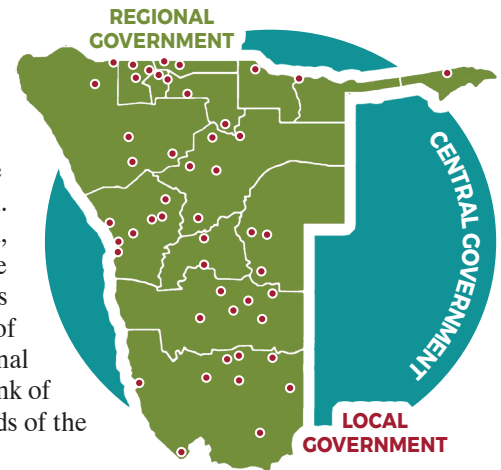


# Regional and Local Government

The Namibian Constitution establishes three levels of government:  
(1) central government (2) regional government and (3) local government.  
Why do we need these three different levels of government?

The President and the members of the National Assembly represent all the people of Namibia. They deal with issues which affect everyone in the nation. But communities also need other government bodies which are closer to them, to focus on the issues and problems of the community. For example, there are many things that affect different regions in Namibia differently. Some regions are very well developed, with many schools and clinics and a good supply of water and electricity, but other regions do not have enough services. A regional government can focus on the needs of a single region instead of having to think of the entire nation all at once. Similarly, local government focuses on the needs of the people who live in that local authority.



Regional and local councillors are important contacts for lobbying on regional and local issues.

## Structure of regional and local government

Regional and local government have similar structures, set by the Namibian Constitution. There must be a council made up of representatives elected by the residents of the region or the local authority. The council will elect one of its members as chairperson, to preside over the council meetings. There must also be a management committee, which is a small group of councillors elected by all the members of the council. The job of the management committee is to make sure that the decisions of the council are carried out. There must also be staff members who can put the decisions of the council into action.

## Regional Councils

Namibia has been divided into 14 regions by a Boundaries Delimitation and Demarcation Commission appointed by the President with the approval of the National Assembly. To “delimit” something means to decide where its boundaries are. The “seat” of each region is the place where the regional council holds its meetings. Each region has been divided into constituencies by the Commission. The “constituencies” make up, or “constitute”, each region. According to the Constitution, there can be 6 to 12 constituencies in each region. The boundaries of the regions and the constituencies can be changed from time to time, and new regions and constituencies may be created. For example, Namibia originally had 13 regions. In 2013, the Kavango Region was divided into Kavango East Region and Kavango West Region so that Namibia now has 14 regions.

The voters in each constituency elect one person to represent them on their regional council. A person who is elected to represent a constituency on the council must go to live in that constituency if he or she is not already resident there. This requirement is necessary to help regional government fulfil its purpose of bringing government closer to the people. Each regional council must select three of its members to represent the region in the National Council. Each representative to the National Council will serve on the National Council for five years.

Regional councils work together with the National Planning Commission to make a development plan which will guide growth and development in each region. Regional councils also help local governments in the region. The President or Parliament can assign other duties to regional councils as necessary.

Each region has a **Governor** appointed by the President. The President may also appoint special advisers to assist the Governor. The Governor’s functions are to act as a link between central and regional government and to investigate and report on any matter relating to the region at the request of the President or the Minister responsible for regional or local government. The Governor can attend council meetings. The Governor may require the Regional Council to convene urgent special sessions or to address a particular issue identified by the Governor. The Governor reports to the President. Each Regional Council elects a **management committee** from amongst its members to hold office for half of the Council’s term (2,5 years). The committee will have 3 members if the Regional Council is small (less than 9 members) and 4 members if the Council is larger (9 or more members). Each Regional Council must also appoint a **chief regional officer** who is responsible for carrying out the Council’s decisions and directing the administration of the Council’s affairs. ►

## Local councils

There are three kinds of local authorities: villages, towns and municipalities. The President decides how to classify each local authority by looking at its financial resources and its capacity to provide services. A local authority can be re-classified as it changes and develops. The classification of a local authority affects its duties and powers – towns have responsibility for more services than villages, and municipalities have responsibility for more services than towns.



