



## GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES AT REGIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL: INSIGHTS FROM HARDAP, KAVANGO AND OMAHEKE

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*“Around the world, there is a new appreciation that local governance is much more than city administration that collects taxes and delivers essential services such as basic education, clean water, sewers, transportation, or housing. Instead, local democracy is rightly seen as the very foundation of a higher quality and more enduring democracy”<sup>1</sup>.*

### Key aspects of this paper

Unfortunately, there is yet to be a “new appreciation” of the significance of local governance in Namibia. All too often, the experiences of and insights from sub-national authorities are overlooked in favour of an obsession with centralised politics and administration. But improved local and regional governance should be the very foundation of a higher quality and sustainable democracy (and therefore more responsive and effective service delivery) as indicated in the introductory quotation.

The quality of regional and local governance tends to be a neglected topic. The media often feature reports about corruption and irregularities at local and regional level, but there is little discussion of what changes and reforms could prevent graft becoming endemic in regional councils and local authorities. Several of the interviews with local and regional officials for this paper tend to indicate that sub-national authorities are not very active in improving their own governance systems and levels of accountability and often have a ‘dependency complex’ – looking to central government (usually the Ministry of Regional and Local Government) for answers, action and sometimes bail-outs.

This paper seeks to challenge this state of affairs by examining governance issues at the ‘periphery’. Between May and July 2012, IPPR researchers visited three towns in three different political regions of Namibia. The mission was to canvass first-hand information on governance issues that local and regional councils are grappling with. After spending several days at Mariental<sup>2</sup> in the Hardap Region, the researchers proceeded to Rundu in the Kavango Region before the last field visit to Gobabis in the Omaheke Region.

From the field trips it has become clear that local accountability systems – particularly through outreach, consultation and forums like Constituency Development Committees – are often either non-existent or patchy, while the exact functions and aims of such initiatives remain sketchy. Only a very small minority of citizens participate even when consultative mechanisms are functioning. At local level this situation is not helped by the fact that councillors are elected according to a party list system and hence do not have direct links with particular communities or suburbs. In the interests of developing accountability and responsiveness at local level it would seem necessary to revisit the ward system and discuss much-needed electoral and delimitation reforms. While the Local Authorities Act (Act 23 of 1992) made provision for the first local authority elections to be conducted according to the party list system, it did state that the next elections should follow

<sup>1</sup> International IDEA. (2001, p. 1).

<sup>2</sup> Mariental is one of the four towns whose Municipality was part of an integrity pilot project for local authorities in 2001. Conducted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in collaboration with the Namibia Association of Local Authorities (ALAN) with the Assistance of Management Systems International (MSI), the project assessed areas that might be most vulnerable to corruption. For Mariental, three main areas were found wanting: “1) Policies and procedures and technical assistance for – procurement, land allocation and sales; 2) Training in Councillor/Staff responsibilities and relationships; 3) Strategy to involve civil society and raise public awareness” (see UN-Habitat & TI, 2004: 34).

a 'first past the post' system in designated wards. However, by 1997 it was felt that Namibia was not yet ready for a ward system since population distribution in urban settings was still heavily influenced by apartheid practices – resulting in some suburbs being predominantly populated by a single ethnic group.<sup>3</sup>

Gaps between public officials and ordinary citizens also affect the fight against corruption since there is sometimes limited understanding and agreement on what constitutes corruption. There appears to be an urgent need for more civic education and joint initiatives between councils and community groups aimed at raising awareness about the dangers of corruption.

Most interviewees for this paper expressed frustration that the wheels of decentralisation have turned so slowly since the policy was first introduced in the late 1990s. This is causing frustration and disillusionment among staff and elected representatives at sub-national authorities. The policy of decentralisation needs to be revisited and revitalised if sub-national authorities are to fulfil their potential in driving development in their areas.

It also emerged that some local and regional authorities lack capacity in terms of human capital. This can have negative consequences if some functions such as finance are decentralised yet there is no capacity to adequately monitor and account for how finances are utilised.

The interviews from the three case studies suggest that fighting corruption at regional and local levels is not given the attention it deserves. All the council officials agreed that aside from national initiatives such as the efforts of the Anti-Corruption Commission and the police, localised anti-corruption initiatives are required.

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## Recommendations

1. Constituency Development Committees and Village Development Committees should be utilised to discuss local and regional development issues including anti-corruption awareness-raising and strategies. At the moment they appear to be little more than democratic window-dressing with no legal or formal basis. Their role, composition, and links with civil society should be clarified through appropriate amendments to existing laws and regulations.
2. Local and regional councils should actively promote awareness campaigns on preventing and tackling corruption in tan-

dem with the ACC's public education programmes, non-governmental organisations and civic organisations.

