

GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

*A Summary of Focus Group Survey
Findings*

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INTRODUCTION

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) has implemented democracy support programs in Namibia since 1995. NDI programs have focused on democratic institution building and consolidation of democratic processes and structures, working primarily with elected representatives and civic organizations.

Since its inception in Namibia, NDI has developed programs and conducted activities in consultation with all major stakeholders, including Parliamentarians, Parliament staff, elected regional and local councilors, and members of the executive and representatives of civil society organizations.

NDI Namibia initiated the establishment of a Program Advisory Committee consisting of representatives of all partner organizations. The success of NDI programs in Namibia is to a large extent attributed to the role of this advisory committee and the continued guidance, technical support and financial assistance from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Recognizing that democracy must be people centered and that the Namibian citizens are both the agents and beneficiaries of democratic governance, NDI has placed the Namibian citizenry at the core of the consultative process, soliciting their input in the conceptualization, development and implementation of programs.

NDI has utilized different mechanisms to maximize stakeholder input in the development and implementation of programs. Roundtables, Workshops and Focus Group surveys are some of the instruments that have been used by NDI since 1995.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE FOCUS GROUP SURVEYS

This report is about findings by a group of researchers on the views, opinions and perceptions of samples of individuals representing different sectors of the Namibian

society. In July 2001, NDI commissioned the services of a group of Researchers to conduct a study to determine the views, opinions and perceptions of Namibians towards democratic institutions in Namibia.

The study also sought to determine public knowledge of democratic institutions and processes and access to elected representatives at national, regional, local and traditional levels. Throughout the implementation of its programs, NDI has used Focus Group surveys to determine the impact of program activities on the lives of the Namibian people. The 2001 Focus Group survey results will go a long way in informing NDI on the progress and impact made since 1995, and thereby provide a basis for realistic prioritization during the remainder of the program.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of every Namibian citizen, nor those of NDI. This report therefore, contains the views and opinions of individuals who participated in the focus group discussions.

Since 1995, NDI has conducted several Focus Group studies in Namibia, focusing on different topics. However, at a time when NDI Namibia has embarked on the implementation of an exit strategy, the 2001 Focus Group results will assist both NDI and its partners to determine the status of democracy in Namibia, priority areas that require support and strategies that may be used by NDI and its partners in contributing towards the consolidation of democracy in Namibia in the short, medium and long term.

The 2001 Focus Group results complement the Sustainability Study conducted by NDI during the first quarter of 2001. While the assessment focused on the views of NDI partners, the Focus Group survey focuses on the Namibian citizens.

The survey focused on the following specific inquiries, most of them considered as basic pillars of democratic governance to ensure that the results of the survey are inline with NDI program areas, as agreed upon by major partners, not least of which are the Parliament of the Republic of Namibia and USAID:

- A general understanding of democratic governance;
- A general understanding on the roles and obligations of both elected representatives and those that elect them;
- Knowledge of Political Institutions such as Parliament, Regional Authorities, Local Authorities, Traditional Authorities and access to these institutions;
- Knowledge of civil society organizations and access to these organizations;
- Knowledge of and access to the Legislative Process;
- Responsiveness of elected representatives at the different levels of governance;
- Knowledge of and access to avenues of Public Participation in the legislative process;
- Accountability and Transparency of government;
- Overall effectiveness of the Namibian political system,
- The decentralization process and;
- Familiarity, feasibility and access to modern technology.

METHODOLOGY

In assessing public opinion, perceptions, attitudes and views, NDI Namibia opted to continue using Focus Group Studies as the main research instrument. Focus Group studies are different from other forms of research, in that representative groups of citizens have an opportunity to talk through issues and questions thoroughly. Focus Group research does not claim to show what everybody thinks, yet the instrument is a good indicator of perceptions and attitudes that are otherwise hard to gauge using other forms of research.

Focus Group surveys provide an opportunity for researchers to learn not only what people think, but why they hold a particular view and how. Unlike other forms of surveys that provide defined questions, Focus Group surveys are not question and answer sessions, but rather discussions moderated by a researcher, providing an opportunity for participants to discuss, debate, reconsider views and explain why they hold a particular

view. In this context, while other forms of surveys have “respondents,” Focus Group” surveys have participants and it is for this reason that NDI opted to utilize Focus Group surveys.

