

The effectiveness of Namibia's development framework – Lauren Davidson

In recent years, development frameworks and processes have been the subject of scrutiny for technical blue-print approaches, with their emphasis on inputs and meeting targets rather than on processes which achieve meaningful change. Conventional development planning techniques very rarely reflect the real challenges on the ground which lead to grandiose goals that are not attainable, undermining the very definition and intention of 'development'.

Namibia's development agenda is determined by five-year National Development Plans, of which the fourth one is coming to a close in March 2017 and the fifth currently in formulation. These plans are guided by Vision 2030, which aims to see Namibia as an industrialised nation by 2030. Recently, these plans have been the product of inputs from a wide range of stakeholders in the private and public sectors, directed by the National Planning Commission. The end result consists of specified areas of intervention through which strategies and programmes are identified to achieve the desired goals. Line ministries are responsible for the implementation of such strategies and programmes which are subject to timeous monitoring and evaluation processes.

Under these National Development Plans, notable economic successes have been achieved in the last 15 years. Notwithstanding achievements, a large number of targets and goals have not been accomplished, largely due to external shocks, but many of them were simply unattainable. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that civil servants are bogged down by the tedious reporting required for monitoring and evaluation, which have been claimed to divert efforts in driving the objectives at hand. One of the contributing challenges encountered with M&E of NDP4 is that not all strategic initiatives have clear measurable outcomes and targets.

With such challenges in mind, it may be worthwhile to consider a more inclusive, problem-driven and flexible approach to development, which are strengthened by quick feed-back and adaptive learning mechanisms. In reality, this will be a testing and tedious feat to achieve as it involves a wide range of interests and actors, presenting itself as an intricate and complex process. Though, if pursued with meaningful intent, such an approach holds major potential in addressing the real development problems at an individual level and a greater chance of reducing inequality and poverty.