3. Decentralisation has faltered. There is a need for a national review of decentralisation with a view to speeding it up, setting clear targets, and gearing the policy to enhancing accountability and improving service delivery.
4. There should be a deliberate approach from central government to building human resource capacity in the regions. Where such capacity is lacking locally, there should be a clear policy of importing such skills with emphasis on skills transfer to Namibians.
5. At local authority level, links and lines of accountability between councils and their communities can be enhanced by introducing the ward system to elect local politicians. Government should review the potential for introducing this form of representation in appropriate local authorities (mainly larger settlements as the delimitation of wards in small settlements may be problematic).
6. The ACC should receive adequate funding to be able to open regional offices that would have both investigation and public education roles.

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## 1. Levels of corruption at local and regional level

Media reports over the last few years tend to indicate that there are severe corruption risks at local and regional level. Since 2005 at least 32 cases involving allegations of corruption and poor governance were reported on in the print media involving 18 separate local authorities. Eight of Namibia's 13 regional councils have featured in reports about corruption dealing with 15 sets of allegations<sup>4</sup>. Since 2005 there have been very few reported convictions in these cases – partly because some investigations appear to peter out and also because of the slow pace of Namibia's justice system. For example, the case involving the former Karas Chief Regional Officer, Salmaan Jacobs, has been before the courts for five years without a resolution.<sup>5</sup>

The common thread in many of the cases is one of public officials abusing their positions to siphon off funds and benefits for themselves and their relatives and associates. Several of the allegations concern the claiming of expenses that were not due to the individual official. The fact that these payments were made in questionable if not criminal circumstances suggests that accounting officers often fail to identify the risks involved in such

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<sup>3</sup> The issue was highlighted in a Law Reform and Development Commission document published in April 2012 called 'Revision and Reform of the Namibian Electoral Act (Act 24 of 1992) Report' by Professor Gerhard Toetemeyer, which in its recommendation 59 stated that there should be a "governmental commission ... to consider the subdivision of local authority areas into wards and recommend which local authorities should qualify for a ward system."

<sup>4</sup> As cited in Tjirera E., Haimbodi M., Hopwood G. "Risking Corruption-Regional and Local Governance in Namibia", IPPR Anti-Corruption Research Programme, Paper 9, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> See 'Ex-Karas CRO pleads for more time' in The Namibian Sun, March 1 2012 - <http://www.namibiansun.com/content/national-news/ex-karas-cro-pleads-for-more-time>

transactions and fail to block such payments. The other worrying theme in cases recorded since 2005 is the regular abuse of the public procurement system – suggesting that regional and local tender boards operate arbitrarily and without proper oversight.

According to the ACC's national urban survey of late 2011, local authorities came tenth in terms of perceptions of the 'most corrupt' institutions in Namibia. However, corruption at both local and regional levels was seen to be increasing by respondents. The Namibia Institute for Democracy's Actual Instances of Corruption report for 2008/09 found that 16 percent of print media articles on corruption allegations focused on local authorities, with only parastatals and the private sector being more common locations for graft.

However, regional and local officials interviewed for this paper mostly played down the threat of corruption, arguing that instances of graft were still low. Worryingly, not many of those interviewed appeared to think that their authorities should be playing a pro-active role in preventing corruption both through personal leadership and by introducing systems and regulations that promote integrity.

At Mariental, the Mayor Alex Kamburute said corruption has affected the Municipality in several ways including cases of nepotism with people in power employing their relatives and theft and embezzlement through money going missing from Council coffers. The Mayor said there were internal structures for handling corruption issues.

Hardap Regional Governor Katrina Hanse-Himarwa observed that being ethical stemmed from individual conviction and could not be enforced by law. She added that existing structures such as the anti-graft agency, the police and the justice system were sufficient to handle corruption cases.

There is an implication in the responses of some officials that any frank discussion of corruption, weaknesses in systems, and lack of controls could impinge negatively on the image of the sub-national authority. However, strategies that promote actions aimed at curbing corruption are clearly needed. Therefore, it is important not to see discussion of corruption-related matters as a potential public relations *faux pas* but rather as an opportunity for improving the quality of governance practices by closing loopholes, adopting best practices and providing examples of ethical leadership.

## Instances of alleged corruption at Mariental

### Catherine Boois

Acting CEO of Mariental Municipality & Vice-Chairperson of the Local Tender Board

- (a) There is a case of N\$ 18,000 stolen from a cashier. It is now with the police, and investigation is ongoing. Internal investigations also took place and the people involved are on final written warnings pending the outcome of the police investigation.
- (b) Suspected fuel theft – an internal investigation yielded no evidence to suggest that there was fuel theft.

According to the Councillor of Mashare Constituency, Bonafatius Wakudumo, the Kavango Regional Council has not experienced major incidences of corruption. He believes the priority should be given to raising awareness among citizens as to what constitutes corruption. He said that many local people did not understand what corruption was. To illustrate his point, he gave the following example: Picture a person wanting to travel 200km to Rundu. An official driving a government car stops to give this person a ride to Rundu. The driver asks him/her to pay N\$100. He/she is happy to pay the N\$100 to get a ride and would not perceive such a payment as corruption.

