

# NAMCOL Market Survey

December 2020



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# Acronyms

NAMCOL	Namibian College of Open Learning
NDP5	Namibia's 5th National Development Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
ETSIP	Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme
CECD	Certificate in Early Childhood Development
DECPPE	Diploma in Early Childhood and Pre-Primary Education
DAPP	Development Aid from People to People
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNAM	University of Namibia
LMIP	Labour Market Intelligence Partnership
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
LMS	Learning Management System
BAYCD	Bachelor of Arts in Youth and Community Development

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## Background

NAMCOL is a public institution that was established through an Act of Parliament (Act No 1 of 1997) for the purpose of providing learning opportunities for adults and out-of-school youth. Since its inception, the College has grown phenomenally to become the biggest single education provider in the country, in terms of student enrolment. In Namibia, NAMCOL is widely recognised as the custodian of distance education. Over the years, the College has striven to be responsive to the educational and skills needs of the Namibian economy, in line with the Fifth National Development Plan (NDP5). In addition to the NDP5, the government has also put in place strategies that will support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

To address the human resource challenge, which is a major impediment to achieving the ideals of the NDP5 and the SDGs, the government mooted a 15-year Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP). The ETSIP was later integrated into the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture's strategic plans from 2010 and also streamlined within the Ministries of Higher Education, Training & Innovation and Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare. The provisions of this all-important ETSIP are now given expression through the strategic plans of these different ministries.

It is envisaged that through these ministerial plans, the government in partnership with donors, the private sector and civil society organisations, will be able to:

- Strengthen the supply of middle to high level skilled labour to meet labour market demands and support overall national development goals;
- Improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the general education and training system;
- Systematise knowledge creation and innovation to ensure adequate capacity for the production of knowledge to improve productivity growth;
- Improve the effectiveness, quality, efficiency and development-relevance of the tertiary education and training systems; and
- Strengthen the policy, legal and institutional frameworks to support equitable access to high quality and responsive adult learning.

NAMCOL seeks to improve its contribution to national development whilst at the same time it enhances its sustainability. In this regard, the College continues to scan the market in order to sharpen its programme focus. Accordingly, the College has identified new possible programmes to be offered in the near future. To ensure viability of these new programmes, NAMCOL commissioned *Saide* to conduct a market survey to inform the College on whether these newly identified programmes are in demand. The study also sought to establish whether the programmes are relevant for the country. All over the world, particularly in higher education, programme viability has increasingly become a key factor determining the bucket of programmes offered by any institution. This has seen many institutions closing down programmes that fail to attract critical numbers of students, and therefore are considered to be non-viable. Thus, market research has become one of the strategies commonly used to minimise the risk of developing programmes that fail to attract students.

The discourse on using financial viability as the major determinant of whether a programme should be offered or not is replete with contestations. On one hand, there are arguments that are in support of academic programmes being able to attract enough money to sustain themselves, irrespective of the contribution they make in the wider society. These market-induced processes, driven mainly by market

expansion, are informing what counts as valid knowledge and what disciplines to prioritise.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, there are arguments that are premised on the notion of education as a public good, which support the idea of publicly funding a programme of study even if it is not able to generate enough income to sustain itself. The latter school of thought criticises market ideologies for pushing for commercial interests that protect profits and not people.<sup>2</sup> In the process, as Yang (2003) argues, the market fails to safeguard the needs of those without money as it responds only with sensory equipment that can detect money and profits.<sup>3</sup> Thus, although market surveys have recently been popularized as a strategy for determining what academic programmes to offer, there is room for institutions and governments to also consider the social benefits of funding certain programmes of study.

In this study, particularly in developing research instruments, researchers were guided by key questions that will inform decisions to be made when it comes to introducing new academic programmes. These questions are:

- Is there a need for more graduates with the skills and knowledge that will be earned in this programme?
- In which sectors of the economy/society are the skills needed?
- Would this programme be more successful if offered through distance, online, face-to-face or blended approach?
- How can an institution gauge prospective students' interest?
- How can an institution differentiate its course offerings and stand out from competitors?
- How should an institution market its programmes?

## Methodology

Market surveys are aimed at collecting data from large numbers of the target population in order to understand the size of the market for a new product and the expectations of that market. The main method of collecting such data is therefore quantitative, although interviews and focus group workshops are also sometimes conducted with a limited number of identified stakeholders. In this study, Saide conducted both online and telephonic surveys. Online surveys generally have the advantage of reaching out to many research subjects. Their main disadvantage however is that they can only be used with research subjects who have access to online facilities. Generally, they also have a low return rate. Survey response rates in the 5% to 30% range are far more typical, especially where there is little person-to-person contact between the business and the customer, (Customer Thermometer, 2020)<sup>4</sup>. To make up for the possible low return rate of online surveys, Saide also conducted telephonic surveys. This involved field researchers phoning a sample of respondents drawn from the telephone directory and completing the questionnaire on the phone as they got answers to survey questions from respondents. This approach enabled the consultant to broaden its reach of the target population, including rural communities that were not reached by online surveys.

In addition to the surveys described above, the consultant also conducted interviews with identified stakeholders for each of the five programmes for which the market survey was done. NAMCOL identified

<sup>1</sup> Cloete, N., Bunting, I. and Kulati, T. (2000) Higher education leadership challenges in 1999. In Cloete, N., Kulati, T. & Phala, M. (eds.) Leadership and Institutional Change in Higher Education, CHET, Pretoria.

<sup>2</sup> Yang, R. (2003) Globalisation and higher education development: A critical analysis. In International Review of Education, Vol.49 (3-4) pp.270-286

<sup>3</sup> Yang, R (2003: 272)

<sup>4</sup> 2010 - 2020 Customer Thermometer Ltd - THE customer satisfaction survey: <https://www.customerthermometer.com/customer-surveys/average-survey-response-rate/#:~:text=A%20survey%20response%20rate%20of,range%20are%20far%20more%20typical>

these stakeholders, mainly on the basis of their particular interest in the different programmes. Since these interviews were only supplementary to the survey method, only thirty stakeholders were identified for all the five programmes. The main purpose of the interviews was to solicit respondents' views on the proposed new programmes: their relevance in the economy, their potential to attract students, and the competitiveness of NAMCOL on the education market.

## Literature Review

Market research has been used by businesses since about the 1930s as an adjunct to advertising. Its main purpose is to methodically gather information about potential customers and markets (McQuarrie, 2005). In the context of the current report, higher education institutions now collect data on potential students in order to meet their needs best. If an institution wants to offer new courses, and gain access to new student markets, a number of agencies provide advice on how to go about gathering data. RMS (2014) advises that **not** conducting some form of feasibility research before offering a new programme can be more costly than carrying out market research. RMS recommends three approaches:

- Conduct a competitive analysis of your local competition: What other institutions are offering similar programmes at the same level?
- Investigate the labour market demand through occupational supply and demand research.
- Survey the prospective student population to gauge interest in the potential programme.

Another market research organisation has produced *A University's Guide to Market Research: Three Key Data Types for Assessing the Viability of New Programs* (Emsi, 2015). This guide stresses the importance of offering new programmes in making institutions relevant and competitive, but points out that such offerings can be risky. Produced in the United States, the guide recommends investigating degree completion data, labour market data and business data to decide if a new offering will be viable or not. A third resource gives advice on applying market research to higher education course development (Martin, n.d.). The organisation (flex<sup>mr</sup>) advises institutions to identify the market, understand student needs, test course material, and monitor feedback from students.

The literature cited here is all from developed countries, and in the context of NAMCOL, their advice is not necessarily practicable. For example, the data that Emsi (2015) advises reviewing is not available in Namibia. However, all three sources stress the need to carry out some form of market research prior to embarking on developing new programmes. Thus, the surveys and interviews described in this report are a valuable way of determining the feasibility and potential of the courses which NAMCOL wishes to offer. Once the courses are proceeding, the advice on collecting student feedback should be considered by the college, as it will provide valuable data for further course development.

## Results

### B.Ed. Honours in ECD

The Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) Honours degree in Early Childhood Development (ECD) targets teachers who are responsible for nurturing the social, physical and educational development of pre-school and early grade children throughout Namibia. The prime aim of the programme is to produce teachers and child carers who have enough expertise to give such children sound grounding for educational achievement in life. Early Childhood Education has a significant lifelong impact on the physical, mental, emotional and cultural development of children. Thorough training of teachers at this phase is therefore important if children are to be set for success right from their tender ages. NAMCOL is currently offering a Certificate in Early Childhood Development (CECD) and a Diploma in Early Childhood and Pre-Primary Education (DECPPE) as a way of laying a sound foundation for the educational welfare of children in the country. In pursuance of this noble goal, the College aspires to introduce a higher qualification in the same area so as

to produce even better qualified teachers for this tender age group. At the same time, the Honours qualification will also provide a logical pathway for Diploma graduates to advance themselves in early childhood development.

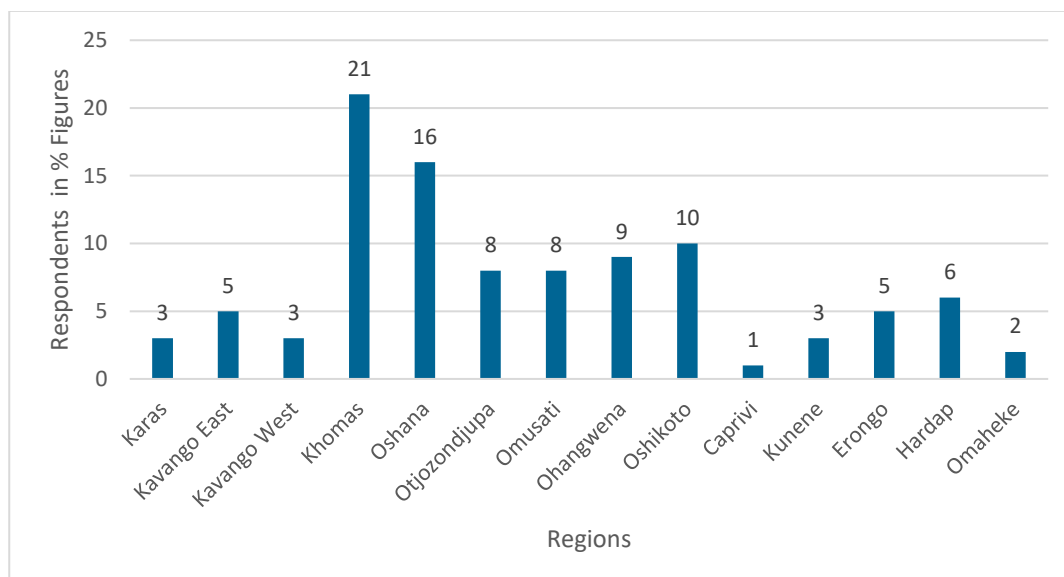
## Survey Results

As highlighted in the methodology section of this report, the market survey for this programme consisted of sending out surveys to the target group, conducting telephonic surveys and interviewing few identified key stakeholders in the area. The population for the survey were all NAMCOL students who went through the CECD and DECPPE programmes between 2017 and 2020. According to the NAMCOL database, this population was approximately 6705. In addition to this population, other private and public organisations that work with children were also surveyed telephonically to augment the online survey. Key individuals with knowledge about early childhood development were also interviewed in order to get their opinions on various aspects relating to the Honours programme. As is expected with surveys, especially when conducted online, 255 returns were received and 4 stakeholder organisations were interviewed. Although the return rate looks low from a statistical point of view, the results are still significant enough for purposes of informing decision making. This is because the survey returns are important in terms of showing opinion trends amongst the surveyed population.

In terms of gender, 10% males and 90% females were surveyed. This is not surprising as there is a general preponderance of female over male students at NAMCOL, a trend that is noticeable in most Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions internationally. The majority (44%) of the surveyed people were between 20 – 30 years old, followed by the 31-40 age group (41%). It is also noteworthy that 13% of the respondents were between 41 – 50 years old. Clearly, most of the respondents are young people below the age of 40 who still aspire to pursue education and the majority of them (72%) are still single.

The survey also tried to cover the entire country, in order to get the opinions of people from all over Namibia. Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents by political region.

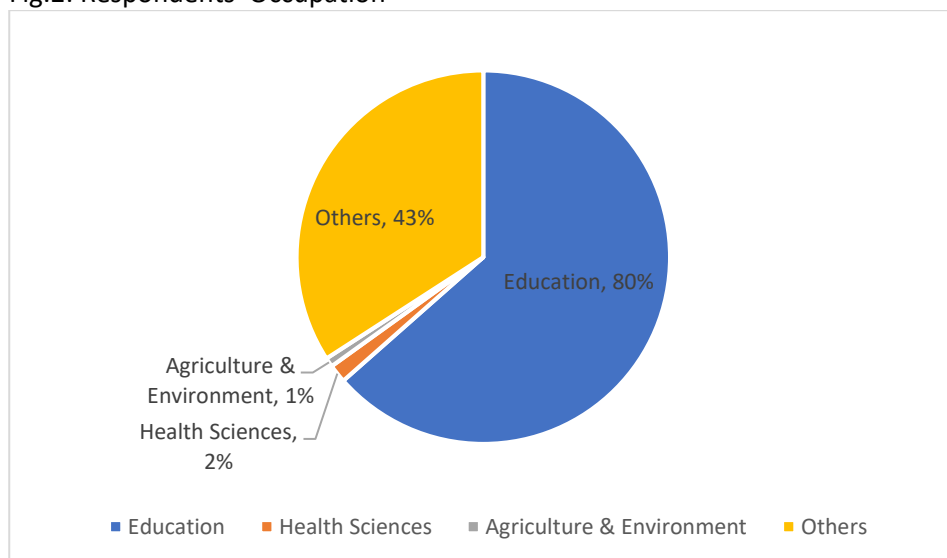
Fig. 1: Distribution of respondents by political region



The majority of respondents were from Khomas (21%), Oshana (16%) and Oshikoto (10%). However, it is important to note that all regions participated in the study and there was at least one respondent from every one of the 14 regions in the country.

In identifying respondents for the study, consideration was taken of the familiarity of the respondents with education generally and with child education in particular. This was to ensure that responses were based on some reasonable amount of knowledge and familiarity with the field. As Figure 2 below shows, the majority of survey respondents had some education background.

Fig.2: Respondents' Occupation



Eighty percent (80%) of the respondents had an education background. This is followed by 43% who indicated that their occupational background was “Other”. The following occupations were given as part of this answer: student at NAMCOL, Correctional Services Officer, pre-primary school specialist, disaster risk management officer, and Adult Education and Community Development officer.

Survey respondents were asked to give their views on whether NAMCOL should offer the Honours Degree in Early Childhood Development, and to explain why. An overwhelming majority (94%) responded affirmatively, 2% responded that the College should not offer the Honours programme and 4% were not sure whether NAMCOL should proceed to offer the programme.

