



JENNY MATTHEWS (FORMAT)

**WAR  
ON  
WANT**

# IMPROVING HOMES IN LUANDA

In Angola's capital Luanda nearly a million people live in shanty-town Musseques in and around the city. Most of their homes have no piped water, electricity or main drainage. An imaginative new project will

# THE ANGOLAN EXPERIENCE

help the people of one of these

**T**he people of Luanda, Angola's capital city, face a problem familiar to every major city in the Third World: how to improve life for the women, men and children who are crowded together in appalling conditions where even the most basic services are lacking.

Luanda is one of the fastest-growing cities in Africa, with a population rising by 8 per cent every year. Two-thirds of this increase is through migration from the countryside, due to the continuing war with UNITA rebels and periodic droughts. Many people still live as they did before independence in 1975, in self-built shacks made of odd building materials which they put up wherever they can rent a space.

These 'informal' settlements, the Musseques, have become more and more crowded until they form dense networks of fragile huts and narrow passageways. Most families have no access to piped water or main drainage; the city's system of roads, water, power and drainage was originally meant only for the 250,000 Portuguese who lived there before independence.

After 1975 the new government planned to house the Musseques dwellers in modern blocks of flats, but the massive programme needed was beyond the capacity of a state weakened by war and short of both money and skilled labour. Meanwhile people were pouring into Luanda, as war refugees returned from other countries. Their home villages had been ravaged by the fighting and they looked for a better life in the city. The existing Musseques were full, and new ones started to grow all round the city. The Musseques now contain three-quarters of Luanda's 1¼ million people.

In the early 1980s the government decided to encourage self-help improvement of the Musseques dwellings, using government funds to provide basic building materials. The government also planned to extend the city's water and electricity supplies and improve the inadequate drainage system; some areas had become flooded and diseases were on the increase. Self-help schemes are now central to government planning.

JENNY MATTHEWS (FORMAT)



