

INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF NAMIBIA'S RURAL LANDSCAPES



Ministry of Environment,
Forestry and Tourism





Namibia Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance to Eradicate Poverty



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A PARTNERSHIP FOR NAMIBIA'S PEOPLE, LANDSCAPES AND FUTURE

For more than three decades, the Global Environment Facility has been a trusted partner of the Government of the Republic of Namibia. The partnership grew from the historic agreements reached at the Rio Earth Summit and has helped Namibia turn its commitments on biodiversity, climate change and desertification into action that benefits our people and protects our natural heritage.

GEF support has strengthened Namibia's ability to manage its land, forests, water and biodiversity. It has also helped Government institutions, communities and development partners work together in responding to environmental pressures that affect livelihoods, food security and national development.

The Namibia Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance to Eradicate Poverty, known as NILALEG, is a strong example of this partnership. Since its launch in 2020, the project has brought environmental protection and rural development together across five landscapes.

NILALEG was founded on a simple principle: Namibia cannot protect the environment without improving the lives of the people who depend on it, and lasting development cannot take place if the natural resource base is degraded. Through the project, communities have gained better access to water, livelihood skills, productive assets and support for local enterprises. Degraded land has been restored, sustainable farming and forestry practices have been promoted, and community institutions have been strengthened.

The project also supported the management of Hamweyi, Kanovlei and Zambezi State Forest Reserves, covering more than 175,000 hectares. These forests are part of Namibia's natural wealth. They protect biodiversity, store carbon and provide resources and opportunities for surrounding communities.

The achievements of NILALEG reflect the value of partnership. Traditional authorities, regional and local authorities, communities, Government institutions, civil society organisations, academic institutions, the private sector and development partners all contributed to the work of the project.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Namibia, I express our sincere appreciation to the Global Environment Facility for its longstanding confidence and support. I also thank the United Nations Development Programme for its technical and implementation support and for its continued partnership with Namibia.

I extend special appreciation to the communities in the NILALEG landscapes. Their knowledge, leadership and participation made these achievements possible. I also commend the project team, landscape coordinators, technical officials and implementing partners for their dedication.

As NILALEG concludes, Government will work to protect the investments made, sustain the institutions and partnerships established, and apply the lessons of the project in other parts of the country. We remain committed to development that restores our landscapes, strengthens climate resilience, expands rural opportunities and leaves a healthy environment for future generations.

The project may be concluding, but the work continues. NILALEG has given Namibia a firm foundation on which to build.



HON. INDILENI DANIEL
Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism
Namibia's GEF Political Focal Point



FROM PROJECT RESULTS TO LASTING NATIONAL PROGRAMMES

The Global Environment Facility has made an important contribution to Namibia's implementation of the Rio Conventions. Through GEF financing and the support of the United Nations Development Programme, the NILALEG project enabled the Government to apply integrated landscape management in communities where environmental pressure and livelihood needs are closely linked.

Since implementation began in 2020, NILALEG has worked across five landscapes and reached more than 20,000 people. The project brought agriculture, forestry, water, biodiversity and local economic development into one planning process, with communities involved in identifying priorities and carrying out activities.

At community level, the project supported solar-powered and rehabilitated boreholes, erosion-control structures, nurseries, land restoration and the sustainable use of natural products. It also promoted livestock fodder made from encroacher bush and other practical measures that improve the condition and productivity of the land.

Livelihood support included livestock and small-stock schemes, community gardens, carpentry, beekeeping, Devil's Claw harvesting, livestock marketing facilities and other nature-based enterprises. These interventions provided skills, productive assets and income opportunities, with particular attention to women, young people and underserved rural communities.

NILALEG also strengthened the institutions needed to manage landscapes. National institutions, regional councils, traditional authorities, community structures, academic institutions and civil society organisations worked through joint planning and coordination arrangements. The project supported knowledge management, monitoring systems and information required for planning and for reporting on Namibia's obligations under the Rio Conventions. A major institutional and conservation achievement was the support provided to Hamweyi, Kanovlei and Zambezi State Forest Reserves. Together, the reserves cover more than 175,000 hectares of woodland ecosystems. NILALEG supported management planning, governance arrangements and community participation so that the forests can contribute to biodiversity protection, carbon storage and sustainable livelihoods.

