



discourse

“... the highest form of human excellence is to question oneself and others.”

Socrates

COMMENT

This, our second issue of Discourse, takes the word “participation” as its theme. The reason for this is that Namibia is a participatory democracy and without the participation of the average citizen, a mature democracy cannot be achieved.

There are many benefits of citizen participation, a feature considered essential to any democracy. By participating citizens can make their experiences known. Citizen participation is also an important check and balance for political activities. By airing our problems, we are holding our representatives accountable and ensuring that government makes decisions that benefit everyone.

In the lead article, Jan van Harmelen and Fanie Oosthuizen look at the question of dysfunctional communities and what effect this has on participation in the democratic process.

This issue also looks at the ways in which people of Namibia, as well as South Africa, have chosen to participate and highlights the contribution of our future leaders, the youth.

UNAM has involved its students in forming the Socratic Society.

Here regular meetings are held to discuss philosophical, topical and contentious issues. Sharonice Busch talks about the youth parliament, of which she is the speaker and Frank Liepert, a volunteer currently working with the Hanns Seidel Foundation, shares his impressions of democracy in Namibia (where the way in which the governing process functions is very different from that in his native land, Germany).

In South Africa a Grade 12 learner was amongst a panel of illustrious speakers who spoke on the topic of HIV/Aids at a public forum.

How does Joe Average see participation in the democratic process? Read PERSPECTIVES and find out.

Let’s engage in dialogue. Write and tell us your views. Participation starts with us!

By Bryanie van Harmelen, Editor

MATTERS ARISING

At the launch of Discourse in March, there were a number of questions raised and so, in the spirit of enquiry and open debate, here are some of them:

What is the target audience for this publication?

Relevant officials in offices, Ministries or Agencies of the Namibian Government;

members of the diplomatic corps in Namibia;

non-governmental organisations active in civil society development and/or training initiatives;

practitioners within the civil society arena who operate as trainers or mentors;

tertiary institutions, libraries, newspapers and any specialist magazines.

Discourse aims to be apolitical. Should the term not be non-political?

According to Fowler, H.W. A Dictionary of Modern English Usage, Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1994, p.1. “a-an- , not or without, should be prefixed only to Greek stems.” The word apolitical is therefore correct as it stems from the Greek *politicos*, meaning of citizens.

How long do you intend publishing Discourse?

For as long as we feel that there is a need for it.

Do you have an editorial board?

No, but we have advisors in specialist areas.

Barriers to Community Participation?

By Fanie Oosthuizen¹ & Jan van Harmelen²

Introduction and Background

During the course of the past 15 years the authors have been involved in a variety of development projects and community capacity building initiatives. Based on these experiences they have derived a number of hypotheses that can be used as a possible point of departure in the development of new strategies that they believe may assist in avoiding the pitfalls that have inevitably led to a prevailing scenario which is essentially devoid of development success stories.

This brief paper thus sets out to identify what they consider to be some of the primary causes that have contributed to this rather disheartening situation, particularly in the context of the ideal of addressing rural poverty reduction as a possible mitigating strategy which is aimed at reducing urban migration.

Hypothesis I: The Great Divide

In their introduction to “The Community Development Handbook” Frank and Smith³ note that although community development “means different things to different people in different places.” It is nevertheless a given that it is founded on “voluntary and healthy interdependence, mutual benefit and shared responsibility.” This implies that community development can realistically only take root in a functional and fully integrated community.

However, when considering practically every community within the Southern African context that has evolved from the Apartheid system we are inevitably confronted with a series of dysfunctional, segregated communities.

The business centre “dorp,” which served as the focal point for the development of a town, is surrounded by the formal suburban areas with the formerly “whites only,” more upmarket residences being completely separated from the former “non-white lokasie (township).” The most common identifying feature emphasising this separation is usually an open section of undeveloped townlands, criss-crossed by numerous footpaths with litter as far as the eye can see and populated by a variety of scavenging livestock. This “no man’s land” is a scourge on the landscape and very often serves as a venue for various crimes against those forced to make use of the footpaths

as their only means of reaching their homes. Rape and mugging are an ongoing occurrence with only a fraction of events being either reported to the police or actively investigated by the authorities.

