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# An investigation into the information needs for poverty eradication at Greenwell Matongo in Katutura, Windhoek, in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)<sup>1</sup>

Kingo Mchombu  
University of Namibia.

## Abstract

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the eradication of poverty are two concerns that are highly supported by African governments, bilateral agencies and the United Nations. However within Africa, not much research has been done on what role libraries and information services can play towards meeting the goals of the MDG programme and the eradication of poverty. The aim of this paper is to present preliminary findings from a study in Greenwell Matongo, Katutura, Windhoek, on information needs for poverty eradication in the context of MDGs. Focus group discussions were conducted with three groups consisting of young females, young males, and adults respectively. The participants described the high levels of poverty in their community, and the low levels of hygiene and sanitation. There was recognition that education for children is important to overcome poverty. Gender relations are marked by alcohol related violence and rapes. The rate of HIV/AIDS and TB infection were thought to be high but kept secret because of fear of stigma. There were serious environmental problems in the community because of the use of inflammable fuel sources such as paraffin and candles in the corrugated iron shacks. The community information centre in the settlement is used intensively by young people for educational purposes, but only marginally, by adults for photocopying and literacy purposes. Recommendations are made on how to address the identified information needs of the community and capacity building in the context of MDG and poverty eradication.

## 1. Background and literature review

### 1.1 Introduction

This was a participatory research project, completed in 2008, was aimed at investigating community information needs to meet Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) programme objectives, focusing on poverty eradication and survival information needs and the information use patterns of a community in a City of Windhoek and Finnish libraries (Vantaa Public Library) supported project.

The need for poor urban communities in Africa in general and Namibia in particular such as Greenwell Matongo to engage in poverty eradication programmes to achieve MDGs is pertinent and for that reason, knowing the current use, and possibilities of community information services is essential to address the needs of poor communities in various Windhoek communities and it could help to redesign and reaffirm the present community information strategy as presented by the *Finnish/City of Windhoek project*. To achieve

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**Kingo Mchombu** is Professor of Information and Communication Studies and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. He has teaching and research interests in the fields of Knowledge Management, Communication for Development, and Community Library and Information Services. E-mail addresses: kmchombu@unam.na; kjmchombu@gmail.com

this, the research was determined to investigate the channels and media from which the community acquires information related to all the goals of the MDG programme.

The community's information use patterns to accessing information from news and events, employment and survival information, health care, education, community development projects, community library, shelter and sanitation and various other areas identified by the community itself were therefore investigated. The collected data enabled this study to make recommendations on how to enhance the flow of information to address issues of poverty eradication, deprivation and economic development at the Greenwell Matongo community. It was hoped that these findings would also provide insights into how the needs of other poor urban-based communities elsewhere in Namibia could be provided with access to capacity building information and knowledge to address basic human development needs.

## 1.2 Background to the study

The reduction of poverty and optimizing human capabilities is a concern for all Third World countries and Namibia is no exception. Several key policy documents of the Government of Namibia have the reduction of poverty as an important priority goal (Namibia, 2004). The National Development Plan 2 for Namibia also reaffirms the government's commitment to reduce extreme poverty in the country as Namibia moves towards Vision 2030. Vision 2030 key aim is to turn Namibia into a knowledge based economy by the year 2030. Hence understanding how communities access and use information to address poverty eradication, and other MDGs is important as it will strengthen grassroots information services for the achievement of Namibia's long term vision.

Internationally, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has identified four capabilities for human development: healthy and long lives, access to knowledge, access to adequate resources for a decent standard of living, and opportunity to participate in the affairs of a community (UNDP, 2006). It's not only the second capability which is centred on information and knowledge, but all the other capabilities have information and knowledge implications too. For example better knowledge widens people's opportunities for better health through employing preventive strategies more effectively. Similarly knowledge provides opportunities to improve income generation and to enhance interaction and participation in civic affairs in the community (Mchombu and Cadbury, 2006 p.3)

The World Bank (1999) has identified information and knowledge as vital resources in human development and overcoming poverty and other forms of deprivation. The report points out that knowledge has become as important as the other factors of production such as land, capital, and labour.

Education and the libraries are capable of reaching out to all potential beneficiaries with an adequate amount of information. However, as argued by Gericke, the library can only play a role in development and education if it provides services to all potential user groups in the community. She also asserts that the capacity of local communities to cope with daily problems of economic and social change... depends heavily on access to and use of information (Gericke, 1997).

On the other hand, Evans argues that access to information and knowledge constitutes a global public good and is essential to the advancement of education, science, culture and communication, empowerment, to promote cultural diversity and to foster open

governance (Evans, 2004). Therefore this research attempted to discover how the communities use various channels and media to access information in some of the above-mentioned areas, especially from the community information centre, to address their development needs.

As this study focused on the community and its use of information to address poverty eradication, a detailed understanding of the community views and context was crucial. The Windhoek communities tend to be fragmented into social classes based on ethnic, racial, and even political affiliations. The fragmentation is an unfortunate legacy of apartheid and need to be taken into account to be able to create information services that cater for the entire population. According to Gericke, new approaches are vital in achieving this. These include identifying the needs of different socio-economic groups as well as working with community and voluntary associations to promote and develop information services (Gericke, 1997).

