



**Circular letter No. 1 – July 2025**  
By Elia Widmer -  
An assignment from Comundo

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## I arrived well



*Rest stop somewhere in Namibia, during the journey from Windhoek to Rundu*

The time has come: I am sitting in Rundu (at 25 degrees Celsius, it's winter) and writing my first circular letter. It contains some key points about Namibia and my assignment, some information about my arrival, my first impressions, and my home for the next two years.

I appreciate your interest.

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Comundo sends co-workers to Kenya, Namibia, Zambia, Nicaragua, Colombia, Bolivia and Peru.

Your donation makes these missions possible. You can find information on how to donate on the last page.





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## Intro

You are receiving this letter because you are on the mailing list for my biannual updates. In addition to sharing my personal impressions, these mailings also serve a purpose for my employer Comundo: They are intended to raise awareness of the challenges in the Global South and, linked to this, of Comundo's activities.

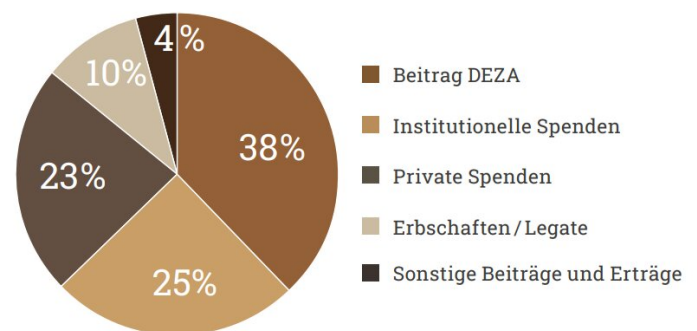
The concept of "circular letters" thus represents a mixture of my private network and my professional life, which is a balancing act for me. The newsletters are accompanied by an appeal for donations, I therefore want to make it clear from the outset: I do not expect you to support Comundo financially. Should anyone nevertheless decide to do so, I am convinced that the contribution will benefit sustainable development and can make a difference in the mid-term, especially among the most vulnerable.

## Key facts about Comundo (InterTEAM)

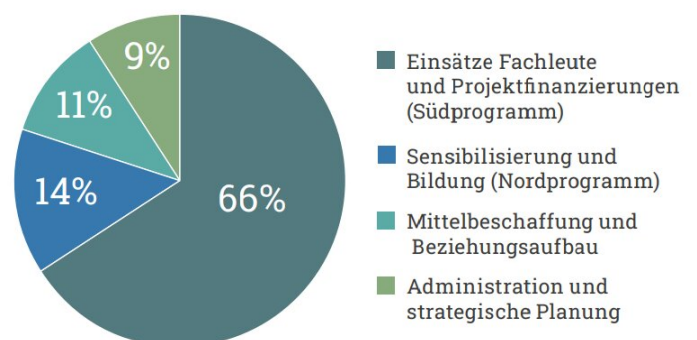
- For administrative and organizational reasons, Comundo still operates under the name "InterTEAM" in Namibia.
- Founded in 1921, the non-profit association Comundo is now the Swiss leader in personnel development cooperation (PDC).
- Currently, a total of around 80 Comundo employees are working in seven countries in the "Global South."



- In Switzerland, Comundo promotes solidarity among the population, highlights the causes of inequality, and is involved in development policy and Swiss civil society networks.
- Employees working abroad receive a "cost-of-living allowance." This is calculated to cover the costs incurred during the assignment period.
- The activities are financed through various channels, as shown in the breakdown below (2024):



- The use of funds (2024) is broken down as follows:





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### Key points of the assignment

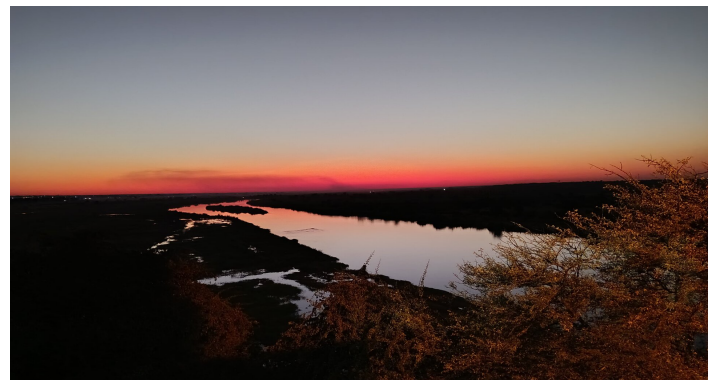
- From July 2025 on, I am working at the MEIYSAC (Ministry of Education, Innovation, Youth, Sports, Arts & Culture). As an "Advisor ICT and Digitalization," I will be working in Rundu (Kavango East region) in the education sector on topics related to digitalization. It's a two year assignment.
- Due to a lack of knowledge around digitalization, the Ministry of Education was explicitly looking for a co-worker to fill this role. My work is not free of charge for the ministry either; a (rather small) monthly allowance is paid to Comundo.
- There are 190 schools in the Kavango East region with just under 2,500 teachers and around 79,000 students.
- Specific goals and projects will be defined together with all involved parties after the first three months on the job. The idea during this period is to "get an impression" of how things work (or don't work) in this new environment. Throughout the assignment, a "classic project reporting" will be in place towards Comundo.



