



Ministry of Environment and Tourism
Republic of Namibia

**Keynote Address by the
Environmental Commissioner, Mr. Teofilus Nghitila**

**on the occasion of the 1st Annual Seminar on Water,
Environmental Education for Sustainable Development for
the Cuvelai-Etosha Basin**

10.00-10.20, 23rd May 2016

Oshandira Lodge

OSHAKATI, NAMIBIA

Hon. Clemence KASHUUPULWA, Governor of Oshana Region,
Ms. Maria Amakali, Director of Water Resource Management,
Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry,
Representative of the Cuvelai Etosha Basin Environmental Working
Group,
Distinguished Workshop Participants,
Members of the Media,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking the organizers of this seminar – the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry through the Cuvelai-Etosha Basin Environmental Working Group. The theme of this seminar - “Scaling up to sustainability at the dawn of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda” is indeed a timely and important one.

As stated in the concept note for this seminar, it is indeed of great importance that environmental issues are at the forefront of sustainable development. This is reflected in Namibia’s long term planning framework of Vision 2030 and National Development Plans as well as the recent Harambee Plan for Prosperity. At the international level we can also see how increasing importance is being placed on environmental issues. Only one of the Millennium Development Goals from 2001

related to the environment. However the environment is a theme running through at least 7 of new Sustainable Development Goals including if I may mention them:

- Goal 6: Ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;
- Goal 7: Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all;
- Goal 11: Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;
- Goal 12: Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns;
- Goal 13: Taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;
- Goal 14: Conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; and
- Goal 15: Protecting, restoring and promoting the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably managing forests, combating desertification, and halting and reversing land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

These goals cover the environment in its broadest sense and highlight its cross-cutting nature. Caring for the environment needs to be a central part of how we provide energy for our people, how we manage our cities and how we produce and consume the resources that drive the economy. This represents a major shift in thought away from environment being confined to issues of nature conservation and the management of national parks. This is a shift we need to embrace here in Namibia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Environmental management is an issue that cuts across almost all sectors, and it requires our close cooperation and collaboration. This is why I am glad to see the establishment of working groups such as the Cuvelai-Etosha Basin Environmental Working Group. I am further glad to see the focus of this seminar on issues of communication, education and public awareness.

Low levels of awareness of the importance of the environment is undoubtedly one of the main drivers of environmental degradation in Namibia. If we think of the pressing environmental issues facing the regions here that make up the Cuvelai Etosha basin, it is clear that low levels of awareness among our people is a problem.

Namibia has historically been considered the cleanest country in Africa but we are rapidly losing this status. Litter is an eyesore in most of the towns as well as along our roadsides here in the north. Not only does this create a bad impression among visitors and tourists to the area, but it also is a source of danger to our people and animals. The Ministry is committed to working closely with the Regional Councils and Local Authorities and the local population to address this problem and to modernize the management of waste. This will help us to bring back our proud reputation as the cleanest country in Africa, increase the civic pride of our people in their environment, and further open up the northern regions to tourism.

I am further concerned by a number of development activities, which are having serious impacts on the health of our environment and populations here. The uncontrolled mining of sand for use in construction and in the development of the road network is a particular worry. Huge areas of the north have been scarred by open pits and holes left behind after the mining of sand. This is typically done without any rehabilitation and consideration of the impacts on ecosystems and the dangers of these pits for humans and animals. I am glad to see this item on the agenda for the seminar and I look forward to receiving your recommendations on how we can go about resolving this issue.

Lastly Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would not be doing my job if I did not make reference to climate change and its impact on the northern regions. All of us here I am sure are aware of this issue and it should be clear to us that climate change is already playing itself out in Namibia and especially here. Since 2009, we have either experienced severe flooding events or severe drought events with little evidence of what we may consider as “normal” rainfall. This is a symbol of things to come and we need to be better prepared to deal with this scenario.

Planning is a key element to enhance our resilience to flood and drought events. Unfortunately much of the development here, including the construction of roads and settlements has taken place without us taking into account the potential for more severe flood events under climate change. It is critical that climate change is integrated into our local development plans such as the Oshakati Master Plan so that we “climate proof” our infrastructure and settlements.

These past few years we have once again been hit by drought and hugely variable rainfall. This poses major challenges to agriculture and our ability to ensure subsistence and commercial production. The Ministry of

Environment and Tourism, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry and other partners, have introduced a number of good practices in the north to help enhance the resilience of our communities to climate change and to diversify their livelihoods. These have included conservation agriculture, drip irrigation and the distribution of drought tolerant seeds, which allow us to increase yields even in years of low and variable rainfall. In addition we have initiated projects on the rearing of guinea fowls and chickens, the introduction of Boer goats and the conservation of our grain stocks in plastic granaries rather than in our traditional granaries which are vulnerable to damage from flooding.

Our northern regions are also so rich in “traditional” plants and knowledge – we need to ramp up the commercialization and value addition to these plants so that our communities derive greater financial benefits. Here I refer to our Marula, eeembe, bambara nuts, cowpeas and many others. We need to scale up these practices and identify new innovations that will allow our communities to thrive in spite of the difficult environment we are facing.

In conclusion ladies and gentlemen, I thank the organizers once again for creating this platform and bringing us together to discuss these issues

here. I wish you fruitful and deliberations here and I look forward to receiving your recommendations so that we can set about implementing them as quickly as possible. As we know, this is the year of implementation and we urgently need to action if we are to ensure poverty eradication and an enhanced quality of life for our citizens by 2030 in line with Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

I thank you.