While Focus Group surveys were considered more useful within the context of NDI programs in Namibia, the final analysis for each discussion remains a hypothesis requiring further testing. The participants who speak during the Focus Group discussions only testify to their personal experiences, therefore the validity of their conclusions ultimately rests on whether other people have had similar experiences and have come to the same conclusions. To address this challenge, NDI conducted a series of Focus Group Surveys throughout the country, using the same discussion guide with different groups of people.

While the locations for the focus group discussion did not necessarily reflect the demographic composition of Namibia, every effort was made to interview people based on the following criteria:

- Sex, race and age
- Occupation and income
- Place of residence, rural or urban
- Socio-economic status
- Previous experience in Focus Group discussions or similar surveys

A total of 20 Focus Groups were conducted in five administrative regions of Namibia as follows:

Khomas Region

Male Group age 21 – 35

Mixed Group of Male Professionals

Mixed Group of Female Self-employed

Female Group ages 18-21

Ohangwena

Female Group over 35

Male Group 21 – 35

Mixed Group of peasant farmers

Mixed group of unemployed

Erongo

Female Group ages 21 – 35

Mixed Group of Female Professionals

Mixed Group of Male Self-employed

Male Group over 35

Karas

Male Group Over 35

Female Group 21 – 35

Mixed Group of semiskilled

Mixed group of Professional farmers

Omaheke

Female Group over 35

Mixed Male Group

Mixed Male and Female Professionals

Mixed Male and Female Self-employed

The focus group program was conducted during the months of August/September:

	<u>Region</u>	<u>Date/Time</u>
1.	Khomas	28/8/01
2.	Ohangwena	3-4/09/01
3.	Erongo	7-8/09/01
4.	Omaheke	14-15/09/01
5.	Karas	11-12/09/01

The Focus Group discussions were held in a specially designed setting, fitted with recording equipment to enable the organizers to capture a true reflection of the proceedings and produce accurate reports, without compromising critical aspects of Focus Group research, such as the ability to observe the participants, gauge the mood and listen without interfering with the process. The researchers paid specific attention to the different cultural backgrounds of the participants and encouraged participation in languages preferred by the participants. This technique maximized interaction and every effort has been made to ensure the translation preserves the original views of the participants.

The research group met for one week, during which the Focus Group moderators were trained on techniques and strategies for conducting Focus Group surveys. During the one-week session, the researchers finalized the discussion guide and completed logistical arrangements.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The compelling and most powerful aspect of this report is that it includes the voices of real people. During the survey, the researchers were able to hear the tone and texture of public opinion, the researchers had the opportunity to interact and hear first hand, without intimidation or compromise, public views on issues that matter: socio-economic and political.

Overall, participants in the 2001 Focus Group survey felt that the socio-economic, political situation in Namibia was mostly stagnant in the rural and semi-rural areas while the situation in the urban areas was considered to be progressing.

Most of the participants understood democracy as a concept, and were equally aware of the transition that began in 1989, the dawn of a non-racial and multi-party society and the adoption of a new constitution. The problem, invariably cutting across the different groups, sectors and regions of Namibia was the relationship between democratic governance and the eradication of poverty and socio-economic development.

Participants appreciated and supported the democratic structures existing in Namibia, they acknowledged the existence of civil liberties and the end of political apartheid, but democracy in most cases was defined in economic terms, as one participant in the Khomas Region observed:

Yes, political apartheid is dead and we are now living in a democratic Namibia. But it is the political apartheid that ended, the economic face of apartheid remains intact in Namibia, and in most cases, it is growing stronger.

From the creation of jobs to the closing down of liquor outlets, participants felt that a lot remains to be done if Namibia is to become and remain a truly democratic country, this sentiment was echoed by a participant in the Erongo Region who said:

Namibia is a democracy, but how can people have democracy when they have no jobs, they have no food, they have poor housing, maybe there is democracy in Windhoek and Swakopmund, but not here.