To this end, the Councillor contends that current initiatives should focus on educating people about what corruption is before addressing how people can report corruption. Besides the Regional Councils Act, Act No. 22 of 1992, and codes of conduct that govern how officials ought to act, there is no other mechanism that promotes good governance or anti-corruption initiatives at regional level.

## Instances of alleged corruption in Kavango

### Sebastian Kantema

CRO of Kavango Regional Council

- (a) There was an incidence of officials in the Finance Department involved in corrupt activities. The Council took a decision and three staff members were dismissed.

The CRO for Omaheke, Pederius Tjihoreko, played down the impact of corruption: "For the few years that I have been around, I cannot really pin-point a specific incidence of corruption in the Regional Council. We are trying our level best to stick to the provisions and thus far no incidences of corruption

have come to our attention although at times one cannot work on rumours. At times things have been reported here and there but found not to be correct.”

Again there was a sense that the community needed to be educated about what corruption actually is with the CRO saying it is best to “sensitise the community to know exactly what corruption is because people mix corruption with other things. At times it might be just theft and people say it’s corruption.” This points to the need for civic education on corruption-related issues which the Council could play an active role in – in tandem with local civil society organisations and the ACC.

The Governor of Omaheke Laura McLeod-Katjirua believes the Council has not been empowered enough to tackle corruption issues. In reference to public service disciplinary procedures, she argued that “at times we are not able to take anybody to task but rather to follow rules that are made for you to follow.” This has been “frustrating to a certain extent as people believe that government does not punish”. The Governor lamented the absence of supporting legislation to empower regional councils to take action against those found to be involved in corruption and other irregularities. This experience challenges the perception that power has been decentralised to regional and local authorities.

Laura McLeod-Katjirua conceded that the Regional Council “is not immune” to corruption but emphasised “the reporting process is cumbersome”. So far, the Governor observed that they have dealt with corruption by obtaining advice from the Attorney General’s office and the Public Service Commission – a system she believes is “bureaucratic, slow and does not work well.”

## 2. Financial accountability and the role of the Auditor General

Financial accountability is one of the problem areas besetting efforts to achieve good governance at sub-national level. Regional and local authorities find it hard to attract the necessary expertise, making it difficult to maintain the accounting systems needed for proper financial management and accountability.

### (i) Hardap Region – Mariental

The Hardap Governor, Katrina Hanse-Himarwa, pointed out that her office is not audited since they do not receive a budget. Governors’ offices are not subsidised by the local authority; rather the budget for the office of a Governor is administered by the Ministry of Regional, Local Government, Housing and Rural Development.

Hanse-Himarwa believes oversight is critical and welcomes the proposal to have the national tender board overseeing procurement in regional and local councils. However, she believes that control of procurement processes should be left with local

and regional authorities. A national tender board would only be appropriate if it oversees without control, she added. Officials fear that they will lose power to external agencies or central government and that decentralisation will be further undermined.

In addition, the Hardap Governor suggested the following measures to ensure accountability:

- Declarations of interests at regional level – review of current legislation to strengthen declarations to prevent conflict of interest
- Politicians should not sit on the tender board – instead technocrats with relevant skills would do a better job. This will also avoid manipulation by politicians
- There should be a clear policy on the composition of panels for interviews and tender boards aimed at neutralising the influence of lobbying by prospective candidates and contractors

### Staff constraints at Mariental Municipality

Impending staff constraints in financial reporting at Mariental Municipality should be taken seriously. According to Acting CEO Catherine Boois, the transfer of knowledge is not taking place as it should. There are trainable people, but the transfer is yet to take place from the knowledgeable staff member(s) to the new recruits. On a positive note, Mariental Municipality is up-to-date with the Office of the Auditor General in terms of reporting. Alas, according to Catherine Boois – the Municipality does not produce financial reports for the public let alone annual reports on the activities of the Council.

### (ii) Kavango Region – Rundu

Since it is up-to-date with its financial reporting to the Office of the Auditor General, the Kavango Regional Council says it does not have any staffing deficiencies in financial reporting. On a monthly basis, the Regional Council produces financial reports. Annual reports on the activities of the Council are also produced. However, again these reports are not always publicly available.

### (iii) Omaheke Region – Gobabis

Financial accountability and transparency is one of the critical factors in good governance. The major problem that the Council is facing concerns the poor preparation of the reports which sometimes leads to them being returned for corrections or revisions. This can be attributed to the lack of capacity in terms of human resources.