The challenge as stated by Morris, is to provide equal opportunities for all and that implies a commitment to rendering services without discrimination on the grounds of race and gender... or to help everyone achieve their full potential... Equal opportunities is also an important element in redressing the political and social imbalance that has existed for so many years and through this to empower the disadvantaged communities (Morris, 1992).

Information is an essential ingredient in community development and community development is an essential factor in working towards participatory democracy. Lor argues that access to information is of cardinal importance to satisfy daily coping needs, ensure a competitive economy, promote education and lifelong learning, democracy and nation building (Lor, 1996). Harris also states that the capacity of local communities to cope with economic and social change depends heavily on access to information and if communities are not well informed, other policy measures will fail (Harris, 1992).

Many poor communities are still disadvantaged in terms of information access and to address this deprivation requires an improvement to the existing information environment model or to come up with an appropriately redesigned and new model. However, as noted by Coleman, there is a need for a change of approach when using the term "disadvantaged". He cautions that it is not poor people who are disadvantaged but communities experience disadvantage because of the (information professionals and activists) failure as service providers to offer them the same standard of service as other users (Coleman, 1992 p.308).

Therefore it is the public librarians' challenge to employ all possible methods including the creation and repackaging of information in both printed and multimedia form (Poller, 1995; Aboyade, 1984). However, as warned by Zaaiman, information centres should strive for the cooperative model of full community participation, consultation and involvement of the communities (Zaaiman, 1988).

In pursuit of the above template, a study by Mchombu and Cadbury established that it is possible to design community libraries and information centres to reduce poverty and deprivation and promote literacy. However a successful strategy for delivery of development information should include:

- empowerment of the community through their full participation to articulate their needs;
- local information delivery that is accessible to communities, which can only be

- realized through significant government support for the sector;
- close cooperation with other agencies delivering services to poor and marginalized communities, including government agencies; and
- Incorporation of indigenous knowledge resources of the community in the community exchange strategies.
- a trained and proactive information facilitator who can stimulate a good flow and exchange of development information;
- information gaps of the poor must first be identified and appropriate information repackaged to fill the information gaps. (Mchombu and Cadbury, 2006 p.18)

Moreover, knowledge of the multilingual and multicultural society to be served and new attitudes and social skills, as it is the case in Windhoek, are necessary to deal with cultural and language barriers in communicating with various information users. Fairer-Wessels and Machet (1993) note that the widespread presence of illiteracy, absence of a reading culture, general ignorance as to what material and services are available in libraries, and dominance of an oral tradition among the black population affect the use of traditional libraries. The urbanization of large numbers of poor and uneducated (sic) people is also a universal phenomenon which the public library has to deal with (Gericke, 1997).

Some factors, pointed out by Fairer-Wessels can be seen as a hindrance to the effective use of community information centres. It is noted by Fairer-Wessels (1990) that illiterate people overwhelmingly make use of personal sources of information such as family and friends to cope with the needs of daily living and thus personal social networks are important sources of information for daily living. Even literates first rely on oral communication and then resort to impersonal sources of information. But she advises that illiterate and semi-literate people need an information middle-person who is part of the community and whom everyone knows, someone that can give information verbally, and package information that is easy to understand on various topics (Fairer-Wessels, 1990; Stilwell, 2001). However, it is possible to view the state of illiteracy and the dominance of oral communication as an opportunity for tailor made services rather than an insurmountable problem (Mchombu, 1993).

There has been many other studies and reports on information needs and information use behaviour patterns for disadvantaged groups, such as Greenwell Matongo community, Katutura, Windhoek. The mass media has been identified as one such information system. News and public events can provide information and the community itself is made of people who are both news consumers and daily news makers. The mass media can also provide information to an individual but to extract relevant information on health care and education for instance, s/he needs a certain level of education to enable him/her to easily comprehend terminologies used. Information when misunderstood is misleading and therefore worthless (Poller, 1995).

Extension services in health, agriculture and community development have all been identified as forming another information system for disadvantaged groups. As noted above by Fairer-Wessels (1990) they tend to use the two step information flow model with the extension agents serving as an information transfer go-between the community and the information sources needed to address development issues (Mchombu 1993; Chambers, 1983). It has been noted elsewhere as well that extension agents often lack a proper place to store the extension literature and they operate in a fragmented way with different government departments running their own extension services without much coordination (Mchombu, 1993).

