



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

KEYNOTE SPEECH

BY HONOURABLE POHAMBA SHIFETA

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On the occasion of the

Project End Conference

of the

'Promoting Sustainable Forest Management in the Kavango-Zambezi-Regions in Namibia' (NFSM) Project

titled

'The Future of Namibia's Forests – Sustainable Forest Management as Key to Unlock Its Potential'

Venue: Mercure Hotel Windhoek

Date: Wednesday, 20 September 2023

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Director of proceedings

Your Excellency Sinikka Antila – EU Ambassador to Namibia

Honorable members of Parliament here present

Distinguished invited guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to join you this morning here at Mercure Hotel to officiate at the Project End Conference.

At the onset, permit me to express my sincere appreciation to the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) and the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN) for organizing yet another gathering, bringing together various stakeholders to deliberate on the subject of Sustainable Forest Management in Namibia.

MEFT is pleased to be associated with this efforts, which is very important in drawing attention to the importance of forests and the role they play in sustaining livelihoods of thousands of people in our country and beyond.

Allow me to start with a quote by Mr Kapil Tatarwal which, I believe, perfectly sums up the topic of today's engagement:

'The choices we make today create the future that we are dreaming of.'

This statement holds true, and underscores that we must make the right decisions today in order to guarantee our future. Let us all be reminded by this statement when we are talking about the future of Namibia's

forests and sustainable forest Management as key to unlock its potential.

Director of Ceremonies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Article 95(L) of the Namibian constitution - one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, regarding the protection of our environment - guides the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism in its mission to promote biodiversity conservation in the Namibian environment through the sustainable utilisation of natural resources and tourism development for the maximum social and economic benefit of its citizens.

Connected to this constitutional provision, is the concept of Sustainability which is defined as **“meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”**. Sustainability is no longer on the margins but has moved to the mainstream and has done so at lightning speed. It is now at the heart of not only the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism; it is also at the heart of policy, business, and social life.

The significance of trees and forests cannot be over-emphasised. Trees and forests provide numerous ecosystem services which are essential for our survival.

Trees produce oxygen, filter pollutants from the air, reduce water runoff and regulate flooding, provide habitats for wildlife and fight climate change. They also prevent soil erosion, reduce noise pollution, provide shade and improve water quality.

Furthermore, trees provide economic benefits, such as timber and other forest products and support job creation in wood-based industries.

Our forests are facing multiple challenges, chief of which is deforestation. However, we are encouraged that Namibia is making efforts to reduce the rate of forest loss through implementation of measures such as forest protection, tree planting programs and uncontrolled wild fire management. Next month, Namibia will be celebrating Arbor Day on the second Friday of October, and I am calling on stakeholders to play their part in the following manner;

1. **Plant a tree:** Plant a tree in your own yard, or you can participate in a community tree planting event.
2. **Care for existing trees:** If you already have trees in your surroundings, ensure that they are taken good care of. This include watering them regularly, pruning them and protecting them from pests, diseases and uncontrolled fires.
3. **Learn about trees:** Take some time to learn about different types of trees, as well as their benefits and needs.
4. **Volunteer:** Consider volunteering your time to help in tree plantings and cleaning up activities during Arbor Day events.
5. **Donate to the tree planting events:** If you are unable to plant a tree yourself, consider donating to an organization that plants trees on behalf of others.

The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism has begun carrying out research on how to make use of our native trees species with a view to make tree seedlings available for the community members to plant these species.

Furthermore, the Ministry has been implementing the Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) Programme in forest management, which saw 46 Community Forests being established across Namibia and in which communities are practicing sustainable forest management.

Director of Proceedings,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's conference is pulling together in a coherent way the next steps towards the future of our forests. Forest-based actions will help to further advance the implementation of the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) for Namibia – an ambitious roadmap for Namibia to fight climate change through adaptation and mitigation programmes. When forests are well managed, they offer nature-friendly solutions to most of the global challenges we face including climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss.

I am aware that our communities are not yet fully benefiting from the resources in their surroundings. To this end, Government has enacted the Access to Biological and Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge Act, 2 of 2017 and subsequently an ABS office was established at MEFT. I am also encouraged by efforts for value addition to timber and non-timber forests products in order to draw maximum benefits for our people.

In closing, I wish to reiterate that protection and caring for trees and forests is our collective business. I wish you success for today's conference and I hope that the lessons shared here will enable Namibia to promote a vibrant, sustainable and socially conscious forestry sector.

I thank you!

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