



Circular Letter 1 – August 2022

By Daniel Rafferty - Strengthen nationwide education
An assignment from Comundo

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Entrance to the Regional Office offices where I work

On February 1st I arrived in Namibia and started my assignment at the Kavango East Regional Office as management advisor to the Ministry of Education. The photos of Namibia showing vast expanses of desert that I had in mind before my arrival were quickly replaced by green plains dotted with trees and rain, rain, rain. I soon regretted that I had left my rain jacket at home in Switzerland.

Contact address - Daniel Rafferty

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Capacity Building

The primary goal of a Comundo development worker, or co-worker, is capacity building. While most co-workers are involved in building capacity in the teaching area, i.e., teaching the teachers, my focus is similar but in the finance area. Based at the Kavango East Regional Office of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Rundu, I support finance management and staff at the Regional Office and at the schools, establishing and enhancing internal controls and reporting.



Accounting for COVID-19 Infrastructure Spending

Namibia - big country, small population

Namibia is bigger than Texas. It has 14 regions that are centrally managed from the capital, Windhoek. Rundu is the capital of the Kavango East region.

Getting an Impression

During the first three months of an assignment, co-workers of Comundo follow 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 an assignment. Instead, the emphasis is on taking three months to get to know the organization by studying relevant documents, listening to and observing colleagues, field visits and attending management meetings.

I have gained split impressions of the Regional Office and the schools. On the one hand, management and staff are motivated and have the basic tools necessary to perform their jobs. On the other hand, the Regional Office and schools need to be better organized and leadership improved. 60% of the schools have no internet. The existing IT infrastructure needs upgrading and software that is in place is under utilised. Below are several exercises that illustrate my involvement to date.

«Hard work and proper accounting control.» Advice from Frans Indongo, Namibian businessman, for running an organization successfully.

COVID-19 Infrastructure Development

In 2020, Namibia received a N\$ 1 billion (US\$ 60 million) loan from the African Development Bank for the construction and renovation of education infrastructure due to COVID-19. The Kavango East MoE received N\$ 45 million (US\$ 2.7 million) from this loan. From June 2020 - June 2022 the funds were spent for the construction and/or renovation of classrooms, hostels and ablution (toilet) facilities.



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COVID-19 Infrastructure Development continued

After two years of construction and renovation, I reviewed each of the 44 projects with accounting to determine their status and report this to the Rundu Regional Council. A follow up meeting was held with the Regional Council Building Department to discuss issues identified and actions for their resolution.

Too often, corrupt officials and contractors line their own pockets from development projects with few tangible improvements for the people. Happily, our review showed that classrooms, hostels and ablution facilities were built with the money spent. While there is still much to do, progress is being made to provide learners and teaching staff with better infrastructure.

National Payroll Verification

National Payroll Verification (NPV) is a yearly exercise started in 2019 to ensure that only staff who were entitled to a salary were being paid, and to verify the accuracy of the Human Resources (HR) database. Teams from the HR and finance areas from all 14 Regional Offices travel to every school and verify the teachers and staff at each school. I was assigned to one of two teams covering Rundu, the circuit with roughly half of all learners and teachers in the Kavango East region. On the morning of the first day one of my team members came to me and said that we were ready to go, but transportation had not yet been arranged. I told him that I had a 4x4 pick-up and off we went. We visited schools in town and schools in more remote areas, almost getting stuck in the sand road traveling to Ngcove primary school, a new school built with the COVID-19 funds.

Help thy Neighbor

Due to weak institutions (no welfare, no unemployment insurance) and high unemployment, family and religious institutions are the social safety nets many rely upon. International NGOs play an important role supporting government institutions.

I told the HR girl traveling with us that if we got stuck, she could drive while me and the guy from finance pushed. She replied that she did not know how to drive. In that case, I told her, she would have to push. I heard she is now taking driving lessons. While NPV highlighted internal control weaknesses that need addressed, it also evidenced a significant reduction in the number of cases requiring follow-up and rectification compared to prior years, i.e. progress.

Further Impressions

Far too many lack basic housing with running water and electricity. Far too many are unemployed. Far too many children do not finish primary school. Still, I have gained many positive impressions. My colleagues at the MoE have warmly welcomed me and treat me with respect that has become less commonplace in Western culture. When introduced, I tell people that they can "call me Dan". OK, they say and call me "Mr. Dan". Being older can have its advantages. Every formal meeting starts with a prayer. All bow their heads and say "Amen" at the end. There is a genuine spirituality expressed both at work and privately that has also become less commonplace in Western culture. I have stated that if I can make even a small difference that helps the MoE fulfill its mandate to educate and train for a sustainable national development, that my time in Namibia will have been a success. I am encouraged by my efforts to date.

Best regards from Rundu, Mr. Dan



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Cooperating for a fairer world

What if the right to a healthy, safe life free from violence no longer applied? If the opportunity to attend school – vital for education and a decent job – was denied? Or if the only way to feed your family was to flee to a foreign country?

With a team of about one hundred co-workers, Comundo improves the lives of people in Latin America and Africa, focusing in particular on children, youth and older people. This is all thanks to sharing knowledge and experience with local partner organisations, networking, and the promotion of mutual learning.

As a civic organisation in Switzerland, Comundo works towards achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It puts our co-workers' specific experience and skills to excellent use on site and couples this with political action in Switzerland.

Comundo
im RomeroHaus
Kreuzbuchstrasse 44
CH-6006 Lucerne
Phone: +41 58 854 12 13
Mail: spenden@comundo.org
www.comundo.org



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