Libraries and community information centres have been identified as another information system to serve disadvantaged communities. Most of the services for this category have tended to concentrate on the better off urban areas rather than poor urban and rural communities (Mchombu, 1993; Aboyade, 1984; Mchombu and Cadbury, 2006). Zaïman (1988) Kempson (1985) and others have noted the need for community involvement if the community information service is to address their needs. The need for a community information officer to coordinate the information transfer/exchange process has also been identified as an essential ingredient (Mchombu, 1993)

### **1.3 Description of Greenwell Matongo**

Greenwell Matongo community forms part of the Katutura Township in the City of Windhoek. Katutura, which means in the Herero language 'the place we do not want to live' has a tragic history, as it was created by the former South African apartheid regime from the forced removal of black people from the suburb of Hochland Park. The forced removals formed part of the apartheid policy of racial segregation, was implemented from 1959 and 1961 and led to protests by the affected people which resulted in police shooting to death 13 people and many injuries. Within Katutura, the policy of apartheid led to further segregation according to ethnic origins of the black people to enforce tribal separation (Pendleton, 1994)

After independence in 1990, the Government of Namibia has made tremendous efforts to improve the living standards of people in Katutura. Several schools have been built; a Katutura Central hospital and several health centres have also been built and other social amenities such as water, electrify, tarred roads and shopping complexes. Katutura is estimated to have a population of over 200,000 and it is the fastest growing part of the City of Windhoek. Katutura has attracted many rural migrants who have moved to Windhoek in search of a better life. Most of the recent migrants have put up shacks made of corrugated iron sheets, without sanitation, water, and electricity. Greenwell Matongo is one such informal settlement. The majority of residents face many hardships including high unemployment, high rate of crime, and shabeens (informal alcohol selling places) which are open throughout the day and night and sell alcohol to anyone who has money, regardless of age. Because of high unemployment and poverty, prostitution is rife in Greenwell Matongo (Muronga, 2011).

### **1.4 Research problem statement**

The brief review of existing literature reveals that although there are many reports/papers on information support for the poor communities in Africa, very few studies provide practical answers on how to provide development information for poverty eradication and meeting the MDG programme goals. Further, the strong emerging awareness that information and knowledge are a key resource to alleviating poverty is seldom supported by action research studies which clearly indicate how the various aspects of information needed for poverty eradication, the information use behaviour of the urban poor, and the supporting infrastructure and info-structure can all be brought and woven together to design a community development information system that adequately and efficiently addresses the development information needs of the poor to overcome poverty, deprivation and other human development challenges.

#### **1.4.1 Purpose of study**

This study investigated the current use patterns of information by selected communities in the Greenwell Matongo area for the purpose of addressing poverty eradication and other

development goals. The data gathered from this study was used to redesign and reaffirm the existing community information strategy of the City of Windhoek/Finnish project. It therefore aimed at collecting data on development information needs of the community as well as the current community information centre strategy and matched these two aspects. Towards that end, the community information use patterns were investigated including the use of channels to access information from various sources including news and events, education, health care, environmental degradation, community development projects and other areas identified by the community itself.

### **1.5 Research objectives**

1. To investigate the community perception of poverty and survival strategies
2. To explore the extent to which the community have access to resources including information and knowledge, and other resources, which address poverty and development needs.
3. To identify sources of development information for the community in health, formal and adult education, income generation and other pertinent areas.
4. To critically assess the current usage patterns, relevance, and adequacy of resources and facilities at the Grenwell Matongo community information centre
5. To identify gaps and weaknesses in the information service network from the communities' perspectives for better services
6. To make recommendations in the on how information centre strategy could be effectively implemented for the benefit of the communities in Katutura to address poverty eradication and development needs in accordance with Namibia's Vision 2030 and MDGs.

## **2. Research design**

### **2.1 Research methods**

The research was multistage in order to establish i) an assessment of community information and knowledge needs for development ii) Discussions with stakeholders on the types of interventions and redesign of the community information centre strategy. This study which used participatory communication for development research design combined data collection and capacity building. The main research methods for the community information needs study component were:

- i) Focus Group Discussions (FGD)
- ii) Chapati or Venn Diagramming

Briefly, the FGD combines group interviews and in-depth discussions which ideal when a community is providing data on a subject on which they may not be familiar. Chapati or venn diagramming is a process of listing and ranking groups with communication systems and information sources, in order to show the relative importance of difference sources and channels to community development. Because of limitations of space, the chapatti or Venn diagramming neither is not included in this article.

### **2.2 Research procedures**

The study used a qualitative study design based on two data collection instruments, the first was a Focus Group Discussion guide and the second was Venn Diagramming guideline. Both instruments sought to find out the existing situation with regards to the different MDGs areas from participants. The Windhoek Municipality's department of community development facilitated access to community leaders and young people who formed focus groups for the study.



The group of young females had six active members, throughout, though at times, there were additional young females who dropped in and stayed for a while before moving on. Their ages ranged from 15 to 22 years old, and they had education ranging from grade 9 to 11. The interviews were conducted in English. The young males group had six active members, though there were times when the number was swollen by individuals who were curious and wanted to join the discussion. The ages ranged from 16 to 35 years old. Their levels of education ranged from grade 9 to university level. The adult group had six members as well, 3 females and 3 males. The original idea had been to have two groups, male and female separately, but because of difficulties in getting enough participants, it was decided to combine the two. Their level of education ranged from grade 1 to 7. The interviews were conducted in the Oshivambo language as most of the participants had insufficient command of English.

