Lack of Integrated Data is Costing Namibia

Opinions | 2020-05-08

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THIS IS A reflective piece on how the government can improve the use of data to effectively aid communities during any pandemic.

This area has been relegated to the background for quite a while now and needs urgent revival for proper decision-making, stronger communities and institutions.

In Namibia, there is a general challenge concerning data capture, storage, management, and its use to enhance effective and efficient decision-making. Without population data, no meaningful decision can be made. This certainly amplifies the adage "bad data is better than no data at all".

Big data is considered a gold mine, as authorities can use it to reveal patterns and understand human behaviour. Governments that utilise data are able to make informed decisions on the needs of a country. Moreover, data promotes the intelligent allocation of financial and human resources.

Where do we find ourselves as a country during this pandemic (Covid-19) – especially with regards to the use of citizens' data?

It's been reported that the central government is sending requests to local government to provide verification data for beneficiaries of the N$750 once-off emergency income grant.

As Namibians, we are aware that the reliance on individuals to manually share data for government programmes can be tempered with, as in the classical example of the housing waiting list saga.

Based on criticism of the government's emergency income grant (EIG) circulated on social media, there is a challenge in equal access to aid during the Covid-19 pandemic. This may have been caused by a lack of up-to-date information and the inability to use data to inform decision-making.

For a country with a population of 2,5 million, data capture, storage and management on population for resource distribution and informed decision-making should not be difficult, since government decision-making and implementation are already decentralised.

It is a matter of having local and regional authorities to digitally verify existing and new data sets on vulnerable constituents and forward these to central government for the incorporation into a centralised database. This will certainly help reduce the duplication of work and efforts of agencies and organisations requesting information of citizens.

Namibia spends billions of dollars on the collection of data each year, which competes with the expenditure of some of the advanced countries with larger populations.

For example, by 2012 the US was estimated to have spent 75 billion pounds supporting 585 000 enumerators.

Germany spent about 750 million pounds on around 80 000 enumerators. The Netherlands spends little or no funds on census data collection as the reliance on population data is informed by local and national registries.

The country has integrated databases supported by local and national agencies that inform central governments' decisions.

Namibia can learn and take inspiration by spending no funds on countrywide enumerations.

Instead enhance the capacity of local government by investing in information technology (IT) infrastructure and skills.

If an integrated database does not already exist in Namibia, I suggest we create one through the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) managed by the Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA). This will not take a long time to create and subsequently operate.

The database can serve different purposes, but most importantly it is to inform the government of the needs and service gaps in the country without government officials travelling or sending faxes to local authorities to obtain needed data.

Firstly, one of the government agencies dealing with data capture, storage and management on behalf of Namibians is the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security, which registers births and deaths, and keeps immigration records. These various data sets can be linked to a central data centre.

Therefore, one will not need to constantly provide hard copies of your identity document when needing government services.

When a child is born, birth certificates have serial numbers. These can be linked to parents through ID numbers. Secondly information concerning employment can be provided by the relevant institution, supported by the Directorate of Inland Revenue.

Lastly, the decentralised institutions such as municipalities, towns and village councils can provide data on rate payers, supported by the deeds registry from the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform.

All this can be linked to a central database that is managed and updated by a government agency.

Maps of local authorities supported by the latest satellite images can be used to identify the communities needing the most assistance. One can carry out an analysis on where the highest densities are or which communities will struggle with social distancing.

There would be no need to have people queue up to benefit for government aid. Donations can be dropped at the doorstep and records of beneficiaries can be updated for future interventions.

The implementation strategy of the establishment of the central data centre needs the conceptualisation, designing, testing and deployment through collaborative efforts of public institutions, the private sector, civil society and individuals.

The government could hire a group of computer scientists and software engineers to support all government institutions in order to implement a centralised database.

Ground truthing will be important, but you will need fewer human resources than we currently do.

The only people who can benefit from the status quo of no distributed database are the corrupt and proponents of nepotism.

Let's keep in mind the government should ensure effective service delivery so that all citizens can meet their basic needs.

Service delivery can be improved with proper IT infrastructure complemented by professionals at all levels of government

Namibia has the capacity. Funding will not be a major issue. All we need is robust political will.

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- My purpose out here today is to share this article to the world about how Muum Zabaza helped me in getting back my EX-girlfriend that broke up with me 2 months ago. I tried all i can to make him see reasons with me so that we can continue our relationship but he denied me. Thank God for giving me the thought of going into the internet for help, i searched properly and i saw different reviews of Muum Zabaza and i insisted in giving it a try by contacting him via what's app on (+27659143055). He gave me reason to live again and he prepared a spell and told me that my Ex-girlfriend will come back to me within 12 hours. Can you believe it, my EX-girlfriend came back to me and our wedding will hold Soon. Contact him now!!! if you need any help.
  Email: muumtraci1983@gmail.com and he does a lot of spells. Once again i want to say am very grateful for your help

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