## FROM RESISTANCE TO RECONSTRUCTION

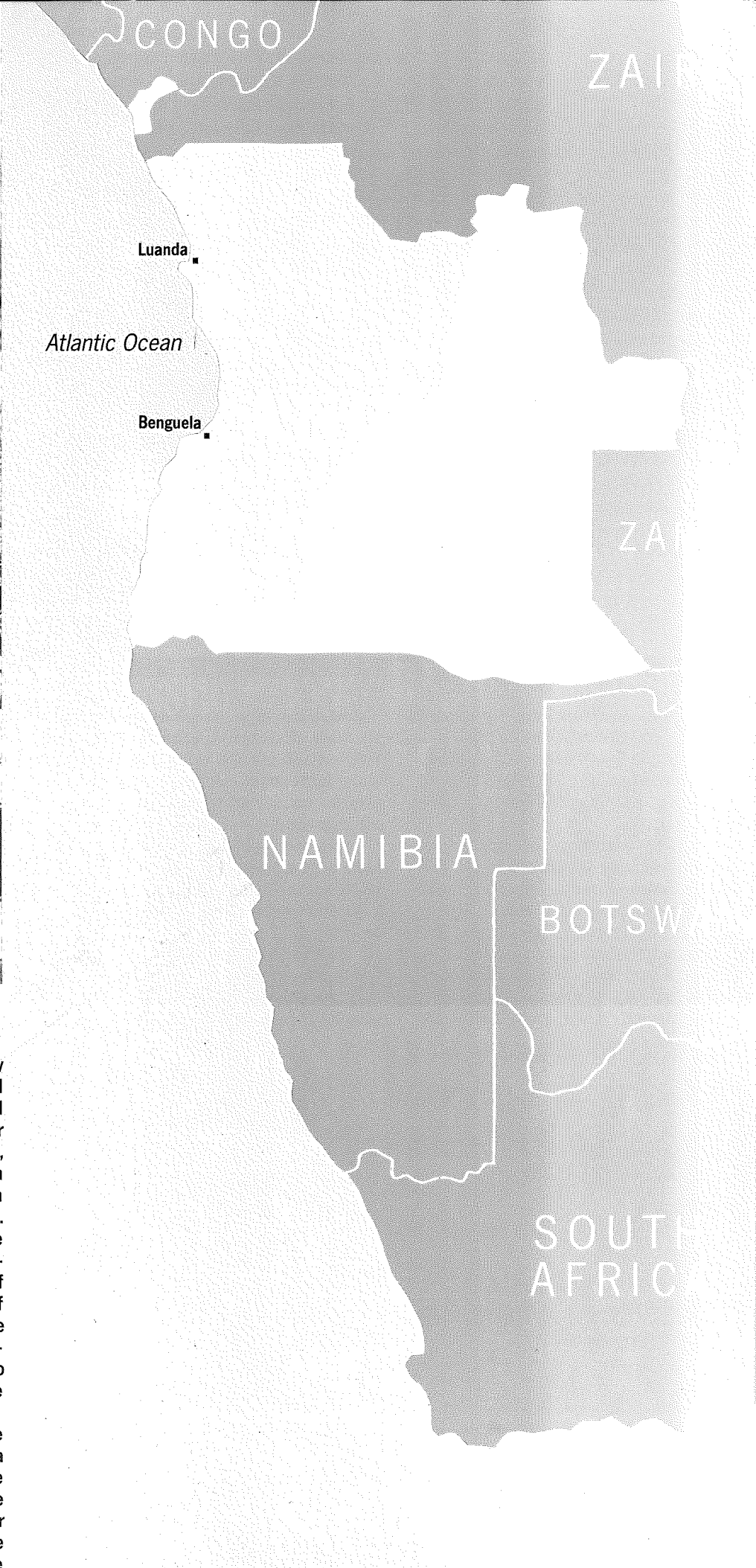
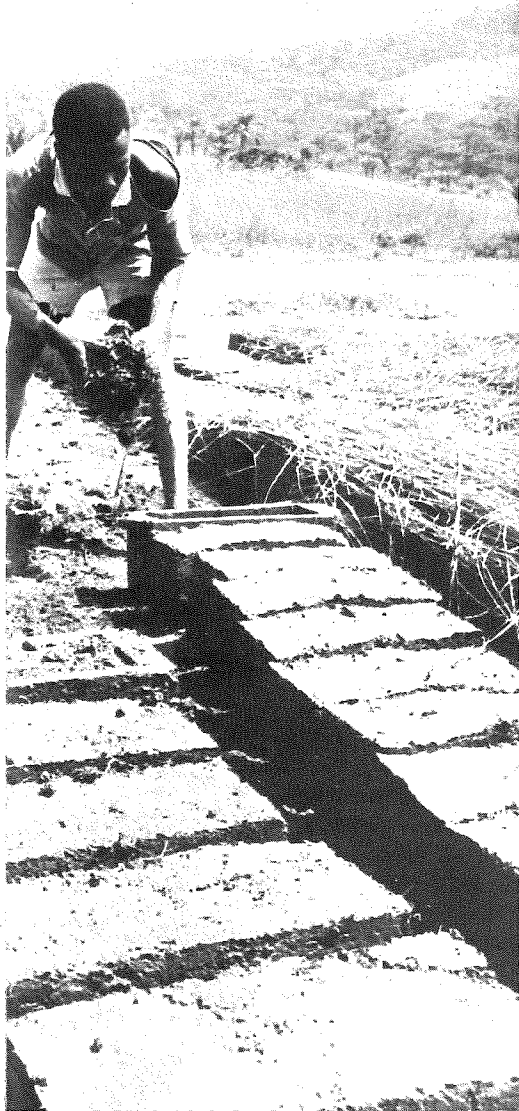
The women and men of Sambizanga, an old Musseques to the north of the city, were active in organising the early resistance to colonial rule, and there is still a lively tradition of community action. The present population is predominantly young and there is a strong desire for better schools and community facilities. There are still some spaces where new buildings can be put up, and local people have volunteered to help in the work. A scheme for a new school has now mushroomed into a pilot project to upgrade the

whole neighbourhood by the progressive rebuilding of houses.

The Angolan Government has offered to allocate scarce building materials and supply some manpower, and War on Want is contributing funds for the project. Local women and men will do most of the work, with training and equipment provided by a new Community Workshop – itself partly built by local work brigades. This workshop has a key role because it will satisfy many different needs of the project.