The mood of the Namibian citizens who participated in the discussions was in most cases mixed. While enthusiasm for democracy remains high, the daily problems experienced by most of the participants obscure prospects for democracy in the communities, access to land being one of the biggest problems identified by participants throughout the country. The Namibian citizens who participated in the discussions strongly felt that government had not done enough to address the land issue. One participant in the Karas Region said:

We fought to liberate this country; all along we were fighting for our land. Eleven years later, although we have our own government, we have not won the battle for land, inequalities remain high and until we get access to land, we can not talk about democracy in this country.

MOOD AND OVERALL CONDITIONS OF COMMUNITIES

Eleven years after independence, participants remain enthusiastic about democracy, particularly within the context of political freedom and respect for human rights. This sentiment was echoed across the regions, cutting across the different groups that participated in the survey. However, most participants were quick to qualify their definition of democracy. Democracy was mostly defined in two aspects. The first and most common one being the end of apartheid and the coming into power of the democratically elected government. The second definition was socio-economic whereby participants invariably cited unemployment and alcohol abuse as the main challenges for the democratic process in Namibia. ***One participant in the Ohangwena Region said:***

Life is OK here but unemployment leads to poverty in this region and poverty is the biggest threat to democracy in our country.

When discussing living conditions in the communities, besides poverty and unemployment, alcohol abuse was cited as the main cause of the deteriorating standards of living in the communities and as the main culprit contributing towards child and women abuse, and to an extent, the HIV-AIDS pandemic.

The research team noted with interest that in all the discussions, HIV-AIDS was rated third on the list of challenges facing communities. Notably, participants highlighted problems facing their communities, identified the causes of the problem and in some cases proposed solutions and remedies to these problems. While alcohol abuse was rated as the second biggest challenge from unemployment, participants could not identify the source of financial resources spent on alcohol in the communities nor reconcile poverty and alcohol abuse. A Gobabis resident had this to say regarding life in the community:

The abuse of alcohol and drugs amongst the youth is due to a lack of educational and recreational facilities.

A stark contrast was observed when older participants (ages 35 and above) expressed feelings on the need to provide recreational facilities for the youth, while the youth themselves wanted to see more job opportunities and access to finance to start their own businesses.

When discussing community life, women were concerned more about violence and moral decay within their respective communities. A businesswoman in Keetmanshoop said:

Teenagers and school children abuse alcohol even though there is a law that prohibits persons under the age of 18 to buy alcohol. Husbands beat the children and the children then go to the shebeens. Once the children come back home they are violent towards their parents, creating a vicious cycle. These days there is a shebeen next to every house

and this is creating an unsafe environment and even during the day, innocent people are being hurt.

The communities visited by the research team knew what they wanted and most of them were capable of defining the problems and recommending solutions. The team noted with interest the worth of wisdom and knowledge prevalent in the communities. However, participants were concerned that Windhoek did not recognize this potential and often, decisions were made without their input. There was also a prevailing perception that only the needs and views of people from the Northern part of the country were being accommodated and addressed.

And whether this perception in fact has basis or not, this was a recurring perception, particularly when the team visited regions of the country other than those in the North. On the other hand, there was a different view that the leaders in the North had the same amount of public resources like their counterparts in other regions, but that they were more responsive to the needs of their constituents than their counterparts from other regions. A businesswoman in Erongo said:

The Northern part of the country is being developed because the elected leaders are doing what the community asks them to do. In comparison with her area, the lady complained that the local council had purchased a brand new Nissan Maxima that would not serve the community at a time when the community was in a dire need of resources and infrastructure.

The pattern of concerns and problems facing communities in the different parts of the country was similar. A participant in the southern region cited alcohol abuse as the main problem and lack of employment opportunities as the main contributing factor to this growing problem. When asked what she thought was a solution, the participant suggested closing down all the Shebeens, a view that was greeted by jeers from the male participants.