A total of three focus group meetings were held in afternoons, in the last week of July and first week of August 2008. Students in the Department of information and communication studies were trained to administer both the focus group instrument and Venn diagramming instrument. Only the findings from the focus group discussions are reported in the following section of this report.

### **3. Presentation of findings**

The Focus Group discussions sought to collect data from participants on the following MDGs core areas, in relation to participants general perceptions, their information needs, and the information channels and sources which can be used to access the required information.

#### **3.1. Extreme poverty, hunger and livelihoods**

The participants were asked to explain how they perceived poverty, hunger and livelihoods. There were several follow up questions, including, causes of poverty, survival strategies, and whether the groups felt people had enough power to change their lives, and their vision of what needed to be done to change the poverty situation in the community.

The focus groups were in agreement on the high level of poverty and hunger in Greenwell Matongo. From the group of young males it was said by several members that "the situation is very bad". Basic amenities such as water, electricity, and sanitation were said to be absent. "People end up using the open spaces at night as toilets" because of this situation. The group of adults also agreed on the high level of poverty and noted that: "here people sleep on empty stomachs". Young women go into prostitution because of lack of alternative means to earn a living. One adult member said people on medication "drink the medicine on empty stomachs which causes death because of poverty".

The root causes of poverty were perceived in terms of several things, lack of education, one's behaviour, and unemployment and the social and economic structures which made it difficult for the poor to break out of poverty. The male youth group, for example, saw poverty as caused by lack of education as well as skills; rapid urbanization without adequate resources, and alcohol drinking and laziness of individuals. The social economic structures also were mentioned as a fundamental cause of poverty because it is not easy for the poor to have access to resources easily. The adult group identified unemployment due to old age as it becomes difficult to get a job if one is old, as well as lack of information on how to start and run small businesses profitably. The adults also pointed excessive drunkenness in the community, as another root cause. However, among the youth it was mentioned

that “getting drunk” is often the only way to reduce stress and frustration. Corruption of officials who take away resources earmarked for the poor was also identified as a cause of poverty by all the groups.

The community used different survival strategies to cope with poverty. The adult groups identified running small business as the main strategy such as selling fruits, sweets, traditional beer, vegetables, firewood, old bottles, and kapana (roast meat). The young males were in agreement with the above strategies and stressed cheap manual labour, and crime such as house breaking, shop lifting, and prostitution, as well as begging.

Responding to the question on what people can do to break out of poverty, the responses indicated that there were four things that could be done – government to come up with programmes to address poverty, setting up small businesses, creating more employment opportunities including farming, and increasing amenities in the community. The government, it was said by the youth male group, could do several things, including taking the plight of the poor seriously, encourage people to go back to rural areas and do farming, and old people to change their ‘mind set’ to stop the belief that ‘because we were colonized, the government should do things for us’. Breaking out of poverty was also seen by the adult group in terms of having more basic amenities in the community such as public toilets, a health centre, and clean water. The issue of government and its dominant role was also dominant in the discussions from the young female group. The things government could do were listed as: build houses for the poor, loans to start small businesses, build an open market for people to sell their things, and employ community members in self-help projects and provide food assistance.

On the issue of power and what the community would change if it had power, many suggestions came from the discussions. The main consensus from the adult and young males groups was that poor people are powerless and too weak to change their own situation. Some of the statements were: ‘we can’t do anything without assistance’; ‘no one has power unless empowered’; ‘people who are hungry can’t think straight’. ‘People don’t know anything because they are hungry’. Poor people do not have power because a beggar will never be allowed to speak to the master’; ‘no one respects the poor’. The young males and females groups, however, while sharing similar sentiments of powerlessness in their community, had a slightly more optimistic perception of the power in their community to affect change. “They have power but it is limited as authorities can decide not to act in their favour’; ‘the source of power is personal commitment’. People are allowed to demonstrate and draw attention to problem areas which are not going well’.

The general feeling of helplessness, however, was not inhibiting when the groups were asked to discuss the things they would change if they had power. The youth male and female group suggested that they would like houses built for people, infrastructure for sports improved and a vocational training centre as well as a health centre. The adults group wanted a place for baking bread, industrial parks for small businesses to operate from, a playground for children, and theatre for music and drama. The group also pointed out that ‘we have knowledgeable people in our community and they need to be brought together to bring employment to our community’. The adult group discussions led to identification of several resources the community could use to fight poverty: the Goreangab dam, nearby, has water which could be used to irrigate crops, as well as fishing; we could harvest the wild grass and make baskets, bags and sell. The adult group however recognize that they need to learn and acquire new knowledge and skills to be able to do these new things they had proposed.

### 3.1.2. Information needs to eradicate extreme poverty, hunger and improve livelihoods

The group discussion was also aimed at finding out the different kinds of information poor people need to cope/overcome poverty and for the community to mobilize itself to address its problems and challenges. The adult group suggested the need for combined information support and advisory services to be able to implement the ideas for the betterment of the community. They specified that there is need for information on: small businesses and income generation opportunities; television and video shows on practical information on how to eradicate poverty; and self-employment; and agricultural knowledge so that they can work on farms and start agricultural projects. The young males and female groups suggested that their greatest need was employment information. It was suggested that all job adverts should be in a computer data base so that each person could see the qualifications needed so they can apply if they qualify. Financial information and skills were identified as important in order to know where to get loans and how to manage finances. Hygiene information was also identified as important especially for those selling foodstuffs. According to the youth groups, the main problem is that although information is very important, poor people do not know where to get such information.

