



## Circular Letter 04 – December 2023

By Daniel Rafferty - Strengthen nationwide education  
An assignment from Comundo

## 2023 Examinations



*My security guard Tjakamba arrives home with his wife Anna (in polka dot skirt) and their two new born twin girls. Their three sons and the neighbors welcome them.*

The school year, which is the calendar year in Namibia, is coming to a close. Examinations started mid-October and continue until the end of November. 12<sup>th</sup> graders have been sitting their exams to determine if they receive their high school diploma and to determine their eligibility for university.

38,019 full-time candidates sat the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary (NSSCO) exams at 363 full-time centres at the end of the 2022 school year. Only 5,812 (15%) scored enough points to continue on to university.

### Contact address - Daniel Rafferty

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daniel.rafferty@comundo.org - Comundo bears the costs for all assignments.

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I spoke with a principal at one of the larger senior secondary schools in Rundu about the poor results. “During the COVID-19 years of 2020 and 2021 we just promoted the learners to the next grade without testing them. The 2023 examination results will be as bad or worse than the 2022 results”, she stated. We are all anxiously awaiting the results due out at the beginning of January.

## How the world’s best performing school systems come out on top

McKinsey & Co, a consultancy firm, performed an in-depth study over ten months to understand why some of the world’s top performing schools consistently achieve high results and why some educational reforms have been very successful while most others have failed. Their research identified the three most important factors that the top performing school systems had:

1. Getting the right people to become teachers.
2. Developing teachers into effective instructors (“the only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction”).
3. Ensuring the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child.

While the majority of my fellow co-workers at Comundo assist with point 2, my focus in the finance area of the Ministry of Education is on point 3.



*Two 25 litre cast iron cooking pots used to prepare porridge for 428 learners at Divundu Senior Secondary School.*

## The System

How can the system ensure that every child receives the best possible instruction? One way to do this is to have funding and support focused on areas where it can have the biggest impact. A well maintained and functioning infrastructure is important.

As part of the semi-annual revenue audits we visit all the schools with hostels and audit the receipts and deposits of boarding fees paid by the learners. During our February 2023 audit at Divundu Senior Secondary School the food (porridge) for the learners was being prepared outside in 25 litre cast iron pots heated by firewood as seen in Figure 1. The reason for this was the stainless steel pots in the hostel kitchen were not working. It rained heavily on several days during our time there auditing.





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Returning to the regional office I spoke with the people in procurement and the mechanical maintenance departments. Being in finance I knew the budget numbers and urged them to procure new pots. "Budget is available!", I told them. Yes, they replied, but the procurement process is very bureaucratic and takes a long time. We have to be patient.

The young man from procurement has his office directly across from mine. Every morning he would put his head in my office and greet me. After exchanging pleasantries I would ask him where we stood on the procurement of 12 pots and one new frying pan for six hostels, including for Divundu Senior Secondary School. I repeatedly raised the issue with the chief accountant and the head of maintenance. Finally, in late June all the pots and one frying pan were delivered and installed 😊



*Two new 225 litre cooking pots, near left and far right, with frying pans in a hostel kitchen.*

When I attend management meetings and people are asked to explain why they have not achieved their targets a common reply is, "due to funding constraints".

My experience with the pots taught me that a focused, unwavering pursuit of the target to be reached is necessary to get things accomplished at the Directorate of Education in Rundu. Gently apply pressure and do not let up. Funding constraints are seldom the issue.

During the first three months of an assignment, Comundo has the concept of "Getting an Impression". It differs from the usual probationary period when starting with a new employer in that a co-worker is instructed to refrain from rolling up their sleeves and jumping into the assignment. Instead, the emphasis is to take the first three months to get to know the organization by studying relevant documents, listening to, and observing colleagues as well as field visits and attending management meetings.

After 22 months on the job at the Directorate of Education in Rundu I have gotten not just an impression, I have gained insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the Directorate. People I talk to in Switzerland have asked me, why is it that Africa does not "progress" in ways that create jobs, opportunities and a well-functioning civil society?

While I cannot comment on Africa, or even the whole of Namibia, I can comment on my own experiences here in the Kavango East region. There is a spirituality here that is still alive and well at all levels of the population. Meetings at the Directorate of Education as well as at the Regional Council, the highest governing body in the region, start with a prayer. It is as normal as saying good morning.



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The Chief Accountant, who I work with very closely, just flew from Windhoek to Frankfurt as part of his master's studies. The first flight of his life. After arriving at his hotel in Frankfurt he texted me that everything went well and closed with, "God is with me, but I was afraid to walk in the darkness of 06h00 in the morning looking for the hotel."

Karl Weintraub, a renowned professor of history at the University of Chicago, stated that one needed to sense the problems of a community in one's bones to properly understand them. The problems that the Kavango East community are facing I cannot sense in my bones, so my commentary on them is inadequate.

I cannot offer an explanation for the weak justice system, where employees who are found to have committed a felony, such as embezzlement, do not get criminally charged or dismissed. Nor can I explain why the majority of men are unwilling to marry (it is not due to any financial reasons that I am aware of). The pervasiveness of tribalistic attitudes can be attributed to the different language spoken by each tribe, but is also an answer to central control from the capital, regardless of who is in power: tribe first, nation second.

