

LG 4: LOCAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONAL CASE STUDY



Title: Woman politician driving change in Keetmanshoop Municipal Council – Namibia

Quotable quotes: “I am a go-getter and I don’t believe in things that there is no money. If you are more concerned about money than the issues on the table then you cannot succeed.”

Fact file:

Country	Namibia
Council	Keetmanshoop Municipality
Why Selected	Best case COE
Score when score card first administered	Count only the relevant 25 questions
Agreed score at summit/during verification	New score card
Population	25,000 (2011 Census)
Key characteristics	Men and Women
Contact person	Fiina N. Elago
Designation	Deputy Mayor
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Description: The mandate of the Municipality/Council is to plan, coordinate and supervise socio-economic and physical infrastructural development activities within the jurisdiction of Karibib town, in a manner that will improve household quality of life and business or industrial engagement, in the town by providing for an appropriate town planning and establishment various projects to empower where needs are.

What was the situation of gender mainstreaming before the intervention by GL?

I knew GL since 2006 – 2007 through “At the Coal Face” study when Colleen was interviewing women in local authorities in SADC region. I participated in the study. I was the chairperson of management at the time. I was the only female councillor against 6 male councillors. We knew what gender was all about but we didn’t know about differentiating sex and gender. We concentrated on more women than looking at the mainstreaming whereby everybody should be included. It was in 2010 when Sarry came to establish the CoE that our eyes opened to know the difference between sex and gender. I only concentrated on women and somewhere somehow I sidelined men. I managed to bring in a woman in the finance. Fortunately when Sarry came I was already there and it was not difficult to get political buy-in right from the beginning. We are now 3 women in the council. We belong to different political parties and often women from these parties may not collaborate on issues affecting the community.

Women were afraid to come out especially women because they were not prepared to go out and be a public person. Culture contributed to women's subordination and domestication of women. As much as culture is dynamic we must evolve. Women think when they get involved in politics what will happen to the family. The women saw themselves as the woman of the house and leadership was a man's thing. Men also saw women that their place is the kitchen. They would say stay home and make sure the home is okay, the kids are taken care of while I go out and make money and bring home, forgetting that we can be equal partners and we can both contribute for the welfare of the family. It is not just staying at home waiting for the man to bring something. I think the whole thing is that culture plays a big role in keeping us women hostage in certain areas. There is a saying a woman does whistle and once she does it then something is wrong with her. It is only a man who is supposed to do that because it is a man's thing.

What is the current situation with regard to gender mainstreaming?

After taking us through the stages Sarry took us through the process of planning. For the first time we have a gender policy and budget to support gender mainstreaming. And now as I am speaking we have a budget for 2012 – 2014. Sarry also taught us how to keep data. The most important thing is how to monitor and evaluate. We need to see if what we are doing is working or if we should change course of action. This helped us a lot. We cannot keep budgeting for gender every year without seeing if we are making a breakthrough. She also opened our eyes to have gender policy in place. A lot of things are happening now. Before we were concentrating more on HIV and AIDS issues but now with this gender mainstreaming action plan we try to combine issues including GBV. For us it is a very big change. We have done all the stages of the CoE. We have allocated N\$30,000 for gender mainstreaming and another amount of N\$35,000 this year for HIV, together N\$65,000.

Now we have an action plan, we have a budget, we have a gender champion, and we can go out to the communities to talk about gender issues. We have a gender mainstreaming committee comprised of different stakeholders. For example we have got representatives from the ministry of safety and security, Catholic Aid Action, community enhancement committee, youth, and ministry of gender equality and child welfare. I am the gender champion that is why I am so active about gender issues. We still have people in local authorities who do not understand gender issues. If you don't understand gender issues when it comes to budgeting it is a problem. I need to motivate and justify why we need certain amounts in the budget. What I am having now is a program to call in smaller municipalities, especially focal persons to share with our different councils and guide them about gender issues.

We have municipality tender boards which we also need to go to ensure that they cater for all, not just for men. Women are also in the small medium enterprises. A lot of women are doing small businesses like catering should also need to be given tenders. Those are the things I am advocating for because their businesses can die without support from the local authority. Most of the companies getting tenders in the local authorities are more male owned companies. We are still busy working on our gender policy but it must be aligned with the gender ministry policy. Whatever we do we fall within the line ministry and we don't want to have something different. We need to

collaborate with the ministry of gender. We cannot operate in isolation as a local authority.

How has life tangibly and demonstrably changed as a result of the intervention?

What has changed is that a lot of people now understand gender issues. We are able to get women in the council. In the past when we call people for meetings the turn out was low and people were not participating. But this has changed dramatically. We are now using media, a local radio station. These days people come and they even call on radio talk shows to express their views. We had a case of a three-year old girl who was raped and murdered by the person who was supposed to protect her, her mother's boyfriend. The little girl was called queen dancer. She was just playing at home. This man who is believed to be her mother's boyfriend came and took her away from home and took her to the nearby bush and raped her. He hit her with the stone but she did not die immediately. He suffocated her with clothes. In the evening they reported the child missing. He tried to run from town to village farm but the police arrested him. Luckily enough people saw her with the child but had not suspected anything wrong. He tried to run to the farm but he was apprehended. The case was transferred to the high court in Windhoek and within a year justice was done. He was given 20 years in prison. The man confessed being drunk. It was an emotional issue and the whole town discussed the matter a lot on phone call-ins. The mother was traumatised. We put her through counselling to get help.