Multiple channels were identified during the discussion for accessing information on poverty eradication. The male youth group identified radio as the main channel for such information. Newspapers were ruled out because 'most people do not have money to buy newspapers'. Television was seen as potentially good as people can 'see and hear' at the same time. However, as most residents in the community have no television because of lack of electricity, the usefulness of television was questioned by other youth. The need to have information in local languages was identified as important as most people did not speak English. The adult group, in contrast, were dismissive of radio and television in the present format, as useful channels for accessing information to eradicate poverty. The main reasons given were that radio has too much music and entertainment and there are few programmes educational and development oriented programmes. Television also was said to provide mostly political information. The local language sections of the New Era and the Namibian were seen as potentially useful if they could provide information content related to poverty eradication. The fact that many community members were not fully literate was seen as a major barrier in accessing useful information in newspapers and other publications. Another channel of potential value identified was public meetings. However, it was said that most of the community leaders do not call such meetings because they have nothing of value to share with the community. The Greenwell Matongo community information centre was also mentioned but it was concluded that it offers mostly educational information in English, and has little information on small businesses and development matters. However, the young males and females thought this could be addressed by setting a development information section in the community information centre.

### 3.2 Primary, secondary and non-formal education

The discussions in this section focused on several issues: school attendance levels, places for acquiring literacy, and any problems children face in pursuing their education. All the groups agreed that there are three primary schools near the settlement which children from Greenwell Matongo attend school. All experience high dropout rates because of various reasons. The young females group pointed out that attendance in schools was not always good because of the environment in the community. Some of the factors identified were: parent who cannot afford to pay school fees and other charges, teenage pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, and skipping classes by some learners as parents cannot check

on them nor do such parents attend school meetings. The young males groups said that most children had no one to help with homework at home as parents had low levels of education. The conditions at home were also not conducive to learning as the shacks were small and had no electricity or place to do homework. Some children had lost either one or both parents and were living with relatives who did not always care about their education. The adult group mentioned the problem of children who have to go to school with an empty stomach because of poverty which makes learning difficult.

### 3.2.1 Information needed to support education

The adult group identified the following areas where information was needed to support education in the community: 'parents need information so that they can read notices about what is happening at school e.g. parents meetings'; 'elders need information to know how to read and write so that they can check their children's work at school'; 'children get most of their information from teachers but they also need to be informed by parents'. The young females group, apart from also endorsing the need for parents to get information which will enable them to support the education of their children, mentioned several other areas in which information was needed: information on best self-study methods, parents need information on how to treat the children during exam times because 'parents do not care at all'. The library needs to have enough materials to support education of children in the settlement. Careers information was also identified by the girls group to 'see which subjects are needed for which career so that children can select the right subjects'. The function of the Greenwell Matongo was rated as important by the girls because 'most of the houses in the community don't have facilities like tables, chairs, and electricity because not everyone can afford to pay for electricity so candles and other forms of lighting are used'. The adults also stressed the importance of a place for studying in the community because 'in the houses there are no tables or chairs and houses are too small. Electricity is only in the street, we don't have electricity in our houses we use only candles'.

### 3.2.2 Information channels used to access educational information

The young males group identified several channels they use to access educational information. The principal one was school teachers, and friends and relatives, as well as the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL). Two mass media channels were also identified as a useful source by young males: TV Africa, and the Friday issue of the Namibia newspaper. The community library was also mentioned as a useful channel for educational materials and reading space. The young females group identified the Greenwell community library as the main source of educational information and wanted application forms for institutions of higher learning and vocational education to be available. School meetings were also seen as important. Relatives who are attending institutions of higher learning and vocational training centres were an important source of information, as well as newspapers, radio and teachers.

### 3.3. Gender relations and equality

The question was aimed at discussing gender relations in the community, instances of inequality and instances of domestic violence and rape. The group of young females perceived gender relations in terms of distribution of power in society, social relations, employment and decision making roles. Whereas the adult group pointed out that gender relations differ between urban to rural areas. Men in the adult group saw gender relations differently from women. Women in the group of adults pointed out that there were problems in gender relations but men thought there were no problems - women were just being difficult. There was, however, general agreement that 'all people in the community

are hungry'. Men thought that women tended to have small businesses and had more money while men were doing odd jobs and were poorer. The male had other views as well, such as: 'women are divorcing nowadays because they are educated and this makes them their own bosses and they don't want to honour their marriages'; 'the problem we face is that women can't control themselves'. Women in the adult group had different views: 'men threaten us too much because they do everything, but if a man gets paid you will not get anything from that pay as a wife'; 'man don't want to support their women and families'; 'women are not given an opportunity to continue with their literacy classes by their husbands because of house duties and the need to care for family and husbands'. The girl group shared similar views and it was noted by one participant that because of inequality women have to do a lot of chores both at home and in their survival economic activities so that in the end 'women become exhausted playing the dual role of care taker and breadwinner'. The young males thought that women just 'wanted to control men and because of human rights they like to run to the police station and report their husbands on little things, who are held for a few hours then they are out'.