There were also positive developments in the communities, with some participants suggesting that the government needed more time to follow through on its more realistic promises. Some participants even said that life was fine since the roads were being tarred, schools and clinics were being built and business opportunities were available to the previously disadvantaged communities.

The contrasting view to this one was the concern that in some towns, such as Keetmanshoop, racial segregation was still rampant. One businessman said:

Life in Keetmanshoop is difficult, business opportunities exist, but the white people cannot provide or rent their premises to people of other races, regardless of the financial capital at hand to start a business, its impossible to find business premises.

The participant further said, *the government can not develop Namibia or create jobs on its own, the government needs the support of the communities and the business sector, but the communities can not assist if the environment does not allow them to, there is therefore a need for development, especially job creation.*

Participants also cited the seeming deteriorating security situation in their communities as a major problem. One participant in the Omaheke Region said:

The community is not safe anymore; the government should provide security. Although the government has deployed Special Field Force (SFF), communities regard them as individuals who are contributing to crime rather than combating it, because they beat up people who walk late on the streets and they take earrings and valuables away from them.

Overall, participants in the focus groups acknowledged the end of minority rule, but were quick to separate the end of minority political rule from minority economic rule. Most participants were of the view that economic emancipation was still a dream for most previously disadvantaged communities and that democracy would only succeed if the communities were economically developed. Most of the time there was a direct link

being made between democracy and economic empowerment and participants felt that one could not be in place without the other.

Participants also distinguished between democracy in Windhoek and democracy in other communities outside the city. Participants residing outside of the capital considered the capital city a land of opportunities, a place where the public has more access to government and elected leaders. Participants were concerned that good initiatives, with good intentions were not successful because they were developed in the city, with little consultation, by people who knew little about the communities they were trying to serve.

ACCESS TO ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

The team facilitated discussions on access to elected representatives and leadership in general. The regions expressed various views. One recurring theme, especially among rural communities, was that participants felt much closer to community elders and considered their role as vital to community development. A student in the Ohangwena region said:

Our village elders are the ones serving the communities, and they do not care which party a person belongs to. They do not drive expensive cars and all they care for is the community, we see them everyday, these are the most accessible leaders.

There was also a view that Councilors and church leaders should be given more powers in order to play an active role in their communities. Participants have several concerns regarding decision making and leadership in their communities. A Teacher in the Omaheke Region lamented:

Elders, church leaders and traditional leaders deal with the problems in the community all the time, yet the political system excludes them from the decision-making process at regional and national levels.

We know the leaders, we know their names, we hear about them on the radio, but we have no access to them, we do not see them. The closest leaders whom we see are the ones that are not elected, the chiefs, church leaders and the village elders, the only time we see elected leaders is during elections. A Farmer, in the Karas region said in conclusion.

A participant in the Khomas region said, *The role played by elected representatives is not clear. They are doing nothing; people have to strike in order to be heard; they only help those close to them.*

A professional in the Ohangwena region also concurred with other participants, by saying that: *at local and traditional levels, the leaders seem easily accessible to the majority whereas the regional and national governments seems so far removed from the people and communities.*

Overall, most of the focus group participants complained about the political system and there was growing cynicism about the representative nature of the representative system in Namibia. There seems to be a culture of helplessness feeding on itself. Notably, some of the participants invariably interpreted nearly everything that was taking place in the political arena cynically. For example, one participant said:

People even accuse those elected representatives who genuinely try to listen of not really hearing what the citizens say.

Of significance during the discussions was the admission by some participants that their own failure to participate contributes to the culture of cynicism. One participant in the Khomas Region said:

I don't think you can divorce democracy and development from the degree to which people do or do not participate in the process, when people do not participate, it helps to create an atmosphere of cynicism.

A participant in the Ohangwena region expressed concern regarding the prevailing cynicism. *Cynicism can be infectious, creating a culture or a mind set that can be passed from one generation to another and this is an alarming prospect.*

The role of the media was acknowledged and highlighted prominently throughout the surveyed regions. Virtually all participants said that they received information on Parliament and Government through newspapers, radio and television. Many referred to Parliament reports on NBC television while others referred to radio programmes such as Open line and Prime Minister's Question Time.