Village councils have 5 members. Town councils have 7-12 members and municipal councils 7-15 members – depending on their size. Elections for local authority councils are held every five years. Local authority elections are held on the basis of party lists, where voters elect a political party rather than an individual. Voters and persons on the party list must have been living in the local authority for at least one year.

The powers of the local authorities are divided into three tiers:

- (1) All local authorities are given certain powers automatically.
- (2) Other powers are given to towns and municipalities automatically, whereas villages are given these powers only when the Ministry responsible for local government thinks they are ready.
- (3) Still other powers are given to municipalities automatically, but are given to towns and villages only when the Ministry thinks they are ready.

This system is designed to help local authorities develop, by giving them increased responsibilities only as they are ready to handle them. For example, a village can be given additional powers until it is doing almost all of the things that a town can do automatically – then the village will be ready to be re-classified as a town.

Local authorities have the power to make local regulations on a wide variety of matters. All local authorities must supply water, sewerage and refuse disposal services to communities which have been formally established as residential areas – which includes neighbourhoods where the local authority has laid out streets and divided the land up into plots available for purchase. When any local authority is unable to carry out its responsibilities, central government may take steps to deal with the problem.

Each municipal council and town council elects a **mayor** and a **deputy mayor** from amongst its members. The mayor and deputy mayor serve as the chairperson and vice-chairperson of the council. They are responsible for formulating policies, promoting employment, and monitoring the implementation of the council's policies. The mayor and deputy mayor are accountable to the people who live in the local authority. They have a duty to investigate and resolve issues relating to the local authority. A village council elects a **chairperson** and a **vice-chairperson**. These officials have powers and duties similar to those of the mayors and deputy mayors in larger local authorities.

Municipal and town councils elect **management committees** from amongst their members each year. A management committee has 3-5 elected members, depending on the size of the council. It also includes the mayor and deputy mayor. The management committee is responsible for seeing that the council's decisions are carried out. It controls the council's budget. It also has the power to ask the council to reconsider a decision in light of factors pointed out by the committee.

Municipal and town councils appoint clerks. Village councils appoint village secretaries. These clerks and secretaries act as the **chief executive officers** of the local authority. They are responsible for carrying out the council's decisions and administering the local authority's affairs. The chief executive officer is a good point of contact if you have questions about the local authority.

Regional and local authority council meetings are generally open to the public. Councils can also convene **public meetings** to give community members a chance to share their views on a particular subject. Public meetings are supposed to be announced in local newspapers and through other channels, so that interested persons will know the date, time, place and topic. You can request a public meeting on any matter of public interest. If you or your organisation collects the signatures of 10% of the registered voters in your region or local authority, then the council *must* hold a public meeting.

Regional and local councillors may not take part in any decision that could affect a financial interest of the councillor or the councillor's spouse, relative, household member or business partner. This prevents **conflicts of interest**.



## Traditional leaders

The members of a traditional community may follow their customary law to choose a traditional authority consisting of a chief or head, senior traditional councillors and traditional councillors.

If the procedure for selecting the traditional authority is in order, the President will formally recognise the designation. Traditional authorities must live in the communal area of the traditional community which they lead.

Traditional authorities must administer customary law and preserve their community's culture, language, traditions and traditional values – but they must not apply any custom or tradition that violates anyone's constitutional rights. They have a duty to promote gender equality as regards leadership positions. They must be sure that their political opinions or party loyalties do not influence their functions as traditional leaders. Chiefs/heads may not hold political office unless they take leave of absence from their traditional positions. Traditional leaders have a duty to support the policies of central government, regional councils and local authorities. They must help the police prevent and investigate crimes if necessary, and ensure that natural resources are used sustainably. With community consent, traditional authorities have the power to collect contributions for Community Trust Funds which can be used to finance community projects and cover the authority's administration costs. The central government provides allowances to traditional authorities. The Namibian Constitution establishes a **Council of Traditional Leaders** which advises the President on the control and use of communal land and on other matters referred to it by the President. ■