



**GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**  
**MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM**

Minister's address to the 2012 EAPAN conference and AGM

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After gaining independence in 1990, the development of new infrastructure and the provision of land, water, mineral and occupation rights has intensified. Hundreds of kilometres of roads have been built or resurfaced. The country's two harbours have been deepened, towns and cities are expanding, new power-supply projects are under way, and new boreholes, dams, canals and pipelines are being developed to meet escalating demands for water. Namibia aspires to becoming an industrialised country by 2030, but at the same time we are committed to conserving our natural heritage and growing our nature-based sectors such as tourism, fisheries and agriculture.

There is much that we need to do. But we need to do the right things, and we need to do them right!

Consequently, the need for proper planning and accountability, using Environmental Assessment as a tool, is more important now than ever before.

Through our policies and laws created since Independence, this government has highlighted the importance of Environmental Assessment as a key tool in promoting sustainable development. We urge that all policies, plans, programmes and projects, be fully assessed through Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) or Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) before they are approved and implemented.

That's in theory.

In practice we know how hard it is to get the right balance between conservation and development.

On the one hand, we must halt and reverse worrying trends in habitat degradation, soil and biodiversity loss, pollution and the destruction of our land. There are three types of people who cause this degradation:

- Those who are greedy – we need to find ways to curb their greed and control their excesses,
- Those who are needy – we need to work harder to help people escape from poverty so that they have options and reduce their pressure on the environment, and

- Those who are uninformed – we need to ensure that the right information and support is provided to help people acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to manage resources sustainably so that we might pass them on to the next generation in a healthy condition.

On the other hand, we must deal with the reality of unacceptably high unemployment rates, poverty and hopelessness. Particularly as environmentalists, we must understand the need for diversifying our economy, stimulating investment, creating jobs, and being competitive in an increasingly complex global setting. Poverty is one of the worst forms of pollution – we must rid our society of this scourge before we can start to claim that we are following a sustainable development pathway. Poverty poses the additional threat of social instability, and social instability inevitably leads to accelerated environmental degradation.

Simply put, we need development, but the right kind. We need policies, plans, programmes and projects that take account of Namibia's comparative advantages and that will move us towards the goal of sustainable development.

On a daily basis, my ministry and my technical staff are pressurised by stakeholders, all with their own agendas. Politicians, investors and businesspeople are anxious to see quick decisions in support of their initiatives, whilst the "green lobby" often wants to block projects that they think will have negative environmental impacts. Both sides use the media to promote their agendas, and very often exaggerate or misrepresent reality in the process. Reacting to pressure is not the right way for taking rational decisions.

I want to see far better use of Environmental Assessment in helping me and other decision-makers, to take wise decisions that we can defend. A well organised Environmental Assessment process will create the opportunity for all stakeholders to participate meaningfully. Honesty and integrity is needed so that we listen to all viewpoints, and not just to those who shout the loudest, who have political influence or who are greatest in number. The assessment must include thorough scientific work so that we have the best available information as possible at our disposal. At the end of the day, we must properly understand the consequences of a proposed development, weigh up the positive and negative aspects, and make the right decision.

The increasing volume and complexity of EIAs places our small staff compliment under tremendous pressure, often leading to delays in administrative processes and decision making. Our Environmental Management Act empowers us to make use of external expertise to help evaluate EIA reports, at the cost of the proponent. We will make more use of this option in the future to improve our effectiveness, and we hope that EAPAN members will be available to assist us in this regard.

My message to you as environmental practitioners is to always consider the environment as your client, no matter who pays for your professional services. Always be independent and never be biased for or against a project. Do your work honestly and deliver objective, sound, scientifically-based, clear and carefully considered opinions in your reports. Write your reports so that non-technical people can understand them.

Write your reports for me, so that I can benefit from your advice and so that you are making my job easier. If you do that, then we can develop the kind of partnership that this country sorely needs.

EAPAN has come at the right time and I welcome this organisation and its members as partners in development planning. I welcome your efforts to better represent your sector, to improve the quality and standards of environmental practitioners and to set in place a clear code of conduct. By maintaining high standards, you will be respected in society as a vital profession and your opinions and advice will be taken seriously by everyone. Perhaps in the future we could look at strengthening EAPAN by making certification as a practitioner a legal requirement. Other countries in the Region are moving in that same direction, so let's discuss this possibility in the months ahead.

I look forward to close collaboration with you and urge EAPAN to keep in regular contact with my office, and the office of the Environmental Commissioner and his staff. Let us work together for a better future for our country, our people and our environment.

Thank you.