#### *3.3.1 Information needs on gender relations and inequality*

The information needs identified by the girl group were as follow: information on how to support each other financially and socially; education on the rights of men and women and respect for those rights; where to go when women are raped as they are shy and don't want anyone to know about it; information is also needed on how to cope with the trauma and emotions of rape. The young males identified the need for workshops on gender equality. The adult group identified the information on laws on gender and rape to be made available in all languages.

#### *3.3.2 Channels used for accessing gender information.*

The girl group identified the radio as the most useful channel, followed by the community information resource centre 'because this is where young people gathering take place'. Another channel identified was parents but it was said 'they are least useful because they never discuss gender related matters with their children'. The police station was also dismissed because 'it is too slow and it is never friendly'. The adults however did not rate radio very highly for gender information because 'the programmes are too short and don't explain very well and this causes confusion'. Newspapers were also not deemed useful because 'they are written in English and not all people can read them'.

The conclusion of the adult group therefore was that 'there is no useful information coming though the various channels'. The young males identified workshops on gender relations as the most useful channel followed by radio. Other channels mentioned were: radio, library, and neighbours. However because of illiteracy, books were deemed least useful.

#### **3.4. Mother and child health care**

The situation of mother and child health in the community was regarded differently by the different groups. While the adult group said it is not possible to tell 'only doctors can tell', some in the group thought that child mortality is on the increase, and teenage pregnancies are also on the increase. The youth groups noted improvements in family planning. The practice of girls getting family planning advice without parental consent was condemned by the adult group. The girl group, in contrast, noted that there were serious health problems such as: 'increase in malnutrition and child mortality'; 'unhygienic living conditions which lead to diseases'; 'polio in children because they like to play in unhygienic

conditions'; 'sexually transmitted diseases'; 'TB'; 'smoking and alcohol abuse by expecting mothers which causes lung and heart diseases among children'.

#### *3.4.1 Information needs for mother and child health*

There were two camps among the group members on the need for family planning information. The youth groups (both females and males) expressed the need for family planning information but others thought that only grownups should get this information and not teenagers. The girl group, however, wanted more information on family planning, Anti-retroviral medication, how to keep the environment clean, and methods of breastfeeding and child care for mothers. Mothers should also get information on pre-natal and neo-natal care.

#### *3.4.2 Channels for accessing information on mother and child health*

The adult group stated that health information for mother and child health was only available to those who visit the health centres, which makes it difficult for men to get this kind of information. According to the adult participants, the health centre close to the Greenwell Matongo community is at Wanaheda (next suburb to Greenwell Matongo) and has only a few nurses who can only do visits during polio vaccinations. The girls' group, however, was of many more sources of health information compared to the adults. The girls' group mentioned the following sources: health facilities, desert soul booklets, television, radio, newspapers, parents, and books in the community information centres. Radio and the Clinic were cited as most important; newspapers were cited as least useful because of price and the fact that there is no space available to report on health matters, except when they become a news item.

### **3.5. HIV/AIDS and TB**

The adult group thought that there were high levels of HIV/AIDS infection in the community; however stigma ensures that it is kept secret by affected individuals and families. A participant pointed out that there are many because he sees them in counselling programmes. The young males also agree that there could be many who are infected because of low use of condoms, prostitution as one noted 'N\$ 50 you can satisfy your sexual desire'. Other factors in the environment of Greenwell Matongo which could contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS mentioned were: poverty, too many alcohol drinking places i.e. shabeens, laziness and behaviour of the youth. The girl group, like the young males, was not quite sure of the extent of HIV/AIDS in the community but also noted similar factors which could contribute to the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS, adding polygamous relationships, peer pressure, sugar daddies, and ignorance about how both HIV and TB spread in the community. As one of the girl discussant put it:

"Peer pressure among young people where they influence each other to have sex with people older than themselves. Sugar daddies can support them financially"

The adult discussants suggested there is high unemployment and poverty. As a survival strategy people have set up small businesses. One in particular could also fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS. One participant had this to say: "our houses are all bars and everyone is welcome. We need separate places for bars"

#### *3.5.1 Information needs for prevention of HIV/AIDS and TB*

The girls group pointed out different types of information which are needed to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS and TB: how to practice safe sex, abstinence, contraceptive use, and

the importance of being faithful to one partner. Another category of information which was highly rated is the need for patients to go for treatment for both TB and ARVs if they are HIV positive 'rather than stay at home'. The girls group also identified several types of information for those who are infected: emotional and psychological support, stigma, appropriate diet and how and when to take medication. The adult group was not clear cut about the information needs to stop HIV and TB from spreading, other than saying that the available information is out of date, and needs to be renewed once every three years, because people need to be well informed. Aids does not spread through handshakes, those who discriminate are not well informed'. The young males agreed that there was a great need for more information on both HIV and TB prevention. The group identified the following topics: how the virus spreads, abstinence, and behaviour-change information, use of condoms, diet, where to get treatment, and the problems of alcohol abuse for infected persons, consistent use of medication, positive living, and to a the need to void superstitious beliefs.

