest-growing peri-urban settlements (Statistics Botswana, 2022), exemplifies this governance crisis. Waiting for housing, for residents, has transformed from a temporary administrative transition into an enduring mode of everyday urban life. Trapped in prolonged temporal uncertainty, households are forced to navigate precarious living conditions, including overcrowded family homesteads, informal backyard rentals, and makeshift structures, with little clarity on whether or when their land allocations will materialise. These realities demonstrate that the housing crisis in peri-urban Botswana cannot be fully captured by static measures of supply backlogs; but requires a closer examination of the temporal dimensions of land governance and the profound ways state-enforced waiting shapes everyday life.

Against this backdrop, this study investigates the multi-dimensional crisis of land and housing allocation delays, using Mogoditshane as a critical case study to examine the lived experiences of applicants enduring decades-long waitlists. It critically analyses the systemic, bureaucratic, and structural bottlenecks, such as land acquisition hurdles and compensation disputes, that perpetuate prolonged delays in peri-urban land governance. To identify viable pathways, the research explores alternative land-delivery strategies emerging from global policy debates and international planning experiences. Finally, the study evaluates the efficacy of current domestic policies and administrative interventions in mitigating housing instability, ultimately seeking to bridge the gap between policy intent and the timely, equitable allocation of urban land.

2.0 Theoretical Conceptualisation of Waiting and Housing Backlog

Waiting is a concept that is both familiar and elusive. While traditionally viewed as a mere pause between anticipation and fulfilment, recent scholarship reveals that waiting is far more than a passive passage of time. Rather, it is fundamentally a social, political, and temporal condition that structures access to resources, rights, and opportunities (Auyero, 2012; Hage, 2009). Consequently, waiting reflects

not only delayed outcomes but also the institutional and power dynamics that dictate who waits, for how long, and under what conditions (Conlon, 2011; Jeffrey, 2010). Across the social sciences, waiting has been conceptualised in diverse yet complementary ways. Appadurai (2013) underscores waiting as a state of anticipation directed toward an imagined future, whereas Blanchot (1995) describes it as a suspended space between action and expectation where possibility coexists with uncertainty. Expanding on these perspectives, Hage (2009, 2011) argues that waiting is fundamentally about the distribution of hope and the capacity to aspire, capacities that are unevenly allocated across society. Waiting thus serves as a critical mirror of broader socio-political inequalities, revealing how institutions regulate access not only to material resources but to imagined futures (Appadurai, 2013; Hage, 2009).

Framed in this light, waiting is inherently political. Bourdieu (2000) contends that the power to make others wait while never entirely extinguishing hope functions as a subtle yet effective technique of domination. By regulating time, institutions control the pace at which individuals access resources, services, and opportunities, thereby reinforcing existing hierarchies of power (Auyero, 2012; Bourdieu, 2000). Bureaucratic waiting, therefore, extends beyond simple administrative inertia to become a primary mechanism by which the state governs everyday life (Auyero, 2012). Building on this spatial and institutional dimension, Conlon (2011) frames waiting as a political practice through which institutions organise mobility, inclusion, and belonging. Similarly, Jeffrey (2010) demonstrates that prolonged waiting has increasingly become a defining condition of contemporary citizenship rather than a temporary interruption to it.

However, waiting should not be conceptualised as absolute passivity. While institutions dictate the temporal parameters of daily life, individuals continuously exercise agency to negotiate uncertainty and navigate prolonged delays (Bayat, 2010; Simone, 2004). Bayat's (2010) concept of "quiet encroachment" illustrates how ordinary citizens employ incremental, informal strategies to secure livelihoods and necessities outside formal state channels. Rather than engaging in overt political confrontation, citizens use these everyday practices to circumvent structural constraints through gradual, dispersed, and often invisible actions.

Within housing contexts, this everyday agency becomes especially visible. Prolonged waiting for state housing forces households to actively negotiate housing insecurity rather than passively accept institutional failure. In South Africa, Oldfield and Greyling (2015) show that families awaiting formal housing opportunities rely on overcrowded family homesteads, informal backyard dwellings, and precarious shelters as deliberate survival strategies. At a broader spatial scale, Caldeira (2017) argues that peripheral urbanisation is defined by residents actively producing the city through incremental development and self-construction, directly challenging conventional models of state-led urban development. Likewise, Holston (1991) demonstrates that "auto-construction" enables households to progressively build homes in response to fluctuating financial circumstances, illustrating how residents shape urban space even while formal systems delay access to secure housing.