Moreover, information through indigenous languages such as Oshana, Eraka ro Tjiuana featured prominently.

Notably, these views and the sense of impotence seem to transcend region and circumstance. People from different walks of life, women and men and youth complained of not being heard. The participants in the Focus Groups did not just complain, they often offered what they considered as solutions to address some of these problems. Below are some of the views as succinctly summarized by participants from various regions. For instance, a participant from Ohangwena Region said:

The role of a Traditional Leaders should be enhanced and where possible elevated, these people do their best to bring the people together and help the communities with their problems every day, Ohangwena Region

The role of local councilors should be improved, they often lack an understanding of the communities they represent, and often, it is the views of town councils and experts that are taken into account, this is a problem, said one participant from the Erongo Region

It was further emphasized that the Regional Councilors should be given more power so that they can work on their own instead of seemingly running back to the Central/National Government for everything and more often than necessary.

Members of Parliament should get the information from the public before they can make decisions; COD, UDF and DTA only concentrate on government faults while the ruling party SWAPO is seemingly ignorant on issues raised by the opposition. Said a participant in the Khomas Region.

If elected representatives begin to fulfill the promises they made during their election campaigns, they will win back public confidence. Said a participant in the Omaheke Region.

The public can only participate if people have access to information and to government. People in the communities do not have access to information nor to government, as they are often not fully aware of what government is doing. However, and if they are, then they are not aware of why and how the government prioritizes its programs. Said a participant in the Karas Region.

The public has to provide its own hope. Nobody is going to come and make everything better or address all our problems, it is us, as a community, we are the problem and we are the solution. Said a participant in the Karas Region.

Notably, participants no longer saw themselves as victims, they saw themselves as agents, they saw themselves as beneficiaries and they seemed to understand their role as citizens of the Republic of Namibia. According to most participants, they understood the problems at hand better than the elected representatives and the experts whom government often use to address problems, because they experience the problems personally.

This thinking was prevalent across regions and among the different groups that participated in the focus groups. This thinking also corresponds with the thinking of participants in the 2000 regional survey conducted by NDI and the National Council, during which participants invariably acknowledged that they had a role to play in the democratic process and in developing their own communities. Participants in both studies

adhered to the principle of “becoming actors rather than casualties” and seeing themselves as the “solution.”

ACCESS TO LEGISLATIVE INSTITUTIONS AND THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Participants in the focus groups have ideas and they believe that they have solutions to some of the problems facing their communities. Participants in the Focus Groups would like to be involved in the decision making process and they assert that, unless they participate, and unless their views and input are sought before decisions are taken, development and democracy will remain challenges.

Participants were equally aware of the institutions provided for by the constitution to facilitate this process; they understood the role of Parliament, of the Regional Councils and of the Local Authorities. Therefore, the problem was not so much lack of knowledge of the constitutional establishment of representative structures; the problem in most cases is access. In some cases where participants had access, their views were either not considered or the final decision taken by the elected representatives did not reflect the public will.

While participants knew and understood the representative structures at local, regional and national levels, the efficiency of these structures was always a concern. Participants failed to understand how elected representatives, who had emerged from their very communities, failed them.

We know these people, we elected them, but once they go to Windhoek, they forget about the community, they only come here once in a while, particularly during election times and make more promises, said a participant in the Erongo Region.

In the Khomas, Omaheke and Karas Regions, a considerable number of the focus group participants had at some stage, the opportunity to either participate in the legislative and

decision making process or followed the deliberations of their elected representatives. The following is what they had to say;

In Parliament, the leaders only make jokes; and even the Prime Minister and the Speaker once told them to stop being childish, Khomas Region.

Parliament acts as the machine that runs the country, I am not sure what the Regional Councils do, I have never heard them conduct a public meeting and I have not attended one, but I know the Councilors and I know their offices. Omaheke Region.

Things will not change unless women are granted more power. Women can do what men can do and they are more mature than men, you can see this in Parliament, the men make noise and women are always concentrating on the issue on the table. Khomas Region.

