

The cost of decentralization on service delivery in Namibia: A case study of the Kavango West region

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Abstract: This research paper aims to investigate the cost of decentralization on service delivery in the Kavango West Region. The findings show that there is little understanding of the decentralisation among officials. The paper found that handling and processing of financial matters is not properly done. Various issues were observed which considered as the main contributing factors and major challenges that impacting the effectiveness of service delivery in the region. Issues such as functions are not yet decentralized, better performance, funding, shortage of transport, lack of monitoring of planning activities, unavailability of regional council staff members as well as involvement of stakeholders to executing their functions. Also lack of clear guidelines on decentralization, lack of commitment from central government, planning process which is done separately, overlapping in terms of reporting system, lack of human resources, poor time management, lack of coordination of activities, no follow-up trainings, misunderstanding of resources and resistance to change.

Keywords: Constituency, Regional Councils, Service Delivery, Coordination, monitoring, Training, Delegation, Decentralisation

1. Introduction and orientation of the research paper

1.1 Introduction

The idea of this paper is to investigate the cost of decentralization on service delivery in the Kavango West Region. The paper will provide a deeper understanding of the contributing factors affecting the cost of service delivery during delegation of the decentralised services and some possible suggestions to improve the effectiveness of service delivery of the selected regional council. It will also provide sound information to the policy-makers and decision-makers to come up with possible strategies to address these shortcomings before the devolution. It will also serve as a guiding tool to future researchers who would wish to conduct research on decentralization and service delivery. This paper seeks to find out the cost of the delegation phase in the Region. The findings of the study will enlighten the policy makers to come up with possible solutions to address this issue before the devolution phase.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Before independence 1990, many Namibians were denied to participate in national development due to the colonial background. This resulted that the central government played a key role in the planning of the development of the grassroots at regional, constituency and village levels. After independence, the new government had a desire to remove the legacy of the oppressive and divisive apartheid era including the Bantu education system which was based on race, colour and ethnic origin. This prompted the government to realize the need to rectify many barriers including deny of the majority of the Namibians to exercise their democratic rights into participating in any decision-making and development as stipulated in South West Africa Peoples' Organization SWAPO's 1989 Election Manifesto (SWAPO Manifesto 1989).

The idea of decentralization dates back prior to Namibia's independence, when SWAPO promoted decentralization as one of the guiding tools for the liberation struggle. In 1988 SWAPO committed itself to

comprehensively reform the colonial governance after Namibia became an independent country, Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing & Rural Development (MRLGH, 1990). The colonial background prompted the new government to commit itself to decentralization. The objectives of the government's decentralization process are to enhance participatory democracy and to bring services closer to the people ((MRLGH, 1990).

It is against this background that the research paper is aimed at investigating the cost of decentralization on service delivery in the Kavango West region. According to the regional Council Act number 22 of 1992, Central Government decentralised services to all 14 regions including Kavango West region. Some functions are not yet decentralised, because of lack of insufficient funds, shortage of transport, lack of monitoring of planning activities, unavailability of regional council staff members as well as involvement of stakeholders to executing their functions. There is lack of clear guidelines on decentralization and lack of commitment. There is also a lack of capacity building at management level to execute their duties at leadership and management levels. Therefore, the finding of this paper revealed that the status of delegation phase is at the snail pace.

1.3 Research question

The main research question that the study aims to answer is as follows:

- What is the cost of decentralization on service delivery in the Kavango West Region?

1.4 The objective of the study

- The main objective of the research paper is to investigate the cost of service delivery in the Kavango West Region.
- To identify the contributing factors affecting the cost of service delivery on decentralized services.
- To make recommendations in order to contribute to the body of knowledge and inform the policy-makers on how decentralization could improve the effectiveness of service delivery.

1.5 Significance of the study

The significance of this paper is to investigate the cost of decentralization on service delivery in the Kavango West Region. The paper provides a deeper understanding of the contributing factors affecting service delivery in the decentralization process and some possible suggestions to improve the effectiveness of service delivery of the selected regional council. It also provides sound information to the policy-makers and decision-makers to come up with possible strategies to address these shortcomings before the devolution. It would serve as a guiding tool to future researchers who would wish to conduct research on decentralization and service delivery.

This research paper seeks to find out the status of the delegation phase in the Kavango West Region. The findings of the paper would enlighten the policy makers to come up with possible solutions to address this issue before the devolution phase.

1.6 Limitations of the study

The research paper would only cover the middle and top management members of the Regional Councils due to the limited time prescribed and financial constraints. The personal attitudes, own experience of being a former Chief Development Planner in the Ministry of Urban Rural Development in Windhoek and reactions from respondents can also be another possible limitation, especially during the data collection process.

2. Literature Review

Van As (2000) defines a literature review as a critical summary and assessment of the range of existing literature in a given field. Literature review can be restricted to books and papers in one discipline or sub discipline or may be ranging in approach. The main purpose is to situate the research to form its context or background and to provide insight into previous work.

Rondinelli (1981) defines decentralization as the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and the raising and allocation of resources from the central government and its agencies to field units of government agencies, subordinate units or levels of government, semi-autonomous public authorities or non-governmental private or voluntary organizations.

The World Bank Group (2001) also defines decentralization as the transfer of authority and responsibility of the public functions from the central government to the immediate and local governments and/or the private sector.