Several reasons were given as to why NAMCOL should offer the programme, the main one being that the College has the capacity to offer such a programme. Only 3% of the respondents felt that NAMCOL does not have such capacity. Other common reasons given for NAMCOL to offer the Honours programme are captured in the textbox below:

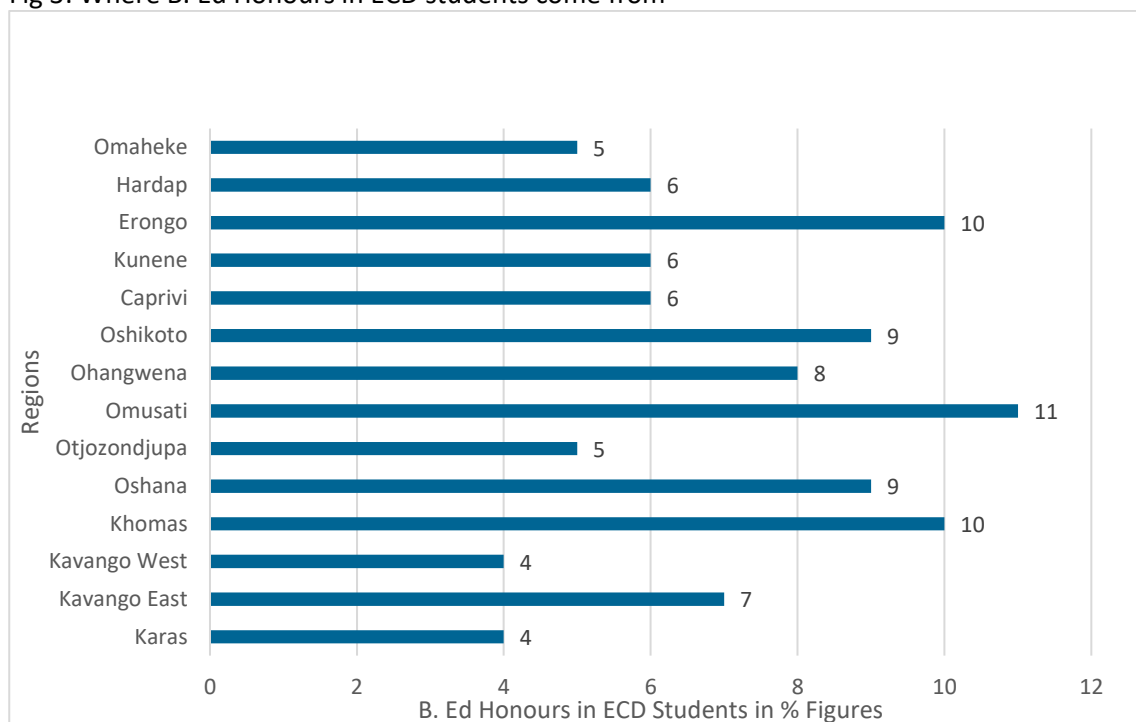
## Reasons why NAMCOL should offer the Honours Degree in Early Childhood Development

- Because NAMCOL is affordable and gives quality education,
- For better future of children;
- NAMCOL have provided their students with the useful study materials;
- Because I am one of the students who are doing DECPPE at NAMCOL, I still want to continue my studies;
- For the student that are completing their DECPPE to continue with the same institution;
- Because NAMCOL have lots of graduates who are willing to continue studying with the institution because of its effectiveness;
- So that as teachers, we are able to advance ourselves and become more competitive jobwise;
- I completed my Diploma in Early childhood that's why I just want to continue with NAMCOL again
- It will be a great advantage for people who are studying at NAMCOL already;
- Because other institutions are full and their entry requirements are too high. I have been waiting for this for so long; it will be a great opportunity;
- It is a fact that the nation needs well-trained teachers for the foundation phase. I believe that the challenges faced at upper primary and secondary level are a result of poor quality of the foundation phase. Early childhood development should be strengthened. We can't build a house on a weak foundation;
- There's a need for "educarers" in remote areas and they need to have the skills to work with children and to lay a good and rich foundation for primary education.

The most common reasons given are that people who study at certificate and diploma levels will have an opportunity to advance in the same area, the country needs well-qualified teachers for early childhood education and that NAMCOL offers programmes at affordable fees. In fact, it is important to note that 94% of the survey respondents indicated that they had done either the certificate or the diploma programme in ECD at NAMCOL. Ninety-four percent of respondents indicated that they are prepared to recommend the programme to their relatives and friends.

One of the reasons given by respondents as to why NAMCOL should offer the Honours programme is that there should be well-trained ECD teachers especially in the rural areas where children are less exposed to a stimulating environment. Such trained teachers know how children develop and what they need in order to develop holistically and get better prepared for schooling. The survey sought respondents' views on where they think most of the students for the Honours programme would come from. Responses in Figure 3 show that students are likely to come from all over the country, including rural areas.

Fig 3: Where B. Ed Honours in ECD students come from



Given the pattern of student participation displayed in Figure 3, NAMCOL’s Honours programme has great potential to make a positive impact in the education sector nationally. Countries with sound education systems, particularly at primary school level have mainstreamed early childhood education into the relevant education ministries and invested in the professional training of ECD teachers.

Further to the information on where students are likely to come from, respondents also indicated that graduates of the Honours programme in ECD are likely to secure employment in government and private schools throughout the country, in tertiary institutions like University of Namibia, and in private organisations that work with children. Sixty-five percent of the respondents reported that they saw at least one job posting in the field of Early Childhood Development whilst 35% reported that they didn’t see any.

Given that NAMCOL is an ODL institution, most respondents recommend that the Honours programme should be offered through a blended mode of delivery. They think that most of the studies should be done remotely from the College but with occasional face-to-face block sessions where students can have discussions with their peers and tutors. Some students however feel that such face-to-face sessions should be minimal and most of the interactions should be done using technology. These views are critical pointers at how NAMCOL should design the Honours programme in a way that makes it convenient for many students to participate whilst at the same time it remains cost-effective for the College. Many respondents seem to be quite amenable to using technology to access course resources, to interact with peers and tutors and to submit assignments.

### Interview Results

Key stakeholder organisations that were involved in this study through interviews are the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, Lifeline/Childline, Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, and some of the NAMCOL tutors who have experience with ECD programmes currently offered at the College. It is unfortunate that some of the stakeholders that had been earmarked for participation in the study, like UNICEF, were not available for interviews. Nonetheless, the views of those stakeholders that participated in the study will still be insightful on key issues that were pursued through interviews.

### **Do stakeholders think NAMCOL should offer the B. Ed Honours in ECD?**

All the people interviewed in the stakeholder organisations that participated in this study concurred that it is a good idea for NAMCOL to introduce the Honours programme in ECD. They all felt that offering the programme would help in professionalising the qualifications of teachers at the ECD level, a gap that needs to be plugged in the national education system. Interview quotations below exemplify typical views of these stakeholders:

#### David's response<sup>5</sup>

Yes, I completely support the idea. It is a good idea as the Degree programme would provide for graduates from the certificate and diploma programmes with opportunity for advancement.

David thinks offering the Honours programme will provide a pathway for certificate and diploma graduates to advance their qualifications in ECD.

#### Martha's view:

It is a good move; there is a qualification gap; most Edu caregivers do not have formal qualifications in ECD; better still, demand can be created by recognising ECD teaching as a profession.

Martha thinks that ECD care givers in Namibia need to be more qualified and the Honours programme helps professionalise ECD teaching.

#### Theresa's views:

People who take care of early childhood education should be qualified. Therefore, it is a good idea to offer this programme. About 70% of our children Edu carers are not educated, hence the Roger Federer intervention. It is more affordable for people to study through NAMCOL and the quality is good.

Theresa concurs with Martha on the need to enhance the professional skills of ECD teachers. She also thinks that it is a good idea for NAMCOL to offer the programme because the College's programmes are more affordable and therefore many people would get access it.

Another theme pursued through the study is whether the Honours programme is likely to attract enough students. Programme design and preparation are costly investments; it is only worthwhile if, in the end, enough students register on the programme. Interviewed respondents were quite optimistic that the Honours programme would attract many students, as there is demand for trained ECD teachers in the country. One respondent was of the view that to motivate more people to register for the programme, the government should professionalise ECD education. One respondent commented, "Definitely, certificate and diploma graduates would enrol on the degree programme". An important insight that came from one of the respondents is that fees levels will determine how many students will register on the programme. Alecia strongly believed that the determining factor will be the cost - how much it costs to enrol on the programme. She also believes that the pass rate will be an important factor influencing how attractive the programme will be. One strong argument respondents raised in favour of programme viability is that there are no institutions in Namibia that offer an Honours qualification in ECD. The closest programme they knew of is the Master's Degree in Pre-primary Education that is offered at the University of Namibia (UNAM). This programme is offered face-to-face and would be different from NAMCOL's proposed distance education

<sup>5</sup> Note that where names are used for interview quotations, they are not all pseudonyms.

programme. More people are likely to register for the distance education programme as it offers them flexibility to study whilst at the same time they work.

### **What mode of delivery should be used for the Honours Degree in ECD?**

Whilst research participants were unanimous that the programme should be offered flexibly, they also felt that there should be a small component of face-to-face encounters, especially for practical activities. They think that there should be opportunities for student internships and attachments, which are formally assessed. It would appear that NAMCOL should consider offering the programme through the blended mode.

### **Will graduates of the programme secure employment?**

Graduate employability is increasingly becoming a key aspect of higher education provision the world over. This aspect is directly linked to institutional responsiveness through the curriculum that is offered in a particular programme. As Wedekind and Mutereko, (2016:1)<sup>6</sup> argue,

Central to both student employability and the responsiveness of an institution to the various drivers is the curriculum. The curriculum is the medium through which knowledge is selected, translated and transferred, and it represents both the official intentions of an education institution and the lived experience of teaching and learning of the participants within the institution.

In this study, respondents' views were sought on whether graduates of the Honours programme would get employment in the country. One of the respondents reported that at the moment, getting employment is a challenge because ECD teaching is not fully recognised by Government as a profession. This speaks to key policy issues that need to be addressed in order to mainstream ECD in the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and elevate ECD teaching to professional status.

Overall, most respondents think that although there are challenges, graduates are most likely to be employed by the Ministry of Education. They also think that they can be self-employed or employed by private service providers or community organisations. An expert interviewed who works with ECD organisations in the country reported that the government has plans to have at least one ECD class at every primary school in the country. She thinks that if government implements this plan, graduates of the Honours degree programme will not have any problems in securing employment.

### **Programme funding**

As highlighted at the beginning of this report, programme funding is increasingly becoming a matter of concern in many institutions. Research participants were asked who they think should fund NAMCOL's Honours programme in ECD. Below are examples of responses research subjects gave on this matter:

Ellen's view:

If Government pays for teacher training, perhaps the same should be extended to students of this programme-but that may only happen when ECD is made part of the formal system, with ECD teaching recognised as a profession.

Mary's view:

I think government should fund the programme, through NSFAS. Students should apply for government funding.

Sarah's view:

<sup>6</sup> Wedekind, V. & Mutereko, S. (2016) Employability and Curriculum Responsiveness in Post-School Education and Training, Labour Market Intelligence Partnership (LMIP), Pretoria.

Should be government funded. NAMCOL should also facilitate some form of student loans.  
They can look for private organisations that are keen to fund students.

The general view held by respondents is that the government should subsidise the programme or at the very least, provide some form of student loans. This would enable many students to access the programme. Some respondents also felt that where students afford, they should pay fees upfront.

### **Respondents' general suggestions**

Researchers gave respondents an opportunity to make open suggestions on the idea of NAMCOL offering a B. Ed Honours Degree in ECD. Various people interviewed in this regard raised valuable points. The first point relates to flexibility of entry requirements. Respondents are of the view that NAMCOL should consider how the current unqualified and underqualified ECD teachers (for example those with Grade 9) can be given an opportunity to advance and finally attain a formal degree qualification. The College should look into possibilities of accepting students on the basis of recognition of prior learning (RPL). As an ODL institution, it is expected that the College will design the programme in such a way that there will be flexible entry requirements to the programme.

Another key point that was raised is the issue of language. Respondents think that NAMCOL should also consider how mother tongue will be dealt with since mother tongue is the official language used at ECD level and in primary school up to the third grade. Namibia has many different local languages which vary according to regions. In addition to mother tongue, respondents also think it is important that Honours students be proficient in English, therefore they suggest that NAMCOL should build in a compulsory course in English, possibly a communication skills course. They also think that students should be taken through an academic writing course, especially at the beginning of the programme.

Of course, programme affordability came up many times during interviews. Respondents think that to broaden accessibility, the fees should be affordable. This links directly to what was reported above on programme funding.

Lastly, respondents think that it is important for NAMCOL to liaise with government and influence a conducive policy environment in the ECD sector. This would go a long way in making the programme popular and in improving employment opportunities for ECD graduates.

### **Conclusions**

Research data show that ECD is a key area in Namibia where more investment in terms of human resource development is needed. Offering the Honours programme at ECD level is seen as an important development that plugs an existing gap in education. People also show confidence in the ability of NAMCOL to offer the programme, given that the College is successfully offering related qualifications at Certificate and Diploma levels already. There is a general feeling that the Honours programme would provide a good opportunity for Certificate and Diploma programmes to advance academically. Thus, the programme has great potential to attract enough students.

## **B. Ed Honours in Primary Education**

One of the programmes NAMCOL has identified for possible offering in the near future is the Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) Honours Degree in Primary Education. This programme targets teachers and other personnel with an interest in Primary Education in the country. The aim of the programme is to build solid foundations for teaching and learning in primary schools. It is envisaged that the programme will offer in-depth understanding of the complex processes of learning based on sound professional engagement with theory, research and practice. Thus, the B. Ed Honours Degree in Primary Education will position primary school practitioners more appropriately for the fast- changing environment in the education sector. The

programme will develop capacities required by educators to work in a technology environment. International trend is that teaching and learning processes are being strengthened through increased use of educational technologies. These technologies have profound influence on pedagogical approaches that are used in education, which are aimed at developing critical thinking and problem solving skills in learners. One of the international gurus in using technology to enhance children's problem solving skills, Mac Prensky argues that 21st century skills like communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking need to be given the attention that they deserve on the curriculum, (Prensky cited in Singh, 2014:52). The same author argues that entrepreneurship, problem-solving and self-direction are skills which will be needed to help learners thrive in emerging work and educational environments, (Prensky cited in Singh, 2020:52). Unless teachers are well trained and inducted in these new ways of educating, they will continue to produce learners who lack the competencies that are needed not only for life-long learning, but also for the work environment. They need to harness the affordances of educational technologies in order to adequately prepare learners for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The way teachers implement the curriculum in the classroom has profound influence on the skills learners pick from school education. As Singh argues:

Young people also must be equipped with the set of skills and competencies related to knowledge management which is suited to the knowledge economies. These include processes related to information selection, acquisition, integration, analysis and sharing in socially networked environments. These skills are supported by information and communication technology (OECD, 2009). According to Peters (1999), a "paradigm shift" in education would mean that certain models or patterns no longer exist as they have been substituted by new models and patterns which significantly differ from the old ones. He was also of the view that distance education will have to orient itself and develop new instructive structures. The ODL system, especially in the last two decades, has seen a paradigm shift which highlights open and distance education as a fertile land for *innovation, experimentation, and creativity*, which are all 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, (Singh, 2020: 53)<sup>7</sup>.

The foregoing paragraphs put the NAMCOL B. Ed Honours in Primary Education programme within a broad international perspective. They help show important changes that are happening in education, which teachers and other education practitioners need to understand in order to make education relevant. Education and training institutions like NAMCOL need to support efforts at keeping teachers updated with key developments in the field. It is envisaged that the B. Ed Honours Degree in Primary Education curriculum will be informed by latest developments and trends in education.

