

# **An assessment of the delegated education and training function of the Kunene Regional Council**

*Sitali B. Lwendo*<sup>7</sup>

*Albert J. Isaacs*<sup>8</sup>

*University of Namibia*

---

## **Abstract**

The mandate of the Regional Education Directorate is to provide access to quality education in Namibia. This sector has been identified as the priority social service due to its fundamental importance in improving the quality of life hence this study undertook an assessment of the delegated education and training function of the Kunene Regional Council. The study used a qualitative method in data collection due to its ability to yield rich and thick description of phenomena. The research design was a case study involving key informant interviews, observation and desk research. Ten interviewees were purposively and conveniently selected from four key stakeholders: The Ministry of Urban and Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Education, Local Authorities and the National Planning Commission.

---

<sup>7</sup>Dr Sitali B. Lwendo possesses a PhD in Public Administration. He is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Namibia. His research areas are Management and Public Administration.

<sup>8</sup> Dr Albert J. Isaacs possesses a PhD in Educational Leadership and Management. He is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Applied Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education, University of Namibia. His research areas are Leadership and Management.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr Sitali B. Lwendo, Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Namibia. Email: [sblwendo@unam.na](mailto:sblwendo@unam.na)

The research population for this study consisted of about 300 staff members and 30 respondents constituted the sample size for this study. To supplement primary data, secondary data was sourced from observation and desk study of relevant documents. Data were analysed by arranging the responses thematically. The findings of the research revealed that the understanding of the decentralisation policy and concepts are different among research participants. The findings further revealed that there is a lack of inter-organisational collaboration and coordination regarding the management of delegated education activities which leads to poor planning as well as refusal by seconded staffs to follow the correct reporting lines. The study recommends more sensitization and advocacy on education and the challenges faced by the Kunene Regional Council.

***Key words:** decentralisation, delegation, education, accountability, policy, training.*

The government of Namibia started developing the policy and legal framework upon which decentralisation would rest such as the Regional Councils Act, no. 22 of 1992, the Local Authorities Act, No 23 of 1992 as well as the Decentralisation Policy of 1998. The government also set up institutional arrangements that would facilitate the implementation process. The decentralisation policy was adopted in March 1998, and it has been one of the cornerstones of government since independence. It had the expressed purpose of bringing government closer to the people. In support of the decentralisation

policy, a Practical Guide to the Decentralisation Enabling Act was introduced in the year 2008.

The aim of the decentralisation policy in Namibia is “to provide people at grassroots level with the opportunity to participate in decision-making that affects their life and to extend democracy, based on national ideas and values” (Decentralisation Policy, 1998, p. 10). The implementation of decentralisation Policy in Namibia aims to decentralise functions from line ministries to the regional councils and local authorities. This will be accomplished, first, by delegation and ultimately devolving the delegated functions, power, and authority to local and regional governments.

It is against this background that the Government of the Republic of Namibia has undertaken ongoing reform initiatives, with the view to further strengthen and transform the system of education in the country while taking cognisance of the importance of decentralising its services to the regions. In June 1998, the Cabinet Secretariat issued a memorandum to Permanent Secretaries (PSs) to start with the preparations for the implementation of the decentralisation policy as per the Cabinet Decision of March 1998 (Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development [MRLGHRD], 2007). This led to the organisational structures of regional councils to be expanded and fine-tuned to accommodate the new functions to be decentralised. The Directorate of Education was then established under the regional council structure as the first step towards decentralisation.

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC) chose to delegate the functions of Primary and Secondary Education to regional councils with effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2009 as per the Cabinet Decision No. 5/17.03.09/004. The

handover of these functions to the various regional councils took place between the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2009 to the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 2009. During the handover, the ministry sought to explain and agree on how the functions and activities would be carried out (MRLGHRD, 2012). The Ministry of Education seconded all staff members attached to the above-mentioned functions to all the Regional Councils. This was in furtherance of the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) set idea of creating one unified, but decentralised structure for education administration. Currently, Namibia allocates more than 20% of its national budget to education. This represents six to seven percent of Namibia's total GDP and Namibia, is one of the three countries with the highest percentage of GDP directed towards education in the world (MoE, 2011).

### **Literature Review**

Since, there are varying definitions it is, therefore, worthwhile to discuss the degrees of decentralisation and the form of decentralisation in a particular country. There are different types of decentralisation such as, political, administrative and fiscal. Namibia has opted to use administrative decentralisation to redistribute the authority and responsibility to the local government. There are three major forms of administrative decentralisation such as de-concentration, delegation, and devolution. Each form has different characteristics (World Bank Group, 2001).