Despite this complex lived realities and temporal negotiations, national housing policies remain largely indifferent to the condition of waiting. Housing shortages continue to define contemporary urbanisation (Van Noorloos et al., 2020), particularly in the global South where rapid population growth consistently outpaces government infrastructure capacity (Zambrano-Monserrate, 2025; Randolph & Storper, 2023; Spaliviero et al., 2020; Goebel, 2007). In response, housing policy has historically focused exclusively on supply-side metrics to increase output, reduce physical deficits, and accelerate the delivery of serviced land and housing units (UN-Habitat, 2020; Gilbert, 2002). Within this dominant paradigm, housing performance is evaluated through quantifiable indicators such as units built, plots allocated, and waitlists reduced (Gilbert, 2014; Charlton & Kihato, 2006). While these metrics offer tangible administrative benchmarks, they obscure the institutional power dynamics of waiting and the incremental strategies that citizens deploy as they navigate state-enforced delays. As several scholars have observed, the dominant housing discourse conceptualises housing primarily as a technical and administrative problem of insufficient supply, emphasising land availability, infrastructure provision, construction finance and institutional capacity while paying comparatively little attention to how housing systems are experienced by those who depend upon them (Bhan, 2019; Fields & Hodkinson, 2018; Gilbert, 2002). As a result, success is frequently defined in terms of the number of housing opportunities delivered rather than their quality, accessibility, or temporal dimensions.

This production-oriented perspective significantly shaped housing governance across the global South. International organisations and national governments have promoted diverse housing strategies (including mass public housing, sites-and-services schemes, incremental housing, self-help programmes, and market-based housing finance) as mechanisms to address growing housing demand (UN-Habitat, 2020). While these approaches differ in their institutional arrangements, they share a common assumption that increasing housing supply will ultimately resolve urban housing shortages. However, evidence from numerous countries in the global South demonstrates that improvements in housing production have not necessarily translated into equitable access to housing. Instead, housing delivery systems frequently remain characterised by bureaucratic complexity, uneven allocation processes, and prolonged waiting periods that disproportionately affect low-income households (Bhan, 2019; Boonyabancha, 2005).

Recent urban scholarship increasingly argues that housing should not be understood merely as a physical asset but as a social, political, and institutional process through which citizenship, inclusion, and urban belonging are negotiated (Fields & Hodkinson, 2018; Gillespie, 2016). From this perspective, housing governance extends beyond the provision of shelter to encompass the institutional arrangements that regulate access to land, services, and tenure security. Botswana provides an important illustration of these tensions. Since independence, the country has pursued a distinctive housing strategy centred on serviced land delivery, Land Board administration and self-help housing rather than large-scale public housing provision (Toteng, 1994; Kalabamu, 2006). This approach has contributed to expanding access to urban land and promoting home ownership. Nevertheless, rapid urbanisation, demographic growth and increasing demand for residential land have generated persistent pressure on urban land administration systems. In rapidly expanding settlements such as Mogoditshane,

prolonged waiting for residential plots has become a defining feature of many residents' housing trajectories, despite continued government efforts to improve land allocation processes (Kalabamu & Morolong, 2004). These realities suggest that housing challenges cannot be adequately understood through measures of delivery alone because they overlook the prolonged periods of uncertainty experienced by prospective beneficiaries. The predominance of housing backlogs as the principal measure of housing performance therefore obscures an important dimension of urban inequality. By focusing primarily on the number of housing units or residential plots delivered, conventional housing policy overlooks how institutional processes organise time, defer access to resources and shape everyday life. Waiting is consequently rendered an administrative by-product of housing shortages rather than an object of scholarly inquiry. Yet for many urban residents, the most significant consequence of housing shortages is not simply the absence of housing but the prolonged uncertainty of waiting for it.

3.0 Methodology

This section presents the methodological framework for examining how housing waiting shapes residents' everyday experiences, housing pathways, and perceptions of state institutions in Mogoditshane, and concludes with data collection procedures, thematic analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Study Area

This study was conducted in Tsolamosese, Mogoditshane, a rapidly urbanising peri-urban settlement situated along the western periphery of Botswana's capital, Gaborone. In 2022, Mogoditshane was the fastest-growing village in the country, reflecting acute demographic expansion and mounting pressures on land administration, housing delivery, and municipal infrastructure (Statistics Botswana, 2022). Over recent intercensal periods, the settlement has undergone structural transition, evolving from a rural village into a complex, high-density peri-urban landscape marked by residential expansion and demand for formal housing and serviced land. Mogoditshane's positioning makes it ideal for examining the friction between formal governance regimes and informal housing negotiations. Peri-urban settlements occupy transitional zones where customary traditions and modern municipal planning frameworks overlap, creating persistent institutional ambiguities, land governance disputes, and administrative backlogs (see Simon et al., 2004; Tacoli, 2003). In Mogoditshane, this rapid urban transformation strained formal land management, outpaced state infrastructure delivery, and exposed the institutional limits of local land boards in responding to urban growth. Mogoditshane's proximity to Gaborone positioned it as a primary, lower-cost residential extension for the capital's expanding urban population. However, this spillover growth has severely overdriven local land allocation systems, exacerbating administrative delays and restricting access to formal housing programs. Although state-led interventions such as the Self-Help Housing Agency (SHHA) broadened access to serviced plot distribution and micro-finance housing support, many applicants were entangled in decades-long waitlists and prolonged temporal precarity (Mosha, 2010; Kalabamu, 2006).