The Governor attributes capacity gaps to staff members moving to greener pastures: “Today you might say you have everything on board. Tomorrow some resign for a better offer or



for whatever reason. So, obviously a gap is created and I think the process of recruitment is a lengthy process.” This indicates that the Council’s ability to tackle corruption can be undermined by a lack of competitive salaries and a constant turnover of staff. This is worsened by the slowness of the system when it comes to replacing staff.

McLeod-Katjirua expressed mixed feelings when it comes to the proposal to have oversight of the councils by a national tender board. She agrees with the Governor of Hardap that politicians should not be part of the tender board. Moreover, McLeod-Katjirua is against the idea of a permanent tender board. “Permanent tender boards for me are not the way to go but a simple solution would be to rotate tender board members when the need arises.” The implication is that officials who serve only for a temporary period would be less corruptible than officials who are known to be always dealing with such processes. This would help to eliminate incidents of lobbying for tenders by company representatives (possibly using underhand methods) who have links to permanent tender board members.

To increase transparency, the CRO for Omaheke suggested the following:

- Training from time to time so as to reduce risks
- Transparency when inviting quotations
- Confidentiality in dealing with quotations and tenders

As far as financial reporting at Gobabis Municipality is concerned, there are no staffing constraints. Financial reporting to the Auditor General is up-to-date and there are monthly financial reports issued by the Council for those who are interested in the financial matters of the town.

### 3. Decentralisation policy and accountability

*“We are still functioning under a heavily centralised system”<sup>6</sup>.*

There is general consensus, or perhaps frustration, among regional and local authority officials interviewed that decentralisation has not adequately taken root at sub-national levels and its benefits are yet to be fully realised. Interviews suggest that decentralisation is a mixed bag of a process. While the aim of bringing of services closer to the people through decentralisation is commended, for some officials its implementation remains a mirage – or a ‘dream’ in the language of Sebastian Kantema.

#### (i) Hardap Region – Mariental

Decentralisation has been proposed as a mechanism for achieving accountability. One way of achieving decentralisation is through the establishment of Regional Development Coordinating Committees and Constituency Development Committees. In the Hardap Region, the impression that one gets is that these committees are not functioning as they are supposed to due to several challenges.

The first challenge is the conflict of jurisdiction between these committees and other regional structures. In addition, there are allegations of a lack of professionalism. According to the Mayor of Mariental, confidential information is being leaked from some of these committees. As a result, there is an environment of mistrust within regional structures that are supposed to be working together to promote good governance within the region. In general both regional and local consultative committees lack clear mandates and functions.

According to the Hardap Governor, Regional Development Coordinating Committees and Constituency Development Committees are operational. She, however, admits that there are major challenges such as political manipulation resulting in the hand-picking of committee members who usually do the bidding of their political masters and not that of citizens.

The Mayor of Mariental said that only some functions relating to education, health and social services have been decentralised. In general, local authorities want to have more control over the revenue that they collect and use it to develop local infrastructure.

On the part of the Governor of Hardap, there is a need to adapt the decentralisation policy based on the experience that has been gained from implementing it so far. She observed that at this point, the decentralisation policy has only been successful in creating structures. Decentralisation “cannot just create structures without resourcing them and the main resource to strengthen these structures is financial. If the financial resources are still centralised then decentralisation becomes sweet talk.”

It can be concluded from the interviews with the Mayor of Mariental and the Governor of Hardap region that decentralisation is still in its infancy. Decision-making remains in the hands of central government to the extent that local authorities have to seek permission from the Minister to donate to the needy in their communities. Obviously this defeats the whole purpose of decentralisation as a means of speeding up service delivery. There is also a need to harmonise legislation on local and regional authorities with the decentralisation policy so that relevant powers and responsibilities are taken on by sub-national authorities.

The Hardap Governor explained further: “If you want to donate yet the budget is already approved by the Minister. For a small item inside the approved budget, you have to go back and ask for approval. These are the things that are hindering the smooth progress and the issue of development at this level. In fact

<sup>6</sup> Interview with the CRO of Kavango Regional Council, Sebastian Kantema on June 11, 2012 – Rundu.

some of the things are illegal: Regional Councils must get their money directly from the Minister of Finance and not through the Ministry of Local Government – as per the Regional Councils Act. What is happening at the moment is that Regional Councils have to forward their budgets to the Ministry of Regional and Local Government, which is nowhere in the Act. But somehow for a ‘smart partnership’, things are being illegally done and we keep peace with that.”

This tends to support the finding in the IPPR’s earlier research paper<sup>7</sup> - that decentralisation in Namibia has focussed on the transfer of functions rather than power and that it has been unacceptably slow.