JENNY MATTHEWS (FORMAT)





## TOOLS FOR THE JOB

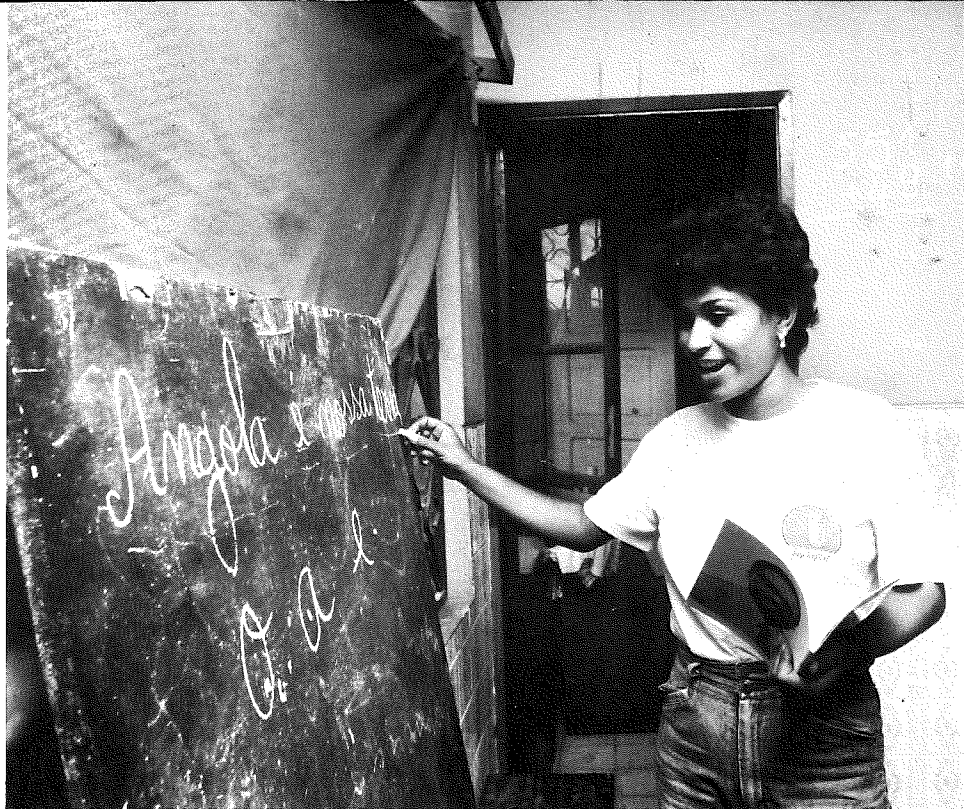
Local people will go to the Community Workshop for training in basic building and carpentry skills. The workshop will also lend them tools and manufacture materials for them to use: latrine slabs, drainage channels, building blocks and roof tiles. Trained women and men will form work brigades as a reservoir of skills for tackling future projects.

Groups of families in Sambizanga have also formed Community Housing Cooperatives. These will organise the building of schools and clinics as well as the upgrading of houses. One of their most difficult tasks is the allocation of land; in a crowded neighbourhood it is not easy to rearrange the plots to make room for a school, or to allow more space for improved dwellings.

In the Sambizanga scheme families are not asked to leave their plots of land unless a good alternative is available in the same district. There is also expert advice for those who need to submit plans to the authorities or establish legal tenure. It is a far cry from the desperate slum-clearance schemes of some



JENNY MATTHEWS (FORMAT)



JENNY MATTHEWS (FORMAT)

A literacy class for women

## PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

It will be a long time before basic services for water, power and drainage can be offered to every dwelling in Sambizanga. Nevertheless, the project is planned in such a way that it will be easy to connect up each house when the services arrive.

A further advantage of rearranging crowded plots is that access will for the first time be possible for fire and ambulance services. At the same time, every effort is being made to preserve the basic layout that gives each neighbourhood its character.

Families can design their own houses or use a standard plan for a two-room 'core' with space for later extensions. Earth latrines are

placed so that they can all be connected later to main drainage. Electricity and water supplies will initially serve only occasional street lights and standpipes, but in due course may be connected to individual homes at minimum cost.

Improvements like these will all help reduce the extra workload that falls to women wherever basic services are lacking, and the Organisation of Angolan Women supports the project.

The Sambizanga project will, if it succeeds, offer a model for urban improvement in many other parts of the world. It is an exciting development for several reasons:

- The local community is kept together and involved in the planning process
- Low-cost local materials and local skills are used
- The scheme is flexible in allowing for further development through self-help and the provision of better services by the city.

Sambizanga is part of a vast worldwide problem. A quarter of the world's people have inadequate shelter, and in Africa the urban population is expected to double by the end of the century. The Sambizanga project offers a realistic solution to a desperate human predicament.

Washing clothes, and collecting cockles from Luanda Bay

*I would like to help  
War on Want's work  
in Angola*

I enclose a donation of £100  £50  £30  £ \_\_\_\_\_  
(payable to War on Want)

Please send details of covenants

Please tick for receipt

Please tell me how I can become more actively  
involved in War on Want's work in Southern Africa

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_



FORMAT