3.2 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach to examine how formal land governance and housing delivery processes shape the resilience of informal land and housing practices in Botswana. Qualitative research is well-suited to investigating complex social phenomena because it enables researchers to explore how individuals interpret, experience, and ascribe meaning to social realities within their specific contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Qualitative inquiry examines the processes, experiences, and meanings underlying social phenomena (Mason, 2018), and was considered suitable for exploring how households and practitioners experience, interpret, and respond to the structural constraints embedded within Botswana's formal land and housing system, particularly in relation to housing insecurity, prolonged waiting and everyday adaptation strategies.

3.3. Study Sampling

To capture rich, context-specific land governance and housing precarity, this study employed purposive sampling (Patton, 2015). In qualitative research, purposive sampling is prioritised over statistical representativeness to deliberately select information-rich cases that offer deep insight into complex social processes, institutional mechanisms, and lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sample comprised two distinct participant groups designed to enable a multi-scalar analysis of the housing allocation system: (i) The first group consisted of residents of Tsolamosese in Mogoditshane who actively navigated prolonged delays in securing state-allocated residential land (Fig. 1). These participants provided critical, firsthand accounts of enduring long waitlists, managing precarious interim shelter, and deploying everyday survival strategies amid temporal uncertainty. (ii) The second group comprised key institutional stakeholders, including Land Board officials, officers from the Self-Help Housing Agency (SHHA), physical planning professionals, and land administration practitioners. Their perspectives illuminated the governance structures, legislative frameworks, and administrative constraints that perpetuate structural bottlenecks in land delivery. Semi-structured interviews were employed for the two groups to balance consistency and flexibility, allowing researchers to explore predetermined themes and enable participants to introduce experiences and perspectives that may emerge during the conversation (Bryman, 2016; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Triangulating empirical data across residents and institutional scales enabled the study to bridge top-down policy implementation and bottom-up lived realities.

The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis following the approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis provided a systematic yet flexible method for identifying recurring patterns across participants' accounts while allowing themes to emerge inductively from the data. Analysis generated codes to capture significant concepts relating to land allocation, housing delivery, institutional governance, policy implementation, everyday housing experiences, and adaptive practices. The codes were organised into broader themes through an iterative process of comparison and refinement. The interpretation of the themes was informed by the conceptual framing of the paper, specifically, theories of waiting, informality, and permanent temporariness to examine how institutional

arrangements shape both housing precarity and the adaptive practices through which households respond to prolonged uncertainty.

Ethical research requires researchers to protect participants' autonomy, confidentiality, and wellbeing, particularly when investigating experiences associated with vulnerability and inequality (Bryman, 2016). To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms and generic professional descriptors (such as Town Planning Professional, SHHA Officer, and Tsolamosese Resident) are used throughout the paper. Audio recordings and interview transcripts were securely stored and used solely for academic research purposes.

4.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents the empirical findings exploring the complex interplay between formal land governance and informal housing resilience in Mogoditshane. This is structured around four key themes: (i) how policy requirements produce a prolonged condition of waiting for land; (ii) the impacts of fragmented institutional processes on housing access; (iii) everyday households' strategies to navigate 'permanent temporariness' and (iv) participant-driven visions for reimagining more flexible and inclusive housing policies.

4.1 Formal Land Governance and the Production of Waiting

A central finding of this study is that the resilience of Botswana's informal land and housing sector cannot be understood in isolation from the operation of the formal land governance system. Across participant narratives, housing insecurity did not begin with the absence of housing itself, but with the prolonged and uncertain process of acquiring residential land. Rather than functioning as separate policy domains, land allocation and housing provision were experienced as deeply interconnected processes in which delays in one inevitably constrained access to the other. The findings therefore suggest that the persistence of informal housing practices is rooted not simply in housing shortages but in institutional arrangements that regulate access to land and housing. This relationship was evident in the requirements of the Self-Help Housing Agency (SHHA), which conditions access to housing assistance on prior ownership or leasehold rights to land. While intended to promote orderly housing development, this institutional arrangement unintentionally excludes households that remain on lengthy waiting lists for residential plots. As one participant explained: "We applied for plots years ago, and we cannot apply for SHHA without that paper to show we have land." (Pers. Comm. Tsolamosese Resident, 2025).

This excerpt demonstrates that waiting for housing is embedded within broader systems of land governance. Participants repeatedly described a condition in which eligibility for formal housing support remained indefinitely suspended because access to land had not yet been secured. The consequence was not simply an administrative delay but an extended period of uncertainty during which aspirations for secure housing were continually postponed. Waiting, therefore, became institutionalised through the

sequential organisation of Botswana's land and housing policies, creating conditions which excluded households from their housing needs. The prolonged waiting produced by formal governance systems functioned as a chronic form of urban stress, compelling households to reorganise finances, postpone long-term investment, adjust living arrangements, and seek alternative forms of shelter. Informal housing practices therefore emerged not because households rejected formal systems but because the formal system was unable to provide housing within the timescales required by everyday life. Informality, in this sense, became an adaptive mechanism through which residents negotiated the temporal limitations of formal land governance.

