

**Consultative Dialogue between the Southern Africa Trust and Civil Society
Organisations in Namibia
Kalahari Sands Hotel, 1 April 2009**

▪ **Introduction**

The Southern Africa Trust, in collaboration with the Namibian Non Governmental Organisations' Forum (NANGOF) and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), organised a consultative dialogue on 1 April 2009 at the Kalahari Sands Hotel, Windhoek, Namibia. The objectives of the dialogue were to:

- discuss how key civil society organisations in Namibia and the Southern Africa Trust can work together on initiatives to overcome poverty;
- explain the work of the Southern Africa Trust to CSOs in Namibia;
- understand key issues, emerging trends and challenges facing CSOs in Namibia; and
- introduce the Drivers of Change Awards.

Presentations

1. About the Southern Africa Trust

Communications and Partnerships Manager at the Southern Africa Trust, Petronilla Ndebele noted that this consultative dialogue presents an opportunity to exchange views and find ways of working together in an effort to eradicate poverty. Ndebele explained the Trust's strategies as capacity building; facilitating increased regional policy dialogue among governments, business and civil society; influencing policies based on evidence; and provision of grants. She noted that the overall aim of the organisation is for the poor to have a voice when policies are being formulated. Ndebele noted that policies that are rooted in the experiences of poor people will have a meaningful impact in overcoming poverty.

2. Strengthening civil society participation in regional policy processes – what are the constraints and opportunities?

Barbara Kalima-Phiri, Policy Analyst: Poverty Reduction Strategies outlined key challenges facing civil society in southern Africa as:

- Civil society sector is fragmented (diversity), lacks a coherent strategic approach;
- Access to policymakers is not coordinated and systematic, the voices of the poor are therefore not heard;
- Lack of information and effective engagement strategies;
- Limited funding – the emerging trend is that in most cases, donors prefer to work with bigger and more professional civil society organisations;
- Government funding modalities vs civil society modalities;
- Civil society organisations tend to “chase the money” vs agenda setting;
- Poor leadership of organisations;
- limited formal analysis of the sector as a whole to inform the changing dynamics of CSOs;
- and

- Lack of evidence based knowledge to inform their policy positions.

Kalima-Phiri indicated that if approached in the right way, the political environment in southern Africa is ready for stronger engagement of voices of the poor/CSOs in a way that is not available to Northern bilateral and private donors. She noted that the Southern African Development Community is slowly opening up participation of civil society in the policy space and gave an example of the setting up of the regional poverty observatory as a great opportunity and avenue for civil society participation.

Kalima-Phiri noted the role of the Trust as brokering new opportunities for policy engagement between policy makers and CSOs. She also noted that the Trust establishes linkages and alliances between different types of organisations as well as providing resources to CSOs working on diverse policy issues with a regional impact.

3. How can a free and viable media influence pro-poor policies?

Kaitira Kandjii, MISA Regional Director, noted that the southern Africa region faces many challenges including HIV and AIDS; poverty; environmental degradation; unemployment; and social conflict – these cannot be overcome without the ability to generate, disseminate and consume information. He believes that information in itself cannot do anything without the right to freedom of expression. In this regard, MISA looks at the ICT sector as a critical component that can drive access to information and freedom of expression.

Kandjii noted that the concept of “Information Society” has become part of the public and political debate in many countries as many people are not sure how to work around it in a practical manner. This concept is, however, believed to have the potential of bringing economic growth and social prosperity in many countries. For MISA, the Information Society is about empowering communities and bringing to the fore the voices of the poor. The promotion of freedom of expression will unlock the potential in people and create much stronger societies that are able to withstand social, political and economic challenges.

4. Key issues, emerging trends and challenges facing CSOs in Namibia.

Anna Beukes from the Namibian Non Governmental Organisations’ Forum (NANGOF) noted the national priorities that the organisation is working on as:

- The Government of the Republic of Namibia - CSO Policy & Draft Bill;
- Labour Act and Volunteers;
- Governance & Management Training (CSMQ);
- Updating the database of NGOs registered with the NANGOF Trust;
- CSO Salary Survey;
- CSO Baseline Survey;
- Basic Income Grant; and
- Representation at local, regional & national level.

Beukes outlined the challenges facing civil society in Namibia as:

- Enormous development needs in the country;
- Limited resources;
- Lack of institutional capacity and experience;

- Impact critically needed within the shortest time;
- Scepticism of development partners;
- Lack of political and strategic and financial support;
- Lack of coordination and focus in the sector;
- Challenges within the Government of the Republic of Namibia-CSO Partnership;
- HIV/AIDS Pandemic; and
- NANGOF Member participation and commitment.

To address the challenges facing CSOs in Namibia, Beukes called for a coordinated and focused response; prioritising needs; sharing of resources, capacity and facilities; voice to influence; among other things.