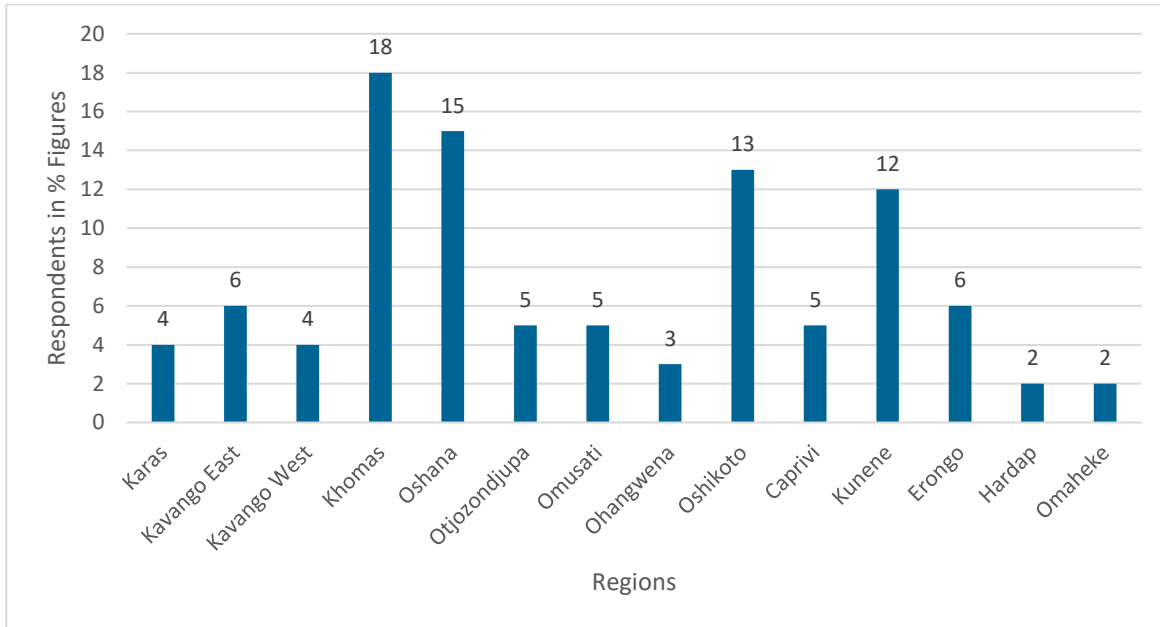
## Survey Results

The population targeted in the market survey for the B. Ed Honours in Primary Education consisted of all students who went through the NAMCOL Certificate in Early Childhood Development (CECD) and Diploma in Early Childhood and Pre-Primary Education (DECPPE) programmes between 2017 and 2020. The rationale behind targeting this population was that early childhood development generally overlaps between pre-school and early primary grade education. Teachers who handle early grade learners need to know what these infants are capable of mastering and how best they should be handled. At the same time, they also need to have sound knowledge of the primary school curriculum which these infants go through. In terms of size, the population targeted by the survey was 6705. A total of 184 responses were received of which 78% were females and 22% were males. Like in the Honours ECD programme, the majority of respondents were between 20 – 30 years old (43%) and 31- 40 years (40%). Eleven percent of the respondents were aged between 41 and 50 years. Thus, most of the respondents (83%) are young people

<sup>7</sup> Singh, R. K. (2020) Curriculum and Open Schooling. In Mays & Singh (eds.) *Addressing the Learning Needs of Out of School Children and Youth through Expansion of Open Schooling*, COL, Vancouver, pp. 39-57.

who are still aspiring to study for higher qualifications in order to enhance their life chances. Seventy-five percent of them were still single, 21% were married and 4% had separated with their spouses.

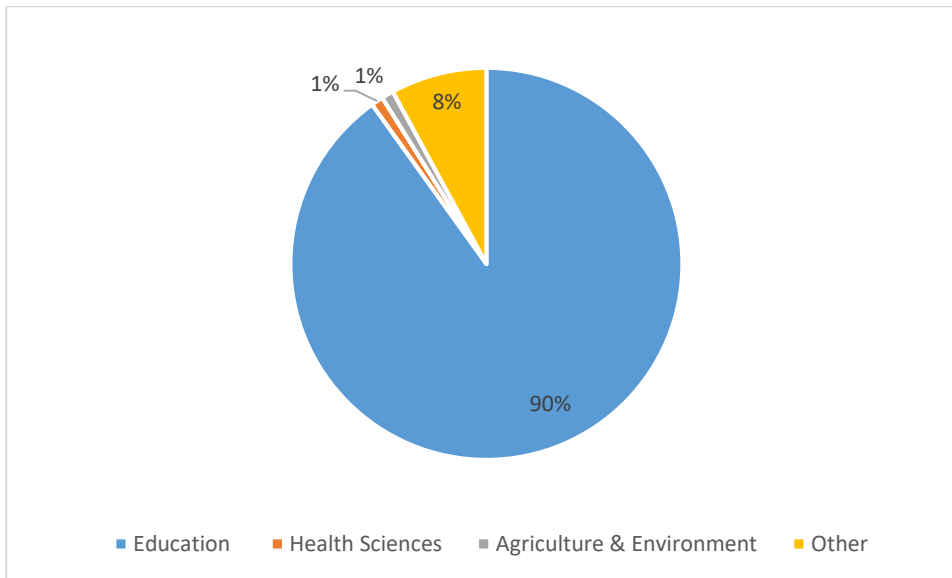
Fig. 4: Distribution of respondents to the B. Ed Honours in Primary Education programme by regions



The majority of the respondents were from the Khomas region (18%), followed by 15% from Oshana and 13% from Oshikoto Region. Figure 4 above shows that survey respondents were fairly distributed across all the 14 regions in the country.

Since this was an Education programme, the majority of participants targeted in the survey had some knowledge of or an interest in education. Figure 5 below shows the occupational backgrounds of people who responded to the survey.

Fig. 5: Percentage of occupations of respondents to the survey as a percentage



The majority of respondents (90%) were from Education, 8% were from “Other” occupations, and a paltry 2% from Health Sciences and Agriculture and the Environment combined. The composition of respondents shows that people with Education as their main occupation/interest were targeted by the survey. Fifty-four (54%) percent of these respondents knew of at least one institution in the country where a similar programme is offered and 46% didn’t know of any such institution. This question on institutions that offer a similar programme to the B. Ed Honours NAMCOL is planning to offer has significance in terms of the potential competition the College is likely to face on the market. This is a crucial factor NAMCOL should consider before offering the programme. If the programme is offered in other local institutions, NAMCOL would need to design a unique programme that does not duplicate what already exists. The general perception of survey respondents was that NAMCOL should proceed to offer the programme. This view was held by 92% of the respondents, compared to 2% who felt otherwise, and 6% that was not sure. Various reasons were given in support of this view, and these included that:

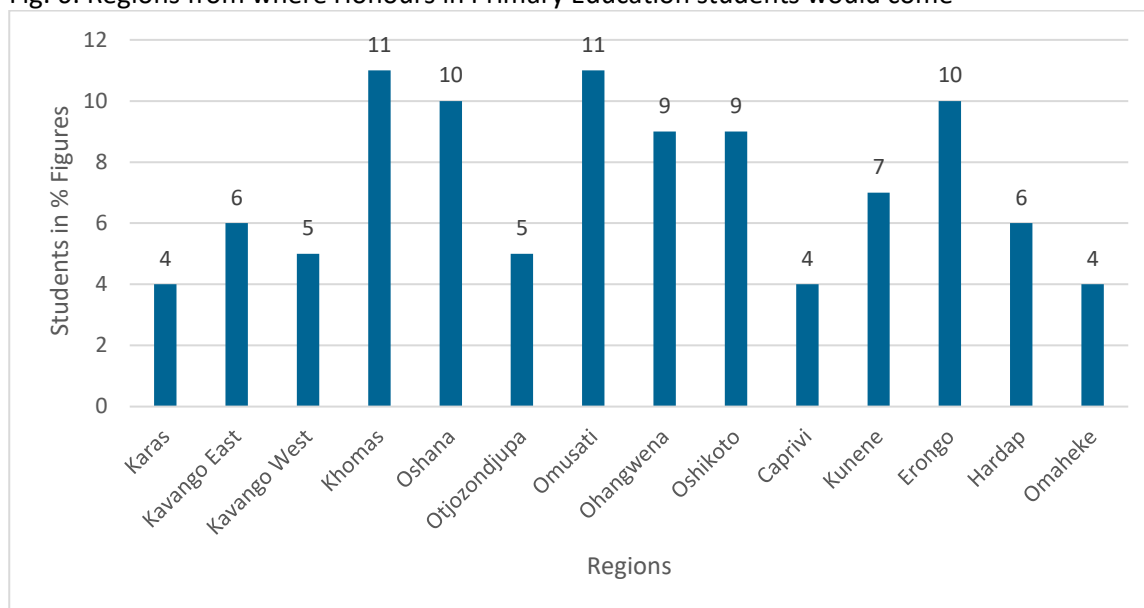
- NAMCOL is affordable as compared to the University of Namibia, which is very expensive; besides, when I finish my diploma in pre-primary education I want to proceed through NAMCOL;
- It is not good to re-apply to other institutions for B. Ed;
- NAMCOL provides quality education compared to other colleges around;
- NAMCOL study materials are simplified and easy to use;
- There is lack of graduate d teachers in the education system;
- NAMCOL is well resourced;
- NAMCOL has low entry requirements, which cater for students with fewer points in grade 12;

Ninety-six percent of the respondents were confident that if NAMCOL offers the programme, it would get enough students. Also, the majority of respondents (85%) were confident that NAMCOL had the capacity to offer such a programme, especially through distance. This is mainly because respondents feel that NAMCOL is well experienced in distance education provision and has systems in place. Only 13% of the respondents was not sure if the College has sufficient capacity, and an insignificant 3% doubted the College’s capacity to roll out the B. Ed Honours programme. In addition, an overwhelming 98% reported that they would recommend the programme to their relatives and friends, if NAMCOL offers the programme.

In line with the College’s aim of supporting development at national level, and in particular Sustainable Development Goal 4 on ensuring that quality and equitable education is provided to all, the study sought respondents’ views on whether graduates from the Honours in Primary Education would benefit the whole

country. Figure 6 below shows respondents' views on the relative number of students that would come from the various regions of the country.

Fig. 6: Regions from where Honours in Primary Education students would come



Whilst regions like Khomas and Omusati are expected to dominate in terms of number of students who will register on the programme, respondents expect that there will be fair representation of all regions on the programme. Thus, the NAMCOL's programme is likely to benefit all the regions in the country in terms of supplying well-qualified primary school teachers with a B. Ed Honours qualification. Asked where the graduates would work in these regions, research participants mentioned areas like schools, Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture offices; Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare. They also expect some of the graduates to work in other countries in the region. In these areas, graduates would be employed as teachers, Heads of Departments, Academic or Curriculum Advisors, and Education Officers (Inspectors). Seventy-nine percent of respondents reported that they had seen at least one job posting relevant for the B. Ed Honours qualification in the past twelve months.

A striking finding of this study is that although participants are fully aware that NAMCOL is an ODL institution, the majority of them (43%) prefer the College to offer the programme through blended learning rather than through purely distance education. Only 38% prefers the programme to be purely distance, with 18% opting for online delivery. Two percent prefers face-to-face.

**Aspects that need to improve at NAMCOL for the Honors degree to run smoothly**

Respondents were given the option to suggest what NAMCOL needs to improve for the Honours in Primary Education to run smoothly. Suggestions that were given are in the text box below:

- There should be qualified tutors with at least a Master's qualification, including in the regions.
- NAMCOL should provide materials on time as well as memoranda of assignments.
- Communication with students should improve.
- There should be enough online support for students.
- There should be enough computers for students at study centers, with reliable internet.
- Provide friendly, competent, effective and welcoming student support officials.
- NAMCOL should provide students with study loans as well as laptops.
- The programme should be in line with the new curriculum and technology developments.

## Interview Results

For this programme, six organisations were identified for interviews but unfortunately, only four were available to participate. Key stakeholders that were interviewed about the B. Ed Honours programme are the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture; Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare; Lifeline/Childline and NAMCOL itself.

### Stakeholder views on offering the B. Ed Honours in Primary Education

The few people interviewed from stakeholder organisations that participated in the study were all in favour of NAMCOL introducing a B. Ed Honours in Primary Education. One of them, a senior official in the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture had this to say:

NAMCOL was established with a specific mandate. It is a good move as there is no need to stifle innovation and growth. Perhaps the NAMCOL Act may need to be revised if they are to become a university offering degrees; The Strategic Plan and governance would also need to be revised.

Whilst the respondent is positive about the introduction of a B. Ed Honours degree in Primary Education, she is aware of changes that need to be addressed to facilitate this process.

### Preferred Mode of delivery for the B. Ed Honours Degree in Primary Education

NAMCOL is perceived as an institution that is experienced in and competent enough to offer quality distance education. Respondents also believe that NAMCOL has well-decentralised support infrastructure to reach potential students in every corner of the country using technology. One of the key areas they cite is the College's ability to develop high quality teaching and learning materials that are relevant for independent learning, some of which are electronic. Such digital learning materials coupled with a functional Learning Management System (LMS) place the College favourably in terms of rolling out technology supported distance education programmes. In this regard, some of the respondents think it is a good idea for the College to offer the Honours in Primary Education programme online. There was also the suggestion for NAMCOL to offer the programme through blended learning, with block release sessions where students meet face-to-face with tutors. This trend was also noticed in respondents' views on the Honours Degree in ECD. This shows that the majority of people in Namibia still believe that conventional face-to-face education is superior to distance training.

On the question on whether there are likely to be enough students enrolling on the programme, all the respondents interviewed, including the senior official from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture were optimistic that the programme would attract enough students. One of the respondents had this to say:

There will be high demand, based on current enrolments on ECD and Pre-primary Diploma; the courses are cost-effective and the mode allows for people to have full time jobs and study at the same time.

Respondents also think that demand will be high for the programme as there are teachers with no degree qualifications who would want to advance their academic and professional qualifications. Whilst they were in support of the idea of introducing this new programme, some respondents were quick to point out that NAMCOL should look at what other institutions like UNAM are offering, and design a programme that is different. In fact, one of the respondents argued that the advantage of the qualification will depend on how different and unique (value addition) the NAMCOL qualification will be.

### **Graduate Employment**

This is a key question that was pursued through interviews. Generally, respondents felt that if the students are people who are already in employment, then securing employment would not be a problem. However, if the people who enrol on the programme are not employed and only aspire to secure employment after completing their studies, there may be no guarantee that they will secure employment after graduating. The official from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture pointed out that currently, Primary Education is oversubscribed in terms of teachers. For example, she reported that there are 600 qualified teachers, mostly from the Kavango Region who are unemployed and most regions are also overstaffed.

Another related challenge that came out through interviews is the issue of language. Given that policy in the country requires Grades 1 – 3 to be taught in the mother tongue, it is important for NAMCOL to consider offering different languages that are spoken in the different regions in the country, in addition to English. Whilst this is a huge challenge from a programme design perspective, it will make graduates more employable in the country.