Participants' reflections on alternative housing delivery models further illustrate the complexity of this relationship. Some argued that government should prioritise the direct provision of completed housing rather than requiring households to navigate lengthy land allocation procedures before qualifying for assistance. One participant explained:

"In my opinion, a more effective approach to addressing the housing challenges in Mogoditshane would involve directly funding the development of houses, rather than relying on delayed or slow land allocation processes. This would speed up the delivery of housing for those in need" (Pers. Comm, Tsolamosese Resident, 2025).

However, this perspective was not universally shared. Other participants strongly preferred receiving land rather than completed housing, emphasising the autonomy, flexibility, and livelihood opportunities associated with incremental self-building. A participant argues:

"With land, I can build slowly. People have different uses and preferences for the land. Some may want to use it for multiple purposes or as a way to make a living" (Pers. Comm. Tsolamosese Resident, 2025).

These contrasting perspectives demonstrate that land represents far more than a prerequisite for housing development. For many households, it is a productive asset, a source of economic security, and a means of controlling the pace and form of housing construction. Incremental building, a defining characteristic of self-help and informal housing systems, enables households to construct dwellings in accordance with changing financial circumstances and household needs. These findings therefore reinforce the proposition that informal housing practices should be understood not simply as substitutes for formal housing but as adaptive systems that enable residents to respond to structural constraints within formal land and housing delivery.

The findings resonate with studies elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. In Ghana, delays in land administration have similarly been identified as major constraints on housing delivery, particularly for lower-income households dependent on formal state programmes (Agyemang & Morrison, 2018). Comparable dynamics have been documented in Kenya, where fragmented land governance creates prolonged periods during which households possess neither secure tenure nor the ability to commence construction (Njogu, 2021). Across these contexts, institutional fragmentation contributes to the expansion and persistence of informal land and housing practices as households seek alternative

mechanisms for accessing shelter. These findings reveal that delays within the formal land governance system create the conditions under which informal housing practices emerge, evolve, and endure. Informality, therefore, functions not merely as evidence of planning failure but as a resilient urban system that absorbs pressures that the formal housing sector is unable to accommodate.

4.2 Institutional Fragmentation and Conditions for Informal Housing Resilience

Beyond land governance, the findings suggest that prolonged waiting in Mogoditshane cannot be attributed to a single institutional failure but rather arises from the interaction of fragmented governance systems that separate policy development, land allocation, infrastructure provision, and housing delivery into disconnected processes. Participants consistently described housing access as shaped by multiple, overlapping delays, in which constraints within one institutional process intensified challenges in another. What was a transitional pathway towards secure housing became an extended condition of uncertainty, shaping where households live and how they adapt to the limitations of formal housing provision. This fragmentation demonstrates that the resilience of informal land and housing systems stems in part from the inability of formal systems to respond effectively to changing urban realities. As Mogoditshane continues to grow, participants questioned whether existing housing policies remain sufficiently responsive to the complexity and scale of contemporary housing needs. One planning professional reflected:

"The current housing policies in Mogoditshane are not effective. When these policies were developed, they were not tailored to address the specific challenges facing the area. As a result, we see them falling short today, unable to adequately respond to the growing demand and evolving housing needs" (Pers. Comm. Town Planning Professional, 2025).

The above quote highlights that the challenge is not simply the absence of policy but the inability of existing frameworks to adapt to evolving urban conditions. Housing policies that were developed under different demographic and spatial circumstances have struggled to accommodate increased demand, changing household needs, and the realities of urban expansion. Similar dynamics are observed in South Africa, where standardised housing interventions struggled to respond to the diverse social and spatial realities of rapidly growing settlements (Khumalo, 2012). These comparisons suggest that effective housing governance requires adaptive frameworks that respond to local contexts rather than relying solely on uniform approaches.

The consequences of this institutional rigidity are particularly evident in the relationship between land allocation and infrastructure provision. While access to land represents an important first step in housing development, participants emphasised that allocated plots remain unusable without adequate servicing, including water, sanitation, electricity, and road infrastructure. As one planning professional explained: "The servicing of land before allocation is falling short, resulting in significant housing backlogs due to the high demand for serviced land" (Pers. Comm. Town Planning Professional, 2025). This narrative demonstrates that waiting does not end once land is allocated. Instead, it continues

through additional institutional processes required to transform land into viable housing. The gap between allocation and servicing therefore extends the period of uncertainty and delays households' ability to begin construction. Similar challenges are documented in Kenya, where infrastructure shortages left land allocated to households effectively unusable for housing development (Njogu, 2021). In both contexts, the separation of land administration from infrastructure delivery creates a situation in which households have formal recognition of housing eligibility yet remain unable to realise housing security.