Although there are communities within communities, e.g. church groups, within these towns, there is little to no commonality of purpose or real will to bridge this divide.

Furthermore, ineffective and inefficient local authorities have little to no impact on alleviating the situation. These local authorities are a part of a highly politicised national bureaucracy, preoccupied with political infighting with very little to no attention being paid to sound governance processes within which elected office bearers act as a non-executive oversight body over a professional executive of qualified and dedicated appointed service provider personnel. As a result, although vast sums of money have been spent on a variety of planning documents, there is no time or energy left for the implementation of mitigating strategies that are aimed at bringing about the integration of their communities.

Hypothesis II: Despair and Inertia

Whilst any form of anti-social behaviour, such as crimes related to personal assault or physical abuse, can never be condoned, it is contended that mere punishment for committing the crime does not really serve as a deterrent in an effort to address this burgeoning problem. Without engaging in a discourse in criminology suffice it to say that punishment for a crime already committed tends to be acknowledged as a case of attempting to address the result of the problem as opposed to focusing on the cause of that problem.

Based on the various experiences of the authors, it is contended that one of the primary causes of crime, particularly in smaller communities, is sheer desperation in terms of the need to ensure the survival of self and family. Unfortunately, when once a crime has been committed – the adrenaline rush experienced, coupled with that momentary power over the victim and the relative ease with which money and/or goods are acquired, quickly delude the criminal into believing that this is the way to go. A factor which also exacerbates this situation is the fact that the inevitable display of material wealth in the face of the authorities who appear powerless to do much about the situ-

1 Fanie Oosthuizen is the Managing Director of the Institute for Management and Leadership Training (IMLT) and holds a B.Econ (Honours) degree from Rand Afrikaans University.

2 Jan van Harmelen is an independent consultant who has been operating as a networking consultant with IMLT for the past 9 years and has collaborated with Fanie Oosthuizen in the preparation of numerous studies, strategic planning and specialist training programmes. He holds an MBA degree from the University of the Free State.

3 Frank, F. And Smith, A. 1999 “The Community Development Handbook” Canada: Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

ation, garners the admiration that the poverty stricken, unemployed and inevitably marginalised members of the community have for these “gangsters.” Furthermore, this admiration also manifests itself in the fact that these “gangsters” become icons within their immediate communities and serve as role models for the youth of those communities.

The issue here is the dilemma related to how one breaks this cycle, which is in itself a factor in creating a sense of community that bonds this marginalised section into a community group who do not fear the punishment meted out by the courts, if they are indeed ever even convicted of the crime.

Hypothesis III: Maslow – Public Enemy No. 1

When one examines the classification of the members of a society in the context of the findings of Abraham Maslow (Hierarchy of Needs 1943) one finds that as a person ascends the pyramid towards the pinnacle of self-actualisation, so the personal motivation becomes more selfish and individualistic. It is thus contended that this model runs contrary to the ideal of community building through selfless involvement with initiatives to build community capacity. This is essentially ascribed to the presumption that the self-centredness associated with this degree of individualism would preclude any involvement in an activity that dilutes this self-centred focus.

Although it must obviously be conceded that Maslow’s model was not constructed with this intent as the achievement of self actualisation is largely dependent on society’s acceptance and admiration of an achiever, the issue of the value system that is applied should be examined in any given context. An example would be the “White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP)” model that underpins most modern business models developed in the USA or the UK. These tend to be highly individualistic and value personal initiative as opposed to the more traditional African or even Asian value systems that essentially eschew such individual behaviour and tend to favour decision-making by consensus building.

In the context of the above it is argued that our education system, based as it is on Euro-Centric (particularly primary and secondary systems) and Anglo-Saxon type British and American models for tertiary education, is a primary contributing factor in the evolvement of a more self-centred individualistic value system. This situation often results in a splintering of family units with the educated (and partially educated) youth being contemptuous of their less educated (often products of Bantu Education) parents and elders. This fractionalisation of traditional family units breaks down any sense of community amongst a section of any community which ostensibly shares the same traditional heritage and related value systems.

