



KEYNOTE ADDRESS:
BY HONOURABLE POHAMBA SHIFETA
Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism

At the National Conference
***'The Future of Namibia's Forests – Sustainable Forest
Management as Key to Unlock Its Potential'***

Safari Court Hotel and Conference Centre
Windhoek

20 July 2022



Director of proceedings,

**Your Excellency Sinikka Antila, Ambassador of the European Union
to Namibia**

**Senior Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism Staff Present
here,**

**Dr. Clemens von Doderer, Resident Representative, Hanns Seidel
Foundation**

Distinguished invited guests

Members of the media

Ladies and gentlemen

I am incredibly honored by the invitation from the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) and the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN) to deliver a keynote address at this very important conference under the Theme ***The future of Namibia's Forests – Sustainable Forest Management as Key to Unlock its Potential***. This gathering has come at an opportune time as Namibia is sharply focusing on the protection of our forests, which is central to our sustainability and economic development.

Permit me to begin by citing the Namibian Constitution, which is one of the most progressive constitutions in the world regarding the protection of environment. Article 95 states and I quote:

“The State shall actively promote and maintain the welfare of the people by adopting policies that are aimed at the maintenance of ecosystems, essential ecological processes and biological diversity of Namibia and utilization of living natural resources on a sustainable basis for the benefit of all Namibians, both present and future”.

This Article guides the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism in its mandate to protect the environment, promote biodiversity conservation, ensure sustainable utilisation of natural resources and tourism development for the maximum social and economic benefit of its citizens now and in future.

The concept of sustainability is no longer on the margins but has moved into the mainstream and has done so at a lightning speed. It is now at the heart of not only the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism; but also, at the heart of policy, business, and social life.

Today's event is pulling together in a coherent way the next steps towards the future of our forests. Namibia has lost nearly 20% of its forest area during the past 30 years as a result of unsustainable use of our resources. However, Namibia remains committed to reverse this concerning trend by reducing deforestation and promote tree planting. To this end, the Ministry is strongly pondering to introduce a provision in our law that will compel everyone who harvest vegetation to plant more trees and care for them. With only 8 years remaining to reach our 2030 target as set out in the revised 'Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), Namibia is taking concrete actions to reduce the impacts of climate change. This noble endeavor cannot be left to the government alone and I therefore implore all stakeholders to join us in meeting this target.

Director of Proceedings,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Forests do not only play a major role in mitigating climate change. Many people in Southern Africa, and of course in the rest of the African continent and the developing world, depend on forests and forest products for their

livelihoods. Sustainable forest management is thus essential to the alleviation of poverty. Forests also play a vital role in the vitality and growth of our respective national and regional economies. Forests are generally located in rural areas and are often the main source of jobs, building materials, energy, infrastructure, skills development, and business opportunities for these communities. The subject matter is therefore of great importance to all of us. It is imperative that we work together in dealing with the challenges of developing and protecting our forestry resources.

We must, therefore, take urgent actions to reverse the rate at which deforestation is taking place and aggressively embark on reforestation and afforestation programs. Now, more than ever, we need to pool our collective knowledge and experience, and commit to accelerating action towards better management of forest resources.

In this regard, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism through the Directorate of Forestry, is carrying out research on how to propagate native trees species with a view to make tree seedlings available for the community members to plant these species. The Ministry has been implementing the Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) Programme in forest management, which saw 43 Community Forests established across Namibia.

Forest-based actions will help to further advance the implementation of the NDCs we set ourselves. For example:

- When forests are well managed, they offer nature-friendly solutions to most of the global challenges we face – from improved adaptation

and mitigation measures to climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss, to building resilience against future crises.

- When forests are protected, they play a crucial role in eradicating poverty, growing food, improving energy security, and maintaining vital watersheds.
- When forests are valued, they support the livelihoods of the most vulnerable segments of our society.
- When forests are healthy, they work as a natural buffer against the transmission of diseases. During the COVID-19 pandemic, forests provided us with essential health products – from masks, to cleaning supplies, and ethanol for sanitizers.

It is therefore crucial to promote sustainable forest management in Namibia.

Director of Proceedings,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the vital lessons learned throughout the world is that sustainable forest management is only possible when local people are actively involved in this and experience tangible benefits from their involvement. I believe that there are many international lessons to be learned in this regard and I hope that you will share these.

In closing, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to commend the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) and the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN) for bringing us together today to discuss this important subject of sustainable forest management. I wish you successful deliberations and it is my hope that this conference

becomes part of an ongoing '***learning through sharing process***' that will propel Namibia to promote a vibrant, sustainable and socially conscious forestry sector.

I thank you and I now declare the conference officially open!