

CONSTITUENCY HANDBOOK

For

Elected Representatives in Namibia

Introduction

This handbook has been designed to assist Members of the National Council of the Parliament of Namibia with practical suggestions in organizing and conducting constituency work. As elected representatives, Members of Parliament are custodians of the “public interest.” However, one of the biggest challenges for elected representatives is to identify the “public interest” and thereafter identifying strategies and solutions to address it.

This handbook does not claim to provide all the answers to all the questions; neither does it seek to identify the “public interest” and solutions thereof. This handbook seeks to provide principles rather than prescriptions, based on experience and lessons drawn from within Namibia and other democracies. The application and adaptability of these strategies and mechanisms in your constituency will depend entirely on individual elected representatives and the availability of human and financial resources in your respective constituencies. Occasionally, a concept that has been discussed under one topic might be repeated under a different topic. This might be so because the concept is relevant and important to both topics.

Just as the price of liberty is eternal vigilance, the price of democracy is continuous hard work, building and rebuilding mechanisms for expressing and facilitating the “public interest.” Lack of trust and confidence in government institutions, whether rightly or wrongly, remains a challenge of democracy in modern times. Therefore establishing effective constituency programs contributes towards restoring that confidence. By providing practical mechanisms and avenues for public access to elected officials, constituency programs in return enhance democracy.

While it is a popular fact that there are many MPs in Namibia who are already active in their respective constituencies and demonstrating a commitment towards the improvement of lives of their constituents, the reality is that elected representatives can not address all the needs of their constituents at the same time, and not all the time. This handbook seeks to identify mechanisms that can promote public confidence, even when individual needs of constituents are not satisfied.

Your Constituency Work is of prime Significance

As a Member of Parliament, you have a constitutional responsibility to initiate, deliberate, review, pass, amend or reject laws that govern Namibia. This responsibility makes the work of elected representatives in Parliament very important. As a Member of Parliament, you are also responsible for ensuring that the government works efficiently and responsibly in addressing the needs of the people that elected you.

While Parliamentary work remains an integral part of your responsibilities, including other responsibilities such as your work on Parliamentary committees, participation in

Parliamentary debates and maybe even your work in the Cabinet. While all these may seem like the most important aspects of your job, it is important to always remain cognizant of the fact that work in Parliament is only half of your job as an elected representative. In actual fact, there could be more work in your constituency than in Parliament.

In reality, no one appreciates the role of constituency work as much as elected representatives, who from time to time face the constituents to elect or re-elect them into office. However, the structured constituency work outlined in this handbook is geared towards complementing your existing constituency work through the following key areas:

- **Credibility:** A practical constituency program creates open and visible avenues for decision making to which everyone has equal access. A constituency program also increases credibility in the decision making process as it provides a forum for the expression of divergent view points.
- **Identifying public concerns and values:** Because different interest groups often have fundamentally different points of view, these groups often evaluate any proposed action from a different perspective. A constituency program provides mechanisms by which the elected representative can understand the problems, issues, and possible solutions from the particular perspectives of various interest groups.
- **Developing a Consensus:** With highly divergent public viewpoints, no single philosophy can guide all actions by the Member of Parliament. A successful constituency program provides a framework for arriving at a consensus on an issue by issue basis where different philosophies emerge.
- **Leader in Development:** At any given time, there are different development initiatives going on in the constituency. Government, international institutions or local entities sometimes fund these development initiatives. As an elected representative, it is important to have information pertaining to development initiatives in your constituency and other constituencies, including information on potential international and local partners in development. A constituency program provides a mechanism for monitoring development initiatives and mobilizing support.
- **Constituency Leader:** In addition to your Parliamentary work, your constituency has daily needs and problems that require your attention. A constituency program establishes the elected representative in a structured manner, making you an organized, effective and institutionalized constituency leader, even when you are not physically present in your constituency at a particular time to address a particular issue.

Your Constituents Demand Your Services

According to perceptions and views of constituents towards their elected representatives, they know that you are in Parliament to represent them, and they expect to be able to meet with you, face-to-face, on a regular basis. Your constituents want to tell you their problems directly, and to discuss the challenges facing the people in your constituency. Public opinion research conducted by NDI has shown that most Namibians feel that the greatest responsibility of their MP is to be accessible to the electorate and articulating the views and needs of the electorate in Parliament.

According to the surveys, if you are not active and accessible in your constituency, it is difficult for you to fulfill this responsibility. In addition to the constituency demands on you, making yourself accessible to your constituents is also one of the best methods of insuring that you are re-elected into office.

You are the People's Representative

The most important principal in a democratic society is that all people have an elected representative and that decisions are taken in consultation through the representative. As the representative of all your constituents, you have a responsibility to understand the problems, concerns and priorities of your constituents, and ensure that the government works in their interest. If you are not active and engaged in your constituency, you cannot fulfill these responsibilities and your constituents are denied their democratic right to representation. In other words, constituency outreach is an essential part of your job.

One of the Priorities for your Constituents is Development

Most Namibians are concerned about local issues. Your constituents want food, water and education for their children, good health, adequate housing, good roads and access to business opportunities. Your constituents want real development in their own communities. As an elected representative, you have intimate knowledge of your constituency, and you can quickly learn what the people in your area really want and identify priorities. As an elected leader, you can help organize and initiate development projects that address the most pressing concerns of your constituents. Through a constituency program, you have information on potential partners on specific projects and as an elected representative, you have the mandate to collaborate with these partners on development and constituency issues on behalf of the constituency.

As an Elected Representative, You have Power

Being an MP gives you a great deal of stature and respect. You have the right to question civil servants and government officials about their activities in your constituency. You have access to information and resources that most citizens do not. You can negotiate with government and donors on behalf of the people you represent. You can act as a

bridge between your constituents and sometimes complex and confusing government structures and processes. Using your power for the benefit of your constituents will bring you their support and will ensure that projects are accomplished in your constituency.

In addition to being the bridge between the people and government, there are a number of non-governmental and constituency based organizations conducting work in your constituency. As an elected representative, you are in a position to collaborate with these organizations for the benefit of your constituents.

As an Elected Representative, How Do You Address Public Expectations?