### **Programme funding**

Like survey respondents, people interviewed also think that this programme should be partly funded by government, since it aims at improving the quality of teachers in schools. One of the respondents aptly put it, “Tertiary Education is expensive, there should be a combination to allow for higher enrolment”. Public support of the programme would go a long way in motivating more students to enrol on the programme, especially at the beginning. This would go a long way in elevating the general professional standing of teachers in the system. Cost-benefit studies in education link investment in human capital development with increased social and economic benefits.<sup>8</sup> This is a good reason why governments choose to invest in teacher professional advancement.

### **Respondents’ general suggestions**

One of the important suggestions that came out of the interviews is that NAMCOL should get and analyse the framework of Pre-primary education that was shared by the Ministries of Education, Arts and Culture and Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication so that they can align the Honours programme appropriately. Respondents also underscored the importance for the programme to address the real need so that graduates will not sit without jobs. If NAMCOL is to offer an Honours degree in Primary Education, it should be clear in terms of what is unique about the programme and what differentiates their programme from UNAM and private colleges. The College should not duplicate what is being offered in other institutions.

<sup>8</sup> Shaha, S. B. (2008) The rate of return to investment in education: a case study of polytechnic diploma graduates. Unpublished Master’s thesis

Also, the importance of professionalising teachers in the education system cannot be overemphasised.

## Conclusions

There is general agreement amongst both survey and interview respondents that it is a good idea for NAMCOL to offer the Honours Degree in Primary Education. Respondents also believe that there is need for the programme in the country, as teachers need to upgrade their qualifications in order to become more professional and cope with changes in the field. The results of the study also show that there is great potential for NAMCOL to attract enough students for the programme, if it does not duplicate what is already offered at UNAM. If NAMCOL offers the programme, it should complement rather duplicate what is currently on offer. Respondents familiar with the policy environment in Namibia also underscored the importance of revising relevant legal instruments in order to pave way for the College to offer degree programmes.

## Diploma in Sign Language

In its quest to support efforts at achieving inclusive development in the country, NAMCOL identified a Diploma in Sign Language as one of the new programmes that should be introduced in the near future. The aim of this program is to prepare students to enter the field of sign language interpreting as professionals who can make a significant contribution to the deaf community by providing sound interpreting services. The programme offers Namibians an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills about Namibian Sign Language, the Deaf community and Deaf Culture. It covers topics on Namibian Sign Language, Linguistics of Sign Language, Deaf Culture, the Interpreting process, role and work of interpreters in various settings, preparation for an interpreting assignment, and working with other professional interpreters.

## Survey Results

Respondents to the survey on the Diploma in Sign Language consisted of 83% Namibian and 17% non-Namibian citizens. The population that was targeted for the online survey was drawn from the NAMCOL database. It consisted of all the 129 students who went through the NAMCOL Diploma in Education for Development between 2017 and 2020. The rationale was that these people have sound understanding of issues in educational development in Namibia, including issues of inclusivity. Many education systems in Africa are characterised by their exclusive nature. Groups that are most difficult to reach, like the physically handicapped, the poor, and those in remote rural locations often lag behind as far as education is concerned. Amongst other things, Education for Development addresses these issues, including strategies, approaches and policy options that can be used to address this social anomaly. People who have gone through formal programmes on Education for Development are therefore well placed to give sound suggestions on programmes like Sign Language.

In addition to respondents that were identified in the NAMCOL data base, researchers also identified other relevant public and private organisations that work with the deaf. These organisations were included in the telephonic survey. However, Sign Language is a specialised area and hence the population targeted is relatively small.

In total, 82 survey returns were received. In terms of gender, 67% were females and 33% were males. Like in the other programmes, the majority (52%) were within the 20 – 30 age group and 21% were in the 31-40 age group. Eighteen percent of the respondents were above 41 years old and only 9% were below 20 years old. Eighty- one percent were married, 17% were single and 2% had separated with their spouses. Although the targeted base population was small, effort was made to reach people in all the regions of the country. Figure 7 below shows regions from where survey respondents came from:

**Fig. 7 Distribution of respondents to the Diploma in Sign Language survey by regions**

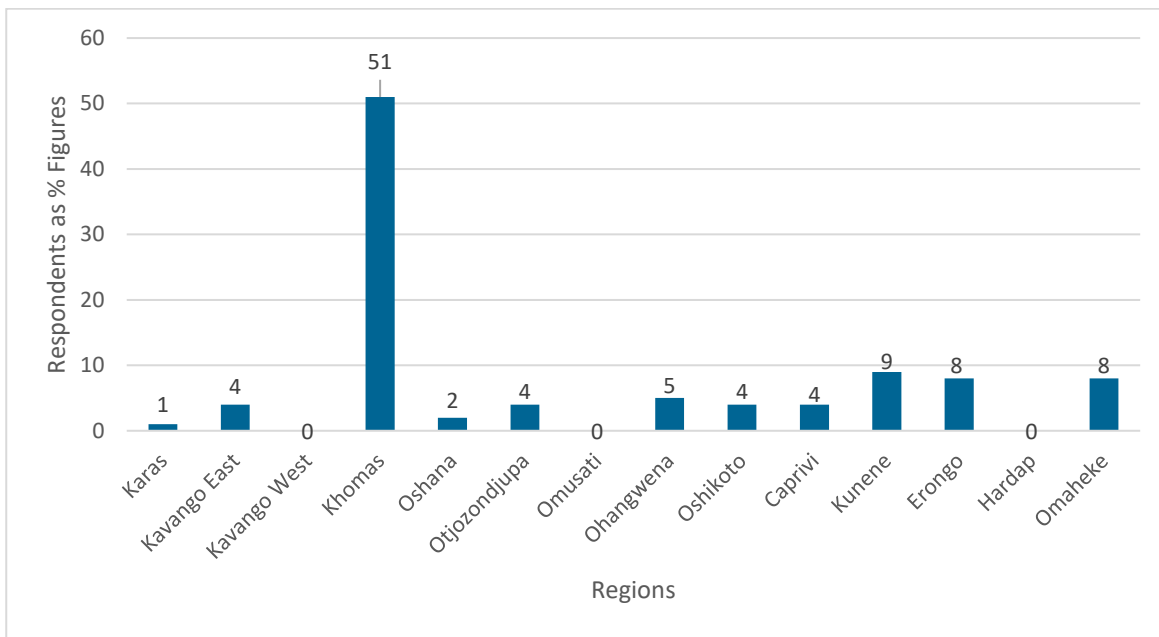
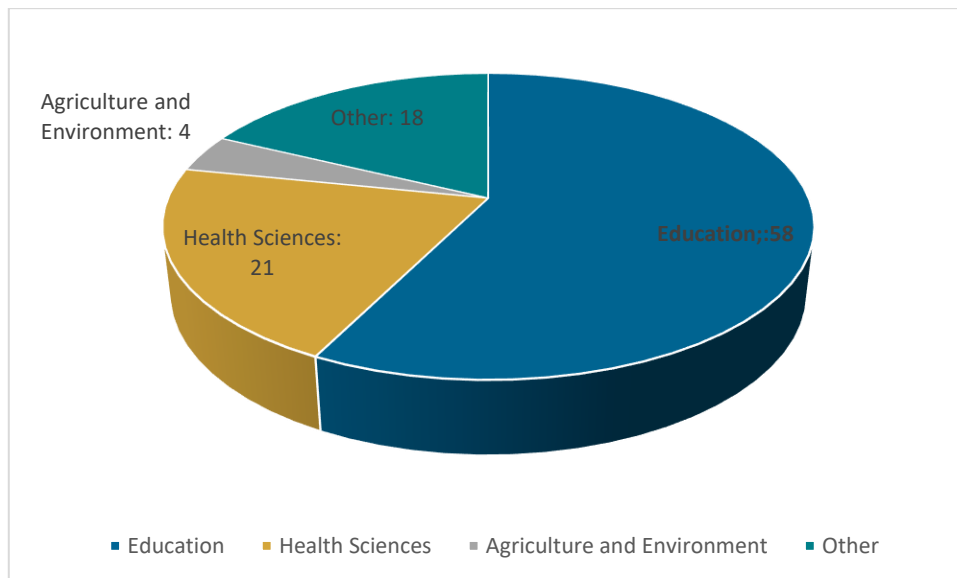


Figure 7 shows that there were respondents from all the country’s regions except Hardap, Kavango West and Omusati. Khomas region had significantly more respondents than any other region in the country. It is not clear why this was the case.

Figure 8 below shows the distribution of respondents to the Diploma in Sign Language survey by occupation.

**Fig.8: Respondents by Occupation in Percentage Figures**



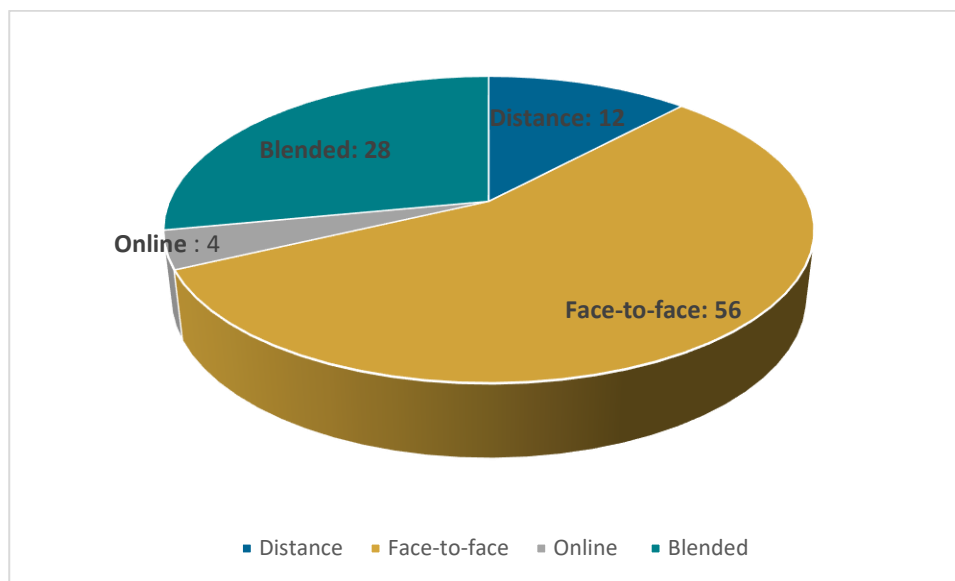
Based on the rationale given above, the majority of the respondents had their background in Education. A significant percentage of the respondents also had Health Sciences as its background. Those who reported “other” as their occupational background mentioned Early Childhood Development and Youth Development Work as their main areas of activity. Figure 8 above shows respondents by occupation.

Respondents were also asked for their opinions on whether it is a good idea for NAMCOL to offer a Diploma in Sign Language. An overwhelming 95% of the respondents thought that it is a good idea for NAMCOL to offer the Diploma in Sign language. Only 3% felt that it was not a good idea and 2% were not sure. The main reason given in support of offering the programme was that there is a need for sign language interpreters in Namibia. As will be noted below, where interview data is reported, the same view came out loudly through interviews. The other reason was that NAMCOL is one of the institutions in Namibia that improves the lives of many Namibians by making them professionals. This is because of the kind of programmes it offers and the wide access it provides through flexible delivery modes. The third reason was that offering the programme would see people who are sitting at home getting an opportunity to access education. The last two reasons speak to the all-important idea of developing the knowledge and skills of Namibians so as to make them more employable and productive in the economy.

Survey respondents generally showed confidence in the capacity of NAMCOL to offer this specialised programme. Seventy-seven percent expressed their confidence in the capacity of NAMCOL to offer a Diploma in Sign Language, 3% did not have confidence in the College’s ability to offer the programme, and 20% were not sure. An overwhelming 99% reported that if NAMCOL offers the programme, they would be prepared to recommend the programme to their friends and relatives. This shows the confidence that research subjects invest in NAMCOL as an education provider.

Figure 9 below shows that the majority (56%) of survey respondents preferred that if NAMCOL offers the programme, it should be through face-to-face.

Fig. 9: Preferred mode of delivery for the Diploma in Sign Language



Respondents were asked if they knew of any other institution in the country that offered a Diploma in Sign Language. Seventy-nine percent responded that they didn’t know of any such institution whilst 21% reported that they knew of at least one such institution. As will be shown in the interview data below, those that indicated that they knew of institutions that train in Sign Language could have been referring to short, non-accredited courses that are offered by some non-governmental organisations in the country. These results show that there are not many institutions in the country that offer a formal qualification in Sign language, hence the limited expertise in this area.

One of the key factors determining whether NAMCOL’s decision to offer the programme is graduate employability. Respondents mentioned several areas where they think graduates of the Diploma

programme would be employed. These included translation jobs in the various government ministries, like Justice, Health and Education. Some respondents also felt that sign language interpreters would be employed in schools and in television and radio stations in the fourteen regions of the country. Yet others believe that there are private organisations that work with the public, which need sign interpreters. Public gatherings like conferences and workshops also require sign interpreters and therefore provide employment opportunities for independent sign interpreters. The survey also required respondents to indicate whether they saw any job advertisement requiring sign language skills in the past six months. Seventy-two percent responded in the negative and 28% indicated that they had seen such job postings.

Like in the other two courses reported on above, respondents to the survey on Sign Language were asked to give their views on the top six regions they think students for the Sign Language programme would come from. Figure 10 below shows what respondents think about the main source regions for the students.

Fig. 10: Top six regions where students are expected to come from

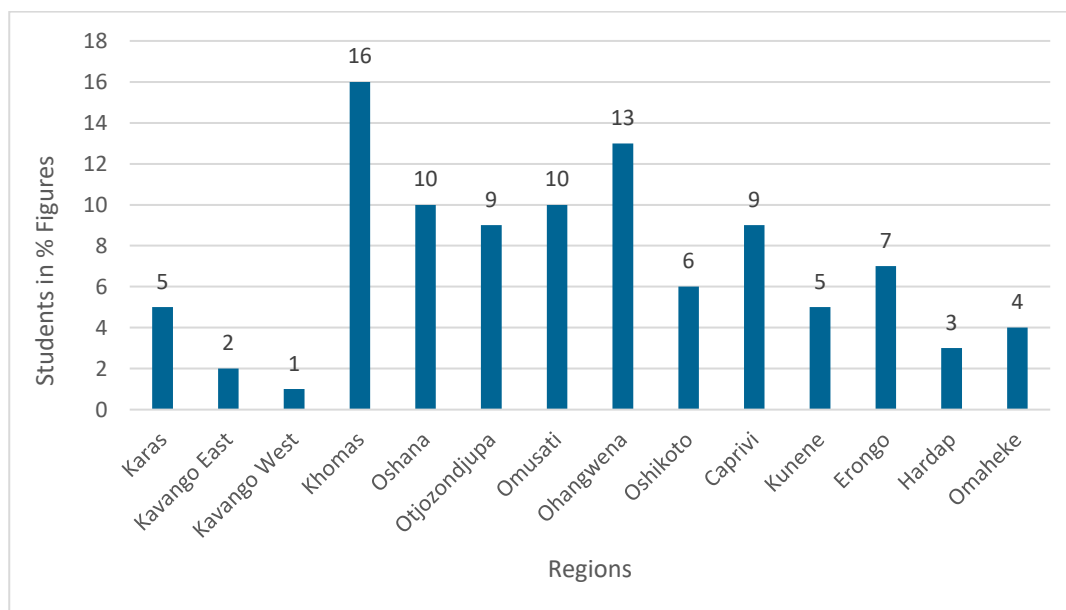


Figure 10 shows that the top six regions from where students for the Diploma in Sign Language are expected to come are Khomas, Ohangwena, Omusati, Oshana, Otjozondjupa and Caprivi. The two Kavango regions are expected to send the least percentage of students. The pattern shows that generally, NAMCOL’s Sign Language students are likely to come from all over the country. This indicates potential for the programme to benefit the entire Namibian society, particularly in terms of promoting inclusivity.