The persistent delays expose how institutional inefficiencies create opportunities for informal systems as essential mechanisms of urban survival. When formal pathways fail to provide timely access to shelter, households develop alternative strategies to secure housing. Informal rental arrangements, incremental construction, shared accommodation, and reliance on social networks become practical responses to institutional uncertainty rather than deliberate departures from formal systems. Informality, therefore, emerges as an adaptive capacity in response to gaps in formal governance.

Administrative challenges further reinforce these conditions. Participants described inconsistent record management, unclear procedures, and cases of double allocation as factors that prolonged waiting periods and reduced confidence in formal land administration. As one Estates Manager explained: "Double allocations are a significant issue. These issues create further delays, as resources are stretched thin, and proper land allocation becomes increasingly difficult" (Pers. Comm. Estates Manager, 2025). Such institutional failures demonstrate that waiting is produced not only by policy structures but also by everyday administrative practices. Allocation errors and weak coordination consume already-limited institutional capacity, slowing land delivery and reducing public trust in formal processes. Comparable challenges were observed in Ghana, where weaknesses within land administration systems contributed to delays, uncertainty, and increased reliance on informal land practices (Agyemang & Morrison, 2018). These parallels indicate that informal housing resilience cannot be separated from the institutional environments within which it develops.

The resilience among households in Mogoditshane is not generated in the absence of formal institutions but through continuous negotiation with their limitations. As formal systems struggle to provide timely and accessible housing, informal practices emerge as adaptive responses that absorb the pressures created by institutional gaps. Informality therefore operates as a resilient urban system that enables households to secure shelter, maintain livelihoods, and remain connected to urban opportunities despite prolonged uncertainty. Understanding resilience in this context requires moving beyond the idea that informal practices simply represent failures of planning. Instead, they reveal the capacity of communities to respond creatively to institutional constraints while exposing the structural conditions that make such adaptation necessary. The following section therefore examines how these forms of resilience are sustained through social networks, collective support systems, and everyday survival practices.

4.3 Living Through Permanent Temporariness: Everyday Adaptation

One of the most significant findings of this study is that prolonged waiting for housing is far from a passive experience. Instead, waiting emerges as an active and transformative condition that reshapes how residents organise everyday life, negotiate uncertainty, and secure shelter. As formal housing systems repeatedly delay access to secure housing, households are compelled to develop alternative strategies to remain in the city, sustain livelihoods, and preserve aspirations for more secure housing futures. Waiting, therefore, becomes not only a condition of exclusion but also the context in which informal practices of resilience are continuously produced. Across interviews, residents described how delays in land allocation and formal housing access compelled them to rely on alternative forms of shelter, including renting under insecure conditions, sharing accommodation with extended family members, and accepting housing options that did not always meet their needs. One resident explained:

"The waiting periods for land allocation are long, and housing is expensive, even for renting. The more affordable housing options are often made from poor materials and are of low quality. For example, after the rains, my house was flooded and belongings ruined" (Pers. Comm. Tsolamosese Resident, 2025).

This account demonstrates that the consequences of waiting extend beyond delayed access to formal housing. During prolonged periods of uncertainty, households are required to occupy temporary arrangements that gradually become permanent. The distinction between temporary and permanent, therefore, becomes increasingly blurred as residents continue to live in spaces initially intended only as short-term solutions. In this sense, waiting produces a condition of 'permanent temporariness' in which households are neither fully excluded from the city nor able to secure housing futures. These experiences reflect broader patterns across African urban contexts, where housing insecurity often results in prolonged reliance on informal and semi-formal arrangements. In Mogoditshane, prolonged waiting similarly reshapes residents' experience of urban life, influencing mobility patterns, household relationships, and everyday aspirations.

One of the most significant consequences of housing uncertainty was the spatial burden placed on residents. Many participants described living on the urban periphery because affordable housing options closer to employment opportunities were increasingly inaccessible. The distance between residential locations and economic opportunities created additional financial pressures due to higher transport costs and lengthy daily commutes. As one resident explained: "I work in Gaborone, transport is very expensive, the long distance to my workplace costs me" (Pers. Comm. Tsolamosese Resident, 2025). These experiences demonstrate that housing insecurity is also a question of spatial inequality. The inability to access affordable, well-located housing forces households to navigate the trade-off between affordability and accessibility. While peripheral locations may provide relatively cheaper accommodation, they also increase dependence on expensive mobility systems and reduce access to urban opportunities. This reflects Parnell's (2016) argument that urban marginality is shaped not only by where people live but by the unequal ways required to move through the city.

Beyond spatial challenges, waiting also reshapes household relationships and social arrangements. Participants described overcrowding, reduced privacy, and tensions associated with extended periods of

shared living. One respondent explained:

"Living with six people in the same household can sometimes be difficult; both personal space and daily routines are affected " (Pers. Comm. Tsolamosese Resident, 2025).

These arrangements reveal the importance of social networks in sustaining households during prolonged waiting periods. While overcrowding represents a material consequence of housing insecurity, shared accommodation also demonstrates the role of social relationships as informal support systems. Families and communities become important mechanisms through which residents absorb the pressures created by formal housing delays. Informal living arrangements therefore represent both vulnerability and resilience; they expose households to hardship while simultaneously enabling them to remain connected to urban opportunities.