Since, there are different definitions with similarities in their main thrust; it is therefore worthwhile to discuss the degrees of decentralization and the form of decentralization in a particular country. There are

different types of decentralization such as political, administrative and fiscal. Namibia has opted to use administrative decentralization to redistribute the authority and responsibility to the local government. There are three major forms of administrative decentralization such as deconcentration, delegation and devolution. Each form has different characteristics as described below (World Bank Group, 2001).

Dillinger (1993) defines deconcentration as the transfer of power to local administrative offices of central government. The World Bank Group (2003) characterizes it as the weakest form of decentralization that used most frequently in unitary states to redistribute the decision making authority, financial and management responsibilities among different levels of the central government to the local government at the regional level.

The World Bank Group (2001) defines delegation as the transfer of certain responsibility for decision-making and administration of public functions to local government. It characterizes it as a more extensive form of decentralization because the central government gives the authority to take over certain functions as semi-autonomous. Furthermore, in this case the central government does not wholly control on the activities of these institutions but the institutions remain accountable to the central government.

Mukwena & Chirawu (2008) view delegation in the Namibian context as a transfer of functions from a line Ministry to enable and empower the regional council or local authority to perform the function as an agent on behalf of the line Ministry. Therefore, officials to carry out functions are to be appointed to have a great deal of discretion in decision-making and they may be exempted from constraints on regular civil service personnel or may be able to charge users directly for services.

Sherwood (1996) defines devolution as it involves the divestment of functions by central government onto new units of governance outside the control of central authority. It is also characterized as a typical administrative decentralization process that underlies most political decentralization.

For Namibia as a democratic country, to introduce the decentralization policy, means to enhance and guarantee democratic participation by the majority of the people at grassroots level, as well as to achieve sustainable development (MRLGH, 1997). Furthermore, decentralization in Namibia as stipulated in the constitution has to be implemented in accordance with the nation building within the framework of unitary state which is against the historical background of apartheid. In the past, apartheid promoted homelands, rather than to meet the challenges to extend democratic institutions closer to the people as possible as well as to stimulate participative and sustainable development of various communities and the entire country at large (MRLGH, 1997).

The main aim of the implementation of the decentralization in Namibia is to provide a vehicle through which greater effort will be made to enforce gender sensitive and responsive governance where all members of the community have an opportunity to participate in decision-making (MRLGH 1996:11).

3. Research Method

3.1. Research Design

This research paper adopted qualitative research design as the research methods used in investigating the cost of decentralization on service delivery in the Kavango West Region. Royce & Bruce (1993) argue that qualitative research design gives the researcher an opportunity to interact with individuals or groups whose experiences the researcher wants to understand.

3.2 Research population

Melville & Goddard (1996) state that a population is any group who is the subject of research interest or want to study. It further says that it is not practical or possible to study an entire population thus; the researcher can determine the average of a group to consider for the paper and to make general findings based on the sample. Therefore, the research population for the paper consists of about 200 permanent staff members employed in the Kavango West region. The paper's focus was only on staff members, who serve at management level. As Melville & Goddard (1996) state that it is often not practical or possible to study an entire population therefore the researcher has to determine the average.

3.3 Sampling procedures

Thus, the research paper targeted 20 respondents from various directorates, such as Planning and Development, General Services and Administration, Human Resource Administration, Constituency Councillors and Constituency Development Committee and the Village Development Committees and the Chief Regional Officer.

3.4 Research instruments

This research paper used the qualitative research method. The researcher employed multiple instruments and techniques within the qualitative approach of data collection. In the context of the research, the following research instruments were used: semi-structured interviews, observations and documentary analysis.

The paper used the in-depth individual interviews to collect data and to get a deeper understanding of the individual's perception and experience of the phenomenon. According to Patton, cited by Merriam, argues that we cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe behaviours that took place in a previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. The purpose of interviewing is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective (Merriam, 2001).

Observations were used to obtain the richest data which supplement the interviews. In addition, the researcher collected official documents such as the decentralization policy, Act, Rules and Regulations and other related documents. For Lincoln and Guba (1985), document analysis is important because it gives the researcher a general background on the subject that is being studied. Since official records are vital sources of data, it is necessary to include the documents to enhance the interviews.

3.5 Data collection procedures

The researcher conducted observations on the management members and attended their meetings. Both primary and secondary data were employed to collect information from the respondents. Informed consent was obtained from the Chief Regional Officer and the selected respondents before personal interviews were conducted. A personal interview was used as the data-collection method and a face-to-face setting took place between the interviewer and the interviewee. The researcher used semi-structured interviews and the responses were recorded on a tape-recorder and then transcribed.

3.6 Data analysis

Thorne (1997) defines analysis of data as an explicit step in theoretically interpreting data collected by using specific strategies to transform the raw data into a process form of data. For Bogdan and Biklein (1982) "analysis of data involves working with data, organizing it, breaking it down, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned and deciding what a researcher will tell others".

Therefore data collection from the interviews was tape-recorded and then transcribed. The data was read and examined carefully. The researcher classified the similar responses to emerge them into themes and categories. As McMillan & Schumacher (1993) stress that qualitative data analysis is an inductive process of organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns among the categories. Furthermore, the categories and patterns emerge from the data rather than being imposed on the data, prior to data collection. In other words, after data has been collected the interview records were edited, based on the categories of the various offices. This helped the researcher to examine the interview transcripts and documentary notes before identifying the patterns and organizing the data into categories. The data was presented in a narrative form.

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