## Interview Results

Key stakeholder organisations that participated in interviews for the Diploma in Sign language are ClaSH, National Disability Council, Centre for Communication and Deaf Studies, Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare; Namibia Association of the Deaf, Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Lifeline/Childline Namibia, and University of Namibia-Disability Unit. All these stakeholder organisations work with deaf people in one way or another, and therefore have an interest in sign language, especially sign language interpretation.

### Stakeholders views on offering of the Diploma in Sign Language

Interviewed respondents concurred with surveyed research participants that offering a Diploma in Sign Language is a good idea. All of them were positive about NAMCOL's proposed initiative and as one respondent said, "It is an excellent idea, which is long overdue". The respondent from the Centre for Communication and Deaf Studies welcomed NAMCOL's proposed sign language programme as she thinks it goes a long way in mainstreaming the deaf in the economic and social activities in the country:

The Diploma in Sign Language interpreting will prepare interpreters already proficient in sign language. NAMCOL would be the first tertiary institution to offer this diploma, which can only be a benefit for Namibia. It will be an advantage to both deaf people and the hearing community; this will enable deaf people to have access to various services offered in the society, including education, health etc.; this course is long overdue as there is a real need in Namibia.

The interviewee from the National Disability Council underscored the need for such a programme in the country. He stressed the need to cater for the country's deaf community to empower it to actively participate in every facet of national development and engagement. He thinks that for this to happen, every sector should have sign language interpreters. He specifically cites examples of government ministries like Health, Judiciary and the Police. Respondents also suggested that the Diploma programme should target interpreters who are already doing related work so that they have standardised qualifications, as well as people who want to pursue sign language as a profession. They think it offers a good opportunity for people who received various forms of training in sign language to obtain formal, accredited qualifications that can be recognised internationally. The programme should also be opened to whosoever is interested in pursuing a career in sign language interpretation, especially the unemployed youths.

The study also sought research subjects' opinions on whether the Sign Language programme will get enough students, given its unique nature. One of the respondents from a private organisation thinks that there is huge interest in sign language and the Diploma would certainly attract large numbers of students.

We get many inquiries from people who want to know where they can learn sign language. But to be a sign language interpreter is a profession and it should be treated as such, with a code of conduct, which a diploma could develop.

Another respondent concurred that there is potential for the programme to attract enough students, given the need in the country. He was however quick to point out that for the programme to be popular, sign language interpretation should be recognised as a profession with employment opportunities.

Yet another respondent who is a senior government official in the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare informed researchers that:

As a government Directorate, we are advocating for the creation of positions for sign language interpreters in every government department and parastatal.

It is also the respondents' view that the programme will be attractive to many people who are doing courses in sign language at the National Association for the Deaf and at the Centre for Communication Studies in the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, as they need formal qualifications. It was clear during interviews that there is no institution in Namibia that currently offers an accredited qualification in Sign Language. This gives NAMCOL a competitive edge in terms of attracting students on their accredited Diploma programme.

Although respondents generally concur that the Diploma programme has great potential to attract many students, they also warn that much depends on NAMCOL's marketing strategy. The programme has to be marketed everywhere in the country so that all people get to know about it. As highlighted by respondents

for other surveyed programmes, many Namibians associate NAMCOL with its primary school programmes and they do not know about its tertiary/higher education programmes.

Respondents were asked what advantages there are in offering a Diploma qualification, as opposed to a certificate qualification. Generally, research subjects think that a higher qualification will add value by providing added knowledge and skills and will make graduates more marketable. One respondent said that higher qualifications enhance research in the area of sign language. This has implications on what NAMCOL should prioritise when they design the programme. Offering higher qualifications than a certificate will also provide opportunities for people to advance their qualifications locally, and not go to other countries for higher qualifications. The quotation below is from one of the respondents who supports the idea of offering not only a Diploma qualification, but also undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications locally.

There are no opportunities for advancement in the country; opportunities are found in SA at the University of Wits. There is need for the sign language training to be offered beyond a Diploma level; for example, when someone is studying for a degree, it is ideal that the interpreter be also qualified to a degree level.

However, some of the respondents were of the opinion that there should be shared responsibility between NAMCOL and UNAM in terms of building capacity in sign language in the country. In this regards, one respondent suggested that “If NAMCOL offers a Diploma programme, UNAM can then offer the programme at degree level”. In any case, there is the expectation that if NAMCOL rolls out the Diploma in Sign Language, there should be opportunities for graduates from that programme to do a degree in the same field within the country.

### **Preferred mode of delivery for the Diploma in Sign Language**

The mode of delivery NAMCOL will use for the Sign Language programme is very important as far as striking a balance between increasing access and achieving quality training is concerned. Whilst the majority of respondents interviewed think that the programme should be offered in a flexible manner, and appreciate the advantages of the distance mode of delivery, most of them seem to think that there needs to be some face-to-face component. Albert, one of the respondents had this to say; “A face-to-face component is necessary; if online, there is need for 3-dimensional images and visuals”.

Nicky gave similar views to Albert:

I think it should be a blend of distance and face-to-face. It is difficult to train practicals through distance, so that component should be done face-to-face.

Alice was of the opinion that both modes of delivery (distance and face-to-face) should be used to give many people an opportunity to advance.

Michael, who sounded to be a convert of the conventional face-to-face mode of delivery, was adamant that “face to face is ideal because this is a visual language”.

The responses above point at the importance of carefully planning how the Sign Language programme will be rolled out. Involvement of people with expertise in the area will be necessary in order to build in all the critical skills called for in the programme and make correct decisions on how those skills should be imparted to trainees. It is also worthwhile considering how the affordances of technology can be harnessed in order to learn skills that are commonly mastered through face-to-face interactions.

### **Graduate Employment**

The aspect of employment opportunities was reported under survey data results. It is also elaborated on here, based on what interviewed stakeholders had to say:

There is likely to be a lack of job opportunities because sign language skills have not been deemed necessary, for example, no ministry has created positions for sign language interpreters. Most sign language interpreters work as freelancers. Therefore, job opportunities may be a challenge unless various institutions, government and organisations recognise the value and need.

**Another respondent echoed:**

If sign language interpretation is recognised as a profession, there will be employment opportunities in every sector of the economy.

If positions are created in government and parastatals, as desired by the Division of Disability Affairs, employment opportunities will become available for graduates of the programme.

Clearly, there needs to be a major policy shift at national level that makes the creation of jobs across the economy possible. This helps in changing people's attitudes towards and general practice relating to sign language and the welfare of the deaf people in the society.

**Programme funding**

Some respondents linked the funding model of the programme to job availability. Martin, for instance had this to say regarding how the Sign Language programme should be funded:

If government is taken to task to create job opportunities, then students can pay privately but supported by public subsidies.

Other respondents were convinced that the programme would roll out more smoothly with funding from government. They suggested that Diploma students should access government loans through NASFAF. A suggestion was made for NAMCOL to discuss with the Disability Affairs office in the Office of the Vice President for funding, especially for the first cohort of students. Interested organisations like the National Disability Council and UNRPD can also be approached for funding.

The main message coming through interview data, as reported above is that NAMCOL should explore multiple sources of funding the programme in order to ensure that access is enhanced.

**Respondents' general suggestions**

Interview respondents gave a number of suggestions regarding the offering of the Diploma in Sign Language programme. One suggestion was that NAMCOL should not lower entry requirements even if the programme targets school leavers. Interviewees think that sign language interpretation requires prior professional knowledge and enrolling people who have had some basic training in the field, even if it is informal training, will help achieve high standards. It was also suggested that candidates of this programme should have sound command of English as the official language, and good mastery of relevant local languages as well. The issue of local languages featured prominently in interviews for the different programmes NAMCOL is planning to offer.

A key point that was raised by the Director of the National Disability Council is that NAMCOL should ensure that the Diploma programme is developed based on national and international benchmarks. This makes the programme internationally credible and allows for transnational movement of graduates either for further studies or for employment.

NAMCOL should also involve all stakeholders when it comes to the actual designing of the programme to enhance maximum collaboration and to complement rather than duplicate efforts. The point was made above that NAMCOL should consult deaf people, who should play a key role in advising of their needs, which should be fully catered for in the curriculum.

## Conclusions

Research results show that there is need for sign language interpreters in the country and providing training in this area will go a long way in building the needed human resource skills. Efforts being made by organisations like the National Association for the Deaf and the Centre for Communication Studies in the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture are commendable but recipients of the training need formal qualifications that are offered by an accredited institution. This makes them professional people and comparable to their colleagues in other countries. In light of this, research subjects feel that it is an excellent idea for NAMCOL to introduce the Diploma in Sign Language. What also came out clearly through interviews is that NAMCOL's proposed programme should focus on sign language interpretation. What needs to be given careful thinking is the mode of delivery. As Figure 9 above shows, the majority of surveyed respondents prefer the face-to-face delivery mode, which is at variance with the norm at NAMCOL. This has profound implications on the cost of the programme. More consultations need to be done, especially with the deaf community in order to decide on the best curriculum and how it should be delivered.

## Diploma in Working with Children and Youth

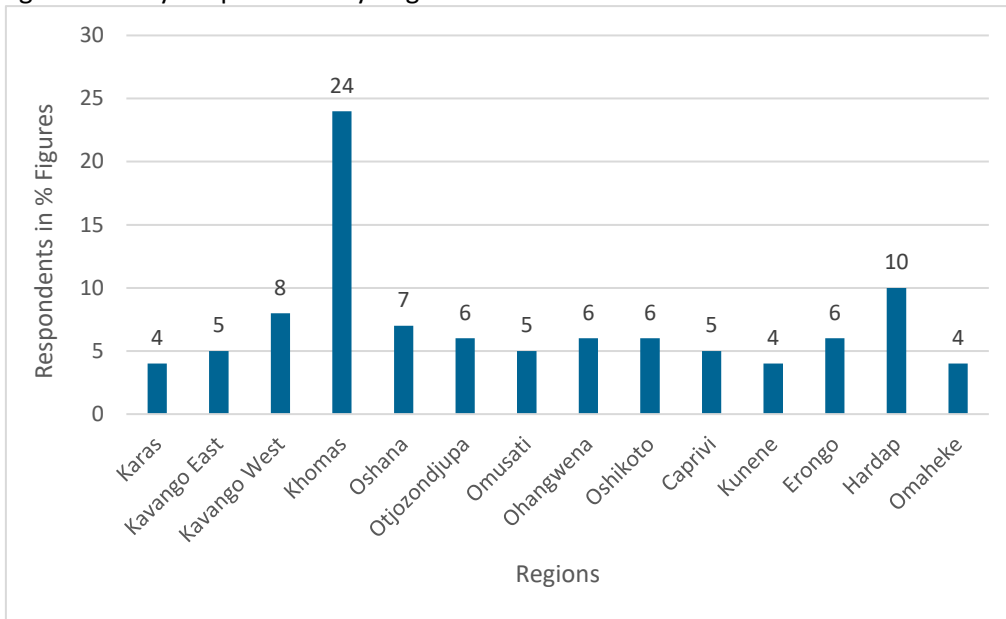
A Diploma in Working with Children and Youth is one of the new programmes that NAMCOL is planning to introduce. This programme promotes holistic development of children and youth in contexts of adversity. It aims at promoting understanding of conditions that prevail in harsh environments characterised by challenges like HIV and AIDS, poverty, conflict and displacement, and equipping youths with knowledge and social tools that enable them to cope with the challenges. Indeed, programmes that focus on children and youth help nurture young people so they can be capable of managing themselves and navigate their way towards becoming stable and mature beings who contribute towards social and economic development in society.

## Survey Results

The online survey for the Diploma in Working with Children and Youth was sent out to 169 past and current students who went through NAMCOL's Diploma in Youth Development Work (DYD) and the Bachelor of Arts in Youth and Community Development (BA:YCD) programmes between 2017 and 2020. The survey was also sent out to 128 students who went through the College's Bachelor of Arts in Youth in Development Work (BAYD) programme between 2018 and 2020. Thus, the online survey targeted 388 former and final year students in these three NAMCOL programmes. As reported in the methodology section of this report, researchers also conducted telephonic surveys in order to reach out to more people on the programme. Telephonic surveys targeted other stakeholders who were not necessarily NAMCOL former students. A total of 120 survey returns were realised and the analysis of survey data below is based on this number of returned surveys.

In terms of gender, 55% of the survey respondents were females whilst 45% were males. The majority of these respondents (72%) are young people who are between the ages of 20 and 40 years. Twenty seven percent were above 40 years old whilst only 1% was below 20 years old. As one would expect from such a population of youths, 59% were single and 33% were married. Four percent had separated with their spouses and another 4% had been widowed. Eighty-five percent were Namibian citizens and 15% were non-Namibians.

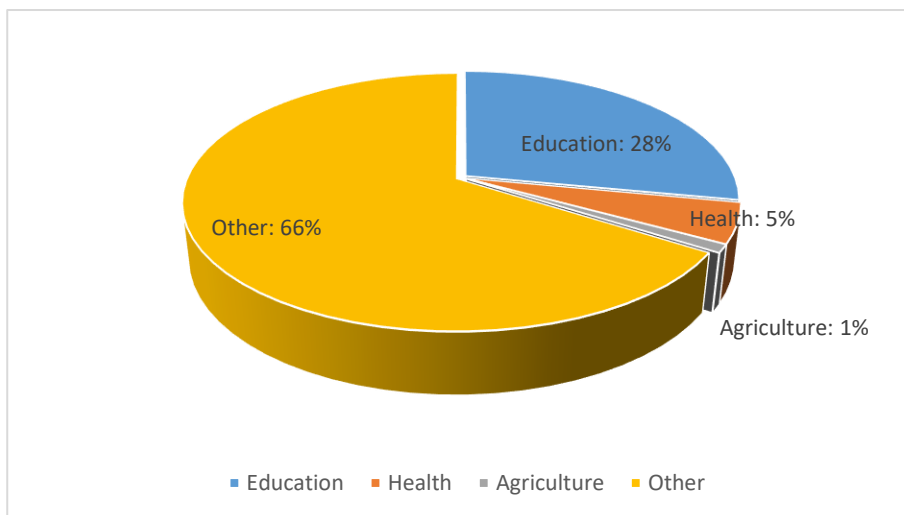
Fig. 11: Survey Respondents by Region



The pattern of spatial distribution of respondents resembles that of other programmes reported on above. With the exception of Khomas and Hardap that were dominant in terms of respondent representation, there was fair distribution of respondents across the rest of regions in the country. Figure 11 above shows the distribution of survey respondents by region.

