

Activity Report

Country/Place: Namibia / Swakopmund
Date: 8 -10 July 2008
Title of Activity: Community Participation and Influence in Municipal
Development Policy
Local Partner Organisation: Namibia National Association of Women in Business
(NNAWIB)
Name of Rapporteur: Dr. Andrew Niikondo

1. Background / Context of Activity:

Chapter 1 of the Namibian Constitution describes Namibia as “*a sovereign, secular democratic and unitary State founded upon the principles of democracy the rule of law and justice for law. All power shall vest in the people Namibia who shall exercise their sovereignty through the democratic institutions of the state*”.

The structure of the Namibian government includes the central, regional and local government. Article 102 of the Constitution stipulates that the country be divided into regional and local units. In keeping with these constitutional requirements, thirteen (13) administrative regions and many other Local Authorities have been established in terms of both Regional Councils Act (Act No 22 of 1992) and Local Authorities Act (Act No 23 of 1992). For the purpose of this training local councillors and community members from the following towns participated, namely: Swakopmund, Hentiesbay, Walvisbay, Karibib and Usakos in the Erongo Region. The focus of the training was on the role of organised communities and their participation in decision making regarding development and service delivery within the local community. Involving the public in the decision-making and judgements of the local authority is a challenging and difficult task. At the same time it can be a rewarding experience which enhances both the legitimacy of decision-making and the value of what is produced. Therefore, this need has necessitated the presentation of this workshop.

In order to promote good governance in local councils, capacity building of role players, including members of communities, is essential. This implies that councillors will become agents for change in their communities, better communicators, and more effective representatives. Most importantly, it also shifts the focus away from communities waiting patiently (or impatiently) for government to deliver, towards a set of actions that communities themselves can participate in. As such, it creates good understanding of cooperative governance where citizens, councillors and officials take collective responsibility for development at the local level. Hence, this training has imparted relevant information to participants in the establishment and promotion of such governance in terms of municipal-community partnerships around service delivery programmes. It is in light of this that this three-day workshop is so relevant.

3. Objectives of Activity:

This training is designed to:

- Make the citizens and Organised Community Base Organisations (CBOs) aware of their powers and co-responsibility in local governance while establishing a culture of democracy at local level.
- Encourage citizens to claim co-ownership of local institutions and partake in co-governance of local authorities.
- Promote interaction between elected councillors and Organised Community Base Organisations (CBOs).
- Promote the participation of community groups in local governance.

Ultimate goal of the training:

To promote open, responsible and effective local government, through the enhancement of community based citizen participation, on particularly socio-economic matters at local level.

4. Concept / Methodology of Activity:

4.1 Concept

The workshop was a two and half days activity took place outside Mariental. The workshop ran from the morning till the afternoon with some breaks in between. The training covered the following topics:

Day 1: Building the knowledge base: Local Authorities as the grassroots level of government in Namibia

Part I: Role players in Local community development

(Morning session)

- Introductory activities
- Functions and roles of the local government
- Importance of local participation to meet municipal objectives
- Service problems of municipalities
- Group discussions

(Afternoon session)

- Group reports
- Round up

Day 2: Exploring public participation strategies at grassroots level

Part II: Empowering citizens to participate in local decision making

(Morning session)

- What the local authority can do to increase participation of local communities?
- Women empowerment
- Strategic levels of public participation
- Public participation strategies through "consulting" citizens
- Discussion topics

(Afternoon session)

- Public participation strategies through the empowering participants
- Other ways of participating in local government
- Discussions
- Round up

Day 3: Exploring role players in local development: NGOs, CBOs and Small-scale Informal Service Providers

Part III: The role of community groups in implementing council decisions (Public private partnership)(Morning session)

- What are NGOs?
- Difference between NGOs and CBOs
- The characteristics of consumers and CBOs in local partnership
- The role of poor consumers
 - Participants in decision making
 - Participants in the construction process
 - Participants in the management, operation and maintenance of services
 - Participants in cost recovery
- The challenge facing the poor in partnership arrangements
- Group discussions

(Afternoon session)

- Small-scale and informal service providers
- Discussions
- Round up the training

4.2 Methodology

The facilitation involved oral presentations with the aid of a power-point projector and the use of flipcharts. Since the participants were from different town councils such as Swakopmund, Hentiesbay, Walvisbay, Karibib and Usakos, group discussions were organised on that line. The participants break into group discussions and discuss the practical issues related to the theory. Group discussions have yielded different practical experiences because of the diversity of participants involved, such as councillors, community members, small-scale business members and small-scale informal service providers. Through brainstorming and debates in respect of local authority management and participation of communities and their associations such as the youth and women groups, the participants have successfully identified all the problems emanating from the side of the Council and from the side of the residents and made recommendations based on the issues raised in discussions.

5. Target Group / Participants of Activity:

This training targets the councillors in the local authorities, community members and leaders, and small-scale informal service providers.

6. Results / Outcomes of Activity:

6.1 Local government councillors

At the end of the training the local government councillors were able to:

- Guarantee the right of citizens to have access to clear, comprehensive information about the various matters of concern to their local community and to have a say in major decisions affecting their future.
- Seek new ways to enhance community participation and to promote a culture of democratic participation shared by communities and local authorities.
- Encourage citizens to accept their responsibility to contribute to the life of their communities.
- Ensure good communication between local authorities and citizens and encourage local leaders to give emphasis to citizens' participation and careful consideration to their demands and expectations, so as to provide an appropriate response to their needs.
- Recognise the importance of fair representation of women in local government administration.

6.2. Community participants

At the end of the workshop participants from the communities of Swakopmund, Hentiesbay, Walvisbay, Karibib and Usakos were able to:

- Understand their civic rights to participate in municipal governance and decision-making;
- Explain that the local government is not the domain of the political elites only;
- Clearly understand the role of the town council, the chief executive officer and the mayor of the respective local authority, especially within the Namibian context
- Influence their local authorities to recognise the important role of small-scale informal service providers, especially within the poor communities living in marginalised areas.
- Recognise the importance of creating Community Based Organisations in their towns to facilitate strong collaboration with their local governments;
- Identify the role of local government in supporting volunteer community participation;
- Understand the importance of influencing the local government decisions through voting;
- Be aware of practical barriers to community participation such as the tyranny of distance; increasing costs; and
- Understand the importance of attending local government public meetings.

7. Evaluation / Assessment of Activity:

The participants have shown appreciation for the provided training indicating that it was practical and related to what is happening within their local authorities. The participants indicated that they became aware of their democratic rights and responsibilities towards service delivery in the respective local authority. The training enlightened the participants to be able to engage effectively in discussions regarding their future and the role of the local authority. The participants also learnt that effective participation can bring a better policy direction, improved services, a new imaginative way of tackling issues, better understanding and more broadly a sense of hope and a shared commitment to change. The participants at the workshop were asked to suggest the action plan to convey the contents of the workshop to their communities and local councils.