Members of Parliament in Namibia face many challenges. Some of these expectations arise from previous election related messages which gave many people high expectations, some of which are impossible to fulfill in the short time that you have been in office. As representatives of the people, you are aware that there is a significant sector of the Namibian society, which lives under difficult economic and social conditions.

These citizens have pressing problems such as lack of food, they lack access to clean water and medical facilities, illiteracy and rising cost of living remains a challenge. Transportation and communication infrastructure in some constituencies is not adequate. To some Namibia's, democracy is a very new concept and many people do not yet understand what role they need to play in a democratic society. Added to these challenges is the limited amount of resources available at your disposal as an elected representative to provide or address all the needs of your constituents.

This reality is not unique to Namibia, and it is one of the factors that make the job of an elected representative challenging. On the other hand, utilizing the little resources effectively and mobilizing resources from other partners is what can make your job much easier. As an MP, you can have a real impact on the quality of life of your constituents by giving them a voice in the democratic process and encouraging development in your constituency. As an elected representative, you have the mandate to organize and mobilize resources for your constituents; the challenge of course is to identify the resources. A constituency program provides a mechanism to identify available resources and the means to solicit them.

The following section outlines some of the methods of constituency work that are being used successfully in Namibia right now. You might have tried some of these methods yourself. Others might be new to you and might give you ideas for activities in your own constituency. It is important to remember that there are no right or wrong ways of working in your constituency. Only you and your constituents can judge what works best in your area.

Constituency Development Projects

Initiating, facilitating and encouraging constituency development projects in your constituency is one of the best ways to bring benefits to your constituents and increase your popularity. Namibians are also willing in most cases to undertake development work on a self-help basis, so you can accomplish a lot with relatively little money. As one European Ambassador to Namibia with wide experience in Africa stated recently “The self-help spirit is alive in Namibia like no other country I have ever seen.” You can encourage the admirable self-help ethic among your constituents and help bring noticeable benefits to the people in your constituency.

Self Help Projects

Although self-help projects are relatively inexpensive, they often fail because the little funding that is needed is not available. There are currently several institutions or funds in Namibia that specialize in funding small scale, constituency led projects. A list of these organizations has been included in this handbook. As an elected representative, you can often help groups or communities in your constituency to secure funding for projects that they have identified themselves. You can also help constituents fill out forms, provide contact information so that donor agencies can contact your constituents, or offer to oversee the projects on behalf of the donors.

Many elected representatives have already secured funding for a wide variety of projects in their constituencies. An elected representative in Omaheke Region helped his constituents to identify funding from the European Union to build a primary school. Another elected representative in the Karas Region initiated several self help projects with funding from different donor agencies, both local and international. Similar examples exist in other regions, such Oshana and Ohangwena Regions.

One elected representative in the Ojtozondjupa Region convinced a private farmer to pay for a piped water project for a local village and encouraged students and parents to assist with the project.

Once funding for self-help development projects is identified, you can often simply supply advice and encouragement for the rest of the project. Visiting the project site frequently and helping the constituency comply with the reporting requirements of the funding agency can ensure that the project is completed and that the funding agency will be willing to donate to the constituency again in the future.

As an elected representative, you can leverage the support of Non Governmental Organizations

Donor support comes and goes, and to a large extent, donor support is not sustainable. Donor support should therefore be used as a startup or a booster of existing concepts, programs and projects. Development programs belong to communities and can only be

sustained by the communities. Communities should therefore position themselves with the guidance of the elected representatives to become both the agents and beneficiaries of development.

However, as an elected representative, you can also promote development in your constituency by working with civic organizations, the common ones being non-governmental organizations (NGOs). By encouraging them to undertake projects in your constituency, NGOs have the capacity to mobilize both financial, human and technical resources and effect development. The challenge is to identify which NGOs are working in your constituency and meeting with representatives of these NGOs. This handbook provides details of some of the NGOs currently operating in Namibia.

By working with both local and international NGOs, as an elected representative, you can help them determine what projects are priorities for your constituents. NGOs as organizations usually do not have the structure or a broad geographical constituency that an elected representative might have. Therefore such collaboration would in most cases bring mutual benefits.

By working with an NGO, you can associate yourself with the project that the NGO is undertaking and increase your popularity while at the same time, the NGO benefits by receiving constituency support which contributes to organizational credibility, a prerequisite for government and donor support. For example, an elected representative in the north knew that his constituents often drew water from polluted streams during the rainy season. The elected representative convinced an NGO to provide four shallow wells and helped supervise the project. An elected representative in the Karas region has developed a long term relationship with another international NGO that continues to fund agricultural and infrastructure projects in that region.

As an Elected Representative, you can assist your constituents in accessing business loans

The government has prioritized employment creation by assigning this portfolio to a specific government Ministry. It is a given fact that development will only come to your constituencies if the people in the constituencies are empowered through education and access to resources and opportunities. There exist different organizations in Namibia that are providing entrepreneurial training and facilities for small and medium businesses. As an elected representative, you can assist your constituents to access these facilities; you will find contact information for some of the institutions in this handbook.

Another method of promoting the development of your constituency is assisting your constituents to secure loans. A number of organizations now lend money to groups or individuals to promote private business and agriculture. As an elected representative, you can assist your constituents by providing application forms and information from lending

institutions. You can also organize constituents into groups to secure loans when necessary, helping constituents to complete loans forms, following up loan applications with lending agencies and encouraging representatives from lending agencies to visit your constituency and conduct meetings. However, care should be taken when assisting your constituents with loans as this could also drive your constituents into big debts.

Added to this is the fact that not everyone in your constituency can manage a loan or a business. While most people think that they can manage a loan or a business, experience has revealed that this is not the case. Such initiatives should therefore be accompanied by capacity development and training.

As an Elected Representative, you are the people's voice in Government

Despite the limited financial resources available in Namibia, much development work in the country is still carried out by the government. As the elected representative of your constituency, you are in a unique position to help ensure that government officials in your area do their jobs and that your constituents receive a fair share of government resources.