Concluding Observations

Although the various hypotheses outlined undoubtedly contain un-

substantiated or unverified observations and may in some instances unfairly stereotype members of a community or institution, the authors nevertheless contend that it is essential that these hypotheses are tested via appropriate research projects in an effort to diagnose the real barriers to community development. Furthermore, it is also acknowledged that any research done in the context of testing these hypotheses will not represent any form of groundbreaking social research due to the fact that most of the phenomena touched on have been well researched and documented. However, the primary purpose of such research would be to develop appropriate baseline data for the Namibian milieu.

And if you think that this is unique to Namibia.....

The following excerpt from the introduction to a resource manual entitled “Building Citizen Involvement: Strategies for Local Government” by Mary L. Walsh says it all:

“Citizen democracy” [is] the creative and positive interaction of business, government, community groups, and individual citizens. . . . Governance is us, not it . . . all of us together as a polity.”

Henry Cisneros

Today, many Americans feel angry toward their government institutions and alienated from governance and policy making. The signs of this major lack of connection between citizens and their government are clear: fewer citizens are voting in elections at all levels of government; public debate is often uncivil, derogatory, and confrontational as a “we-they” mentality sets the tone for city council meetings, public hearings, and other open forums; and public opinion polls indicate that more than 75 percent of Americans have little or no confidence in their local government to resolve problems, with even larger percentages having no confidence in their state or the federal government to resolve those issues that affect their lives.

UNAM Socratic Society

On the first Thursday of the month, for the past five years, the UNAM Socratic Society has met to discuss a variety of topics ranging from environmental ethics (with the focus on hunting), to metaphysics.

“We try to cover as many fields of philosophy as possible”, says society chairperson Rev. Willem Moore, who lectures in philosophy at UNAM.

The society, which boasts an attendance of between 40 and 80 members at its meetings, is based on a fluid constitution with free association membership. The meetings are advertised in the Press and members of the public are welcome to attend. There are six meetings of the society per year, with the highlight being the meeting to celebrate the UNESCO World Philosophy Day in November. The theme for this meeting is supplied by UNESCO. Lecturers from South Africa as well as the United Kingdom have attended meetings of the society

as guest speakers.

The society, Rev. Moore explains, reinforces his teaching in class. “It is a way of making democracy informal.” A formal, prepared speech serves as the impetus for the dialogue where everyone is free to express their point of view. Rev. Moore explains the difference between dialogue and debate in this way: “A dialogue has no winner”, he says, quoting Socrates’ maxim of, “All I know is that I don’t know.” And so, one of the aims of the society is to educate members in this style of dialogue, with participants developing a willingness to give up, or moderate, their own perspective on an issue if necessary, in order to accommodate new insights.

Quiz - Do you know?

1. What is a dictatorship?
2. What are the two basic types of government?
3. How many fundamental freedoms are there in Namibia?
4. What are Namibia’s four National Symbols?
5. What are the main organs of the state?
6. Who is the Commander in Chief of the Defence Force?
7. What do the courts of Namibia consist of?
8. What does NPC stand for?
9. What is the chairperson of the National Assembly called?
10. What is the capital budget?

ANSWERS

1. A form of government in which the leader holds all the power. 2. Democratic and non-democratic. 3. 10. 4. The national flag, national anthem, national coat of arms and national seal. 5. The Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. 6. The president. 7. The Supreme Court, High Court and Lower courts. 8. National Planning Commission, 9. The speaker, 10. Part of the budget that deals with infra-structure and fixed assets

Business Simulation Programme

“It was tough!” “We enjoyed it very much!” “I learned a lot. I learned how to plan a business.” “It was interesting!” “We had fun!”

These are some of the comments made by WVTC (Windhoek Vocational Training Centre) students attending the four-day Business Simulation Seminar in April.