### The elusive search for ‘real’ decentralisation

*“We are happy with offices that have been decentralised, but more offices need to come to Mariental. Most functions are yet to be decentralised and the whole process is still fuzzy. Some offices are decentralized but signing powers are still in Windhoek, e.g. Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration” (Catherine Boois, Acting CEO of Mariental Municipality).*

### (ii) Kavango Region – Rundu

According to Councillor Bonafatius Wakudumo, political leaders at Rundu remain unhappy with the rate at which decentralisation is proceeding. He said, “We are so demoralised by centralisation in the sense that the pace at which decentralisation is implemented is very slow. We are still crying. It is not working.”

Those aspects of government that have been decentralised seem to bear fruit in improved service delivery. Wakudumo lamented what he perceived as a “lack of political will” to implement decentralisation. In addition, he contends that the policy of decentralisation is vague as it does not set targets or timelines.

### The approach is still top-down

*“Decentralisation is still a dream. So far only two ministries have been decentralised: Works and Transport and Education. The approach is still top to bottom. We are still functioning under a heavily centralised system” (Sebastian Kantema, CRO of Kavango Regional Council).*

### (iii) Omaheke Region – Gobabis

The Governor of Omaheke region observed that only two functions of government have been decentralised – the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Works. She maintains that the financial aspect of decentralisation is yet to be implemented despite the fact that in principle it has been approved.

Laura McLeod-Katjirua argued against the current set-up whereby the driver for decentralisation is the Ministry of Regional, Local Government, Housing and Rural Development (through the existence of the Directorate of Decentralisation Coordination). Instead she said decentralisation should be spear-headed by a higher office such as the Office of Prime Minister in order to create clarity and momentum.

As in the Hardap region the challenges of sourcing finance and technical expertise are key. The Governor of Omaheke had this to say: “The main shortcoming is of course financing as usual. If only stones were money, then we would not complain. Secondly, it’s infrastructural development in the regions and thirdly the technical know-how. Up to now the Council has no engineer.”

Decentralisation has often taken the form of deconcentration i.e government offices moving to the regions. While such developments are positive, it is not in essence what decentralisation is about. What should be happening is the empowering and capacitating of local and regional elected authorities with powers and roles being devolved. And this is where the process is either at a standstill or moving at a snail’s pace.

### Bring all the other offices

*“Government offices that were only Windhoek-based are now in the town of Gobabis. This makes services more accessible to the people. The most prominent one is the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration – community members in the past had to travel to Windhoek every now and then to get their official documentation, but now the Ministry is here. This has been a positive move. We would like to see more government offices coming closer to the people”. - Ephraem Dawids, Gobabis Municipality CEO*

The fate of decentralisation is often determined by political culture. “Political culture can impede decentralisation, particularly when it values the idea of final authority – whether for certain governmental institutions or for the ‘nation’ as such.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, there are inherent advantages and disadvantages to decentralisation as a process that are worth noting (see below).

There are downsides and risks associated with decentralisation – not least that corruption could increase as small cabals of

7 Tjirera E., Haimbodi M., Hopwood G. “Risking Corruption- Regional and Local Governance in Namibia”, IPPR Anti –Corruption Research Programme, Paper 9, 2012

8 Böckenförde (2011, p. 9).

sub-national politicians, officials and private interests take hold of large amounts of resources that are being distributed by central government. Such corruption can grow apace because such cabals feel they are operating out of sight of national oversight bodies and other checks and balances such as the media spotlight. Decentralisation only strengthens the argument that the

ACC should have a presence in every region to ensure these negative trends do not develop. At the same time decentralisation must be closely tied to democratisation – with lines of accountability between citizens and elected and appointed officials being strengthened.

## The pros and cons of decentralisation

<b>Positive: decentralising power can assist in:</b>	<b>Negative: decentralising power might cause:</b>
<p><i>“... limiting authoritarianism at the national level.</i></p> <p>Some forms of decentralisation require power sharing, thereby diffusing power vertically.</p>	<p><i>... the strengthening of local elites who could misuse power.</i></p> <p>Powerful interests can misuse the community or local government for private interests. Corruption is hard to eradicate at the level of small and potentially inefficient local governments.</p>
<p><i>... increasing responsiveness to the needs and preferences of the people.</i></p> <p>Local communities are more likely to respond to local needs.</p>	<p><i>... ineffectiveness due to deficient human and financial resources.</i></p> <p>Communities can be too small and overwhelmed to fulfil their functions properly because they do not have sufficient human and financial resources.</p>
<p><i>... managing tensions and potential conflicts within countries featuring a diverse population.</i></p> <p>Decentralisation might enable minority groups to enjoy a degree of self-governance as well as to acquire a majority status in their own region.</p> <p>Political leaders of minority groups can fill a formally recognised leadership position at the regional level.</p>	<p><i>... local elites and politicians to demand greater autonomy. ... the establishment of new regional majorities.</i></p> <p>Assigning majority status to a national minority in a specific region might create new minorities, thereby only shifting instead of resolving the problem.</p>
<p><i>... encouraging positive, active approaches to government and policy development.</i></p> <p>By creating alternative sources of governing authority, decentralisation promotes policy competition, policy experimentation and policy innovation.</p>	<p><i>... harmful competition between regions.</i></p> <p>Decentralisation might lead to inequality and rivalry between regions, since natural resources, industries and employment opportunities differ by region. Moreover, a ‘race to the bottom’ might result as regions progressively weaken regulation in order to attract business and capital.</p>
<p><i>... structuring the complexity of government.</i></p> <p>By distributing suitable powers to regional or local governments, decentralisation spreads the burden of government and enables the national centre to focus on key challenges and priorities.</p>	<p><i>... duplication of work and greater operating expenses.</i></p> <p>Decentralisation can duplicate government functions and permit inefficient, overlapping or contradictory policies in different parts of the country. Decentralised systems also cost more given the greater number of elected or paid officials at several levels of government”*.</p>