You can encourage the civil servants working in your area by ensuring that they are working under good and reasonable conditions and lobbying Ministers to provide resources that the civil servants need to do their job more efficiently. By supporting the civil servants, you can in return demand them to fulfill their work and obligations and ensure that the government policies of which they serve are implemented.

Working with Committees

As an elected representative, it is important for you to maintain a high public profile in your constituency. As a representative of the people, you can only maintain a high profile if you are informed of issues, concerns and opportunities in your constituency and make yourself accessible to your constituents.

One of the best ways to achieve these goals is to meet with your constituents regularly and to participate on as many local committees as possible. Regular committee meetings allows you to meet with key opinion leaders, hear their views and those of your constituents and associate yourself with the work of the committees.

There are several committees engaged in different projects at any given time in your constituency. As an elected representative, you need to be up to date on the activities of these committees, and where the opportunity arise, participate or delegate someone to participate in the committee deliberations and activities. It is always important to remember that you are constitutionally recognized as the representative of the people in

your constituency, and effective representation can only be achieved through structures such as committees and interest groups at a constituency level.

The Constituency Development Committee is a very important Forum

Elected representatives, particularly those at a regional and local level are members of their respective CDCs. The CDC is an important forum where development priorities are identified and development funds are disbursed. As an elected representative, you appreciate the importance of attending CDC meetings whenever possible.

Failure to attend CDC meetings exposes you to a risk of losing the respect of important leaders such as chiefs, NGO representatives and civil servants. You also risk having developments funds spent on projects other than your own or on projects that may not be a priority for your constituents. However, as an individual, you cannot attend all the meetings all the time, and that is why it is important to establish a constituency office managed by a clerk of your choice. This handbook provides guidelines on establishing and managing an effective constituency office.

Other Committees that provide an Opportunity for Interaction

Communities in Namibia have a culture of working in groups. This historical fact still remains intact today as most constituents come together to form committees to deal with specific issues. In a particular constituency, you can find anything from a school committee, committee on women affairs (midwifery), a church committee, a sports committee or a land committee.

The unique characteristic of these committees is that they are usually either non-partisan or multi-party and they are not formed on material interest or gain, but rather on common interest and members are identified or elected based on their skills, experience and commitment.

The often consensus driven decision making process in committees adds to the value and credibility of committees. One elected representative in the Parliament of Zambia appointed representatives of donor agencies into his constituency committee. Interestingly, the donor representatives admitted that projects implemented based on a consensus reached in local committees were more successful than projects conceptualized and designed in the by technocrats in the cities.

It is important for you to maintain contact with all committees in your constituency and encourage as many committees as possible to be formed. Local committees are the ultimate structures of a decentralized constituency administration. However, care should be taken to ensure that committees do not replace or duplicate other elected structures,

but to ensure that committees are complementing such structures. By working with these local committees you can enhance your image as a representative of all your constituents and gain support among people, including those that supported other political parties during the election.

It has been proven in Namibia and all over the world that creating committees for various purposes serves as a useful tool for decision-making, public participation and development.

Reaching out to your Constituents

Public meetings are a proven effective method of keeping in touch with constituents. Your constituents want and expect you to address meetings in their areas frequently. However, as an elected representative, it is important to ensure that the meetings are not just forums for dissemination of information, but also opportunities for the constituents to give you feed back and express their views and concerns on different constituency issues. A meeting where the elected representative addresses the constituency without providing the constituency an opportunity to express their views creates a one-way channel of communication, which is often counterproductive towards constructive engagement and development.

Traditional public meetings can also be supplemented by other types of public meetings. You can call a constituency meeting to discuss a specific problem or project and allow time for the audience to ask questions and contribute to the discussion. NGOs or government officials who might be able to help solve the problem being discussed can also be invited to participate in the meeting. This type of meeting is practical in nature, geared more towards action, than just talk.

You can also open various committee meetings to the public, inviting constituents to listen to the proceedings and participate in the debate. By being open and encouraging participants to voice their concern during functions, you can increase your popularity and allow your constituents to take an active part in the life of the constituency.

Constituency Case Work

Constituency casework simply means helping individual constituents to solve problems they are facing. These problems often involve the government. In many parts of the world casework takes up a large proportion of an elected representative's time, but in Namibia the concept of case work is very new. Examples of case work include helping a pensioner who has not received his or her cheque for several months, assisting a family whose son has been wrongfully detained by the police, or working with a widow who has lost her deceased estate to the relatives of her diseased husband. When doing casework, you use

your influence, resources and contacts in government and key positions to assist your constituents.

The idea of casework might be new to Namibia, but some elected representatives are already undertaking casework in their constituencies. While casework may only help one constituent at a time, it has potential to foster strong personal loyalty to you in the individuals you assist, and stories of your efforts circulate quickly in your constituency, making your constituents realize that you really care and that you have the capacity to solve problems.

Often, the expectations of your constituents will remain high, at times due to campaign promises, but focusing on issues and problems that are manageable proves more effective than to focus on a lot of issues and problems that you do not have the capacity to address. Casework provides a mechanism to identify and address problems that are within your capacity and mandate to address or manage.

As an Elected Representative, you need a medium of communication

As an elected representative, you need to identify mechanism to articulate your vision for your constituency and your development plans, including activities and programs that you are undertaking. Word of mouth is your most important form of publicity. However, coverage of your outreach activities on the TV, Radio or in Newspapers and magazines can be beneficial.

Media coverage of your development initiatives is a powerful tool for your constituents, partners and donors funding and supporting such initiatives. The same applies to ensuring that the print media covers your initiatives. This increases your stature in the constituency and is an effective confidence building strategy for individuals and institutions that could potentially support your vision. Donors and government officials might be more responsive to an elected representative who has a profile at a constituency, regional or national level. In other words, when you do something newsworthy in your constituency, it is in your interest to have it published or broadcast. However, the media will not automatically cover your projects, the role of a constituency office is therefore critical in ensuring that the elected representative receives the necessary publicity.

There are several things to remember when you are dealing with the media. First, do not expect reporters to come to you. You must seek the media aggressively and keep them informed of your activities. Reporters are human beings – they want to do their job with as little effort as possible, so make it easy for reporters to cover your activities.

