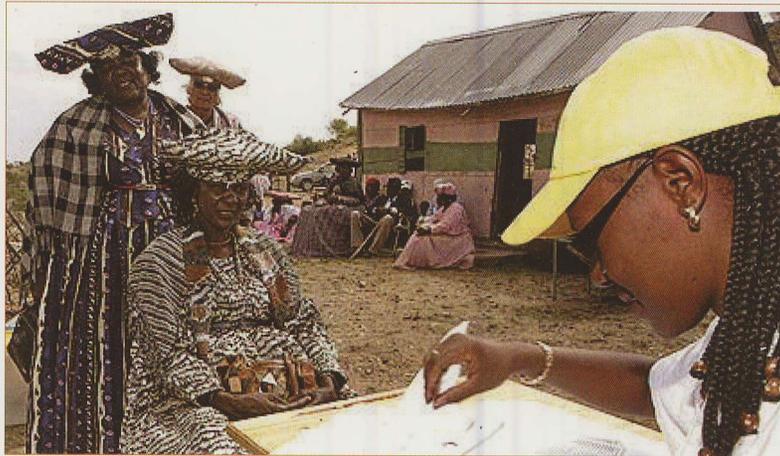


elections and their new voices

The 2014



<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13891138>

Two groups of voices stand out from the 2014 voters' register. For the first time since Namibia has gained self-rule the born free youths will be voting, comprising 44% of the total registered voters and, according to Prof Paul Isaak, ECN director, in excess of seventy-four thousand more women than men are registered to vote.

The significance of these voices is that eventhough Namibians have gone to the polling stations five times before many election promises are still pending. It would thus have been no surprise if people had lost faith in voting. Further cause for lost faith in voting is the daily media exposure to nepotism, cronyism, unaffordable land, and wastage of state funds amidst serious social needs. While Namibia is known as an apathetic nation, the dominant presence of these two groups suggest the respectful tolerance may become replaced by questioning insistence, **"What about us?"**

Further significance lies in the fact that whilst Namibians are known to vote along tribal lines or for sentimental reasons, especially with parents attaching great value to the liberation struggle, the born-frees are reaching for a future not chained to the past. The recent submission of 14 000 applications for affordable housing delivered to Windhoek Municipality CEO, Niilo Taapopi evinced a groundswell of civic action indicative of a new kind of forcefulness. Though the applications were peaceful it came with a hidden threat, implied in the July 2015 deadline.

The youth are tired of hearing about the tangible benefits of the elite when their own efforts seem to bear little fruit in a land their parents also fought for.

Namibia has been self-ruling for near twenty-five years now. Blaming the past for social and economic underdevelopment or the state of education and hospitals is simply no longer acceptable. The ruling party is sure to win, but promises of inclusivity and accountability will probably not fall by the wayside as quickly as in the past.

Government will be required to start giving answers to the missing millions at the Government Institutions Pension Fund (N\$650m), Social Security Commission (N\$30m), and the Offshore Development Company (N\$100m). Unemployment and corruption can no longer remain irritations to be shoved to the side. It is time for the wealth to be spread beyond the well-connected few that keep on being reshuffled as recipients of the nation's wealth.

The poor and "dum" people, quote unquote, have shown they are becoming tired of the nonchalance they are treated with. But it is not only the poor. It is also the educated (born-frees and others) who share this sentiment. While some may argue the youth have an entitlement syndrome, what should also be kept in mind is the madness of Namibian living costs. The cost of land has made it near impossible for even someone with a degree and a good job to make ends meet. I would, however, caution anyone against impulsive

references to things like referendums and revolutions in Namibia. For as with any strike or revolution things can get out of control so quickly and the unpredictable can lead to the unimaginable. So while people may feel they have nothing to lose, Namibia offers a great deal that may be lost due to a lack of thought-through action.

The good news for Namibia is the promises and potential of the incoming government. The lack of significant positive change for the poor and the growing lack of trust will hopefully be addressed in the new dispensation. Why do I say this? It will be the first time in history that Namibia has as many female lawmakers as we will now be getting. The hope is that progressive policies will be promoted. With Dr Geingob's relations to the business world we would hope equitable distribution of wealth can be expected so that fishing quotas and exploration licences will benefit a wider range of Namibians. Thirdly, the bloated civil service won't be business as usual – not with the requirement of service agreements where civil servants, including ministers and permanent secretaries, will be held accountable to actually deliver service. And let us not forget, the president elect is a Twitter man, so with voting electronically for the first time we can hope to fast-track into the digital age. Lastly, with Geingob's campaign slogan, "No-one should feel left out", the two new voices are definitely encouraged to partake in this new democracy.

By **Vida de Voss**