#### *3.5.2 Channels of information to access information on HIV/AIDS and TB prevention*

The adults group identified public meetings as an important channel for accessing HIV/AIDS and TB information. Other sources identified were: the Government, Namibia Red Cross, AIDS Care Trust, Catholic AIDS Action, Anna Mary Association.

The young females identified radio, television, magazines, and health centres and books in the community information centre among the useful channels. Books and magazines were ranked lowest because of high illiteracy in the community.

### **3.6. Environmental conditions**

The girls and young males groups thought that the environment of the community was not ideal because of the following factors: the condition of housing is poor mostly made of corrugated iron sheets, and garbage collection is not effective creating problems of cleanliness and littering in the community. The main source of energy is firewood, paraffin and candles. The adults agreed with all above points but added other problems such as: houses are too small, no running water, toilet or electricity. Clean water is available from the community stand pipes in the mornings during evenings only. The main source of energy is candles and paraffin which often causes fires in the shanty town. One participant had this to say: 'the candles are burning our houses and many people are burnt and die daily. The fire brigade is needed here and should be available every time'.

#### *3.6.1 Information needs to combat environmental conditions*

The young males identified information needs on how to keep the environment clean, dangers of stagnant waters in the community, and alternative construction materials which are cheap but effective. Also requested was information on the Shack Dwellers Association which assists with construction of houses by giving loans. The adult group also identified the need for information on cheap building materials, information from the municipality officials on how to build in planned paces rather than haphazardly, how to manage finances and plans on how to build gradually. It was mentioned by the adult group also that 'men need to be educated to stop urinating everywhere in front of children as this sets a bad example'. The girls group identified similar needs but added the need for knowledge and building skills for people to build own houses, and the need to teach everyone how to keep the environment clean in schools.

#### *3.6.2 Channels of information on environmental conditions*

The girls group identified several channels through which information on environmental

matters reaches the community: the municipality through public meetings, nurses give talks on cleanliness, and radio (in a general way). The young males mentioned environmental adverts in newspapers, radio and television. They called upon the municipality to put up posters on maintaining a clean environment and community leaders to hold public meetings. The adult group said there was little information on the environment that is why the location is dirty, and there is no useful information on how to build houses cheaply. The Community information centre was called upon to supply this type of information.

### **3.7 Networks and ICTs**

#### **3.7.1 Networking and ICTs use**

The participants were asked to discuss what type of contacts they still maintain with rural relatives. The question was aimed at finding out whether strong networks still exist between the urban residents and rural areas and the use of ICTs in networking. The discussions revealed there are strong contact with relatives in rural areas through cell-phones, and travelling there often. In the adult group the women said they go often while the men don't because 'people don't send money because most men don't have a room in the north'. It was also claimed that 'some men don't send any money because they spend it on alcohol and prostitutes'. It was explained that the government provide elders with a monthly pension and the amount is believed to be enough, hence no need for additional remittances. However the adult group also said they receive foodstuff often from the rural areas from relatives. The girl group also had regular contact with the rural areas and carry out farming during school holidays. The ownership of radio and cell phones was high while ownership of television and landline phones was low. Most of the group members only saw a computer, for the first time, in the Community Information Centre and would like to learn how to use it.

### **3.8 Greenwell Matongo Community Information Centre**

The focus groups were also asked questions on the Greenwell Matongo Community Information Centre. Most of the adult group members had used the Centre to make photocopies but not for reading books. The girls group all participants said they had used the information centre for reading purposes and to help their brothers and sisters with their school work. Participants said they use the Centre for studying, internet searches, reading, photocopying, meeting friends, and borrowing books. The young males group also have used the Centre for similar purposes.

Suggestion on how the Greenwell Matongo Community Information Centre can help in overcoming poverty varied among the groups. The young male group suggested more up to date information materials, expansion of the premises for more people to use especially during examination times. They also called for the hiring a teacher to give both information and advice to community members. The games they would like to see in the Centre were: chess, soccer, volleyball, tennis and drama. The girls group had similar suggestions but also added the need for more computers, games such as: cards, draft, snake and ladder. The girls also called for more information concerning the community and its problems. The adult group expressed a need for business classes, computer classes, and driving school/ classes and cinema/video shows on farming and practical skills.

### **3.9 Conclusions and recommendations**

The three focus discussion groups, though not entirely representative of the whole Greenwell Matongo community, had many ideas on the various issues concerning information use to address the MDG programme goals in Namibia. Overall, the young



people appeared to have more awareness of information needs and channels. Quite often, some of the adult group members were not aware of information flows on the various development concerns under discussion. One explanation for this difference is the presence of barriers created by illiteracy, powerlessness, and language problems because most of the information flowing to the community was in English – a foreign language.