Secondly, not everything you do in your constituency is newsworthy. Do not expect reporters to cover every public meeting you have or to be interested in every project you initiate. Be selective when you write news releases or invite reporters to your constituency. Only try to get coverage for truly newsworthy events. Third, not everything

that a reporter records or writes is broadcast or printed. Reporters have bosses who must choose between many different stories each day. Do not get angry at a reporter who covered one of your activities just because the story did not appear on the TV, Radio or in the Newspapers. You should also remember that there are other elected representatives trying to have their events and projects covered as well.

Another alternative is to develop your own constituency newsletter. A constituency newsletter requires fewer resources, basically a computer, a printer and if possible a copier. In the same manner that elected representatives write letters to committees and individuals in a constituency on particular issues, a constituency newsletter is a letter from the elected representative, capturing developments in the constituency and circulated for free.

In the developing world, elected representatives enter into agreements with the business sector to advertise in the newsletter, and this ensures sustainability of the project. It is important to remember that the business sector would like to reach out to your constituents to market products. Often, the business sector does not have the structure and mechanisms of information dissemination at a constituency level. This approach therefore serves both parties and ensures quality and continuity.

The other effective means of keeping the electorate informed is through Press releases. Press releases can be cheap and effective in having your activities and projects covered by the media. It is recommendable to issue a press release whenever you accomplish a major goal, initiate a large project or do something interesting or unusual in your constituency. Do not issue a press release every time you hold a public meeting – save press release for important events.

The most important rule to remember when writing a press release is to write it exactly the way you would like it to appear in the paper or on the air. Editors are very busy people. If an editor receives a short, well written, interesting press release about a newsworthy event, he or she will often print it in the paper or broadcast it on the Radio without changing it at all. Editors are much less likely to waste their time with a press release that has to be rewritten because it is too long or poorly written. A constituency office therefore assists in ensuring quality and timely press releases.

Remember to include quotes in your press releases. You should quote yourself and other important individuals involved in the event when writing the release. You can also quote constituents who say positive things about you or the project you are writing about. Make sure you quote people exactly. Quoting people portrays constituency involvement and support in your initiatives.

Press releases should be sent to media institutions in Namibia. We have provided a list of media institutions at the end of this handbook. Press release about upcoming events or other, time sensitive issues should be faxed or sent by e-mail if possible. Press Releases

describing ongoing projects or issues can be posted to save money. You should also phone the editors of the major papers and news directors when sending very important releases to make sure they have received your press release.

Make sure you send a copy of the press release to anyone quoted or mentioned in the press release and any groups or individuals that you work with on a regular basis. Even if your press release is not published, the people you work with will be happy to receive a copy and will appreciate that you care enough about the things you are doing to inform the press.

It is important to think of the media and reporters as your friends and allies. Even if a reporter writes a negative story about you, it is better to identify a constructive approach to address the issue with the reporter. If such constructive efforts are proving unsuccessful, it is recommendable to approach the supervisors or management of the particular media institution. The worst thing for an elected representative is to become angry and confrontational with the media or a particular reporter. Experience has proven that confrontation does not produce winners, both parties potentially emerge losers and this can be detrimental to a political career.

From time to time, invite a few reporters to come to your constituency to show them the work that you are doing and let them talk to your constituents. Some newspapers feature stories on development activities or important individuals. A feature story on your constituency work could have a big impact on your popularity with your constituents and your party.

However, you should always remember that only your constituents would be voting for you in the next election. While media coverage can give you national recognition and popularity within your party, if you are not working hard in your constituency and doing what your constituents want, you will have a difficult time being re-elected. It is therefore important to strategically involve the media in your constituency work.

As an Elected Representative, you need to assess public opinion on issues

As an elected representative, you represent all the people in your constituents regardless of party affiliations. In order to effectively represent the interests of your constituents, it is important for you to know what your constituents think, what their greatest concerns are how they feel about legislation, government policies and government programs.

As an elected representative, you can learn a lot about the feeling of your constituents simply by spending time and working in your constituency. Informal conversations with constituents, public meetings and meetings of various committees all give you the opportunity to learn more about your constituents' concerns and opinions. However,

there is time when it is useful and necessary to gather public opinion in a more scientific and organized way, through public opinion research.

Formal research can allow you to gather comprehensive information in a short time and will allow you to check if your more informal methods of gauging public opinion are accurate and effective. Research conducted by people other than yourself will also give you honest and objective answers to questions that might be difficult for you to ask yourself, like “Do you think your elected representative is doing a good job?” Obtaining feedback from your constituents can assist you in prioritizing your activities and improve on areas that your constituents identify.

Formal research projects conducted by professional researchers can be complicated, time consuming and very expensive. With the limited resources that an elected representative might have, it is probably better to design, conduct and analyze a simple survey yourself, with the help of local volunteers and active party members. You might also try to use secondary school or university students to help you during holiday periods.

You can design a survey to help you identify the most pressing needs of your constituents, to evaluate your own performance as an elected representative, to gather input on an upcoming piece of legislation or to gain the opinion of your constituents towards major government policy. The results of the survey will help you decide what sector, such as water, health or education, to concentrate your efforts on, what side to take during debate over legislation, or what aspect of your personal performance needs the most improvement.

There are two basic types of public opinion surveys: quantitative surveys and qualitative surveys. Both types are described briefly below.

Quantitative Survey

Quantitative survey involves interviewing a large number of individuals, using a set questionnaire. The individual being interviewed often must answer “yes” or “no” to the questions, or must choose from a list of responses. By compiling the answers you collect from your questionnaire, you can estimate what percentage of your constituents feel a certain way about a particular question and why they feel that way. For example, if you asked 100 of your constituents “Do you think Namibia should have an Anti Corruption-Bureau?” and 85 people said “yes”, and 15 people said “no”, you could estimate that 85 percent of your constituents are in favor of having an Anti-Corruption Bureau. You could also ask, “What is the biggest problem you face in your village?” and provide a list of possible answers that the person being interviewed can choose from.