\*Op. cit., pp. 10 – 11.

## 4. Role of citizens in holding their elected / appointed officials accountable

In the three towns and regions visited, it was apparent that the citizenry have few avenues for meaningful participation. As mentioned earlier, the mandates and roles of regional and local development committees remain unclear and they often operate patchily. Notwithstanding that community members might be invited to council meetings and consultative gatherings by their regional and local councils, they usually do not get to know agenda items of these meetings in advance. Most if not all officials interviewed alluded to a lack of participation and/or interest in meetings from community members. Various factors that impede or explain lack of interest and participation by community members were put forward by the regional and local officials. Invariably, these factors include the following:

1. Ignorance
2. Level of education
3. Apathy
4. A top-down approach – ‘I know what people want’

### (i) Hardap Region – Mariental

According to a previous IPPR paper<sup>9</sup>, some academics argue that decentralisation brings about more equitable and efficient service delivery as well as improved policymaking through increased public participation in decision-making. This is viewed as translating into increased accountability as well.

The Mayor of Mariental, Alex Kamburute, is of the opinion that the role of elected officials is to provide a link between the Council and the community. The Mayor suggested that citizens are free to interact with officials through meetings. Kamburute added that the Mayor’s office has an open-door policy whereby people can come in and talk to the Mayor about any issue. In addition, the Mayor holds that residents are free to demonstrate and protest if they are not satisfied with the responses and service delivery they receive.

The Governor of the Hardap Region commenting on the same issue suggested that structures are there for people to fully participate (see box on this page).

The Mayor of Mariental sees a lack of awareness as a barrier to participation: “The only challenge is ignorance; people do not see the benefits of what we are trying to do. They see corruption, that we are only employing people we know or people who are known to other people and not to the whole community and the trust is being broken.”

### Governor of Hardap Region Katrina Hanse-Himarwa on participation of citizens in governance issues

The creation of the regional council itself, through the Regional Councils Act, indicates already that institutions of government have come closer to the people, so the presence of the institution like the regional council is an indication that people are getting access to the government.

Besides that, regional councils came after independence - but local authorities were already closer to the people through the municipal services that they are rendering to the people. Local authority councillors are elected by the local masses for that matter, so these are platforms through which they have to express their democratic rights. On the other hand, representatives have to make sure that there is continuous interaction through platforms such as community meetings, electronic communication, radio, TVs etc.

The Governor corroborated this position: “The barriers that hinder people to fully utilise platforms and structures that are there varies because of the various set-ups you find in your community and its also influenced by many other factors like the level of understanding of our people, as well as the level of understanding of the elected representatives in terms of the purpose and the service delivery and the level of understanding of their responsibilities.”

Although the Governor of Hardap and the Mayor of Mariental profess that citizens are participating, the extent and level of this participation is worrying. Some citizens are not knowledgeable about their democratic rights and this limits their participation in governance issues.

When asked to highlight how the citizens of the region report corruption, the Governor emphasised that there is no legislation that supports anti-corruption activities at regional level. The region relies on national or centralised authorities.

The Mayor of Mariental pointed out that the structure for reporting corruption is first to the CEO and if no action is taken, then the case can be reported to the Councillor and if still no action is taken, the case is reported to the Mayor. The effectiveness of this approach is doubtful. In most cases, corruption charges will be against the very same people who are tasked with receiving and investigating the case. This structure presupposes that senior officers in the region are not corrupt which may not be the case.

<sup>9</sup> Tjirera E., Haimbodi M., Hopwood G. “Risking Corruption- Regional and Local Governance in Namibia”, IPPR Anti –Corruption Research Programme, Paper 9, 2012



As such, citizens find themselves in a difficult situation where they may be required to report corrupt or irregular activities to the very same people they are accusing. In addition, the whole process is not anonymous and does not provide any guarantees against victimisation by those who are powerful and well connected. The local police would be one alternative as an agency to report suspected corruption to. However, it is clear that a decentralised Anti-Corruption Commission, present in all 13 regions, would be the best option. This would require a major increase in government funding for the ACC.

