

Public Private Dialogues as part of the Local Economic Development Initiatives at sub-national level in Namibia

By

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1- Background and Context

Public Private Dialogue (PPD) meetings provide opportunities for the exchange of information and for the discussion of issues, challenges and problems, and potential or intended solutions to these problems. In Namibia, these discussions are intended to bridge the gap between those who deliver services and those who consume or need these services.

The overall objective of PPDs is to improve the business environment at the local level, hence PPDs are a platform for diagnosing problems and opportunities to foster economic development in specific localities.. Not only that, PPDs can also create awareness of the root causes of certain problems among the public and private sectors. Moreover, PPDs are a mechanism to ensure that issues are taken up at the appropriate decision making levels in both private and public sector organizations. Decision makers are more receptive of tackling issues if they are provided with possible solutions at the same time. The most important part of PPDs is to translate those issues into policies, strategies and plans to resolve them effectively.

It is commonly accepted that the business communities in each locality would have needs and problem which are, somewhat, different from those of ordinary citizens. Typically, private businesses are subject to special legislation and policies that shape their business decisions, the cost of doing business, and their growth potential. At the same time, they generate income, create employment, pay local taxes and levies, and contribute to economic growth. Regular forums such as PPD meetings are thus critical in linking local policy makers and business owners.

There are various PPD initiatives taking place in Namibia on national, sub-national, sectoral and local levels. One such platform which is focused on the sub-national level is the initiative by the Local

Economic Development Agency (LEDA) in cooperation with other stakeholders such as the Namibia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI) and Local Authorities with the support of GIZ.

2- Partnership, Structure and Processes

The Local Economic Development Agency (LEDA) promotes PPDs in cooperation with the Namibia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI) and other stakeholders in Namibia. In particular the LEDA supports PPDs through financial and technical support (e.g. provision of a facilitator, logistics etc). Following the publication of the White Paper on LED in 2011, the LEDA was established as a division of the Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development (MRLGHRD) which assists regional and local councils with the development, facilitation and implementation of Local Economic Development strategies, capacity building, funding and networking.

The Namibia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI) is a business representative and support organisation in Namibia. Its membership comprises of companies across all economic sectors, including prominent large companies as well as SMEs. As a fully independent private sector body, NCCI identifies issues affecting the business environment on sub-national and national levels (e.g. issues on availability of land), highlighted by member organisations during various engagement forums and consultative meetings and advocates for speedy resolutions.

3- Results so far

Results from a recent survey on the impact of PPDs, which focused on assessing the impact of PPDs among business owners in Namibia indicated that, although the organizational, facilitation and content aspects of the meetings were deemed satisfactory, the efforts to implement the outcomes should be intensified across most towns. Moreover, results also indicated that having dialogue is not merely enough and suggested that more tangible results need to be delivered. This means that unless these dialogues deliver, people might become frustrated and despondent. Also, even though the meetings have been well received as forums for discussion, they are less well received as mechanisms for improved delivery. This, however, does not mean that PPDs are failing; it simply means they have so far not improved stakeholders' capacity to deliver. In addition, PPD implementation guidelines for LED practitioners was developed to guide individual local authorities on how to conduct PPD meetings successfully.

In most Local Authorities where PPDs has been conducted private sector have seized the opportunity to share their ideas and propose projects during meetings called by the Local Authorities in the communities especially during the budgeting time. As a result comprehensive budgets are being drawn up, answering the needs of the community in those Local Authorities.

LEDA has recently developed a website to improve information sharing for LED practitioners. The primary purpose of the online platform is to disseminate information, including: an inventory of support programs offered by national government departments, NGOs and other relevant service providers and organizations.



4- Expected Results

Through PPDs at the sub-national level, we are expecting reforms such as changing of bay laws impeding businesses to operate effectively by enabling the local businesses to benefit from the bottlenecks that hinder their emergence and growth. All in all, the main result would be to see an improvement in the local framework conditions. Moreover, the expected results should be driven by the local champions that will drive the process forward.



Biographies of Authors:

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Mr. Elton Uiseb joined the Local Economic Development Agency (LEDA) in the Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development at its inception in 2010 as a Development Planner, and was later promoted to a Senior Development Planner position in 2013. He obtained his bachelor's Degree in Public Management from the Polytechnic of Namibia. He is currently busy completing a Master's Degree in Leadership and Change Management at the same institution.