The advantage of a quantitative survey is that it is fairly easy to design and analyze the findings. You can easily calculate percentages from the answers you receive. Numerical data can also be a very powerful tool for an elected representative. Saying “my research

indicates that 85% of my constituents want Ant-Corruption Bureau” can have much greater impact than saying “A lot of my constituents want an Anti-Corruption Bureau.”

The disadvantage of a quantitative survey is that, to be statistically valid, you need to interview a large number of people. This can sometimes become time-consuming and expensive. Another drawback is that quantitative research does not always tell why a person feels the way they do about an issue, or how strong their feelings or opinion are. Eighty-five percent of your constituents might say they are in favor of an Anti-Corruption Bureau, but many of them might not have thought about the issue before asked the question, or might think that some other issues are much more important than the question you are asking.

Qualitative Survey

Another method of conducting research is through qualitative research. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research includes many less structured survey methods such as key informant interviews, free-form interviews and focus group discussions.

During qualitative research, the questions asked are open-ended, and the person being interviewed answers in his or her own words. Qualitative research does not provide numerical results, but it does allow for in- depth examination of peoples’ opinions and can help explain why people feel the way they do.

Focus group discussions are a relatively simple form of quantitative research that you can carry out in your constituency. To conduct a focus group discussion, you need to assemble a group of eight to ten people from the demographic group you wish to gather information from. For example, you might want to talk to a group of voting-age women, or to a group of male and female farmers. The group is then asked questions from a discussion guide. It is important to ensure all participants have an opportunity to speak, and that the discussion guide is used only as a guide, not as a rigid questionnaire. A typical focus group discussion lasts between one and two hours while one or two individuals record detailed notes. After conducting discussions with several different groups of people in different parts of your constituency, you can review the results and form conclusions about how your constituents feel about different issues.

For example, during a focus group discussion, you can ask, “What do you think are the most important issues in this constituency?” The answers you receive will not allow you to say, for example, “Seventy percent of my constituents think crime is their greatest concern” but the answers will allow you to say, for example, “Crime is a major concern for many of my constituents, and they feel much more strongly about this issue than about transportation problems in the area.” Qualitative research allows you to do this because issues are discussed thoroughly before arriving at a conclusion.

The advantage of qualitative research is that it provides an in-depth view of your constituents' thoughts and concerns, and can also be conducted on an ongoing basis, simply by talking to constituents and meeting with groups of people in your constituency to discuss important issues.

More formal, structured qualitative surveys such as focus groups, however, need to be designed carefully and carried out by trained individuals. The data collected is also more difficult to analyze compared to quantitative data, since there are no simple "yes" or "no" answers, and you cannot calculate percentages or proportions. As an elected representative, you should be conducting informal quantitative research continuously while you are in your constituency, but you might want to ask someone from the University of Namibia or an NGO before you attempt to carry out a formal survey. High School and University Students can also be useful in conducting research.

Setting up and managing a Constituency Office

The previous sections have highlighted different strategies and suggestions on managing an effective constituency outreach program. However, to successfully establish and manage a constituency program, an elected representative can not operate or work alone. There is a need to establish a constituency office for every elected representative, managed by a person who is either identified by the elected representative or assigned by government.

Among other functions, the constituency manager or clerk is responsible for the day to day management of the constituency office on behalf of the elected representative. It would be unrealistic to expect the elected representative to draft press releases, maintain a record of development projects in the constituency and keep track of all constituency organizations working in a constituency. The role of a constituency manager or clerk is therefore to assist the elected representative to serve his or her constituents in a more effectively manner.

However, while a constituency office is important for an elected representative to manage constituency affairs, there are pros and cons for such an establishment.

The biggest advantages of a constituency office include:

- A constituency office can convey a sense of permanence about the elected representative to the constituents
- A constituency office ensures that there is always a physical site for meetings, programs, issues, concerns and constituency administration.
- Constituents identify one central location through which they can contact and reach their elected representative.

- There is one central location where resources, such as materials can be obtained or disseminated.
- Information regarding development in a particular constituency can be obtained at one central location. This is important for NGO and donor partners that are interested in working in your constituency
- A constituency office, whether it is in a house, an old shop and proper office premises symbolizes organizational capabilities and seriousness, both of which are prerequisites for government, donor and NGO support.
- The world is moving at a fast pace, where information and access to it has become a catalyst for development. Through a constituency office, management and access to information is institutionalized An informed constituency is likely to lead in development than a constituency that is in the dark.

However, there are also some know disadvantages for establishing a constituency office:

- A constituency office may inhibit legislators from thinking creatively about how to reach out to the constituents. A constituency office is not an end in itself, but only one of several mechanisms for reaching out to the constituents and managing constituency issues.
- Opening a constituency office is only one part of a constituency outreach program
- A constituency office is only as effective as the elected representative managing it. A constituency office can not manage an elected representative, but vice versa.

International experience has proven that even a highly efficient constituency office cannot replace regular visits by an elected representative to his or her constituents and the need to constantly explore creative ways and means of reaching out and involving the constituents in the decision making process.

What follows are some of the projects currently going on in Namibia and the organizations and institutions supporting and implementing the programs? You will also find a list of local non-governmental organizations and their contact information. The information contained in this handbook should guide you in familiarizing yourself with development initiatives taking place in your constituency or other constituencies. There is no guarantee that you will access resources through this guide, however, you can always identify programs that have been successfully implemented in other parts of the country and explore the possibility of adopting the concepts and strategies in your own constituency.

As an elected representative, you can also use this guide to establish contact with development agencies, governmental, non-governmental and international.

You will also find a sample program proposal that can guide you when preparing a funding proposal for a constituency project.

Proposal Writing

This section focuses on the subject of proposal writing for constituency projects and non-profit organizations. The paper is intended to assist in developing a new constituency project proposal or renewing an existing grant.

This document is not in anyway intended to be prescriptive, however, it captures the frequently used international methods, strategies and standards. In addition, proposal writing does not stand-alone; it must be part of a process that includes planning and research for potential partners and donors. It is also important that a proposal should not only aim for financial support. As an elected representative, you can develop a proposal seeking for technical assistance on a particular constituency project or material support such as equipment or tools. This guideline therefore provides tips for planning and conducting research for the purpose of proposal writing.