However, the impacts of waiting extend beyond physical housing conditions. Participants frequently described the emotional and psychological effects of living within uncertain timelines. Waiting was experienced as a state of suspended progress, where residents felt unable to fully plan their futures because housing security remained uncertain. One resident described:

"The psychological strain of anticipation. We are left in a state of uncertainty, which causes frustration and anxiety" (Pers. Comm. Tsolamosese Resident, 2025).

This demonstrates that time itself becomes a dimension of inequality. Waiting is not simply a neutral administrative process; it shapes people's ability to plan, invest, and imagine future possibilities. As Auyero (2012) argues, waiting within conditions of marginality is deeply political because it reflects unequal relationships between citizens and institutions. Similarly, Bissell (2007) highlights that waiting can reduce individual agency by leaving people in a prolonged state of uncertainty, making future decision-making increasingly difficult.

The emotional consequences of this suspended temporality were further reflected in participants' descriptions of lost opportunities and deferred aspirations:

"Lack of hope, emotional toll, you don't experience life or live it at your maximum potential. The constant instability and fear" (Pers. Comm. Tsolamosese Resident, 2025).

Such experiences demonstrate that permanent temporariness affects not only material wellbeing but also residents' sense of possibility. The inability to predict when housing security will be achieved creates a continuous negotiation between hope and frustration. As Hage (2009) suggests, waiting can become a form of governance in which uncertainty itself serves as a mechanism for delaying people's futures. Yet despite these challenges, participants also demonstrated significant adaptive capacities. Rather than abandoning aspirations for formal housing, residents developed strategies to navigate uncertainty, including establishing livelihoods, building social support networks, and creating stability in temporary conditions. One participant reflected:

"It was a temporary move, what can I say, I started a business and I get to raise my family, so while the circumstances aren't always easy, they have helped me grow and adapt" (Pers. Comm. Tsolamosese Resident, 2025).

This illustrates that resilience emerges through everyday practices rather than dramatic acts of resistance. Residents transform uncertain conditions into opportunities for survival by creating livelihoods, strengthening relationships, and adapting expectations. However, recognising these adaptive capacities should not obscure the structural conditions that make them necessary.

Participants continued to express aspirations for improved housing futures, demonstrating that adaptation does not necessarily represent acceptance of inequality:

"I'll always hope for something better, better than living in Mogoditshane and renting" (Pers. Comm. Tsolamosese Resident, 2025).

Others described developing a sense of belonging despite continued housing insecurity:

"It's not perfect, but I do feel at home. The community here plays a big role in that. The support, the familiar faces, and the sense of belonging make me feel rooted in this place. It may not be ideal, but it's where I find comfort and a sense of stability" (Pers. Comm. Tsolamosese Resident, 2025).

These accounts highlight an important dimension of informal housing resilience: communities do not simply endure hardship; they actively create forms of stability within uncertain environments. Belonging, social support, and everyday practices of adaptation become resources through which residents sustain urban life. Unlike contexts where prolonged waiting has generated visible forms of protest and insurgent citizenship (Holston, 2009; Oldfield & Boulton, 2005), participants in Mogoditshane often described waiting as a normalised condition of urban life. However, the absence of collective mobilisation should not be interpreted as satisfaction with existing conditions. Instead, it may reflect the gradual internalisation of uncertainty, limited avenues for institutional accountability, and a reliance on everyday adaptation rather than confrontation.

This finding reinforces the central argument of this paper, that informal housing resilience emerges within conditions of prolonged institutional constraint. Residents demonstrate creativity, persistence, and social solidarity, but these capacities are exercised within a system that continually delays access to secure housing. Permanent temporariness, therefore, represents both the vulnerability produced by formal housing limitations and the adaptive practices through which households continue to navigate urban life.

4.4 Towards Resilient Housing Governance: Reimagining Policy Beyond Formal Delivery

Beyond the limitations of existing housing governance, the findings point towards alternative pathways for building a more resilient and inclusive housing system. Participants did not simply critique current

policies; they articulated clear visions for reform that reflected the realities of rapid urbanisation, growing housing demand, and prolonged waiting. Across interviews, residents and professionals questioned the continued reliance on land allocation as the dominant mechanism for addressing housing demand, arguing that this approach no longer reflects the realities of rapid urbanisation, increasing housing need, and prolonged waiting. Rather than viewing land allocation as an end, participants called for governance approaches that can respond more flexibly to diverse housing pathways and the everyday realities of urban life.

These perspectives suggest that strengthening the resilience of Botswana's housing sector requires moving beyond conventional distinctions between formal and informal housing. Participants recognised that while access to land remains important, housing security also depends on institutional flexibility, collaborative governance, and policies that acknowledge the adaptive strategies households already employ. The findings therefore point towards a more integrated understanding of resilience in which formal institutions support, rather than constrain, the capacities that already exist within communities. One planning professional proposed a greater role for Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs), arguing that collaborative delivery models could accelerate housing provision while retaining public oversight of land:

"In an ideal scenario, a more efficient housing allocation system could be built on Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) rather than individual land ownership. In this model, the government would contribute land, while investors would bring in the necessary development resources. This could facilitate mass housing projects that are more accessible to a wider range of residents" (Pers. Comm. Town Planning Professional, 2025).