The survey was for Working with Children and Youth, an area that calls for diverse skills and competencies. Respondents to the survey therefore had diverse occupational backgrounds as well, not predominantly Education, as was the case with the first three programmes reported on above. Figure 12 below shows the occupational backgrounds of the survey respondents for the Diploma in Working with Children and Youth:

Fig. 12: Respondents' Occupational Backgrounds



The 66% of respondents who indicated “Other” as their occupational background gave the following as their occupations:

- Public Administration;
- Social Work;
- Community Development;
- Retail and Distribution;

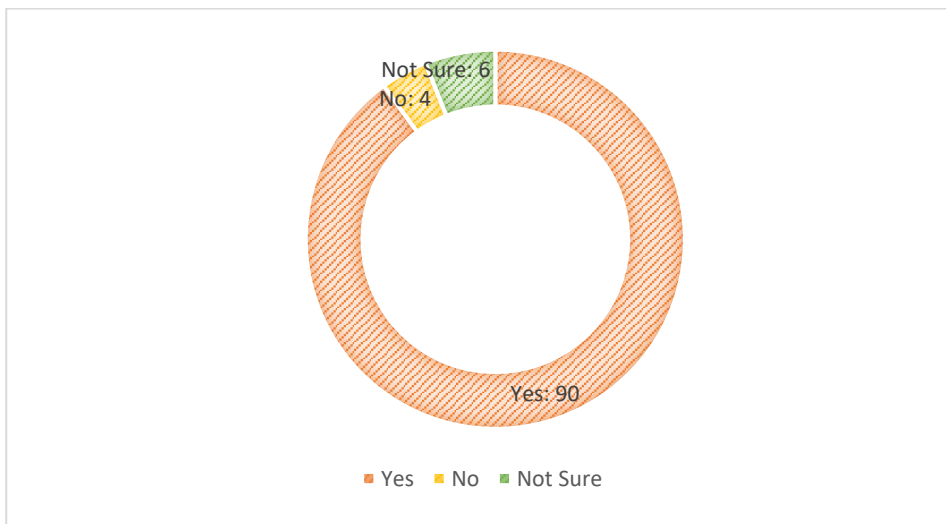
- Event Management;
- Hotel and Tourism Management; and
- Office Administration.

It is worth noting that some of the respondents were not keen to divulge their occupations. It is also important to note that only 19 people responded to the online survey; the rest were from the telephonic surveys.

Ninety percent of the respondents did not know of any institution in Namibia that offers a programme in Working with Children and Youth. The 10% that indicated that they knew of at least one institution that offers a similar programme mentioned the National Youth Council and the Ministry of Youth as institutions that offer a similar programme.

Based on what they knew about programme offerings in other institutions in the country, respondents were also asked to give their opinions on whether NAMCOL should offer the proposed Diploma programme. Figure 13 below shows what the respondents think:

Fig. 13: Respondents' views on whether NAMCOL should offer the Diploma Programme



An overwhelming majority (90%) supported the idea of NAMCOL offering the Diploma in Working with Children and Youth. The following reasons were given in support of this view:

- It will improve skills of people working with children and youth;
- Given the pandemic, there will be information required on dealing with the youth;
- The program will help the government fight against crime, poverty and drug abuse;
- Youth will be able to get educated and avoid dependence on parents;
- Most of the youth do not have a clear direction on what they should be doing in their life;
- Social services are down and there is a lot of passion killing and abuse;
- Because of the growth in child and youth related crimes;
- Youth should be invested into as they are the future of the country;
- This diploma is needed, there are a lot of unsolved challenges that youth and children face.

Generally, respondents think that the programme will help mould youths into more desirable and focused people who can make meaningful contribution in the development of the country. They also think that the programme is important as it helps build better leaders for the future of the country.

It is one thing for a programme to be relevant for an economy and another for an institution to have the capacity to offer the programme at an acceptable level of quality. In this study, the majority of surveyed respondents (82%) expressed their confidence in the capacity of NAMCOL to offer the Diploma in Working with Children and Youth at acceptable levels of quality, as is shown in Figure 14 below.

Fig. 14: NAMCOL’s capacity to offer the Diploma Programme

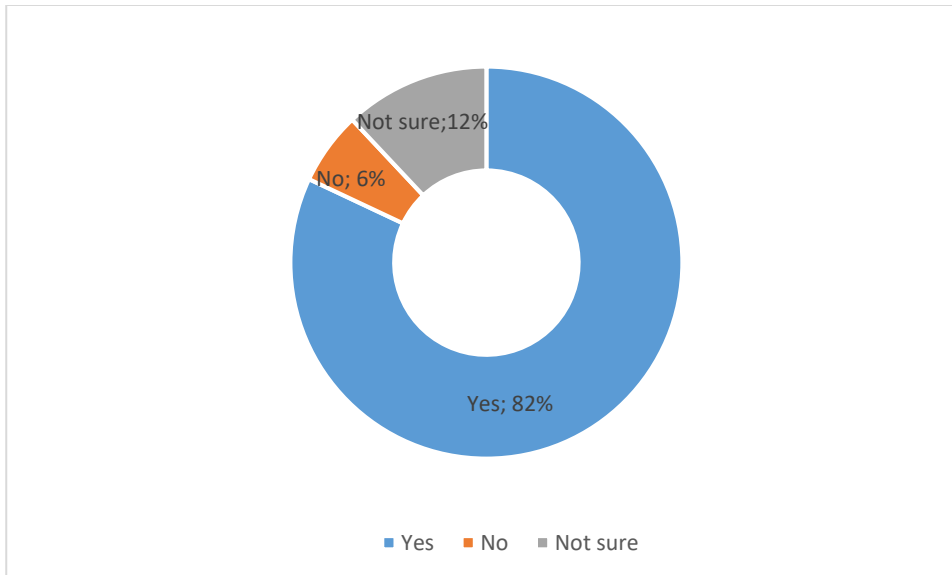
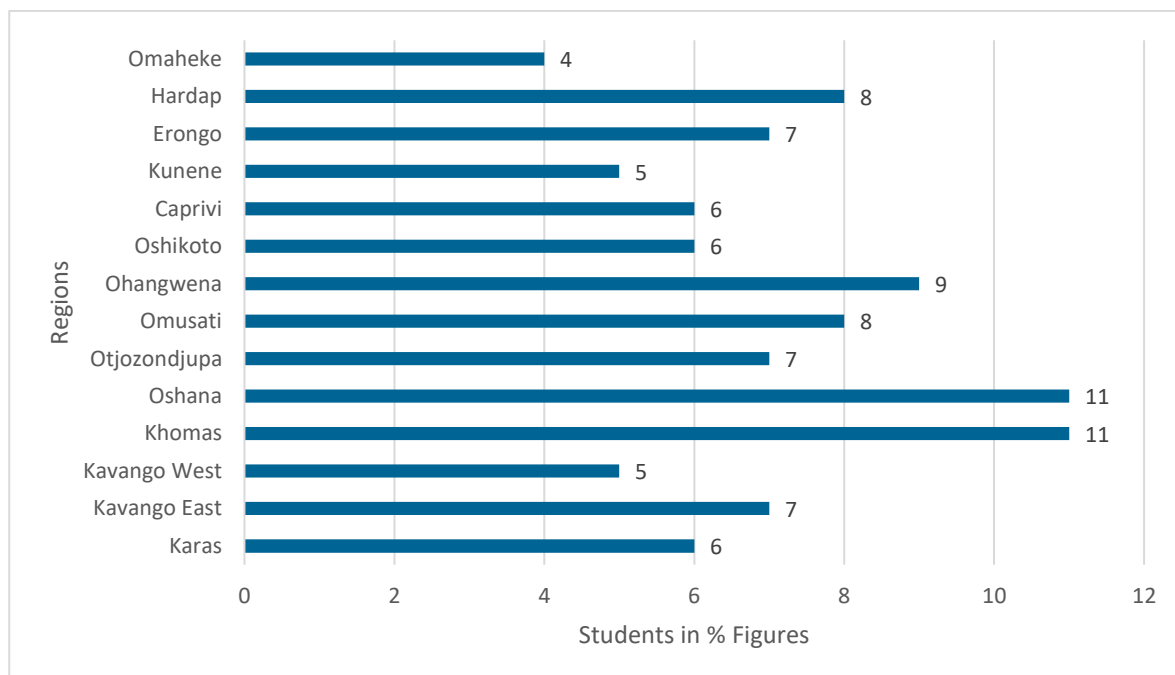


Figure 14 above shows the pattern of responses given by respondents on whether they thought NAMCOL has capacity to offer the Diploma in Working with Children and Youth. Ninety-four percent of the respondents also indicated that if the College introduces the programme, they would be happy to recommend it to their friends and relatives. This shows the confidence respondents have in the College.

Respondents were also asked to give their views on whether NAMCOL would attract enough students for the Diploma in Working with Children and Youth. Ninety-three percent of the respondents were confident that if NAMCOL introduces the Diploma programme in Working with Children and Youth, the programme will attract enough students. Only 5% thought otherwise and 2% said they were not sure. Respondents were asked to indicate regions where they think students will come from, a question that aims at assessing the spread of the impact of the programme in the society. Figure 15 below shows respondents’ views on expected source regions for the Diploma students.

Fig. 15: Regions from which students would come



The majority of students are expected to come from Khomas (11%) and Oshana (11%) regions. Omaheke, Kunene and Kavango West regions are expected to have the lowest number of students registering on the programme.

Forty-six percent of the respondents had come across a job posting that is in line with the Diploma qualification in the last 12 months. This suggests that there is need for the programme in the country and that graduates stand a good chance of securing employment after completing their studies. Respondents suggested possible areas where graduates from the Diploma programme are likely to get employment, and these include ECD Centres, Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Gender Equality & Child Welfare, Ministry of Safety and Security, and the Ministry of Sports, Youth & National Services. Respondents also think that Civic Societies, non-governmental organizations and Regional & Local Authorities are potential employers of people who qualify on the Diploma programme.

Most respondents (57.6%) prefer to have NAMCOL offering the Diploma programme using the blended learning approach. Only 20.3% preferred distance education and 18.6% preferred face-to-face. A paltry 3.4% preferred online provision.

Respondents also gave their suggestions on what needs to improve if NAMCOL is to offer the programme effectively enough. Respondents gave provision of online learning materials as one of the main suggestions. They also mentioned that qualified tutors should be engaged to support the programme. Practical exposure during the training process was given as the third suggestion. Since the majority suggested a blend of distance and face-to-face, they also suggested that there should be arrangements for block release on the programme.

Other important suggestions that were made are that NAMCOL should have an aggressive marketing strategy for the programme in order to get as many people as possible to know about it and to understand its importance in the economy. Linked to this point, is the importance for NAMCOL to review the programme regularly to ensure that it remains relevant for the changing economy. Lastly, respondents suggested that there should be community-based contact points for the programme to link students to day-to-day challenges faced by communities regarding children and youth.

## Interview data

For the Diploma in Working with Children and Youth, five stakeholder organisations were identified for involvement in interviews. These organisations were Church Alliance for Orphans, SOS Children's Village Association of Namibia, Dagbreek School, Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPPSI) and the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL). Of these organisations, only three were available to participate in interviews, namely Church Alliance for Orphans, SOS Children's Village Association of Namibia and NAMCOL. From these organizations, four people were interviewed.

### Stakeholder Views on Offering the Diploma in Working with Children and Youth

All the four people interviewed were in support of the idea of NAMCOL introducing a Diploma in Working with Children and Youth. There is striking convergence of opinion between the surveyed and the interviewed research subjects on this matter. One of the reasons given for supporting the move is that the Diploma programme builds on the Certificate programme currently offered by NAMCOL. Respondents think that this gives certificate graduates an opportunity to advance. One of the important factors for educational institutions to consider is the vertical and horizontal articulation of the programmes of study they develop and offer. Where such articulation is absent, students often run into a dead end after completing studies and this stifles academic development. Notwithstanding other factors, it is a good idea for NAMCOL to develop a programme that provides a pathway for certificate students to advance themselves.

Whilst respondents welcomed the idea of introducing a Diploma in Working with Children and Youth, one of them cautioned against the danger of graduate unemployment:

Great move based on concept of pro-education; have reservations regarding job opportunities because generally people enrol with a view towards employment

Survey respondents were optimistic that graduates from this programme would easily secure employment in the country and they even named some of the organisations that are potential employers, as reported above.

#### Is there need for the programme in the country?

Interviews respondents were of the opinion that the country needs people with a Diploma in working with children and youth. One respondent said that the programme is important as it fills a gap because there are people who work with youths but have no specific qualifications related to their work, like community and church workers. Another respondent spoke from a legal framework point of view:

It is a good idea to offer a Diploma in Working with Children and Youth because it gives students understanding of the **Child Care Protection Act, No.3 of 2015**.

The Child Care Protection Act, No.3 of 2015 is a legal framework that was brought into force on 30 January 2019, as amended by **Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act 1 of 2018** that was brought into force on 14 November 2019<sup>9</sup>. The purpose of this legal instrument is to promote and uphold the welfare of the child in Namibia. The response cited above was from a well-informed respondent who aspires to have the Namibian populace well acquainted with legal frameworks that guide practice in handling children. In this regard, she strongly believes that NAMCOL's proposed programme will go a long way in promoting this goal. The responded from SOS Children's Village concurred with the above view when she said:

Yes, there is need for the programme. It sensitises more people to the legal expectations of working with vulnerable children. There are many things that are not reported.

Respondents see the Diploma programme as a step towards creating awareness in people of the need to promote children's welfare, in accordance with the provisions of the Namibian laws.

<sup>9</sup> Republic of Namibia (2015:1) Child Care and Protection Act 3 of 2015, Government of Namibia:

[https://laws.parliament.na/cms\\_documents/child-care-and-protection-72c24aac08.pdf](https://laws.parliament.na/cms_documents/child-care-and-protection-72c24aac08.pdf)

### **Whom this Diploma programme should target**

Respondents think that there is a wide range of people who are potential targets for the NAMCOL Diploma programme. These people include teachers, community workers, school leaving youths, people working in orphanages and youth pastors. This range of potential enrollees on the programme has implications on the design of the programme, especially in terms of programme entry requirements.

Given the wide range of potential people to be targeted by the programme and the need highlighted by research subjects, NAMCOL's Diploma programme is likely to attract a lot of students. Respondents had the following to say regarding whether the programme will have enough students:

There will be enough students for the programme; people are looking for qualifications as a gateway to employment. Some of NAMCOL's programmes, like ECD are already oversubscribed.

There should be enough students because there are youths who like to do Psychology but don't meet the requirements. So, the Diploma would give them an opportunity to qualify for those programmes.

The programme will attract enough students, especially from the certificate graduates.

Interviewed subjects were optimistic that the Diploma programme would be popular enough to attract enough students.

When asked if they knew of any institutions that offer a similar qualification in the country, respondents indicated that they were not aware of any institution that offered a similar programme to the proposed Diploma. The few institutions they mentioned, like TRUSTCO and UNAM do not offer programmes with a specific focus on working with children and youths. UNAM, for example reportedly offers a module under Social Sciences, which speaks to children and youth issues; it does not offer a full programme in this area. So, the advantage with the NAMCOL Diploma is that it would offer a standalone qualification, which is more comprehensive. For this reason, it is likely to attract many students.