Because constituency projects are non-profit making entities, the proposal writing process is grounded on the conviction that a partnership should develop between a particular constituency project and a donor. It is important to remember that even the donors work equally hard to acquire financial resources, and sometime the resources being used come from taxpayers in other countries. Therefore these often-scarce financial resources can not be easily given away. On the other hand, financial resources contributed by a donor have no value until they are attached to solid programs in the nonprofit sector, in particular, the communities and this becomes the basis for an ideal partnership between a grantor and a grantee.

The partnership is based on the fact that the constituents have the ideas and the capacity to address constituency needs, but no finances with which to implement them. The donors on the other hand have the financial resources but not the other resources needed to create and implement programs in needy communities.

When the two are brought together effectively, the result is a dynamic collaboration. However, this is not an automatic process, there is a need to follow a step-by-step process in the search for donor funds and this takes time and persistence to succeed. After you have written a proposal, it could take as long as a year to obtain the funds needed to carry out the proposed program. Sometimes even a perfectly written proposal submitted to the right prospect may be rejected.

Raising funds is an investment in the future; therefore the aim should be to build a network of different sources of funding or donors. These donors vary; some may just provide equipment as a donation while others might provide periodic grants. By doggedly pursuing the various steps of the fundraising process, each year a constituency project or different projects can retain regular donors and strike a balance with the comings and goings of larger donors.

The recommended process is not a formula to be rigidly adhered to. It is rather a suggested approach that can be adapted to fit the needs of any constituency based nonprofit entity and the peculiarities of each situation. Fundraising is an art as well as a science. Therefore as an elected representative, you and your constituents must bring your own creativity to it and remain flexible.

Gathering Background Information

The first thing you will need to do in writing the master proposal is to gather the documentation for it. You will require background documentation in the following key areas:

1. Concept,
2. Goals and Objectives
3. Program, and
4. Expenses.

If all of this information is not readily available to you, determine who will help you in gathering each type of information. If you are part of a small or rural constituency with little access to resources and expertise, a knowledgeable teacher or government official from the community will be the logical choice. If you are with a larger or urban-based constituency, there should be non-profit entities or party officials, including teachers and students that can play a crucial role in gathering the necessary information.

Once you know with whom to talk, your next task is to identify the questions to ask. This information gathering process makes the actual proposal writing much easier. And by involving other stakeholders and experts in the process, it also helps key people within your constituency to seriously appreciate the value of the project.

Goals and Objectives

Every proposal should have clearly defined goals and objectives. The goals and objectives provide an idea on what you are intending to achieve within a particular

period. The goals and objectives section also outlines how the project will benefit the constituents and the practical outcomes.

A project proposal without clear goals and objectives is like traveling on a road without a clear destination, you can not determine how far you have gone and the distance that remains. Clear goals and objects serve as a road map for yourself as an elected leader, your constituents and the donors. Goals and objectives also assist you and your community in determining the cost effectiveness of the project and what is needed to implement the project.

Concept

It is important that you have a good sense of how the project fits into the needs, aspirations and priorities of your constituents. The need that the proposal is addressing must also be documented. These concepts must be well articulated in the proposal. Donors want to know that a project reinforces the overall direction of your constituency, and they may need to be convinced that the case for the project is compelling. You should also collect background information on your constituency and on the needs and priorities to be addressed so that your arguments are well documented.

Program

Here is a checklist of the program information that you require:

1. the nature of the project and how it will be conducted;
2. the timetable for the project;
3. the anticipated outcomes and how best to evaluate the results; and
4. resources, skills and expertise needed to successfully implement the project.

Expenses

You will not be able to pin down all the expenses and costs associated with the project until the program details and timing have been worked out. Thus, the main financial data gathering takes place after the narrative part of the master proposal has been written. Remember to cost the self-help component of your constituents as well. This constitutes your contribution towards to the total financial cost of the project.

However, at this stage you do need to sketch out the broad outlines of the budget to be sure that the costs are in reasonable proportion to the outcomes you anticipate. If it appears that the costs will be prohibitive, you should then scale back your plans or adjust them to remove the least cost-effective expenditures. Avoid unrealistic projections in your budget; ensure that your estimates are realistic.

Components of a Proposal

- **Executive Summary:** umbrella statement of your case and summary of the entire proposal (approximately 1 page)
- **Statement of Need:** why this project is necessary (approximately 2 pages)
- **Project Description:** nuts and bolts of how the project will be implemented (approximately 3 pages)
- **Budget:** financial description of the project plus explanatory notes (approximately 1 page)
- **Historical Information:** a background of your constituency and any constituency project that you have conducted in the past; how you conducted the project, who benefited and how the project has been sustained (approximately 1 page)
- **Conclusion:** summary of the proposal's main points (approximately 2 paragraphs)

The Executive Summary

This first page of the proposal is the most important section of the entire document. Here you will provide the reader with a snapshot of what is to follow. Specifically, it summarizes all of the key information and is a sales document designed to convince the reader that this project should be considered for support. Be certain to include the following:

Problem — a brief statement of the problem or need your constituency has identified and is prepared to address (one or two paragraphs);

Solution — a short description of the project, including what will take place and how many people will benefit from the program, how and where it will take place, for how long, and who will take a lead in implementing the project (one or two paragraphs);

Funding requirements — an explanation of the amount of financial resources required for the project and your sustainability plans (one paragraph); and

Constituency expertise — a brief statement of the history, purpose, and activities of your constituency, emphasizing its capacity to carry out this project. (One paragraph).

The Statement of Need

If the donor reads beyond the executive summary, you have successfully aroused his or her interest. Your next task is to build on this initial interest in your project by enabling the donor to understand the problem that the project will remedy.

The statement of need will enable the reader to learn more about the issues. It presents the facts and evidence that support the need for the project and establishes that your constituents understand the problems and therefore can reasonably address them. The information used to support the case can come from authorities in the field, as well as from your constituency experience.

You want the need section to be brief, yet persuasive. Like a good debater, you must assemble all the arguments. Then present them in a logical sequence that will readily convince the reader of their importance. As you marshal your arguments, consider the following six points.