The programme, in its third year, was the brainchild of Herbert Lichteninger, a volunteer to the Hanns Seidel Foundation, who brought the programme to Namibia with the intention of testing it here. This was seen as an opportunity for the IMLT to use the programme as an instrument to foster entrepreneurial development and so, together with Rima Saad of the DED (The German Development Service) the programme was ‘Namibianized’ and adopted.

Since 2007, approximately 900 people have attended this seminar which targets final year tertiary students (UNAM, Polytech and the VTCs), start-up SMEs and mid-level management.

The programme is a unique learning instrument which provides participants with hands-on experience in founding and running a business of their own. The goal is to equip each participant with entrepre-

neurial, management and strategic thinking skills.

Team work in groups of three provides a competition-based business environment where there is continuous evaluation of team performance. Participants apply the modern ‘learning by doing’ principle and the seminar provides a platform for making mistakes in a virtual set-up rather than later, in real business. The principles learnt are transferable to all industries.

Each seminar is conducted with a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 21 participants. Approximately 25-35 seminars are held each year, most being held at IMLT but a few are held at other venues such as Polytech, or otherwise out of town.

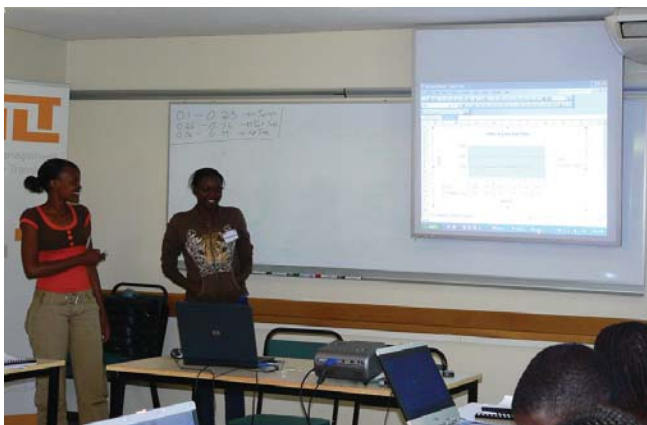
Contact

Tel: 061/230555

Fax: 061/231266

email: andrea@imlt.org.na

WVTC students with trainers participating at the course



Democracy in Namibia

Impressions of a volunteer of the Hanns Seidel Foundation



Rule by the people, rule for the people, rule of the people - this is what democracy is all about. The supreme power is vested in the people, either directly or through representatives. Democracy is the most practiced form of government world-wide. A small number of countries use the word "democratic" in their official name. The majority of state governments call themselves a republic. The origin of this word lies in the two latin words "res" and "publica" meaning as much as "a public thing". Therefore everybody should be involved in the process of decision making.

Before I give an account of my impressions of democracy in Namibia I first want to tell you what motivated me to work as a trainee.

Previously I had never thought of working in Namibia. In Germany I was busy with public relations for a party which was standing for the upcoming local election in my municipality. The opportunity to experience a new country and my interest in political work, induced me to apply for the volunteer programme at the Hanns Seidel Foundation months later. Upon the recommendation of relatives I chose Namibia. 25 students had worked as trainees for the Foundation Since 2003 and in fact I was truly curious about my four months stay in a country far away from home. This would be my first stay abroad and even my first flight. I wanted to be thrown in at the deep end.

What made the whole thing even more interesting for me were the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in which would be held in November. Thus, I expected to see a lot of political activity. Also regarding my duties and responsibilities at the Foundation, acting on the maxim "In the service of democracy, peace and development" served as an incentive to me. These were some of my thoughts and impressions:

Surveying the essential features of a democracy we need to have a closer look at the constitution. At first glance it contains almost everything you would expect. Fundamental human rights and freedom, division of powers and further crucial subjects are enshrined in the constitution. What I was desperately seeking for is something like a Constitutional Court. In addition I noticed that some of the elections are not held in a regular term, but determined by an act of parliament. Sure, these are just some of the controversial subjects. In my opinion the constitution can be improved with a few little changes in the form of amendments. Nevertheless, the Namibian Constitution is definitely a good basis for democracy.