Countries and institutions with women leaders are progressing, therefore we must have more women leaders too in Namibia, women understand community problems and they are not easily corrupt. Karas Region

Like on all other issues, participants addressed issues thoroughly. Although most participants considered the involvement of women a panacea for some of the problems experienced in the communities, participants including women themselves suggested that women must get themselves into politics and actively take part in addressing issues of importance rather than sitting in the background as spectators, allowing men to lead all the time and then complain when things do not go their way.

It was evident in most communities that there was a time when a small elite could decide what problems were to be solved and how. There were true and tested formulas for solving community problems and usually a small group of leaders, usually men, could marshal the needed resources, which were primarily financial and address the problem at hand. Although this practice has its advantages, participants during the Focus Groups said that this system no longer seems to work in many communities.

A small group of people sitting in Parliament or the Regional Council cannot solve the problems of all the communities, its not just about money, it is about a good and clear understanding of the problem, otherwise money will be spent but the problems will not be solved because the decision making process was not inclusive. Ohangwena Region

THE ROLE OF CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS/NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

There were different views and opinions on the existence and role of civic organizations or NGOs throughout the regions. Some participants understood the role of NGOs, but their existence was not prominent. In most cases, participants did not understand the role of NGOs in democracy and development and could not identify any NGO working in the communities.

When the researchers probed further and outlined the meaning of an NGO or a civic group, participants invariably mentioned two institutions, the Red Cross and Farmer's Unions, and some isolated instances, Oxfarm was mentioned. In Windhoek, where most of the NGOs operate, participants knew the names and understood what their role was. However, participants were quick to point out that the work of these NGOs is not visible. For instance, participants in Khomas and Omaheke regions had the following to say, respectively:

Yes, we hear of NGOs, we see their offices and we see their cars, but these NGOs work with the donors more than the communities, except when it comes to distributing condoms and putting up posters.

NGOs are present in the community; they participate in the build together projects and neighborhood patrols.

Some participants understood the role of NGOs and CSOs; however, the issue was, on performance and allegiance. Participants felt that NGOs pay their allegiance and are only accountable to the donors and not the communities they claim to serve.

WORD ASSOCIATION

During the survey, participants were taken through a series of phrases and words, to determine their familiarity and what comes to mind when they hear these phrases and words;

When communities hear the word '**Opposition**', the following is what comes to mind:

- COD
- Politics
- Unfairness
- Competition
- DTA
- Difference
- Discrimination

When communities hear the word '**Multiparty**', the following comes to mind:

- Different parties
- Joint venture
- Togetherness
- Unity

When communities hear the word '**Member of Parliament**', the following comes to mind:

- Justice

- Rich men
- Selfish
- Democratic power
- High society
- Government
- Head of state
- Hall of fame

When communities hear the word '**National Assembly**', the following comes to mind

- Speaker
- Discussions
- Debates
- Decisions
- Disagreement
- Laws
- Promises

When communities hear the word '**National Council**', the following comes to mind:

- Discipline
- Rules
- Control
- Leaders
- Take our issues

When communities hear the word '**Politician**', the following comes to mind:

- Hypocrite
- Greedy

- Empty promises
- Lies
- Freedom
- Meant to serve the nation
- Hero
- Justice
- Self-righteous
- Actors

When communities hear the word '**Gender Equality**', the following comes to mind:

- Discrimination
- Unfair
- Possible
- Fighting
- Debatable
- Unfair decisions
- Dictatorship

When communities hear the word '**Women's Rights**', the following comes to mind:

- Unnecessary
- Male rights
- Mental rights
- Jealousy
- Education

When communities hear the word '**Constitution**', the following comes to mind:

- Rights
- Law

- Freedom of speech
- Unfair
- Abuse of power
- Good governance
- Ignorance
- Capable

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The Focus Group Survey exercise revealed a number of realities characterizing Namibian society, a decade after the country's independence. While the findings contained in this report cannot be considered as the views of every Namibian citizen, but merely as views of those who participated in the focus group studies, there are nonetheless, some general themes that affect the broader community. Among them feature limited employment opportunities, violence and crime, the challenge of political apathy and limited access to elected representatives. Some of these findings revealed themselves during previous studies conducted by other researchers, among them the University of Namibia.