One of the questions researchers asked respondents was to clarify the advantages of offering a Diploma programme when NAMCOL is already offering a certificate qualification in the same area. Respondents were quite articulate in answering the question and related their answers to the Namibian context. As one would expect, an obvious response that was given by one respondent is that:

The Diploma programme will likely equip students better than a certificate; if registered with NQA, the Diploma will also likely articulate into related degree programmes.

The issue of producing graduates with better knowledge and skills is raised in the interview response cited above. Another responded put it:

I think it is important because a certificate is not enough. The country needs people that are more qualified.

The response below was from a respondent with an academic background and she highlights general expectations of employers in government departments regarding qualifications of employees:

The advantage is that people with diploma qualifications will qualify for positions in government departments. At the moment, certificate holders don't qualify. So, the advantage is to both graduates as well as to government.

### **Mode of delivery for the Diploma in Working with Children and Youth**

A trend that is emerging from all interview data for this study is that although people acknowledge that NAMCOL is an ODL institution, and that ODL offers better access to NAMCOL's programmes, they seem to

opt for occasional face-to-face sessions. The following are typical interview citations from some of the respondents:

NAMCOL's main approach is distance; but there is a need for face-to-face options, including on-the-job training, internship and real life situations so that the training is not just theoretical and removed from the real world.

To a certain extent, it should be face-to-face, with an online component. Distance does not give enough practice to students. Also, distance does not show whether a student is committed to working with children or youth. People doing this programme should be registered with the Health Professions Council of Namibia

It can still be offered through distance but with some block release or some synchronous online sessions, or videos showing the practical component. The diploma programme needs to have a strong practical component.

Respondents cite practical sessions as the main reason why the programme should be offered using a blended approach. However, some of them acknowledge that technology can be used as an alternative to having face-to-face sessions. In this regard, the ability of students to have ready access to reliable internet is important where such technology is used, especially if it involves use of video clips and synchronous support sessions.

Researchers explored interview respondents' views on employment opportunities for graduates from the Diploma programme. Their views concur with the views expressed by surveyed research subjects on this aspect. As reported in the survey results section above, the majority of surveyed respondents were confident that there is employment in the economy for people with skills and expertise in working with children and youth. Forty-six percent of survey respondents reported that they had come across a job posting relevant for the Diploma qualification in the last 12 months. Interview respondents cited the same potential employers that were reported in the survey results; the NGO sector; Government Ministries, private schools and community organisations that work directly with children and youths. Whilst research results show a promising picture about employment opportunities for graduates of the Diploma in Working with Children and Youth, it is important to realise the importance of having an enabling policy environment for such jobs to be created.

### **Programme funding**

Like with surveyed respondents, we also asked interviewed research subjects for their opinions on the funding of the programme. Their views were not any different from those of their surveyed counterparts. One respondent was of the opinion that it should be publicly funded since there is demand for people working with children and communities. The other one said that there should be a combination of public and private funding. She believed that private funding could come from private organisations. Whilst the general view was that there should be public funding since the programme is a public good project, one respondent felt that students should also make a contribution through fees so they can be committed to their studies:

Students should pay fees so that they value the studies, but supported by either a government subsidy or a government loan scheme.

One responded was emphatic about multiple sources of programme funding:

NAMCOL should be publicly funded but students should also pay fees. If NAMCOL advertises well enough, they can even attract donations and student bursaries for the programme. The challenge is that NAMCOL is not advertising its professional programmes adequately enough, not many people know of the programmes that the College offers. The majority of the people just associate NAMCOL with its schooling programme.

The issue of programme funding is a moot point in higher education discourse the world over. This has been particularly so in the past 10 years when many governments adopted austerity measures that forced them to slash subsidy to higher education. Under these conditions, institutions are therefore encouraged to find alternative sources of funding their academic project. One way of addressing this challenge is to enrol enough students who pay upfront fees to sustain a programme. Often, this is supported by study grants and donations from various stakeholders. This international discourse is echoed in the messages from research respondents of the current study.

### **General suggestions from respondent**

Interview respondents gave many suggestions regarding NAMCOL's plans to offer a Diploma in Working with Children and Youth. The first suggestion was that in designing the programme, NAMCOL should build in internships so as to equip trainees with appropriate practical skills required in working with children and youths. Respondents also suggested that the Diploma programme should build towards Social Work or Psychology qualifications so as to give graduates flexible pathways for advancement. A suggestion was made that NAMCOL should consider removing impeding requirements for entry to the programme, like experience. Entry requirements should be fairly open and the programme should be rolled out flexibly, without making face-to-face sessions compulsory.

Finally, the message was brought home through interviews that the programme is highly needed in the country because of the need to promote family and children's welfare. Respondents feel that this aspect is not visible in other institutions in the country and NAMCOL is uniquely positioned to promote such welfare. This is a message that speaks to institutional values and to the commitment of the College to the general upliftment of the Namibian society, especially the poor and vulnerable sector of the society. There is the expectation that this is what motivates NAMCOL to introduce this Diploma in Working with Children and Youth programme.

### **Conclusions**

Research results confirm that the Namibian society needs people who have professional expertise to work with children and youths. They also show that familiarity with the country's legal framework in so far as the handling and the rights of children and youth is concerned is fundamental to the promotion of the general welfare of children and youth. In this regard, NAMCOL's proposed Diploma in Working with Children and Youth is seen as a positive development. Respondents also believe that for the programme to roll out smoothly and attract many students, it is necessary to explore multiple funding options for the programme.

## **Community Health Workers Certificate in Psychosocial Support**

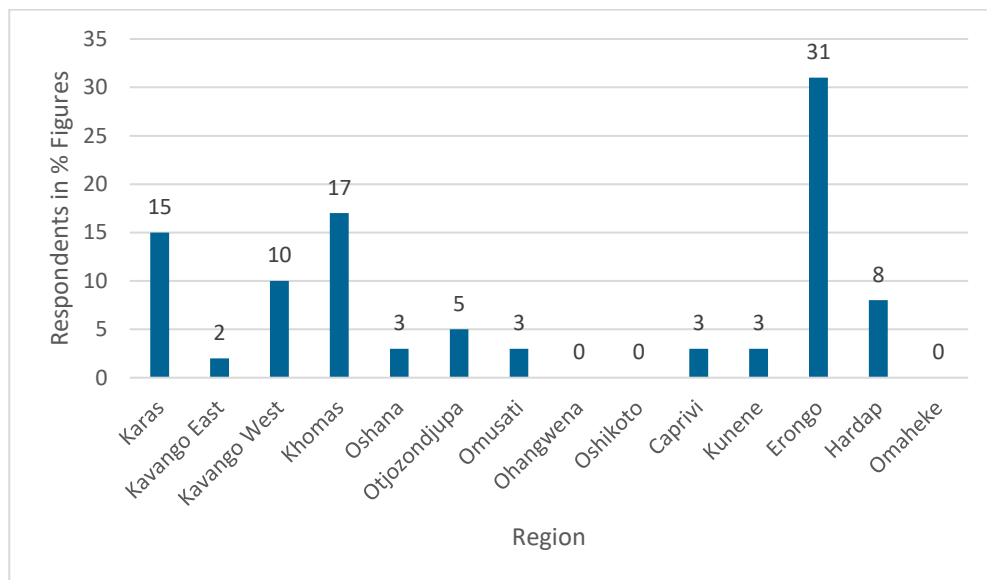
A Community Health Workers Certificate in Psychosocial Support is one of the new programmes that NAMCOL is planning to introduce in the near future. The aim of this programme is to prepare learners to work with children and communities in order to equip them with skills, knowledge and attitudes that make them more resilient to the psychosocial challenges they face in their lives. The programme consists of six different modules that are designed to promote knowledge and practical skills that enable graduates to work directly with children and youth living in difficult circumstances. Graduates of this programme will support communities to appreciate the importance of prevention from exposure to further risk while planning strategically for appropriate support and care.

### **Survey Results**

The last programme to be reported on in this report is the Community Health Workers Certificate in Psychosocial Support. NAMCOL does not offer any programme in this area at any qualification level. It was therefore difficult to define an appropriate target group from the College's current and past students. However, organisations that work in areas relating to psychosocial support were identified and surveyed.

Overall, 6 online and 56 telephonic survey returns were received for the programme. Of these respondents, 71% were female and 29% were males. Like in the other 4 programmes reported above, the majority of survey respondents (82%) were between 20 – 40 years old. Only 3% were below the age of 20 and 15% were above 40 years. Eighty-two percent were single, 15% were married, 2% were divorced and another 1% was widowed. All the respondents were Namibian citizens. The geographical distribution of survey respondents is shown in Figure 16 below.

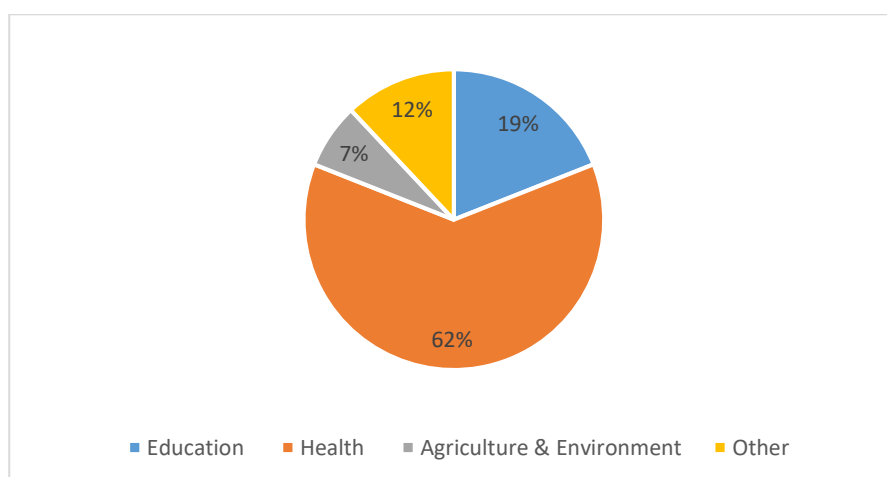
Fig. 16: Geographical distribution of survey respondents.



Survey respondents were predominantly from Erongo (31%), Khomas (17%) and Karas (15%). There were no respondents from Ohangwena, Oshikoto and Omaheke.

Occupational backgrounds of respondents are shown in Figure 17 below.

Fig. 17: Occupational backgrounds of respondents



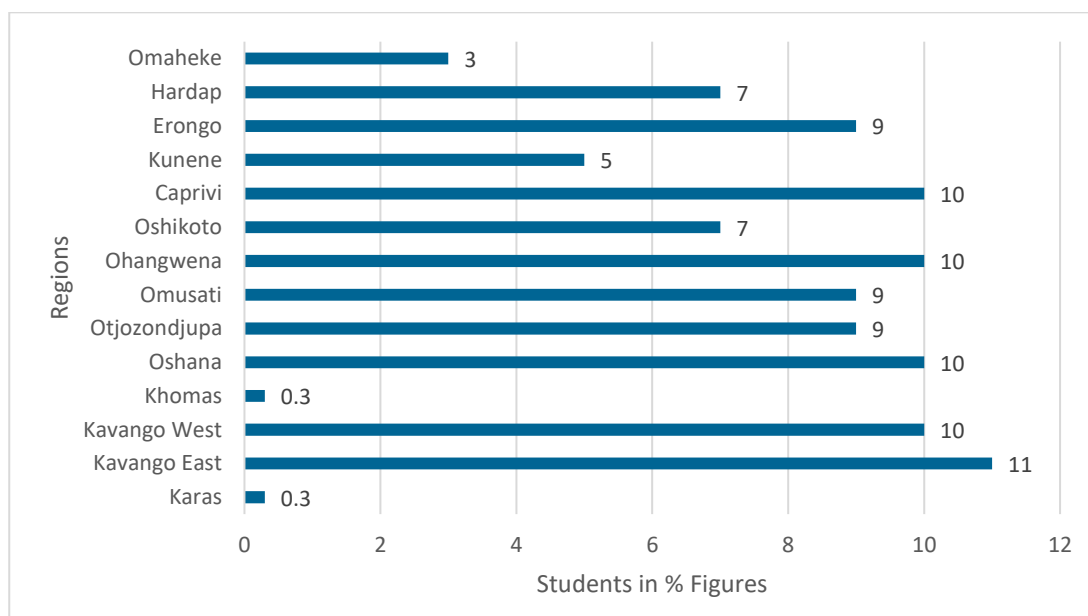
The majority of respondents (62%) had a Health related background. Psychosocial support is largely about health-related services; hence, the majority of stakeholders identified for the programme had a wellness background. Most of these respondents reported that they were not aware of any institution in Namibia that offers a similar programme to NAMCOL’s proposed Certificate in Psychosocial Support. Interestingly,

none of the 16% that reported that they knew of such an institution gave the name of the institution. It is clear from the responses that there is no institution offering a Community Health Workers Certificate in Psychosocial Support. This explains why 97% of the respondents indicated their support for NAMCOL to introduce the certificate programme. Other reasons given in support of this position are that currently, community health workers are ordinary people who are identified from within communities and they do not have any training at all. Offering the certificate programme would help equip these people with the required knowledge and skills to help vulnerable children.

Respondents believe that offering the certificate qualification will provide a basis for NAMCOL to develop a diploma programme in future. They also think that the formal qualification will make graduates more employable.

Ninety-eight percent of respondents was confident that if NAMCOL introduces the certificate programme, it would get enough students on board the programme. This is mainly because respondents think there is great need for trained people in this area. In their view, communities in all regions in the country are in dire need of trained people to work in psychosocial support. As shown in Figure 18 below, when asked which regions would be source regions for students of the programme, respondents believed that students would come from all the 14 regions of the country.

Fig. 18: Source regions for students for the Psychosocial Support programme

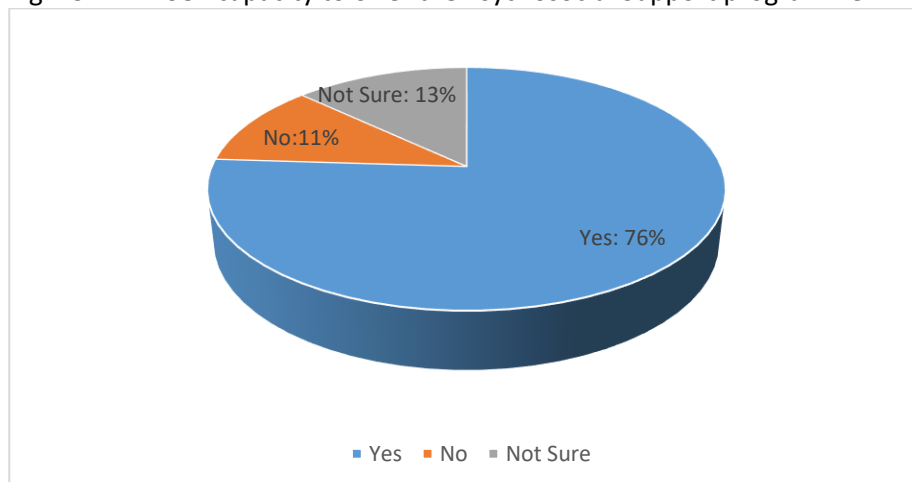


Respondents expect the majority of students for the psychosocial programme to come from Kavango East, Kavango West, Caprivi, Oshana and Ohangwena. They also expect Karas and Khomas regions to send the least number of students.

