

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM



KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY Honourable Deputy
Prime Minister, Dr. Libertina Amathila of the Republic of Namibia

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

Official opening of the High Level CSD Intersessional Meeting on African
Agriculture in the 21st Century -9-10 February

09 February 2009

WINDHOEK

Director of Ceremonies;

Honourable Ministers;

**Director General of the National Planning Commission
(Prof Katjavivi);**

**Under Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs of the
United Nations (Mr Sha Zukang);**

**Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention
to Combat Desertification (UNCCD);**

**Secretary General of the United Nations Conference on
Trade and Development (UNCTAD);**

Invited Guests;

Members of the Media;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Africa is a continent blessed with a unique blend of culturally rich peoples with a myriad of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices that has contributed significantly to natural resource management, more specifically sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation.

The pressures of modern change dictated and driven by the northern hemisphere, has however been too fast for Africa to keep pace with, given the many pressing priorities that African governments are facing. At the same time global

climate change is making its presence felt all over the planet, including Africa, who may perhaps be the least prepared for the significant challenges pose by climate change. This situation is further exacerbated by desertification, land and environmental degradation which is prevalent in many of our countries.

Approximately 50 years ago the first songs of freedom were sung upon the African continent and a ray of hope was shining amongst many of the dreams that captivated the minds of those leaders who led this wind of change. Reading the book "Things fall apart" by Chinua Achebe, which I am sure most of you in this hall might have read, paint the picture of how colonialist rob Africa slowly but surely of her arable lands.

The story is the same here in Namibia. Here Africans were forced out by guns from their productive land. Thus at Independence we were faced with *facto complé*, arable land is in the hands of colonizers.

In Namibia land reform is moving at slow paste. Those who ceased our lands are not willing to share it. Price of land has skyrocketed - to buy farms for resettling the landless is

almost impossible. Their prices include even the game which is a natural resource of this country. These game were fenced in – but now belongs to the farm, and when selling the farm the is included in the price of the farm- which irk some of us.

As we know, many countries were heavily indebted and rural and urban poverty was further worsened by skewed distribution of income. Unequal access to land and natural resources and in appropriate land tenure led to the worsening of environmental quality. At the socio-economic level, we are much worse. Africans were faced with poor education, health services, housing and infrastructure in general. The other important factor was the alienation of rural people from natural resources such as wildlife. This led to serious declines in wildlife numbers across the continent as well as serious environmental poverty.

Over the years interventions and strategic approaches have been initiated to try and halt or even reverse the impact of these negative conditions. Some of these interventions have come a long way and had positive impacts. At this point I need to point out the role played by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification which has a particular

focus on Africa and has the aim of halting land degradation and desertification on the continent and through that improve the quality of life of the African people.

Today some believe the solution to Africa's problems and especially poverty lies within the soil that stretches across the vast land mass. In other words there is a believe that agriculture holds the key to economic development for the continent. A number of strategies to jump-start the industry and improve crop yields, thus increasing profits from agriculture has been applied on the continent over the years with mixed results. Despite of support to the region sub-Saharan Africa remains home to some of the poorest countries on the continent, and the world.

Agricultural potential is further hampered by nutrient depletion of soils across the continent. There are indications that Africa has the highest nutrient-depletion figures in the world. Our soils are characterized by low fertility and this is confounded by the low use of modern inputs such as mineral fertilizers and improved varieties. Agricultural development is further inhibited by overexploitation of the land because of overpopulation and by poor market development. Another

significant fact is that Africa has the lowest land and labour productivity rates.

Director of ceremonies

I have explored in brief the challenges that faces the African agricultural sector. Let me explain what we have done in Namibia to address the issue of drought, desertification and land degradation.

Namibia is one of the driest countries in sub-Saharan Africa. We have no perennial rivers running in the country.

We have only eight percent arable land and we can thus be classified as a dry land or a semi-arid land. Namibia has therefore no choice but to address desertification and land degradation as well as the related issues of biodiversity conservation, land use management, and most importantly climate change and its impact on national development.

The Government of Namibia established strategies and priorities to combat desertification and land degradation long before the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was concluded. We subsequently signed and ratified the UNCCD in 1994 and 1997 respectively

and initiated Namibia's Programme to Combat Desertification (NAPCOD) in 1994.

This programme involved partnership between government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's). I further need to point out that community and grass roots involvement was a key feature of NAPCOD.

Director of Ceremonies

The main focus of your deliberations over the next two days is Agriculture and what it can do for Africa. Our experience shows that for agriculture to make a difference on the continent there is a pressing need for integrated planning for sustainable resource management and use. It is also imperative that we engage in innovative planning for appropriate use of marginal agricultural lands, for game farming, conservation, tourism and other less water demanding alternatives more appropriate to dry countries such as Namibia.

Today we know that desertification is a cross-cutting issue and deserves a cross-sectoral approach.

We need to explore and find those interventions that can make a difference. There is need for the replication of

outcomes that have potential to make a difference with a stronger focus on tangible and replicable impacts. This must of-course be informed by local realities at all levels.

It has become apparent to us that we need to take into account the social, political, economic and environmental consequences of development interventions. It is therefore important that we as Africans take the lead and avoid the old practice of pushing externally driven agendas.

As you deliberate over the next two days you need to keep in mind some of the following issues;

- Move from fixed plan to a flexible, dynamic PROCESS
- Move from science for the sake of science to science working with Traditional knowledge, innovations and practices at local level providing sustainable solutions
- Move towards full PARTNERSHIP with the communities
- Move from central control to SHARED results and collaboration
- Move from a focus on outputs to a focus on IMPACTS
- Move from sectoral planning to INTEGRATED planning
- Move from focus on costly projects to locally driven development

- Empowerment of communities, particularly women to make their own decisions
- Come up with appropriate technology to lessen the burden on rural women who are bending down with hoes, breaking their backs

Director of Ceremonies,

Finally as you discuss this important issue of agriculture in Africa you must be cognisant of Africa's comparative and competitive advantages and how to capitalize on them.

I wish you a successful deliberation and hope you will find your stay in Namibia rewarding.

I thank you.