Dillinger (1993) defines de-concentration as the transfer of power to local administrative offices of central government. The World Bank Group (2003, p. 4), characterizes it as the weakest form of decentralisation that is used most frequently in unitary states to redistribute decision-making authority as well as 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 the local government. It characterises it as a more extensive form of decentralisation because the central government gives the authority to take over certain functions that are semi-autonomous. Furthermore, in this case, the central government does not wholly control the activities of these institutions, but the institutions remain accountable to the central government.

Mukwena and 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, the appointed officials 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. Devolution involves the divestment of functions by central government onto new units of governance outside the control of the central authority. It is also characterised as a typical administrative decentralisation process that underlies most political decentralisation. For Namibia, as a democratic country; to introduce the decentralisation 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, decentralisation in Namibia, as stipulated in the constitution has to be implemented in accordance with nation-building imperatives within the framework of the unitary state which is against the historical background of apartheid.

In the past, apartheid promoted homelands, to meet the challenges to extend democratic institutions closer to the people as much as possible, as well as to stimulate participative and sustainable development of various communities and the country at large (MRLGH, 1997). According to the MRLGH (1997), decentralisation in Namibia is considered as a constitutional requirement. This constitutes the extension of democracy and participation for development to reach all corners of Namibia and its citizens. The implementation of decentralisation in Namibia is done by delegating powers and responsibilities to regions.

The main aim of the implementation of decentralisation 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, p. 11). Elhiraika (2007, p. 22) argues that decentralisation leads to greater accountability and increases prospects that services would reach targeted groups. One of the essential purposes of decentralisation is to improve provision of public service delivery.

Decentralisation in education in Africa has been gaining momentum in search of efficiency in service delivery. Winkler et al. (2017) suggest that there is still too much power lodged above. The authors recommended that the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development insist that management cadres at the national level cede some of their powers to their subordinates at the regional level. To this end, incentives such as accommodation, vehicles and special allowances should be made available to attract and motivate qualified personnel to accept posting to the regions and local levels. MRLGHRD (2014) notes that for

effective implementation of the decentralisation policy, there are institutional and organisational changes needed at national, regional and local levels. The restructuring of responsibility for functions and changes of location is emphasised from the centre to the sub-national levels of government. This implies that increased capacity at regional and local levels needs different institutional arrangements and requirements. According to MURD (2016), decentralisation and service delivery need to be part of planning, which is continuous and involves processes such as making decisions or choices about alternative ways of using available resources with the aim of achieving particular goals.

## **Research Methods**

This study used a qualitative approach to assess the delegated education and training functions at the Kunene Regional Council. Hence key informant interviews, observation and desk study of relevant documents on decentralisation, i.e., Regional Council, Ministry of Education Arts and Culture, Ministry of Urban and Rural Development reports, manuals, and guidelines constituted the research design. The findings were classified into themes and categories. The researchers examined the interview transcript and documentary notes before identifying patterns and organising the data into categories. A thematic analytical approach was adopted.

## **Population**

The population for this study were staff members of the Kunene Regional Council (including the Directorate of Education), the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development (specifically the Directorate of Decentralisation), the National Planning Commission, Opuwo Municipality and the Ministry of Agriculture.

## **Sample**

This study used purposive non-probability sampling. The study targeted 30 respondents who were purposefully selected from various departments as follows: 12 staff members from the Kunene Regional Council (CRO, Directorate of Education, Directorate of Planning and General Services), nine staff members from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and nine staff members from the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development. They consisted of the Chief Regional Officer (1), Directors (4), Deputy Directors (3), Chief



Development Planners and Control officers (4), Planners, Chief Control Officers and Clerks (9), Councillors (9).

## **Results**

### **Demographic Profile**

Out of the 30 respondents, 16 were male and only 14 were female. From the 10 senior management respondents, only 2 were female and both females were from the Ministry of Education Arts and Culture. Most senior and middle management respondents from the Kunene Regional Council were male and most operational staff respondents were female. The years of experience of the research participants varied from three (3) years to thirty-five (35) years.

### **General knowledge on delegated education and training function in the Kunene Regional Council**

The findings of this study revealed that the interviewees had different understanding and knowledge of the decentralised education and training function as they all gave different viewpoints on decentralisation. It was evident from the various responses that decentralisation means different things to different people. Although many respondents tried to provide answers on their understanding of the decentralisation policy on education and training, it was evident that the decentralisation policy is not well known and not clear. This is a clear indication that the ministry responsible for coordinating decentralisation in Namibia is not doing enough in terms of advocacy and sensitisation on the decentralisation policy in the region.

The study found that the policy of decentralisation is well understood at senior and middle management levels. Many respondents indicated that more sensitisation and advocacy on the policy of decentralisation were needed for the policy of decentralisation to be well understood by all. The study respondents pointed out that it is impossible to implement a policy that is not well understood or known by the majority of people. Findings on the question of whether it was a good idea to implement a decentralisation policy in Namibia, reveals that most respondents felt that it was, indeed, a good idea to implement the policy. Even the respondents who seem not to understand the policy so well, articulated the same sentiment. One respondent from the MURD indicated that “it was a good idea to implement the decentralisation policy, because services should reach down to the people who are in need.”