This perspective reflects growing recognition that housing delivery requires cooperation across multiple sectors rather than reliance on government provision alone. However, participants also emphasised that partnerships should not merely increase housing production but should enhance accessibility, affordability, and inclusion. In this regard, resilience is understood not simply as increasing the number of housing units but as strengthening institutional arrangements that can respond to changing urban conditions while protecting the needs of lower-income households.

Participants also proposed hybrid housing models that recognise the diversity of household circumstances and preferences. Contrary to the assumption that households require similar forms of support, participants envisioned more flexible pathways that combine land allocation, incremental housing development, financial assistance, and completed housing options. One planning professional explained:

"A Hybrid Model, where one may acquire an empty plot or partially developed house. Partial government funding option as well as a financial down payment option too" (Pers. Comm. Town Planning Professional, 2025).

This proposal reflects an important shift away from one-size-fits-all housing delivery. By offering multiple pathways into secure housing, hybrid approaches acknowledge that households possess different

financial capacities, housing aspirations, and livelihood strategies. Such flexibility is central to resilient housing governance because it enables institutions to respond to diverse needs rather than expecting households to conform to rigid administrative processes.

Beyond institutional reform, participants consistently highlighted the importance of greater community participation in housing planning and decision-making. Rather than positioning communities as passive beneficiaries of state programmes, participants envisioned planning processes in which residents actively contribute to identifying housing challenges and co-producing locally appropriate solutions. As one planning professional explained:

"A Community Based scenario, where we study the community's needs, and as planners take on a more facilitative role, allowing the community to come up with solutions to their own issues" (Pers. Comm. Town Planning Professional, 2025).

This excerpt reinforces a central insight: urban development depends not only on institutional capacity but also on recognising the knowledge, experience, and adaptive practices that already exist within communities. Informal housing systems demonstrate that residents continuously develop solutions to housing insecurity despite institutional constraints. More participatory governance, therefore, offers opportunities to bridge the divide between formal planning and informal urban realities, enabling policies that are more responsive to local conditions.

Participants' proposals also reflect broader debates on urban land and housing governance across the global South. Scholars have argued that speculative land markets and increasingly market-oriented housing systems undermine affordability and deepen exclusion, particularly for lower-income households (Fields, 2017; Beswick et al., 2016). These concerns resonate strongly in Mogoditshane, where rising land values associated with proximity to Gaborone have intensified barriers to access to formal housing. Participants' calls for stronger public intervention, hybrid delivery models, and collaborative planning therefore represent efforts to create governance systems that prioritise housing as a social good rather than solely as a market commodity.

Together, these findings suggest that building resilience within Botswana's housing sector requires more than improving administrative efficiency. It requires a fundamental rethinking of how housing policies engage with informality, recognise different forms of housing vulnerability, and support diverse pathways to secure shelter. Rather than treating informal housing as a temporary problem to be eliminated, resilient governance would acknowledge the adaptive capacities that have emerged amid prolonged institutional constraints and seek to integrate them into more inclusive housing strategies. Ultimately, the findings indicate that resilience should not be understood as the ability of households to endure prolonged waiting indefinitely. Instead, resilient housing governance is reflected in institutions that reduce unnecessary uncertainty, respond flexibly to changing urban conditions, and work alongside communities to expand equitable access to land, housing, and urban opportunity. Such an approach moves beyond the traditional focus on housing delivery alone and towards a more integrated

understanding of resilience in which formal and informal systems operate as complementary components of an inclusive urban future.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how prolonged waiting within Botswana's formal land and housing governance system shapes the emergence and resilience of informal housing practices in Mogoditshane. Rather than treating housing insecurity as a simple outcome of supply shortages, the findings demonstrate that it is produced by the everyday operation of fragmented institutional systems, in which land allocation, infrastructure provision, and housing delivery are misaligned in both time and process. Within this context, waiting is not a neutral administrative stage but a structuring condition of urban life, one that produces uncertainty, delays access to housing, and reshapes how households plan, adapt, and survive. Across the findings, a consistent picture emerges: formal systems do not simply fail to deliver housing; they actively generate the conditions under which informality becomes necessary. The requirement to secure land before accessing housing support, combined with delays in service delivery and administrative inefficiencies, results in extended periods during which households remain suspended between eligibility and exclusion. In response, residents develop adaptive strategies that allow them to secure shelter, sustain livelihoods, and maintain social continuity. Informal housing practices therefore emerge not outside the formal system, but through its limitations.