### (ii) Kavango Region – Rundu

The issue of citizen participation in Rundu produced similar responses to the Omaheke and Hardap regions. The Councillor of Mashare Constituency, Bonifatius Wakadumo, strongly believes that issues of development should be initiated at grass-roots level. He emphasised the concept of participatory democracy.

In the Kavango region, this is achieved though citizen participation in council matters through various means. The council is in touch with the citizens through radio, one-on-one meetings with citizens as well as making visits to the villages. The structures of village and constituency development committees are operational and are the primary means through which councils plan development.

The major challenge the Council faces is that the Kavango region is vast and therefore coordinating developmental efforts in remote areas can be difficult. Line ministries sometimes do not turn up for crucial planning meetings.

The challenge is the willingness of line ministries, like at the CDC level; some ministries do not show up. You give them letters of invitation and you will tell them to confirm. This does not only happen at CDC level but also happens at the RDCC level and you will see that some ministries undermine us and do not even attend these platforms.

- The Councillor of Mashare Constituency,  
Bonifatius Wakadumo

### (iii) Omaheke Region – Gobabis

According to Laura McLeod-Katjirua, the Omaheke Regional Council is run on the basis of two “arms”, i.e. administrators and politicians. The citizens have become the third arm and participate in determining their destiny by giving input on issues that affect them. The Chief Regional Officer Pederius Tjihoreko qualifies this by stating that they achieve this participation through meetings between council and citizens. Members of

the public are not present in some meetings such as constituency development meetings but the council ensures that they meet at least quarterly to inform the citizens about the deliberations.

As noted in the Hardap region, the same challenges are being experienced in Omaheke with regards to the effectiveness of meetings as a medium of citizen participation. The CRO for Omaheke noted the following:

- Financial constraints – bringing all the people together is a challenge because it costs a lot of money
- Education level – even if they attend, some members of the public have problems in understanding the subject matter
- Lack of interest – some members of public are not motivated to participate in development issues because of a lack of interest
- Political differences – politics play a major role because at times people have reservations about participating due to party political differences
- The Governor for Omaheke concurred with these observations and added the following factors:
- Awareness – the region is experiencing challenges in making the citizens aware of systems that are in place in terms of developmental issues
- Active participation - some members not fully participating

In terms of decentralisation, the Governor is of the opinion that decentralisation structures are clearly spelled out in the decentralisation policy. The structure is such that citizens articulate their views first to Village Development Committees (VDCs). The VDCs communicate to Constituency Development Committees (CDCs) which leads to the Regional Development Coordinating Committees (RDCCs). In the Omaheke region, the Governor maintains that these structures are running smoothly.

## 5. Public procurement

Public procurement is a crucial means through which sub-national structures shape their development agendas. It could be argued that through accountable and autonomous procurement decisions and processes at regional and local levels decentralisation is best clearly manifested.

One of the proposals of the new Public Procurement Bill is for the National Tender Board to have oversight over regional and local tender boards. This proposal does not sit well with regional and local authority officials.

<b>Gobabis Municipality</b>	<b>Mariental Municipality</b>
<p>“Would not want a situation whereby the National Tender Board takes over the responsibilities of the Local Tender Board. But some monitoring and oversight in the sense of seeing to it that all processes are done properly and transparently is welcome”.</p>	<p>“Currently the biggest problem that we are having is that our things are getting messed up because of people sitting in other [central government] offices. It will create more interference. In the case of TIPEEG, central Government appoints consulting engineers on Mariental’s behalf for capital projects. These engineers can come with their own labourers and this puts local people at a disadvantage. If the National Tender Board is given oversight over the Regional and Local Tender Boards, it will create a lot of interference”.</p>
<b>Kavango Regional Council</b>	
<p>As long as the oversight is not going to cause any delays, there is no problem with it.</p>	

Unfortunately, experience has shown at other sub-national authorities that local and regional tendering processes are prone to irregularities if not outright corruption. Therefore a national oversight body is needed to both monitor and advise councils on dealing with public procurement transparently, efficiently and fairly. As public agencies, it is hoped that local and regional authorities will fall under the new national public procurement regime.

- At local authority level, links and lines of accountability between councils and their communities can be enhanced by introducing the ward system to elect local politicians. Government should review the potential for introducing this form of representation in appropriate local authorities (mainly larger settlements as the delimitation of wards in small settlements may be problematic).
- The ACC should receive adequate funding to be able to open regional offices that would have both investigation and public education roles.