Short visit at the MEIYSAC in Windhoek

### Key facts about Namibia

- Namibia has only been independent since 1990, making it one of the youngest countries in the world.
- With just under 4 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (Switzerland: 220), Namibia is very sparsely populated.



View of the Kavango River. In the middle, you can see a tiny hippopotamus.

- Over 30 languages are spoken. The working language at the ministry is English, but I will still learn a little Rukwangali.
- With a Gini coefficient of 59%, Namibia has the second highest wage inequality in the world (behind South Africa).
- Of the 81 snake species found in Namibia, 11 are classified as deadly to humans.
- The Namib Desert is estimated to be 55 million years old, making it the oldest desert in the world.
- At around 10%, Namibia has one of the highest AIDS rates in the world (Switzerland: 0.2%).
- In November 2024, there was a major outbreak of malaria in northern Namibia (where my assignment city Rundu is located). Since then, over 60,000 cases have been registered.
- The Fish River Canyon (in the south of the country) is the second largest canyon in the world, with a length of 160 km.



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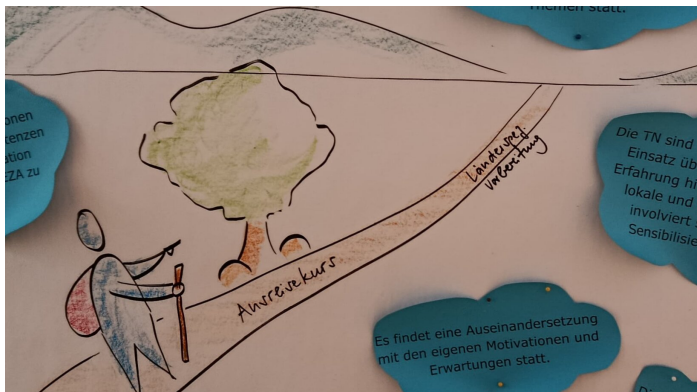
## Now to me

After working in the field of digitalization at management consultancies (Switzerland & Germany) the recent years, this represents a major change (apart from the overarching theme of “digitalization”). However, the multi-stage application process (including assessment day) at Comundo differed only slightly from that of my previous jobs.

The coming period will bring a change that I am looking forward to and from which I hope to derive a certain sense of purpose. Comundo's approach to “personnel development cooperation” offers a promising starting point.

## Preparation course in Lucerne

For a good three weeks, I attended a preparation course in Lucerne together with other “departing co-workers.” All participants will be traveling to one of the seven countries of assignment. The course therefore covered non-country-specific topics such as capacity sharing, participatory methods, culture, change management, gender, and safety in the field. Many of the topics were extremely interesting, but on the last day of the course I was still glad to be able to gather my own impressions.



*Reflection on the assignment at the preparatory course in Lucerne, April 2025*

## Introduction in Windhoek

I spent my first 10 days in Namibia in the capital city of Windhoek, where the local team had prepared a country-specific introduction program.



*Arrival at the airport in Windhoek, June 2025*

In addition to administrative matters, the program also included culinary experiences and tours of the city and its suburbs (“informal settlements”). The journey then continued 700 km up north to Rundu.



*Oshetu Community Market in Windhoek, meat as far as the eye can see (German proverb ;) )*



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## Where do I live?

For the period of my assignment, the ministry has provided me with a large, somewhat outdated house with a (sand) garden. It has electricity, running water, and even air conditioning in the bedroom. The house had been vacant for almost two years, and it showed. My toolbox was in constant use during the first few days.