One way to overcome barriers to the flow of information is to provide information literacy skills in the adult literacy programme, including English lessons, operated from the Information Centre as well as provide user education programmes for both adults and young people.

#### 3.9.1. Extreme poverty, hunger and livelihoods

The focus group members perceived the high levels of extreme poverty in their community as caused by two main factors, firstly is individual behaviours and second is socio-economic structural blockages. Various suggestions were made on behaviour change requirements to deal with individual behaviour. Not surprisingly, the suggestion to break out of the socio-economic structural blockages saw government (and City of Windhoek) as the dominant players and enablers in their role of policy formulation. There was a high level of helplessness and voicelessness among some of the adult group members.

##### • Recommendation

- i) The organizational capacity of the community need to be built up by creating a broad based committee for the information centre to provide advice and direction to address the needs of the community and create a platform for dialogue with government, municipality, political officials and among members of the community on how to tackle problems and opportunities of development in the community.
- ii) The type and range of information provided needs to expand to include: employment information, small business opportunities, and financial information.
- iii) The size of the information centre is small and needs to be expanded to incorporate a development centre concept which will cater mainly for adults while the present library unit also need expanding to cater for the large number of young people who use it.

##### • Primary, secondary and non-formal education.

Education for children, literacy and skills acquisition were regarded as important by all discussants. Lack of facilities for homework at home, and low levels of parental support, and hunger among the learners are the key issues which emerged during the discussion. The need to provide more textbooks and educational materials was cited by most discussants.

##### • Recommendations

- i) The focus of the information Centre is educational in nature, but this role needs further strengthening by expansion of the type and range of information provided to include: a larger textbook collection, careers information, a learning centre approach which would ensure some study carrels and group discussion corners, and some assistance with homework for the young children whose parents are unable to give them any form of assistance
- ii) The computers appear to be heavily used but mainly for email and playing games. Some training on conducting internet searches and an indication of useful websites for homework would be of great help to the young people attending schools and doing their homework in the centre.

• **Gender relations and equality**

The gender relations are characterized by perceived dominance of men over women, role of women not fully recognized, and alcohol related violence and rape occurrences in the community.

• **Recommendations**

- i) The Centre, with the assistance of the municipality and its partners, should hold regular workshops and discussion forums on gender equality and violence against women and children.
- ii) The Information Centre should have gender law and domestic violence materials, in all local languages.
- iii) Information about rape and what the victim should do should be available in the Centre

• **Mother and child health matters**

This area seems better served than other areas investigated in this study. However, the levels of child malnutrition and hygiene, and transmission of mother to child of STDs and HIV could be higher than indicated from the focus groups. Men seemed bypassed in the flow of information on mother to child health matters.

• **Recommendations**

- i) The Information Centre should strengthen its materials in the following areas: family planning, vaccinations, and mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS.
- ii) The Information Centre should organize talks on mother and child health matters, and HIV/AIDS in the community.
- iii) A TV and video combination would be excellent for viewing developmental videos followed up by discussions forums by community members on various development issues in the community

• **HIV/AIDS and TB**

The extent of HIV/AIDS and TB in the community is presumed high although stigma related secrecy makes it difficult to tell the actual extent of infections. Low use of condoms, poverty driven prostitution, high alcohol consumption and wide spread poverty are all factors which may fuel the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS and TB. The adult group appeared to have difficulties accessing HIV/AIDS prevention information.

• **Recommendations**

- i) There need to acquire information posters on HIV/AIDS, and health information booklets (in local languages and English).
- ii) There is also need for information on poster format and booklets on the importance of compliance with prescriptions of ARVs and TB medication.
- iii) The information centre needs to network with government departments and NGOs which are active in the area of HIV/AIDS in order to acquire their information materials and get resource persons to come to give talks at the Centre.

• **Environmental conditions**

The community faces several environmental challenges the most prominent being the corrugated iron building materials used to build shacks which are small and lack electricity, water, and toilet facilities. The main sources of energy are candles and paraffin which have caused many fires in the community with loss of life.

• **Recommendations**

- i) Information is needed on how to keep the environment clean and the dangers of littering and poor hygiene.
- ii) Information about the Shack Dwellers Association should be widely available, at the information centre, to provide an opportunity to residents who want to improve housing in the area by working through the self-help building scheme.
- ii) Information on alternative building materials to corrugated iron sheets and plastic sheets should be made available to the community so they can plan to build different dwellings.

• **Greenwell Matongo Information Centre**

The information centre is used intensively by young people for educational purposes, internet access, as well as a place to meet and socialize. In contrast, the adult usage of the centre is limited to those making photocopies and literacy classes. The centre is too small for the large number of young people who rely solely on it for homework and class work after school hours.

• **Recommendations**

- i) The space of the Centre is too small given the large number of users it has to provide space for reading, literacy, and internet access. Expansion of the centre would go a long way to address the space problems but also some of the new services which the focus group suggested e.g. development information section, video viewing section, and facility where young and old alike can play games and network for information sharing.
- ii) A request for training and skills building in the community was expressed many times by the adults. Apart from holding classes on simple things like knitting for women, workshops could also be held on other skills areas identified in this study.

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