What also came to my attention when I was talking to several people at our workshops throughout the country is the lack of awareness of the constitution. Often participants hadn't read it, or, in fact didn't know it. At this point I was asked myself if they could imagine what democracy is. And you have to wonder how the whole idea of giving power to the people is supposed to work properly seeing that citizens have no idea about their rights. Is it just disinterest or a problem of education? I guess the second one. That's why talking about the constitution should be part and parcel of school education.

Another major issue is the apathy still present in Namibia. Citizens are not going to the polls and thus not relying on their right to vote. Regarding the election results of the last year, the turnout of voters was rather moderate. This fact is quite interesting as we are having similar problems in Germany. However, it's not really comparable since the reasons for people not going and casting their votes are different. In Namibia, for example, you have to face other problems. Long distances have to be covered in order to reach every inhabitant since a large number are living far off and lack transport. The illiteracy rate of approximately 13% plays a significant role, too. Furthermore I've heard of complaints about waiting in long queues when registering as a voter. Once again I would welcome a centralized system of registration. In general the electoral process has to be simplified, especially in terms of transport. The government has to come up with a solution. Everybody should be given the opportunity to cast their vote in a simple manner. Talking about the elections in Namibia, there is one more thing I would change. Currently the ballots papers are taken to Windhoek right after the election day. Knowing this, it was alarming to me when I had listened to stories about full ballot boxes which were found near a bridge. The government should consider decentralise the counting of ballots. This would not only take less time, but would also avoid losses whilst in transport.

To conclude, I am really looking forward to the upcoming elections.

By Frank Liepert

Perspectives

Views from the street

Does the ordinary citizen feel that he/she has an active role to play in the government of the country? This was the question put to a random sample of people in the streets of Windhoek.

These are some of their responses:

“Yes. I work for gender equality and work with children”, said 40-year-old Emily a shop manageress.

“No, but perhaps if we attended more meetings we would make more of a difference”, said a 45-year-old farmer.

“No”, said a shop owner. “Only by voting”, said an insurance broker. “Of course, you can participate through your councillors”, an artist from Caprivi stated.

“Yes, I can play a vital role in the economic development of the coun-

try”, said a 35-year-old security guard.

“Yes, without it (participation) there can be no future”, 25-year-old Cecilia stated. And a 21-year-old florist said that she could always approach local government for advice.

A 45-year-old business woman felt that she could make a contribution by being a law-abiding citizen, setting standards through her work and airing her views through the medium of letters to the press.

A retired university lecturer who now does volunteer work had this to say: “Yes, both as a voter and as someone working with NGO’s in civil society to train the public in awareness issues on human rights and the responsibilities of citizens to participate in the governing process.”

Meet the people

Interview with Sharonice Busch

“It’s an amazing job!” exclaims bubbly Sharonice Busch enthusiastically. Sharonice is the Speaker of the Junior Parliament of Namibia, an institution that was founded in 2005. She became Speaker in 2008 after campaigning for the position.

The parliament is comprised of 69 members with three members coming from every region in the country. Motions are tabled and accepted by the parliament with the go ahead for regional projects being given by the National Assembly. The frequency with which the parliament meets depends on the availability of funding.

“We have to work as a team to solve problems addressing the youth”, Sharonice explains. The Junior Parliament works with junior town councils, drafts proposals and looks for sponsors for its projects. Close to Sharonice’s heart are problems affecting orphans and vulnerable children and last year the Khomas Region targeted kindergartens and had a “Month of the Youth”.

By belonging to the Junior Parliament you are exposed to what is happening in the whole country, Sharonice feels. “You gain confidence as a leader and a speaker and grow as a person”, she maintains.

Sharonice has been exposed to debating since Grade 10 at Cosmos High School in Windhoek. Debating, she feels, exposes you to topical issues, enables you to exchange views and bring about change. Debating, she feels too exposes you to other points of view.