## Recommendations

- Constituency Development Committees and Village Development Committees should be utilised to discuss local and regional development issues including anti-corruption awareness-raising and strategies. At the moment they appear to be little more than democratic window-dressing with no legal or formal basis. Their role, composition, and links with civil society should be clarified through appropriate amendments to existing laws and regulations.
- Local and regional councils should actively promote awareness campaigns on preventing and tackling corruption in tandem with the ACC’s public education programmes, non-governmental organisations and civic organisations.
- Decentralisation has faltered. There is a need for a national review of decentralisation with a view to speeding it up, setting clear targets, and gearing the policy to enhancing accountability and improving service delivery.
- There should be a deliberate approach from central government to building human resource capacity in the regions. Where such capacity is lacking locally, there should be a clear policy of importing such skills with emphasis on skills transfer to Namibians.

## Interviews

**The following officials were interviewed for this paper:**

**Mariental/Hardap – May 28 -30**

Ms. Catherine Boois  
Acting CEO of Mariental Municipality

Mr. Diedrich Hoebeb  
Human Resources Coordinator of Mariental Municipality

His Worship Cllr. Alex Kamburute  
Mayor of Mariental

Cllr. Lafrens Gariseb  
Chairperson of the Management Committee (Mariental Municipality)

Hon. Katrina Hanse-Himarwa  
Hardap Regional Governor

### **Rundu/Kavango – June 11 – 14**

Hon. Maurus Nekaro  
Governor of Kavango Region

Mr. Sebastian H. Kantema  
CRO of Kavango Regional Council

Hon. Bonifatius Wakudumo  
Councillor for Mashare Constituency & Chairperson of the  
Management Council (Kavango Regional Council)

Mr. Gabriel. P. Sinimbo  
Director: Planning and Development (Kavango Regional  
Council)

Her Worship Ms. Hillka W. Leevi  
Mayor of Rundu

Mr. Romanus N. Haironga  
CEO of Rundu

### **Gobabis/Omaheke July 9 – 12**

Mr. Pederius Tjihoreko  
CRO of Omaheke Regional Council

Hon. Laura McLeod-Katjirua  
Governor of Omaheke Region

Her Worship Ms. Sila L. Bezuidenhoudt  
Mayor of Gobabis

Mr. Efraem Dawids  
CEO of Gobabis Municipality

Advanced Community Health Care Services Namibia  
(CoHeNa)  
Head: Eustasia Makhulumo  
Gobabis

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## About the Authors

**Ellison Tjirera** joined the IPPR in early 2011, after spending a year as a Researcher at the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare. He had previously been a Research Associate at the IPPR in 2009. He co-authored the IPPR briefing paper *Not Speaking Out: Measuring National Assembly Performance* and later went on to complete research on Gender and Parliament commissioned by the government and UNFPA. While at the IPPR, Tjirera was a participant in the Afrobarometer Summer School (2009) at the University of Cape Town's Centre for Social Science Research and won the 'Best Research Question Prize' with his paper entitled, *Women's Parliamentary Representation and the Perception of Women's Empowerment: Is There Any Relationship?* Tjirera is currently an MA (Sociology) student at the University of Namibia. For the IPPR's Anti-Corruption Research Programme he has specialised in researching codes of ethical conduct, conflict of interest, public procurement and governance at the sub-national level.

**Malakia Haimbodi** obtained his Bachelors of Public Administration from the University of Namibia (Unam) in early 2011. He previously gained a diploma in Local Government Studies in 2007 also from Unam. He is currently pursuing a Masters in Public Administration at Unam. Since early 2011 he has been a Research Associate for the IPPR, working on the African Governance Report, which involved carrying out a survey of 120 experts on Namibia's political affairs, and the Anti-Corruption Research Programme – specialising in public procurement and governance at the sub-national level.

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## About the IPPR

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) is a not-for-profit organisation with a mission to deliver independent, analytical, critical yet constructive research on social, political and economic issues that affect development in Namibia. The IPPR has been established in the belief that development is best promoted through free and critical debate informed by quality research.

This paper has been produced with the intention of serving as a briefing document for future discussions and consultation on policy and legal reform by the Law Reform and Development Commission (LRDC). The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the LRDC.

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## About the Anti-Corruption Research Programme

The IPPR's Anti-Corruption Research Programme will focus on strengthening anti-corruption regulations, procedures and practices.

The Programme will provide a stocktaking of anti-corruption efforts so far, examine policy options for the future and recommend ways in which Namibia can ensure that the anti-corruption campaign retains public confidence and political support and is ultimately successful in reducing corrupt practices in Namibia.

The programme will pursue the following objectives.

1. Produce rigorous, detailed and accessible research on issues that contribute to the strengthening of anti-corruption systems, procedures and practices in Namibia
2. Raise awareness and debate among Namibian policymakers, politicians, civil society activists, students, journalists, the business community and interested members of the public about effective anti-corruption strategies and policies that could be deployed in Namibia.
3. Seek to partner with agencies involved in tackling corruption in Namibia, in particular the ACC, other civil society groups active on the issue and policymakers who can play a role in ensuring anti-corruption mechanisms in Namibia are effective.



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