A unique feature in the 2001 survey is that, participants did not only highlight problems and challenges, but went on further to offer solutions to these problems. Moreover, participants in the 2001 survey demonstrated abilities to distinguish between government's responsibilities from those of elected representatives as well as both these responsibilities from those of the citizenry. They however, remained at best, ambivalent about the standing in society and role of Civil Society Organizations.

Participants in most of the regions surveyed were concerned that, while the representative system was good, it did not always represent their views. They held that the pace of regional development and service delivery was slow and they attributed that to what they term lack of communication, consultation and coordination. Participants strongly felt that, while they would be consulted on certain matters, a political culture seems to be brewing where the public feel that their input in the decision making process does not

matter, as decisions are taken with limited or no consultation at all, by a small group of people, lobbyists and special interest groups. This development is growing into a perception of marginalization where particular political trends are generalized into formulas for dictating the course of political life in Namibia.

Overall, the Focus Groups Surveys were helpful in identifying perceptions, views and attitudes of the Namibian people towards democracy, political institutions, regional and local authorities, the legislative process, accountability and transparency in government, effectiveness of the Namibian political system and decentralization.

The survey revealed that Namibian citizens appreciated democracy and its institutions, albeit with attendant misapprehensions. Namibians seemed to be unanimous in their perception that, although their elected representatives were by and large, acquitting themselves appropriately in the governance of state, the need for extensive outreach activities to constituencies cannot be exhausted. *Our Government has done well so far, we have peace and democracy... we want jobs in Karas, we want the government to develop the whole country,* exclaimed one participant in the Karas Region.

Among the issues of concern were poverty, unemployment, limited schools for children, school drop out and failure rates, limited vocational training facilities, and lack of qualified teachers. Also, nepotism, tribalism and regionalism were cited as concerns. In fact, there were strong sentiments by participants, that Government was not doing enough to curb poverty, unemployment, crime, nepotism and corruption.

Participants had limited knowledge of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the functions they performed in society. Some were aware of expatriate NGOs such as Oxfam and the Red Cross. They regarded the expatriate NGOs as donors, but notably there was minimal recognition of indigenous NGOs and CSOs.

Some participants took issue with the way land acquisition and distribution has progressed. Many believed that if land distribution was done properly, it could help

relieve poverty and unemployment, and ultimately create an environment conducive for democracy. Although they were familiar with the political order guaranteed by independence and the concomitant democracy, few participants had seen the Constitution of Namibia and, even fewer had read it, partly due to the fact that the document primarily appeared in the English language, which is not widely read by the populace, much as it is the official language.

The question therefore is not the existence of democracy in Namibia, but its effectiveness. The question is no longer the existence of institutions and representative structures, but access, responsiveness and effectiveness. The question in the minds of the participants is not necessarily the role of women or men, but the role of elected representatives who regard and respect the citizens as the legitimate authors of the public will.

Democracy within this context is therefore about solving problems, and even more. Democracy from the perspective of the participants means civil liberties and socio-economic development. Democracy within this context means the building of a community and a country that the people themselves want it to be. Democracy in this context is about transformation and not just transaction.

The participants have vested the mandate to realize this vision in the hands of elected representatives. Participants no longer see themselves as victims of the system waiting to be empowered by someone else or as critical consumers of available political solutions. Participants across the regions see themselves as the ultimate solution. They recognize and acknowledge their role as citizens in Namibia's democracy and they feel that they are well on track as they have fulfilled their civic duty by electing representatives.

The challenge therefore is the effectiveness of the representative system in Namibia. The challenge is the availability of both human and financial capacity and skills in these institutions to fulfil this constitutional mandate. This is a challenge for the government of the Republic of Namibia and development partners, both local and international. This is a challenge for a society in transition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants made a number of recommendations with regard to enhancing the democratic process. These are: that,

- women should be brought into the political mainstream,
- vocational training centers be established to help curb unemployment,
- access to elected leaders be improved and enhanced,
- Government/Parliament implement reforms to curb unemployment nepotism, tribalism, corruption, crime and regionalism,
- land reform be a priority that is fair and transparent and,
- CSOs increase public understanding of their essential roles in the consolidation of democracy.