1. First, decide which facts or statistics best support the project. Be sure the information you present is accurate. There are few things more embarrassing than to have the donor tell you that your information is out of date or incorrect. Remember that some donors might have more information about your constituency, or they might have the capacity to conduct independent investigation or research in your constituency.
2. Information that is too generic or broad will not help you develop a winning argument for your project, remember that there are other constituencies that are interested or might have already applied for the same support or funding. Information that does not relate to your constituency or the project you are presenting will cause the donor to question the entire proposal. There also should be a balance between the information presented and the scale of the program.
3. Second, give the reader hope. The picture you paint should not be so grim that the solution appears hopeless. The donor will wonder whether an investment in a solution will be worthwhile. Avoid overstatement and overly emotional appeals.
4. Third, decide if you want to put your project forward as a model. This could expand the base of potential donors, but serving as a model works only for certain types of projects. Don't try to make this argument if it doesn't really fit. Donors may well expect your constituency project to follow through with a replication plan if you present your project as a model. If the decision about a model is affirmative, you should document how the problem you are addressing occurs in other constituencies. Be sure to explain how your solution could be a solution for others as well.

5. Fourth, determine whether it is reasonable to portray the need as acute. You are asking the donor to pay more attention to your proposal because either the problem you address is worse than others, or the solution you are proposing makes more sense than others.
6. Fifth, decide whether you can demonstrate that your project addresses the need differently or better than other projects that preceded it. It is often difficult to describe the need for your project without being critical of the competition. But you must be careful not to do so. Being critical of other organizations implementing constituency projects will not be well received by the donor. It may cause the donor to look more carefully at your own project to see why you felt you had to build your case by demeaning others. The donor may have invested in these other projects or may begin to consider them, now that you have brought them to their attention.

If possible, you should make it clear that you are cognizant of, and on good terms with, others doing work in your constituency. Keep in mind that today's donors are very interested in collaboration. They may even ask why you are not collaborating with those you view as key competitors. So at the least you need to describe how your work complements, but does not duplicate, the work of others. As an elected representative, you are in a better position to play a coordinating role, since you are constitutionally accountable to the people and the government.

7. Sixth, avoid circular reasoning. In circular reasoning, you present the absence of your solution as the actual problem. Then your solution is offered as the way to solve the problem. For example, the circular reasoning for starting a constituency project might go like this: "The problem is that we have no constituency project. Starting a constituency project will solve the problem." A more persuasive case would cite what a constituency project has meant to a neighboring constituency or in a neighboring country, for example, permitting it to offer access to information and creating a forum for communities to exchange views on an issue such as HIV-AIDS.

The Project Description

This section of your proposal should have four subsections: objectives, methods, human resources/skills/capacity, and evaluation. Together, objectives and methods dictate human resource, skills and capacity requirements. They then become the focus of the evaluation to assess the results of the project. Taken together, the four sub- sectors present an interlocking picture of the total project.

Objectives:

Objectives are the measurable outcomes of the program. They define your methods. Your objectives must be tangible, specific, concrete, measurable, and achievable in a specified

time period. Grantseekers often confuse objectives with goals, which are conceptual and more abstract.

For the purpose of illustration, here is the goal of a project with a subsidiary objective:

“Goal: Our constituency project will help the constituency to understand government policies better.”

“Objective: Our constituency project will assist four communities in constituency “X” to understand the implications of the HIV-AIDS problem on peasant farmers.

The goal in this case is abstract: improving constituency understanding of government the impact of HIV-AIDS on peasant farmers, while the objective is much more specific. It is achievable in the short term (six months) and measurable. With competition for donor funds so great, well-articulated objectives are increasingly critical to a proposal's success.

Using a different example, there are at least four types of objectives:

- Behavioral — A human action is anticipated. For example; “Given the necessary access to a constituency project, 60% of constituency members will participate in the policy development process”
- Performance — A specific time frame, within which a behavior will occur, at an expected proficiency level, is expected. For example; “by the end of the first year, 40% of the participating constituency members will understand the implications of HIV/AIDS on peasant farmers.
- Process — The manner in which something occurs is not an end in itself. Example: We will document the most successful projects as a result of the funding, noting the different project elements that draw the interest of the people, with active constituency participation and noting the methods utilized, identifying the methods and strategies with the greatest success to be used as lessons in future.
- Product — A tangible item result. Example: A manual will be created to be used in addressing the HIV/AIDS problem.

In any given proposal, you will find yourself setting forth one or more of these types of objectives, depending on the nature of your project. Be certain to present the objectives very clearly. Make sure that they do not become lost in verbosity and that they stand out on the page. You might, for example, use numbers, bullets, or indentations to denote the objectives in the text. Above all, be realistic in setting objectives. Don't promise what you can't deliver. Remember that the donor will want to be told in the final report that the project actually accomplished these objectives.

Methods

By means of the objectives, you have explained to the donor what will be achieved by the project. The methods section describes the specific activities that will take place to achieve the objectives. It might be helpful to divide the discussion of methods into the following:

- How.....!
- When.....!
- Why.....!

How: This is the detailed description of what will occur from the time the project begins until it is completed. Your methods should match the previously stated objectives.

When: The methods section should present the order and timing for the tasks. It might make sense to provide a time frame or a work-plan so that the reader does not have to map out the sequencing on his own. The timetable tells the reader "when" and provides another summary of the project that supports the rest of the methods section.

Why: You may need to defend your chosen methods, especially if they are new or uncommon. Why will the planned work lead to the outcomes you anticipate? You can answer this question in a number of ways, including using expert testimony and examples of other projects that have worked in other constituencies.

The methods section enables the reader to visualize the implementation of the project. It should convince the reader that your office and your constituents know what you are doing, thereby establishing credibility.

Human resources, skills and capacity

In describing the methods, you will have mentioned human resource and skills requirements for the project. You now need to devote a few sentences outlining the groups within your constituency committed to this project, is it the youth, women or pensioners, their qualifications, skill levels and the specific roles that they will play in making the project a success. Details constituency members with specific skills related to the project should be included either as part of this section or in the appendix, depending on the length and importance of this information. This will assure the donors that you have the capacity to undertake the initiative and produce results.