Sharonice hopes that in the future tertiary institutions too will be involved in the Junior Parliament which at present is only open to learners between the ages of 16 and 18 years. One of the lessons that belonging to the Junior Parliament teaches, she feels is that it “teaches you to listen and critically analyse.”

Youth participation is something that Sharonice feels strongly about. “Youth should be well informed about our state of affairs. Read in order to be on top of what’s happening,” she urges.

There is, however, no complacency about her position as Speaker. “The youth need to criticize our Junior Parliament”, Sharonice declares. “They need to challenge us and start awareness campaigns and clubs – things that will make parliament more of a success.”



Book Review

From Poverty to Power - How Active Citizens and Effective States Can Change the World | Duncan Green · Oxfam International · 2008

The basic premise of this book is that people are the active subjects of their own development.

As Professor Emeritus of Economics of the University of Cape Town, Francis Wilson says in his foreword: "This is a fascinating and important book...which could well serve as a bible for all those wanting to think intelligently and creatively about poverty in our time."

Poverty and the threat of environmental collapse are the scourges of the twenty first century and this book argues that leaders, organisations and individuals need to act together to build a secure, fair and sustainable world before climate change makes this impossible.

From Poverty to Power argues that the essential forces of transformation will be active citizens and effective states, as it will require a radical redistribution of power, opportunities and assets to break the cycle

of poverty and inequality. People, living in poverty, must be able to have a voice in deciding their own destiny and be able to hold the state and the private sector accountable for factors such as inequality, which affect their lives. Only a country with a state structure that can actively manage the development process of its citizens, can prosper, this book claims.

Poverty to Power is an academically sound work which furthers our knowledge of the development process.

By Bryanie van Harmelen

Newsflash

The Daily Dispatch Dialogues

An initiative taken by the East London Daily Dispatch in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province has resulted in over 5 000 people experiencing participatory democracy at first hand.

Last year ten dialogues were held and so far this year there have been seven, including three community dialogues where people have been able to meet and discuss bread and butter issues and problems, such as the prevalence of drug lords in certain communities. The community dialogues focussed on township, sub-urban and inner city problems and gave people the opportunity to "let off steam". "This created a dynamic amongst people all sitting with the same problems", explains Dawn Barkhuizen, Letters Page editor of the Daily Dispatch, who initiated the idea. The result was that people were able to exchange both ideas and telephone numbers.

The concept of holding regular public dialogues started in 2007 with the East London launch of Mark Gevisser's book, *Thabo Mbeki, the Dream Deferred*. "I saw a hunger in the people present to participate", says Ms Barkhuizen. "Everyone wanted a chance to speak." Ms Barkhuizen feels that a mature democracy needs peoples' participation in order to survive. "I want children to start getting involved", she says. "Debate is important." The dialogues have so far drawn learners from nearby King William's Town to mount the platform and take up the microphone. Keynote speakers have included An-

drew Feinstein, who spoke on the extremely controversial arms deal, dealt with in his book *After the Party*, as well as the prominent businessman, Bobby Godsell, author of *Do It*.

The dialogues have the support both of the editor of the Daily Dispatch as well as Fort Hare University, which is a partner in the enterprise. Forthcoming dialogues are advertised in the Daily Dispatch and everyone is welcome to attend.

The June 1 dialogue was titled: HIV/Aids – beyond denialism. Speakers included Kerry Cullinan, award-winning health journalist and co-editor of *The Virus, Vitamins & Vegetables*, Dr Trudy Thomas, a former Eastern Cape Health MEC and Mathabo Tlali, a Grade 12 learner from Kingsridge High School for girls in King William's Town.

Readers were invited to submit issues online prior to the event and questions were taken from the floor.

However, as Ms Barkhuizen points out, people are not accustomed to hearing other points of view and therefore tolerance is one of the lessons to be learned from the exchanges. The dialogues operate from the ground rule that there must be mutual respect between participants.



Comments and contributions may be submitted to the editor at the following addresses:

e-mail: discourse@imlt.org.na

Mail: P.O. Box 22524, Windhoek