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether they thought graduates of the programme would find employment locally and where they thought they would be employed. They were of the opinion that employment would be available for students who qualify from the programme. In fact, 37% of them reported that they had come across a job posting relevant for the qualification in the past twelve months. Amongst sectors where respondents thought graduates of the programme would work are community counselling, social work and community supervision at correctional services.

An important aspect on which respondents' opinions were sought is whether NAMCOL has capacity to offer the programme. Fig 19 below shows what respondents thought about this.

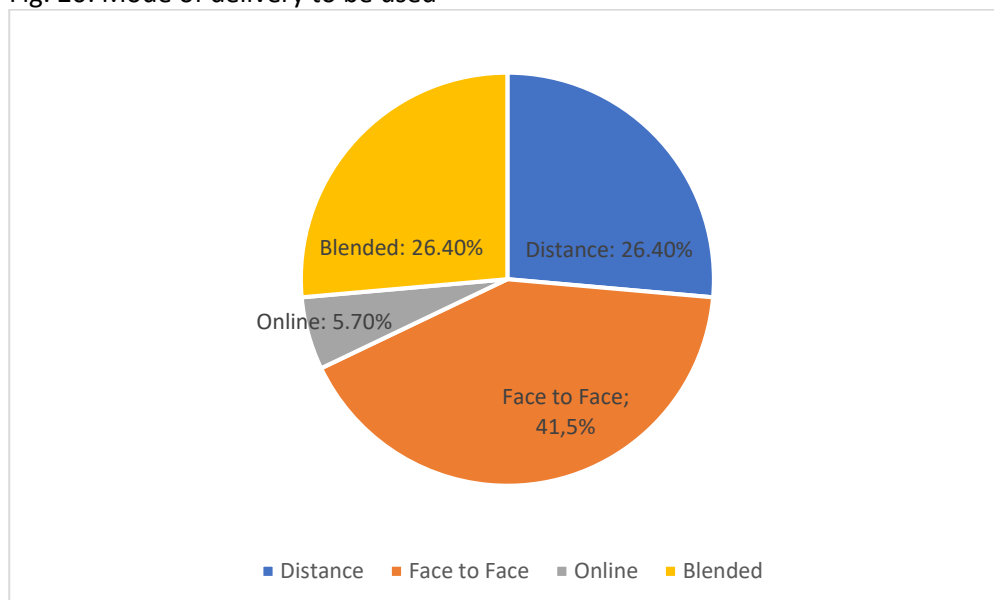
Fig. 19: NAMCOL capacity to offer the Psychosocial Support programme



An overwhelming majority (76%) was of the opinion that NAMCOL has the capacity to offer the programme. Only 11 % thought that the College did not have capacity and 13% was not sure. Interestingly, 98% of respondents reported that if NAMCOL introduces the programme, they would be happy to recommend the programme for their friends and relatives. Only 2% said that they would not, although no reasons were given for this.

As with other programmes, respondents were asked for their opinions on the mode of delivery that should be used if the programme is introduced. Figure 20: below shows respondents' opinions on mode of delivery:

Fig. 20: Mode of delivery to be used



Most of the respondents (41.5%) believe that face-to-face is the best mode of delivery for the programme. Distance and blended modes of delivery were also preferred modes of delivery, with 26.4% each.

## Interview results

Three stakeholder organisations out of the five that were initially identified participated in the interviews for the Psychosocial Support programme. These organisations were Synergos Namibia, Project Hope Namibia and Development Aid from People to People (DAPP). Hans Seidel Foundation was not available for interviews, Intra-health International had reportedly closed down, and the target person could not be located.

### Stakeholder views on offering the Certificate in Psychosocial Support

Like the other four programmes discussed above, respondents' views on whether NAMCOL should introduce the Community Health Certificate in Psychosocial Support programme were sought. All the subjects interviewed from the three organisations that participated responded positively. One of the respondents was quick to link the programme to the psychological stress brought about by the current pandemic:

It is a noble move-there is a need of a cohort of cadres that offer psychosocial support; timely in these times of COVID where people are stressed and the future is uncertain.

The COVID-19 is only one of the many examples of situations that cause stress amongst many people, which points at the need for support from people with relevant expertise.

Concurring with the above view, the other interviewees had this to say:

There is a need for the qualification; for example, Namibia records high numbers of suicides among youths; COVID-19 has also brought and heightened many mental health issues that require specialised responses and management.

The title (of the programme) suggests that it is a good move, as society has a number of issues that need to be addressed like GBV (gender-based violence), conflicts etc.

Research subjects feel that offering the psychosocial support programme is a good idea as there are many people who are subjected to problems that need attention. Such programmes are a way of ensuring that society is kept healthy enough to contribute towards economic development.

### Is there need for the programme in the country?

Interview responses show that there is great need for psychosocial support services in the country, given the problems of suicides amongst youths, gender-based violence and HIV-AIDS related problems, and frustrations caused by unemployment especially amongst young people. It was apparent from interview discussions that many people who are confronted by these challenges hardly access such services. The majority of those who do are not necessarily exposed to expert services. Formal training in this area has great potential to increase service availability and at the same time improve the quality.

### Whom this Certificate programme should target

Interview respondents pointed out that psychosocial support is subsumed in professions such as Clinical Psychology and Social work. Accordingly, they thought that the proposed programme could help equip people working in these areas with more skills and better expertise in doing their work.

Other groups of people that were mentioned by respondents as part of the targeted population are existing community health workers, like government Health Extension Workers; workers in faith-based organisations; parents; civil society community volunteers; and even high school leavers. Researchers also asked respondents if they think NAMCOL would attract enough students if the programme was to be introduced. Given their views on the existing need for psychosocial support in the country, respondents

were confident that the certificate would attract many students, as long as NAMCOL advertises. One of the respondents had this to say:

There is potential demand for the programme; if the demand does not appear apparent, NAMCOL could create demand through its marketing strategies. The qualification appears to be more an add-on for existing professions and jobs; may not be the best option for school leavers.

Expanding on the need for careful marketing of the programme, one respondent was of the opinion that the programme has potential to attract students but perhaps NAMCOL should use a different (simpler) terminology when advertising than "psychosocial support". She thinks that the term might not be well understood by potential students, hence the need for explaining it.

One of the reasons respondents gave as to why they think the NAMCOL programme would attract enough students is that apart from the course on counselling offered at Philipi Trust and the non-credited short course offered by Lifeline/Childline, there are no institutions that offer formal training in psychosocial support in Namibia. Offering an accredited programme that is recognised within the country and in the region would place NAMCOL at a competitive advantage in terms of programme popularity.

NAMCOL is proposing to introduce a qualification in psychosocial support at certificate level. Research subjects were asked what advantage the certificate qualification would have over a higher qualification, like a diploma. One of the respondents had the following to say:

Offering a higher qualification may be ambitious, considering the need for qualified staff and institutional capacity.

The respondent was of the opinion that the advantage of starting with a certificate qualification is that NAMCOL would have time to build sufficient capacity to offer higher qualifications.

Higher qualifications may be a good thing but may be difficult to have a job market for it; the Psychology degree from UNAM, for example, is not recognised for clinical practice.

As suggested in the survey data, the NAMCOL Psychosocial Support Certificate needs to be designed in such a way that it speaks to the needs of potential employment fields. So, starting with a certificate qualification might be an advantage in that it provides the College with an opportunity to gauge how well certificate graduates are received in the work place and what curriculum to develop for higher qualifications.

Another respondent pointed out that the main advantage of starting with a certificate qualification is that NAMCOL would be able to admit people with low entry qualifications, and channel them to higher qualifications. The respondent argued:

Certificate level may offer opportunities for school leavers to enrol; it appears there may be no need to upgrade the qualification to Diploma or degree, because of an uncertain job market; So far, in Namibia, a certificate appears to be good enough as an add-on.

The respondents also think that an accredited certificate which takes a shorter period to complete may be sufficient as an add-on for many people working in psychosocial support who do not have formal qualifications.

### **Mode of delivery to be used for the Certificate in Psychosocial Support**

A striking observation to note is that whilst respondents think that distance education is convenient for most learners, they all suggest that there should be a face-to-face component. The following interview quotations show what interview respondents think about the mode of delivery:

A blended model is best; certainly face-to-face should be key for the practical side, like role-plays and work related environments.

A combination, but face-to-face is necessary for the practical side of the training.

There is need for face-to-face for this qualification; issues of PSS need real life and work related approaches.

Respondents think a blended approach might be the best mode of delivery as it enables the College to implement the practical component of the course more effectively.

### **Programme Funding**

Programme funding is a key aspect that NAMCOL needs to consider not only for the Psychosocial Support programme. The general feeling amongst interview respondents is that there should be a combination of public and private funding of the programme. One respondent thinks that there is need for students to self-fund as a way of demonstrating appreciation of value and commitment.

### **General suggestions**

Respondents gave suggestions about how the programme should be implemented. The first suggestion is that NAMCOL should consider targeting mature persons and those who are already trained professionals in the health sector, given the sensitive nature of psychosocial support. Whilst this suggestion would limit access, its merit is that mainly people who are mature and have experience in working with clients already would be enrolled on the programme. Another related suggestion is that the course should include a strong cultural sensitivity dimension because of the diversity of local cultures in Namibia.

Respondents also suggested that there should be some regulatory mechanism for the trained people when they get into the work space as there is potential for harm to clients. This calls for graduates to be affiliated to formal professional bodies that can regulate the practice of newly qualified graduates.

The last suggestion is that the College should ensure that programme content and approach are relevant for practical application of skills. A lot of emphasis was put on the need to ensure that the programme has a sound practical component, which is assessable. Respondents think that trainees need to have a feel of the work place as part of their training, possibly through an attachment system.

Interview discussions also revealed that psychosocial counselling is not a service that is offered widely in the Namibian society at the moment. This is in spite of the prevalence of stressful experiences the general populace goes through on a day-to-day basis, especially the youth. Institutionalising this service nationwide would not only promote the general welfare of the society, but also create more employment for graduates of related programmes. The main suggestion raised in relation to this argument is that NAMCOL should work hand-in-hand with relevant government departments to influence policy on the provision of psychosocial support.

### **Conclusions**

As the four programmes discussed above, research subjects think that there is need for psychosocial support services amongst communities in the country. They cite stressful challenges that are prevalent in the society as a result of pandemics like HIV-AIDS and COVID-19, growing unemployment especially amongst the youth, and increasing gender-based violence. Many people who are affected by all these challenges do not have access to psychosocial counselling. Introducing a certificate programme in this area would help increase the number of professional people available to offer services. Research respondents also believed that because of the need for human expertise in the area, the programme is likely to attract enough students.

## Recommendations

This study was a market survey for the five programmes that have been discussed above, which are:

- Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) Honours Degree in Early Childhood Development (ECD);
- Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) Honours Degree in Primary Education;
- Diploma in Sign Language;
- Diploma in Working with Children and Youth; and
- Community Health Workers Certificate in Psychosocial Support.

As highlighted at the beginning of this report, the aim of the market survey was mainly to get stakeholders' opinions on whether each of the aforementioned programmes is viable and if there is need for them in the country. The survey also elicited stakeholder views on various aspects of the programmes, like which people are targeted, where they come from in Namibia, the preferred mode of delivery, and programme funding issues. As highlighted in the brief literature review section, not conducting some form of feasibility research before offering a new programme can be more costly than carrying out market research, RMS (2014). Obtaining information on the needs and interest of potential students gives an institution direction and confidence in developing a programme that is relevant and popular on the market. Based on the results of the study that were reported above, the following recommendations are given:

The market generally welcomes the introduction of all the five programmes that NAMCOL has identified. Potential students believe that this offers them a clear pathway to advance their qualifications at NAMCOL. This is particularly true of the two Honours programmes, the B. Ed Honours in ECD and the B. Ed Honours in Primary Education. Whilst these programmes are welcome, it is of utmost importance that NAMCOL should design programmes that do not duplicate what is already offered in other institutions, like UNAM. Stakeholders would like to see new programmes complementing rather than duplicating what is already offered.

NAMCOL needs to carefully consider the mother tongue aspect as it relates to the Honours Primary and Honours ECD programmes. Policy requires that early grade learners should be taught in their mother tongue and equipping teachers with appropriate local language competencies is important.

It is important for NAMCOL to monitor supply-demand realities of primary education in the country in order to ensure that graduates of its Honours in Primary Education get employment.

Linked to the above recommendation is the need for NAMCOL to make further consultations with key relevant stakeholders when it comes the actual design of the programme. For example, the College should liaise with the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture so that it can get and analyse the framework of Pre-primary education that was shared by the Ministries of Education, Arts and Culture and Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication in order to align the two Honours programmes appropriately.

An important recommendation relating mainly to the Honours Degree in Primary Education is the need to build in relevant technology competency outcomes. Teachers who go through the programme should gain sufficient appreciation of and competencies in integrating technology in their practice. This is in line with international trends.

Throughout the interviews for the various programmes, the message to include practical components that effectively familiarise students with workplace challenges came through very eloquently. Whilst this applies to all the surveyed programmes, it has particular relevance to the Diploma in Sign Language and the Certificate in Psychosocial Support.

Many respondents attest to the high quality of education at NAMCOL and this is a big advantage that has potential to lure more students to the College. However, the College should ensure that it has sufficiently qualified and competent staff for the envisaged degree programmes so that it can maintain its positive standing.

Whilst stakeholders involved in this study generally welcome and support the proposed programmes, NAMCOL should adopt a more aggressive marketing strategy in order to create sufficient awareness throughout the country of the programmes it offers outside its schooling focus.

This report recommends that NAMCOL proceeds to introduce the identified programmes as all indications are that there is need for them in the country and that they make a contribution towards national development. However, given the limited number of survey returns and only three interviews for the Community Health Workers Certificate in Psychosocial Support, it is recommended that further consultations with relevant stakeholders in this area be done before the programme is developed.

## **Conclusions**

This market survey was aimed at informing NAMCOL about the viability of the five programmes that were identified as potential offerings in the near future. Typical of market surveys in higher education, data was collected from identified stakeholders for each of the programmes using surveys and interviews. Whilst some of the programmes had large numbers of stakeholders identified, like the two Bachelor of Education Honours programmes, others had relatively few stakeholders, like the Certificate in Psychosocial Support programme. This is mainly because of the nature of each programme and how familiar people are with the field. A direct consequence of this is that there were significant variations in the number of participants in the study according to programmes. The results of the study should therefore be used with caution as one cannot claim that the views obtained from the limited number of respondents are truly representative of the Namibian population. Nonetheless, one can reasonably argue that they provide important ideas and opinions from relevant stakeholders, which can inform decision making at the College.

An important point to note is that the study happened during the COVID-19 period when many people were grappling with many challenges, including working from home, travel bans, and prioritising activities to undertake at any one time. Due to these challenges, researchers found it extremely difficult to locate people who were earmarked for interviews as they were either not in their offices or had to attend to COVID-19 related emergencies. This did not only reduce the number of stakeholders who were interviewed, it also extended the duration of the project. In spite of these challenges, the study yielded useful data on which sound recommendations were made regarding the five identified programmes.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: People interviewed

(See separate list)

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