Human resources encompass both paid and volunteer resources from within or outside your constituency. Describing tasks that volunteers from your constituency will undertake can be helpful to the proposal reader. Such information underscores the value added by the volunteers as well as the cost-effectiveness of the project. It also demonstrates the commitment of your constituents towards the project.

Describe for the reader your plans for administering the project. This is especially important in a large operation, if other civic, community based or non-governmental organizations are collaborating on the project. It should also be crystal clear who is responsible for financial management, project outcomes, and reporting.

Evaluation

An evaluation plan should not be considered only after the project is over; it should be built into the project. Including an evaluation plan in your proposal indicates that you take your objectives seriously and want to know how well you have achieved them. Evaluation is also a sound management tool. Like strategic planning, it helps you refine and improve your project. An evaluation can often be the best means for others to learn from your experience in conducting the project.

There are two types of formal evaluation. One measures the product; the other analyzes the process. Either or both might be appropriate to your project. The approach you choose will depend on the nature of the project and its objectives. For either type, you will need to describe the manner in which evaluation information will be collected and how this information will be analyzed. You should present your plan for how the evaluation and its results will be reported and the audience to which it will be directed.

For example, it might be used internally or be shared with the donor, or it might deserve a wider audience including the constituency and if necessary, government or your political party. It is however important to consult your partners or donors on the scope of the dissemination.

The Budget

The budget for your proposal may be as simple as a one-page statement of projected expenses. Or your proposal may require a more complex presentation, perhaps including a page on projected support and revenue and notes explaining various items of expense or of revenue.

Expense Budget: As you prepare to assemble the budget, go back through the proposal narrative and make a list of all human resource, material and equipment items related to the operation of the project. Be sure that you list not only new costs that will be incurred if the project is funded but also any ongoing expenses for items that will be allocated to the project. You may need to estimate the proportions of your constituency's ongoing expenses that should be charged to the project and any new costs, such as salaries for individuals not yet hired. Put the costs you have identified next to each item on your list.

Your list of budget items and the calculations you have done to arrive at a figure for each item should be summarized on worksheets. You should keep these to remind yourself how the numbers were developed. These worksheets can be useful as you continue to develop the proposal and discuss it with donors; they are also a valuable tool for monitoring the project once it is under way and for reporting after completion of the

With your worksheets in hand, you are ready to prepare the expense budget. For most projects, costs should be grouped into sub-categories, selected to reflect the critical areas of expense. All significant costs should be broken out within the sub-categories, but small ones can be combined on one line. You might divide your expense budget into personnel and non-personnel costs; your personnel sub-categories might include salaries, benefits, and consultants. Sub-categories under non-personnel costs might include travel, equipment, and printing, for example, with a figure attached to each line.

Budget Narrative: A narrative portion of the budget is used to explain any unusual line items in the budget and is not always needed. If costs are straightforward and the numbers tell the story clearly, explanations are redundant. If you decide a budget narrative is needed, you can structure it in one of two ways. You can create "Notes to the Budget," with footnote-style numbers on the line items in the budget keyed to numbered explanations. If an extensive or more general explanation is required, you can structure the budget narrative as straight text. Remember though, the basic narrative about the project and your organization belongs elsewhere in the proposal, not in the budget narrative.

Constituency Background Information and Conclusion

Normally a background of your constituency project should come at the end of your proposal. Your natural inclination may be to put this information up front in the document. But it is usually better to sell the need for your project and then your constituency's ability to carry it out.

It is not necessary to overwhelm the reader with facts about your constituency. This information can be conveyed easily by attaching a brochure or other prepared statements. In two pages or less, tell the reader when your constituency came up with the project; restate the aims and objectives of the project and the mission or vision of your constituency. You should be certain to demonstrate how the subject of the proposal fits within or extends that vision; and describe the constituency's structure, committees, different projects and special expertise and experience present in your constituency.

Conclusion

Every proposal should have a concluding paragraph or two. This is a good place to call attention to the future, after the grant is completed. If appropriate, you should outline

some of the follow-up activities that might be undertaken to begin to prepare your donors for your next request. Alternatively, you should state how the project might carry on without further grant support, **your sustainability strategy**.

This section is also the place to make a final appeal for your project. Briefly reiterate what your constituency wants to do and why it is important. Underscore why your constituency needs funding to accomplish it. Don't be afraid at this stage to use a bit of emotion to solidify your case.

What Happens Next?

Submitting your proposal is nowhere near the end of your involvement in the fundraising process. Grant review procedures vary widely, and the decision-making process can take anywhere from a few weeks to a year. During the review process, the donor may ask for additional information either directly from you or from outside consultants or professional references. Invariably, this is a difficult time for you as a grant seeker. You need to be patient but persistent.

Some donors outline their review procedures in annual reports or application guidelines. If you are unclear about the process, don't hesitate to ask.

If your hard work results in a grant, take a few moments to acknowledge the donors support with a letter of thanks. You also need to find out whether the donor has specific forms, procedures, and deadlines for reporting the progress of your project.

Clarifying your responsibilities as a grantee at the outset, particularly with respect to financial reporting, will prevent misunderstandings and more serious problems later.

On the other hand, rejection is not necessarily the end of the process. If you're unsure why your proposal was rejected, ask. Did the donor need additional information? Would they be interested in considering the proposal at a future date? Now might also be the time to begin cultivation of another prospective donor. Put them on your mailing list so that they can become further acquainted with your organization. Remember that there's always next year.

All this can be achieved if elected representative have the capacity at a constituency level to identify donors, conduct basic research, mobilize constituents and draft proposals. A constituency outreach program, aimed at developing the capacity of constituency human resources or staff would go a long way in ensuring that elected representatives are assisted in addressing the needs of the people that elected them.

The section that follows provides you with information on different projects and programs currently taking place in Namibia. As an elected representative, you need to

have an idea of the human, technical and financial resources available in Namibia. But more importantly, you need to have an idea of what others are doing, what has worked and what has not worked, and draw lessons from those practical experiences for your own constituency. The list that follows is not exhaustive, and it does not follow a particular order. It is rather, just a random sample of organizations, both local and international that are involved in development work.