### **Coordination of Delegated Activities**

This section presents and analyses the results on the perception of participants regarding the coordination of delegated activities between the Kunene Regional Council and MEAC seconded staffs in terms of planning and human resources management. The Directorate of Education is headed by a Director, and according to some respondents, efforts are being made to ensure proper integration of educational staffs into the regional structures. The study found that there is a lack of inter-organisational collaboration and coordination regarding the management of delegated educational activities. Mostly operational and middle management respondents from the MEAC indicated that there is inter-organisational collaboration and coordination. However, a respondent from the RC middle management indicated that the planning of educational activities is done separately from that of the regional council.

Findings revealed different perceptions of respondents regarding the coordination of activities at regional level. A middle management respondent from the Kunene Regional Council stressed that the educational staffs were reporting their Information Technology problems to their Director of Education, instead of the responsible systems administrator in the Directorate of General Services in the Regional Council and this caused delays in rectifying these problems. This perception was also confirmed by a senior manager from the RC who stated that “the seconded staff members refused to follow the correct reporting lines and continued to do their activities like they used before delegation phase.”

Among other responsibilities, the Constituency Development Committees (CDCs) looks at the overall developmental needs of the region, prioritises and makes recommendations to the Regional Council. Constituency Development Committees were established in all constituencies for the effective coordination of the planning and development of the region at the constituency level. The CDCs are chaired by the constituency councillors. Settlement Committees are also established in settlement areas for the purpose of effective coordination of the administration and development of the settlements. These committees identify, assess and evaluate community needs / problems to be considered for development proposals / plans by the Regional Council. The committees generally monitor the delivery of services within their area and report to the Regional Council (MURD, 2016).

A respondent from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture argued that the regional council is considered to be crucial in the planning of educational activities. As a result, the management of the regional council is always invited

by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture to be part of the educational directorate planning sessions. A senior management respondent from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture revealed that a joint educational planning workshop between the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Regional Councils was held in 2014 and was co-facilitated by the International Institute for Education Planning / UNESCO and NIPAM to address the issues of planning and coordination. Despite this, challenges of lack of coordination are still present.

With regards to capacity development, the study found that the Regional Council has an Induction Programme in place for all staff members, including delegated staff members. However, for promotional posts, induction is mostly done informally by the immediate supervisors, while formal induction is conducted annually or biennially. There is also a Training Committee in place, comprising of the Regional Council and delegated Line Ministries' representatives and they meet on an ad-hoc basis. The Regional Council and the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture Directorate have Training Plans that determine staff's development needs. The Training Committee has the responsibility to submit training reports.

The study further found that a list is compiled annually for training, depending on annual training needs assessment. However, the budget is not enough to send all staff members for training. Mostly, the staff are sent to sponsored courses. One senior manager from the RC revealed that some managers attended NIPAM training workshops. It was also revealed that the Human Resources Division has developed a form which is sent out to heads of divisions to fill in that

requests for the name of trainees and the type of training attended in order to keep record of all training done annually.

### **Factors Affecting Performance**

Lack of motivation was among the factors that most respondents identified as affecting their performance. Senior management respondents from the Kunene Regional Council argued that the director of planning is overloaded since most delegated functions were placed under the planning directorate. One respondent observed that, it was very confusing and stressful. Most respondents alluded to having taken on more responsibilities. However, their salary remained the same. It was also found that some seconded staffs were not cooperative. A lack of adequate resources was also said to be another factor that was affecting their performance.

The study participants were also asked how decentralisation benefited the management of educational programmes and service delivery. It was generally found that the educational activities are carried out smoothly and delivered on time. The analysis of the findings revealed that there was some acknowledgement of notable improvement of certain activities which are delivered on time. According to MURD (2014) decentralisation gives regions an opportunity to take full responsibility for development in the region by using resources optimally to attend to specific needs.

### **Discussions**

This study reflected different opinions from different interview participants. The main issue raised seems to be the lack of understanding of the

decentralisation concept and its intended objectives in the region by most participants as well as the lack of integration of the delegated functions into the Kunene Regional Council. Another important issue raised was the reporting lines that were not adhered to, and which hampered proper communication.

The study observed that senior and middle management level staffs were more knowledgeable about decentralisation, compared to operational staff members. The same sentiment was also shared in a study conducted by Petrus (2014) in the Ohangwena Regional Council. Petrus (2014) states that this disparity in knowledge of decentralisation policy among these levels of participants could imply that management level staffs are more knowledgeable because they are involved in decision-making.