*House with spacious grounds*

But now everything is bright again, a thorough dusting has been done, the washing machine is working again, and the biggest piles of leaves from the garden have disappeared. I enjoyed being able to let off steam with my DIY skills :)



*Nighttime leaf burning in the garden, July 2025*

Unfortunately, the crime rate in Namibia is quite high, so the house is guarded around the clock (in two shifts) by security guards. Talking to them gives me an extremely authentic insight into Namibian village life, especially since neither of them (day nor night shift) live directly in the city, but outside (and even spent their entire childhood in remote villages).

«You sleep on the ground, you get eaten.»

Statement by a Namibian colleague on the differences between camping in Namibia and Switzerland.



*Sand road in Rundu*

The proximity to the Kavango River makes the climate in this region somewhat more humid, which snakes and mosquitoes, among others, appreciate. The day guard confirmed that he had already spotted snakes in the pile of leaves behind the house (which we have cleared in the meantime). His watchful eye is probably due to the fact that he had to be hospitalized for two weeks after his last snake bite. The night guard, on the other hand, does not like mosquitoes—malaria has hit him hard in the past.



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The guards also advise me on how to behave in unfamiliar situations: while gardening, I came across a small but surprisingly nimble snake. The guard, Tjakamba, assumed it was poisonous, but also knew immediately what to do: avoid the area for the time being, but look for the snake at sunrise. The cool (winter) temperatures should immobilize the snake so that it can be removed with manageable risk. So we agreed to meet at 7:00 the next morning to start the mission. I wore my most sturdy shoes and two pairs of long pants.

The house has a bomb shelter in the garden, but it is now being converted. Initial construction work is underway; more on this in the next newsletter.



*Bomb shelter behind the house, July 2025*

## Where I work

The Ministry of Education is located about one kilometer from my house, accessible via a sandy gravel road. The reception at the ministry was very formal yet warm, and I was assigned a small office. The people seem interested and cheerful, and the cleaning lady sings while she works.



*My office at the Ministry of Education, July 2025*

Working hours are the traditional 8-5, and working from home is not an option. Since my direct counterpart was initially still on a business trip, I cannot report anything noteworthy about my daily work routine at this time.

## My first impression

A lot of things are just different here. Some things are a bit more complicated and take a bit longer. Even if it seems chaotic, it somehow works out in the end. And sometimes it's even very unbureaucratic and fast. If not today, then tomorrow. I can feel how the "unstructured" nature of things still causes me a certain amount of tension. How I sometimes think to myself, "That's enough now," and would like to bang my fist on the table. But then I take a deep breath, smile, and tell myself, "It's okay." And then I wait relaxed with everyone else for 30 minutes to withdraw cash from the ATM. Or the 45 minutes to pay for my purchases (before being thoroughly searched again when leaving the store). Statements and plans seem to have little binding force here. I think I'm slowly beginning to feel a certain inner calm, to simply accept some things as they are. They're okay.



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## What's next?

In terms of organization, I am attached to the IT department, where I will spend the next three months getting an overview of the existing equipment, processes, and challenges. Even though I will probably not be directly involved with schools, I have planned a few introductory visits to schools for next week. These visits will focus on hardware as well as internet connectivity issues. A 5-year plan is currently being worked on. (Addendum: The visits could not take place as planned right away because no ministry vehicle was available).

I'm curious to see what will emerge in terms of content by the time the next newsletter is published (towards the end of the year).



*Snapshot of the bunker project, July 2025*



*River cruise on the Kavango, Namibia on the left, Angola on the right*

If there are any specific topics or questions that are of particular interest, please feel free to contact me. I'm sure I can include some of them in the next newsletter. And no, unfortunately we didn't find the snake the next morning.

"Me, I don't make plans. Because then it can go wrong. I just take it as it comes."

Colleague at the Ministry of Education

My next newsletter will be published around end of the year. Until then, I wish you all the best!

Elia



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## Attachment

### Working together

Comundo is Switzerland's largest organization for personnel development cooperation (PEZA). Currently, almost 100 people are working in seven countries in the Global South. They work closely with colleagues from local partner organizations on a daily basis, seeking innovative, sustainable solutions. Comundo uses three main instruments: personnel development cooperation, project financing, and the promotion of networks.

The goal is to promote networking, exchange, and cooperation between people and organizations from different continents, cultures, and religions. The vision is guided by the conviction that a world in which all people live together in dignity and peace should be possible. In this way, we contribute to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

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Cuts in international development cooperation are a reality, both in Switzerland and internationally. We are therefore all the more grateful for your support.

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