

➤ **Column** Corruption –
A social disease • Part 153

The role of NGOs during the Year of Accountability

The African Union has proclaimed 2018 as the Year of Accountability. Our President has proclaimed 2018 as the Year of Reckoning.

Accountability implies answerability, rectification and can include liability. Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) fulfil an extremely critical role in developing Namibia. NGOs need an open door to offices/ministries/agencies in order to access information, to influence and steer national debate. If NGOs are too critical then they are blamed, labelled and side-lined by governments.

Within the context of 2019 as election year and given the current national and Zimbabwean humanitarian and socio-economic challenges, it will require from NGOs to act with finesse, eloquence and build relationships of trust with public office holders. They should build bridges of hope with the public and influence politicians without getting too close to politicians. Protecting their credibility, exposing sophistry and waste of development resources with commitment and courage are much needed. There is an expression that, "in one's comfort zone nothing changes".

NGOs have to find a balance between working with government and working in the interest of citizens. Maintaining scientific reputation of the highest standard is even more important than to be politically correct. NGOs should be inspirational to develop trust while promoting citizen advocacy.

On the one hand, harsh criticism and blame without creative and innovative strategies will not develop trust. On the other hand, the real impact of mismanagement, abuse of power and corruption can no longer be denied in the political and public sector arenas.

PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

One of the critical roles of NGOs is to assist in improving public services in a geographically broader context. There is a trend of deteriorating quality of service delivery. NGOs are accountable to citizens in providing services and advice as objectively as possible. Accountability requires monitoring systems to improve the measurability of poverty alleviation programs.

Given the unemployment rate of 43.3% within the age group 18-35, one of the highest inequality rates in the world



Johan Coetzee

and drought amidst a depression it is clear that NGOs have their work cut out for them. It is a mammoth task to make every Namibian dollar invested achieve its optimum impact

NGOs working in the public sector has the accountability to liaise with strategic institutions to transform them in improving service delivery. Such strategic services include health, education, and revenue collection.

Given the 2017 Afro-Barometer findings that most people are not satisfied with public service delivery, a slight to moderate decrease in votes in favour of the ruling party will not be a surprise. Without a Voter Verification Paper Audit Trial (VVPAT), it will require a critical presence of NGO observers to prevent intimidation and election fraud. The mediocre commitment of politicians to reduce corruption – a trend since Independence – requires a bottom-up approach in activating citizen advocacy to compliment a direct top-down approach. This includes inspiring citizens to voice their opinions in print and in social media to express their dissatisfaction with substandard service delivery.

What can NGOs do differently during 2019 to influence decision makers to get Government expenditure more aligned to what should be national socio-economic priorities, e.g. health, education and urban housing? A huge challenge is the few public office bearers that attend presentations of NGOs when research findings are presented. What can NGOs do to increase politicians and public officials' – the decision makers' – attendance at such presentations?

The final and most critical question is: In changing the development deficit, e.g. waste of public resources and skewed priorities: What legacy do NGOs want to leave? One of diplomacy and/or one of inspirational change? I believe both are possible.

However, with a dysfunctional Namibian Non-Governmental Organisations Forum (NANGOF) that cannot get their house in order, the heat is on NGO's.