In this study, it was observed that delegated powers are not effectively implemented in areas of appointments, training, and cases of misconduct. This results in delays, as it was found that lack of proper communications makes the Human Resources Division sometimes unaware and unable to be involved in some misconduct cases. This shows that a top-down approach continues to dominate. There is a tendency to confuse delegation of powers to field administration of central government with regional councils and to keep both of them heavily dependent on the centre by creating hierarchies.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the results, it can be concluded that delegation can, in principle, increase accountability for those functions and responsibilities delegated to the sub-national governments. However, many important functions and

responsibilities usually remain with central government. It is further concluded that decentralisation is a government policy that needs to be embraced by all and it is through collective efforts, regular consultations, and meetings that the process can be taken forward. Decentralisation itself is a complex process and it is difficult to draw general conclusions on how it should be implemented. According to Mugabi (2000) decentralisation takes place within a particular historical context and its effective formulation and implementation is shaped by its content.

## **Recommendations**

The results revealed that most respondents at operational level were not conversant with the decentralisation concepts or lacked understanding of the policy and its benefits. It is hereby recommended that MURD continue to conduct more sensitisation / information sharing sessions with all stakeholders involved in the decentralisation process. Most operational staffs complained about not being aware of the content of the decentralisation guidelines / manual; it is hereby recommended that both the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development and Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture provide the Kunene Regional Council staffs with training on the manual, since they are expected to use the manual. It is also recommended that the guidelines / manuals be reviewed to address the situation on the ground.

Many problems identified are operational and result from a lack of coordination and cooperation between the Regional Council, the Education Directorate within the Regional Council, Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture Head Office and the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development, as some structures are not functioning. For example, Development Committees where all

stakeholders are supposed to agree on regional development initiatives. In view of the above, the study highlights how the issues discussed could be resolved, at the same time, establishing a democratic decentralised system of governance.



## References

- Dillinger, W. (1993). *Decentralisation and its implications for urban service delivery. Urban management programme discussion paper no.16.* The World bank.
- Elhiraika, A. B. (2007). *Fiscal decentralisation and public service delivery in South Africa.*
- ATPC no. 58.
- Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2016). *Status of the Decentralisation Policy Implementation. Planning and Development Directorate. Windhoek, Namibia*
- Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2015). *Readiness Assessment Report on Sector Specific Service Delivery Standards. Windhoek, Namibia*
- Ministry of Education (2012). *Decentralisation Progress Report. Planning and Development Directorate. Windhoek, Namibia.*
- Ministry of Education (2008). *Report on Readiness for Delegation phase of Decentralisation. Planning and Development Directorate. Windhoek, Namibia.*
- Ministry of Urban and Rural Development (2016). *Decentralisation Status Namibia 2016. Directorate of Decentralisation Coordination, Windhoek, Namibia.*
- Ministry of Urban and Rural Development (2015). *Report on the progress made with the implementation of decentralisation. Directorate of Decentralisation Coordination, Windhoek, Namibia*
- Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development (2014). *Presentation on Decentralisation Implementation Strategies. Regional Development Committees Training*
- Ministry of Regional Local Government, Housing and Rural Development, (2012). *Report on the progress made with the implementation of decentralisation. Directorate of Decentralisation Coordination. Windhoek, Namibia.*
- Mugabi, E. A. (2000). *Implementing decentralisation management. Sixth Africa Training Course on Local and Regional Development Planning and Management. Nairobi, Kenya*

- Mukwena, R. & Chirawu, T. O. (2008). *Decentralisation and Regional and Local government in Namibia*. OSSEREA.
- Petrus, M. N. (2014). *An investigation into the effectiveness of the decentralisation process as a mean of integrating seconded staff into the regional council: A case study of Ohangwena Regional Council*. (Master Thesis). Namibia University of Science and Technology.
- SWAPO Manifesto (1989) SWAPO party's election manifesto*. Lusaka, Zambia
- Republic of Namibia (2013). *Generic Assessment for Khomas Regional Council*. Windhoek, Namibia.
- Republic of Namibia (2000). *Decentralisation Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2000)*. Government Gazette. Windhoek, Namibia
- Republic of Namibia (1998). *A decentralisation policy of the republic of Namibia, the Policy, its Development and Implementation*. Government Gazette. Windhoek, Ministry of Regional Local Government, Housing and Rural Development,
- UNESCO (2005). *Handbook for decentralised education planning. Implementing National EFA Plans*. UNESCO/Bangkok: Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education.
- Winkler, D. (2005). *Public expenditure tracking in education (EQUIP2 Policy Brief)*.  
*Educational Quality Improvement Program 2(EQUIP2), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Academy for Educational Development (AED)*.
- Winkler, D. R. & Gershberg, A. I. (2003). *Education decentralisation in Africa: A Review of Recent Policy and Practice*. World Bank  
<http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/LearningProgram/Decentralisation/Winkle.do>