

From Parliamentary compliance to performance

The Parliamentary Code of Conduct makes it compulsory for Members of Parliament (MPs) to annually declare and disclose their assets, business interests and shareholding in companies, including those of their spouses and dependants. The Code is a very positive initiative in Namibia's ongoing endeavour to increase transparency in line with the world trend.

However, MPs disclosures are only used for compliance. No mechanism exist to monitor the correctness of individual disclosures and to take remedial action if needed. The media should have the information to link the annual disclosure of MPs shareholding and business interests with the Register of Company Registrations (that is a cumbersome manual system) so that it is possible to monitor MPs with shareholding in companies to detect conflict of interest. In developed countries, MPs often tend to place their personal assets in blind trusts, to avoid public scrutiny and accusations of conflicts of interest when they direct government funds to companies (Tatum, 2010). Although more complicated it is still possible to detect interests of MPs with influence in blind trusts and companies in which they can influence board decisions such as tenders. Blind trusts will become a trend in Namibia as increased investigative journalism link MPs interests with the anticipated electronic Register of Company Registrations. At the moment, MPs find it very challenging just to comply with



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the annual disclosure of their assets and interests. MPs should progress from their struggle of mere ethical compliance (the 2015 disclosures of both houses are still outstanding) to ethical performance. The said mentioned would increase our rating on governance and accountability indices, e.g. the Transparency International Index and the Mo Ibrahim Index. Investors use these indices for portfolio and foreign direct investment.

It is the public's right to have access to information about MPs so that conflict of interest is not only declared, but also prevented, monitored and managed in a public accountable way. This will allow increased participation of citizens to get more 'bang for their bucks', and it will increase transparency and the performance of MPs. Honourable President, Hage Geingob and the First Lady, Monica Geingos disclosed their assets and business interests during 2015. Parliamentarians should follow this example.

• References

Tatum, M. (2010). WWW. Wise Geek. What is a Blind Trust? Available: <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-blind-trust.htm>, retrieved 1 November 2010.

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