Importantly, the study shows that these informal responses are not static or purely survivalist. Instead, they reflect ongoing processes of negotiation, improvisation, and resilience. Households engage in incremental building, shared living arrangements, informal rentals, and community-based support systems that enable them to remain embedded within the urban fabric despite structural constraints. However, this resilience should not be read as evidence of system adequacy. Rather, it highlights the endurance required to navigate prolonged institutional uncertainty and the uneven distribution of access to urban resources. By foregrounding the lived experience of waiting, this study contributes to an understanding of housing governance in Botswana and similar rapidly urbanising contexts. It shows that improving housing outcomes requires more than increasing delivery rates; it requires addressing the temporal and institutional structures that produce prolonged waiting in the first place. A more resilient housing system, therefore, is one that reduces unnecessary delays, integrates informal realities into planning frameworks, and enables more flexible and equitable pathways to secure shelter.

Declarations

Author Contribution

1. Conceptualisation, data collection, literature review, methodology, writing the main manuscript text
2. Supervision, writing the main manuscript text and editing
3. Editing and writing the main manuscript text
4. Editing and writing the main manuscript text

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Data Availability

Data is available upon request.

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Figures

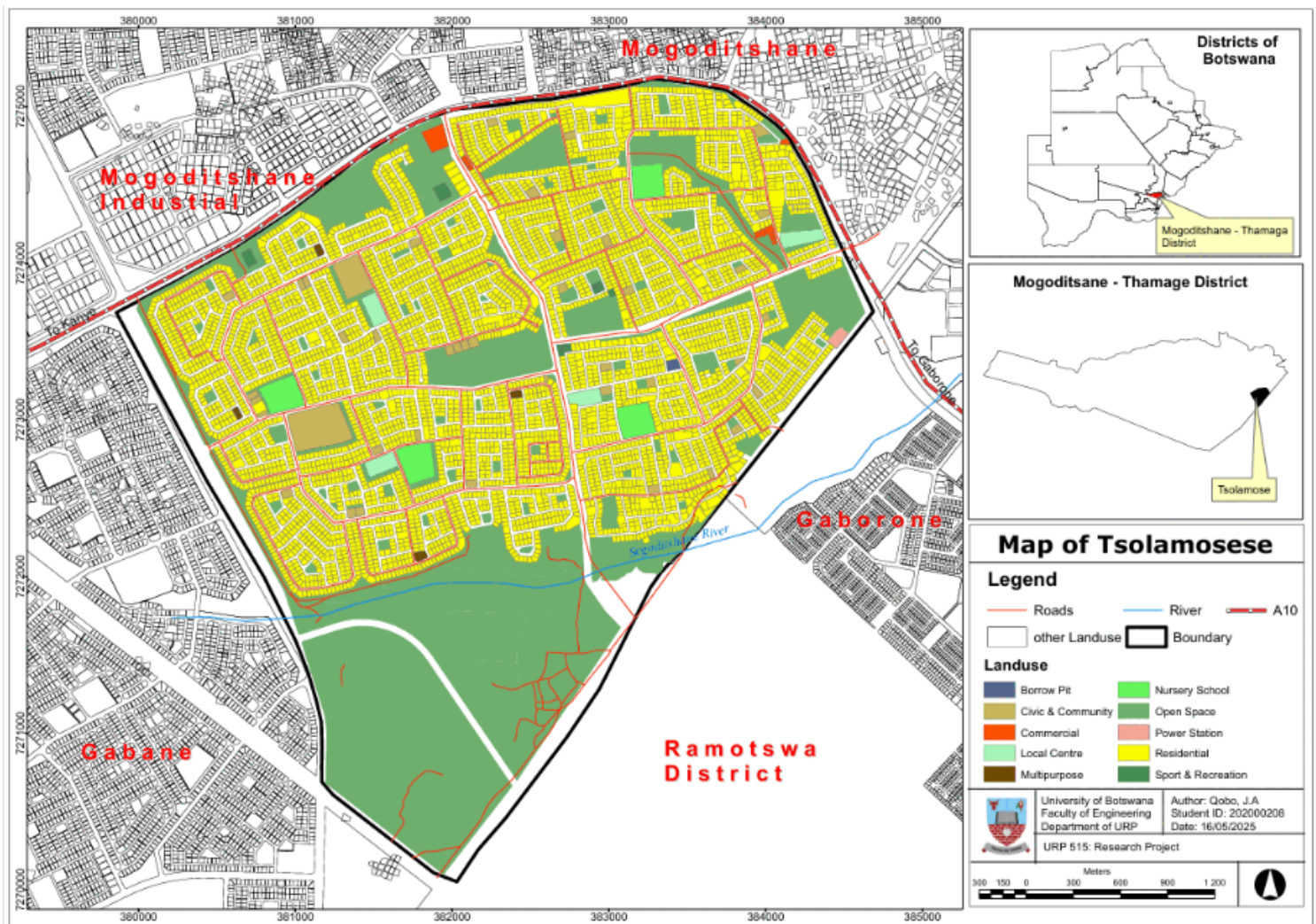


Figure 1

Location of Tsolamosese in Mogoditshane; Source (Authors, 2025)