The biggest problems are visible to all that work within the system. But that is also a problem: the competent, dedicated civil servants at the Directorate of Education are in the minority.

## Update on Utilities

In my last newsletter I reported on my work to reduce costs and increase efficiencies in the utilities area and free up funds for other areas. I am happy to report that my efforts have been acknowledged by the head of finance at the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture.

I produced a business case and a project charter labelled the Utilities Efficiency Initiative. The project will be kicking off nationwide January 2024. **It targets a 10% reduction in the Ministry's utilities expenditures in 2024 and another 10% in 2025.** My efforts in the Kavango East region will be used as a pilot for this project.



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### Time to say goodbye and sign off

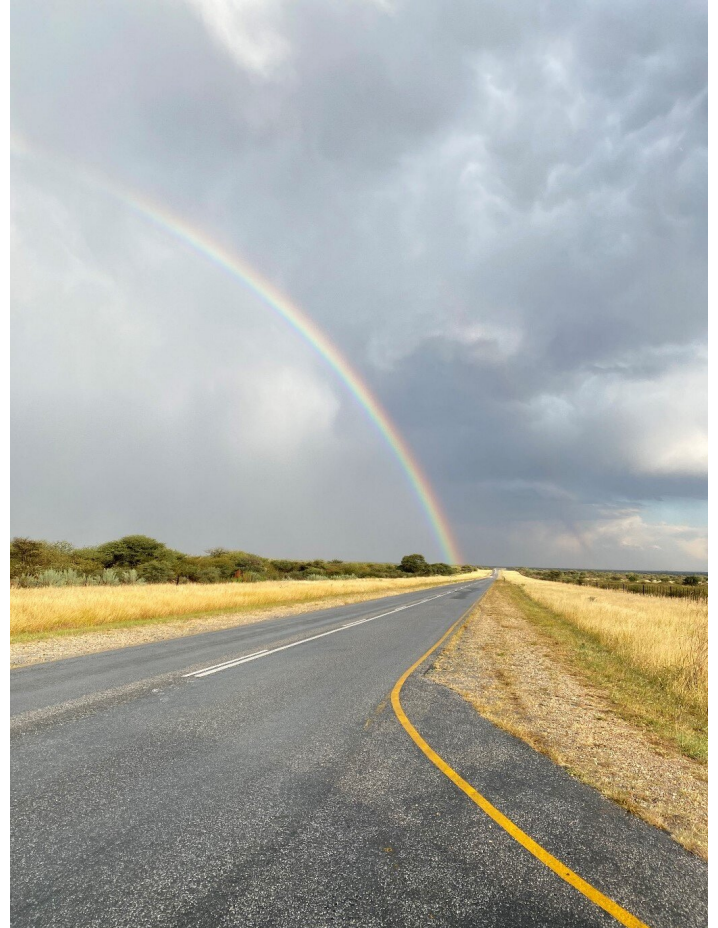
On 29 January 2022 I flew from Zurich to Windhoek to start my two year assignment in the finance area of the Directorate of Education Kavango East Regional Office. We have been “busy busy” these last 18 months. I have been able to use all of my accounting, organizational, project management and investigative know-how to support and advise the local Directorate of Education. I will take the insight that I have gained and many good memories home with me. Have I made a sustainable contribution for the better? I hope so.

Thanks to all of you that have supported me and my Swiss organization, Comundo. Your generosity, feedback and support have helped my efforts and those of my Comundo co-workers make a small contribution towards a better world in Namibia and in all the countries in which Comundo operates.

Last but not least, I want to express my sincere thanks to my wife, Marianne, for her support. At night when I hear the dogs outside barking and howling, then my neighbour's roosters crowing at five in the morning I ask myself, why did she not say “no, I do not want you to go to Namibia!”

Thanks for reading this newsletter and I look forward to any feedback you have.

Hot Springtime greetings from Rundu ...Dan





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## Fachleute im Entwicklungseinsatz

Was, wenn das Recht auf ein gesundes, gewaltloses und unversehrtes Leben nicht mehr gilt? Wenn der Schulbesuch als wichtiger Schlüssel zu Bildung und einem würdevollen Beruf verwehrt bleibt? Oder wenn nur die Flucht ins Ausland die Familie zuhause ernähren kann?

Comundo verbessert mit über hundert Fachleuten die Lebensbedingungen von Menschen in Lateinamerika und Afrika mit einem Fokus auf Kinder, Jugendliche sowie alte Menschen. Dies dank dem Austausch von Wissen und Erfahrung mit lokalen Partnerorganisationen, mit Vernetzung und mit der Förderung von gegenseitigem Lernen.

Als eine Schweizer Organisation der Zivilgesellschaft trägt Comundo zur Erreichung der Ziele der Agenda 2030 bei. Sie verknüpft die konkreten Erfahrungen der Fachleute vor Ort mit politischem Handeln in der Schweiz.

### Comundo

#### im RomeroHaus

Kreuzbuchstrasse 44

CH-6006 Luzern

Telefon: +41 58 854 12 13

[spenden@comundo.org](mailto:spenden@comundo.org)

[www.comundo.org](http://www.comundo.org)



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