Way forward

The Southern Africa Trust and NANGOF Trust will engage to identify strategic areas of support, particularly capacity building for the NANGOF Trust and CSOs. NANGOF will hold a meeting to discuss the Government-CSO Policy Draft Bill.

Launch of the 2009 Drivers of Change Awards

The Namibian Minister of Information and Communications, Joel Kaapanda launched the 2009 Drivers of Change Awards at the Kalahari Sands Hotel. Nominations for the awards can be submitted in English, French and Portuguese and will close on 10 July 2009.

At the launch of the awards, the Southern Africa Trust announced its contribution of US\$6000 towards flood relief efforts in the country. Namibia is currently hard hit by floods in the Caprivi and Kavango regions.

NANGOF Trust

Namibia Non-Governmental Organisations Forum Trust

Name and Surname	Organisation	Contact details
Marbeline Mwashenkele	MISA NAM	Tel: +264 61 236 069 Fax: +264 61 236 6054 Mobile: 081 2748 198E mail: info@misanamibia.org
Gladys Ramadi	MISA	Tel: +264 61 232 975 Fax: +264 61 248 016 Mobile: +264 81 202 8939 Email: broadcasting@misa.org
Linda Engvall	European Commission Delegation	Tel: 061- 202 6000 Fax: Mobile: Email: linda.engvall@ec.europa.eu
Pierre Donadien Antony Jaunard	French Embassy	Tel: 061 2767 117 Fax: Mobile: Email:
Peter Mbwaze	Namibian National Association of the Deaf (NNAD)	Tel: +264 61 202 6000 Fax: +264 61 244 811 Mobile: 0812560598 Email:pmbale77@yahoo.com
Elijah Mukubonda	National Planning Commission (NPC)	Tel: 001- 283 4243 Fax: 001- 226501 Mobile: 081 2526 839 Email:emukubonda@npc.gov.na
Victoria Schmming	Namibian Women's Association(NAWA)	Tel: 242461/0812798065Fax: 263539 Mobile: 0812788065 Email: nagirich@iwayna
Sandra Wilheo	Base FM Misa Namibia	Tel: 263726 Fax: 263733 Mobile: 0811270056 Email: ku@iway.na
Linda Boumann	The rainbow project	Tel: 001-230710 Fax: 011-240 765 Mobile: 0812528 259 Email:linda@trp.org.na / lboumann82@gmail.com
Sam Mtelamo	Nappa	Tel: 264 61 230 250 Fax: 264 61 230 251 Mobile: 081 128 5385 Email: sntelamo@nappa.com.na
Anna Beukes	NANGOF Trust	Tel : 264 61 21 25 03 Fax : Mobile : Email : admin@nangoftrust.org.na
Ben Siyabongo	Nacobta	Tel: 264 61 250 558 Fax: 264 61 222 647 Mobile: 085 554 7578 Email:siya@nacobta.com.na
Rolad Meier	Joint Consultative Council	Tel: 264 61 250 558 Fax: 264 61 222 647 Mobile: 085 554 7578 Email:siya@nacobta.com.na
Martha Amelenge Steven Mvula	NSHR	Tel: 264 236 183 Fax: 264 234 286 Mobile: Email: nshr@nshr.org

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Khasi Sagens	NBE TV News	Tel: Fax: Mobile: 087 412 5552 Email:
Henriette Rispel	Tucsin	Tel: Fax: Mobile: Email: tucsin@mweb.com.na
SK Wilkkie	MISA	Tel: Fax: Mobile: Email: sampa@misa.org
Werani Zabula	MISA	Tel: 264 61 23 2975 Fax: Mobile: Email: communications@misa.org
Pearl Coetzee	NAMPA	Tel: 374 036 Fax: 221713/258262 Mobile: 0812281160 Email: pcoetzee@nampa.org
Joseph Alonga	Radio Energy	Tel: 374 036 Fax: 221713/258262 Mobile: 0812281160 Email: pcoetzee@nampa.org
S. Xoagoo.Eisa	Gemsallam	Tel: 256 78180 Fax: 256 379 Mobile: Email: lossy joss@yahoo.com pcoetzee@nampa.org
Cornelia Mupupiwa	NBC TV News	Tel: 291 3355 Fax: 216648 Mobile: 081 250 1200 Email: cmupupiwa@nbc.com.na
Sylvester Simubali	One Africa TV	Tel: 061-29 1513 Fax: 061-259 459 Mobile: 081 3775689 Email: Sylvester@oneafrica.bv
S. Xoagoo.Eisa	Gemsallam	Tel: 0020421-2882592 Fax: 231626 Mobile: 0812209216 Email: ssxoaguseisea@yahoo.com
Javnard Anthony	French Embassy	Tel: Fax: Mobile: Email:
Gery Leslie	British High Comission	Tel: Fax: Mobile: Email:

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