Namibia is embedded with passion killing. I had a staff member who was killed by her boyfriend. He drove all the way from Windhoek, about 800 kilometres to kill the girl then he killed himself. It was just a love affair. The girl refused him and started dating someone and that was the crime she committed. There was also an old woman who was raped and killed. Someone climbed into the window, raped and killed the old woman. The perpetrator is locked up for the next 30 years. The penal code should change. Normally the person is just locked up. After 20 or 30 years the person will be realised through presidential pardon. There is what is called presidential pardon and the president pardons some people who are believed to have redeemed themselves every Independence Day. But I always say once a criminal always a criminal. A snake does not lose its poison. We were saying bring back the death penalty. Although death penalty used to be used by colonialist but if it solves the problem it should be brought back.

People now know they can go to the women and child protection unit in the police for support when there is domestic violence. People are now coming up openly. Women and children abused now know they can go to the police or confide in a counsellor or a family member who can report the matter. Most of the time women don't want to report the matter because they don't want to be in bad terms with their husbands. Those who don't want to talk with the counsellor or social workers go to the police station. The police in women and child protection unit are specialised people who are trained to handle these cases. These are different from ordinary police. People are now coming up openly and talk about their HIV status but men don't want to talk about their HIV status. We had kids that were on streets but I am working with a lady to put street children back in school. We don't have many street kids now in Keetmanshoop, may be just one

or two. Sometimes the kids are running away from home because of problems. But when you put them in hostels then they can concentrate.

How do we know this change has occurred? What shows?

We normally take pictures to show how we do community meetings. We get certificates of appreciation by those who know what we do. I work for home affairs immigration officer but I joined politics because our constitution allows it. I can't speak the local language but the people are now closer to me than their own tribe. At one time in my municipality I was given a certificate as the best councillor. This was the first and last thing that happened in that council. As a council we got an award on climate change at the national summit because our junior town council is doing tree planting. The winner was supposed to go to South Africa but the presenter fell sick. I participated in the last summit for the first time. When we were invited to the country summit we did a presentation on climate change. We were recognized by GL and got the CoE certificate. We didn't win the country awards. We took a car and drove from Keetmanshoop to Johannesburg. We interacted with people from 10 countries. We went there as Namibians. We came back as Namibians.

Who are the poorest and most marginalised people in the community and how does the council reach?

The poorest and most marginalised people are those living with HIV AIDS. We have got a high rate of HIV in Keetmanshoop. May be this is a high way or entry point to South Africa. Keetmanshoop border is shared with South Africa and also a harbour in the southeast. The south is rated as an area with HIV prevalence because we are a transit centre. There was also misuse of alcohol and drugs. Most of the trucks go through Keetmanshoop, the railway, and fishermen on the other side. Most of the time you see these truck drivers with a little girl in the truck. The little girls sell themselves to earn a living. We have a lot of cases where people were caught with drugs. The Catholic Aids Action are supporting people affected. We are also supporting street children. We raised money to buy warm clothing for winter. These are people who have lost hope and living in state of despair. There is an organisation called people in need. They trained people how to do crafts but the problem is where to sell their products. We gave them a stand in our tourism stand to sell their products.

What factors are responsible for success or failure the CoE work?

In terms of success, most of the time the community is understanding and supportive. The women councillors talk to each other and women in the communities. We have a twinning agreement with 2 local authorities. Internationally we twinned with a town in Finland and one in South Africa. We are working as a four-municipality agreement. Recently the EU gave us N\$3.5m to replace our water system in the municipality. This was through our Finnish partners. The advantage is that we get technical services. We also exchange cultural issues and discuss issues like climate change.

We are working hand-in-hand with the communities. Internationally South Africa is helping us to train our staff in human resources and fire fighting at no cost. Our tourism industry is one of the key areas of collaboration with South Africa. With our Finland partners we have had a lot of exchanges. We didn't have a local economic development before. We sent our person to Finland for training and small miners were sent to

Sweden for training in gemstone. With the Finnish agreement this started in 2004. Our Namibian consular in Finland is helping us set up a project on south-north municipalities to come together. Because of that our two regions also twinned to work together.

In terms of failure some councillors still think that gender issues are women's issues and a waste of time, especially men and some of our staff members. If you are a councillor and you don't get support from the staff member you can fail. It's just a negative attitude that needs to be taken care off. I have met many people who think gender issues are women's issues, which is unfortunate. The other problem is that our budget is too little. But I am a go-getter and I don't believe in things that there is no money. If you are more concerned about money than the issues on the table then you cannot succeed. You don't really that much money to implement a project successfully. Otherwise the support is there.