APPENDICES:

Appendix I: TOR (available elsewhere)

Appendix II: QUESTIONNAIRE (available elsewhere)

7 December 2001

Dr. Achieng Akumu
Director
NDI

Dear Dr. Akumu

RE: FOCUS GROUP REPORT 2001

This memorandum serves to submit the above-mentioned report to you. The report attempts to pull together the findings of the Focus Groups Survey conducted in five of the thirteen political regions of Namibia and as summarized as concluding observations, on page 23 of the said report therewith submitted.

The findings contained in this report are indicative and representative of the general perceptions and opinions of the Namibian citizenry on some key issues as listed on page 5 of the said report. These include a general understanding of some key elements/features of democratic governance, especially in terms of accountability, transparency of government; accessibility to elected representatives, general knowledge on the roles and obligations of the elect and the elected, decentralisation and knowledge of insitutionalised political structures.

Nonetheless, these findings are in no way conclusive nor exhaustive and while they cannot be considered as views of every Namibian citizen, they are nevertheless credible. There is therefore no doubt in our minds that useful generalization can be drawn from these perceptions and opinions.

Firstly, many participants across the regions acknowledge and highly appreciate the existence of the new post-independent era that ushered in a new order with the Constitution of the independent Republic of Namibia – as the Supreme Law of the Land. Albeit, some have not read it but are nevertheless, aware of its existence and other institutionalized political structures in place in Namibia. However, most participants draw a distinction between existence and effective utilization of such structures.

There is, thus need to maximize their utility to the maximum benefit of all Namibians as they put their hands on deck to facilitate and consolidate the democratization process. Secondly, there is the question of the multi-dimensional definition of democracy. Democracy means different things to different people. To the ordinary citizen, and as could be inferred from the survey findings, there is a correlation being drawn between democracy and the politics of the belly. While democracy to the politician may mean an institution in itself with its own abstraction of reality, to the general Namibian public it may mean a bread and butter issue. See as succinctly summarized by a participant on page 10 of the report. Owing to the above, it is clear that participants are quick to point out that democracy on an empty stomach, without shelter due to unemployment and landlessness may not be after all, sustainable. There is, thus a need for the elected representatives and political leaders to stay in touch with their constituencies, to consult, to educate and in the processes to bridge the gap between these perceptions.

The challenge is, thus to bridge the seemingly di-mentrically opposed views to merge into an all-embracing interpretation of the democratization process. Thirdly, and as noted on page 23 of the said report, a unique feature in the 2001 survey is that there is a paradigm shift whereby participants perceive themselves not only as passive recipients and beneficiaries but most importantly as active agents of democratic governance. There is, thus a great need to make democracy a people-centered consultative process geared toward alleviation of poverty, through effective land reform measures that are fair, transparent and realistic.

The challenge is, thus to uphold the above as important pillars that are at the centre of consolidation of democracy in Namibia. For your perusal we have tried to summarize what the people in the regions surveyed said. We have further attempted to briefly analyze the implications of what they say and present some generalizations from which useful inferences could be drawn for your future action. However, for a more detailed exposition on the above see the said report.

In a nutshell and in the final analysis, there is clearly a case being made for more work to be done in the sphere of democratization process in Namibia. It is our sincere hope that what remains to be done by NDI will be done and NDI will no doubt, continue to do the good work it has started in Namibia.

We sincerely thank you for having given us the opportunity to serve the Namibian nation in this honourable way that helped us to revisit our communities. This has been an invaluable opportunity that has rekindled the interest in our communities yet again.

This has indeed been a memorable experience and we only hope and trust that something honourable and beneficial to the Namibian populace will come out from this report.

Once again, thanks.

Sincerely yours

Mr. Vezera Bob Kandetu

Dr. Becky, R.K. Ndjoze-Ojo

Mr. Pero Nampila