The immediate task is to safeguard what has been achieved. Responsible institutions must include the project activities in their regular work programmes and budgets. Infrastructure and equipment must be properly assigned, maintained and used for their intended purpose. Community enterprises require continued technical support, access to markets and sound management. The coordination structures and monitoring systems established through the project must remain active.

The lessons from NILALEG should guide future Government programmes and investments. Integrated planning works best when institutions coordinate their actions, communities take part in decisions and environmental objectives are linked directly to local development priorities.

I express the Government's appreciation to the Global Environment Facility for its financial support and confidence in Namibia. I thank the United Nations Development Programme for its technical guidance and implementation support.

I also acknowledge the participating ministries, regional councils, traditional authorities, communities, implementing partners, service providers, academic institutions and civil society organisations. Particular recognition is due to the NILALEG project team and landscape coordinators for guiding implementation across the five landscapes.

The lasting value of NILALEG will be measured by how well the institutions and communities involved maintain, use and expand the investments made. The Ministry remains committed to that responsibility.



MR SIKONGO HAIHAMBO
Executive Director
Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism
Namibia's GEF Operational Focal Point



UNLOCKING THE BEAUTY OF NAMIBIA

The NILALEG project



Namibia, a land of stunning landscapes, rich biodiversity and diverse cultures, faces a unique challenge: balancing the preservation of its natural treasures with the pressing need to eradicate poverty. In this evolving tale of environmental conservation and human prosperity, the Namibia Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance to Eradicate Poverty (NILALEG) emerges as a beacon of hope and innovation.

Gone are the days when tackling environmental issues and promoting sustainable land management could be addressed through isolated efforts. Today, we find ourselves in a world where interconnected problems demand integrated solutions. Enter NILALEG, a transformative initiative aimed at breaking the boundaries between nature conservation, agriculture and governance to create a harmonious coexistence between people and the environment.

A COMPLEX CHALLENGE: ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND POVERTY

Namibia's environmental degradation is not just about the land; it is about the people too. A staggering 70% of the population depends directly on natural resources for their livelihoods. As these resources diminish under the weight of an ever-growing



population, the challenges of eradicating poverty and preserving the environment become intertwined like never before.

NILALEG recognises the urgency of this complex challenge and endeavours to change the narrative. It acknowledges that traditional sectoral approaches are no longer sufficient to address the multifaceted issues of poverty, biodiversity loss and food production. Instead, it offers an integrated landscape approach that connects conservation, agriculture, institutions and policies into a seamless tapestry.

THE AMBITIOUS GOALS OF NILALEG

At its core, NILALEG seeks to revolutionise the management of Namibia's rural landscapes. The project's overarching goal is to reverse environmental degradation while nurturing sustainable livelihoods rooted in nature. In the absence of such an approach, the densely populated northern regions of Namibia are at risk of deepening poverty and inequality. This downward spiral would come at the cost of forest cover, biodiversity, soil fertility and carbon sequestration, endangering the country's global environmental commitments and national development objectives.

THE KEY OBJECTIVES OF NILALEG ARE CLEAR:

Promoting integrated landscape management: NILALEG aims to bring an integrated landscape management approach to key agricultural and forest landscapes, fostering sustainable livelihoods and biodiversity protection while restoring forests as essential carbon sinks.

Strengthening institutional coordination: The project seeks to enhance institutional coordination and governance mechanisms necessary for successful integrated landscape management.

Implementation and upscaling: Through on-ground efforts, NILALEG intends to implement the integrated landscape management approach in target landscapes and ensure sustainable financing for its expansion.

Knowledge management: A robust system for knowledge management, monitoring, evaluation, gender integration and impact assessment is pivotal to NILALEG's success.

EXPLORING THE FOCAL LANDSCAPES OF NILALEG

NILALEG encompasses a range of focal landscapes, each with its unique challenges and opportunities. Let's take a closer look at some of them:

Omaipanga landscape: Nestled in Namibia's northwestern regions, this landscape features dry and semi-dry conditions. Livelihoods here revolve around livestock and seasonal crop farming, with a mix of ethnic groups, including the Ovaherero, Ovazemba and Ovahimba.

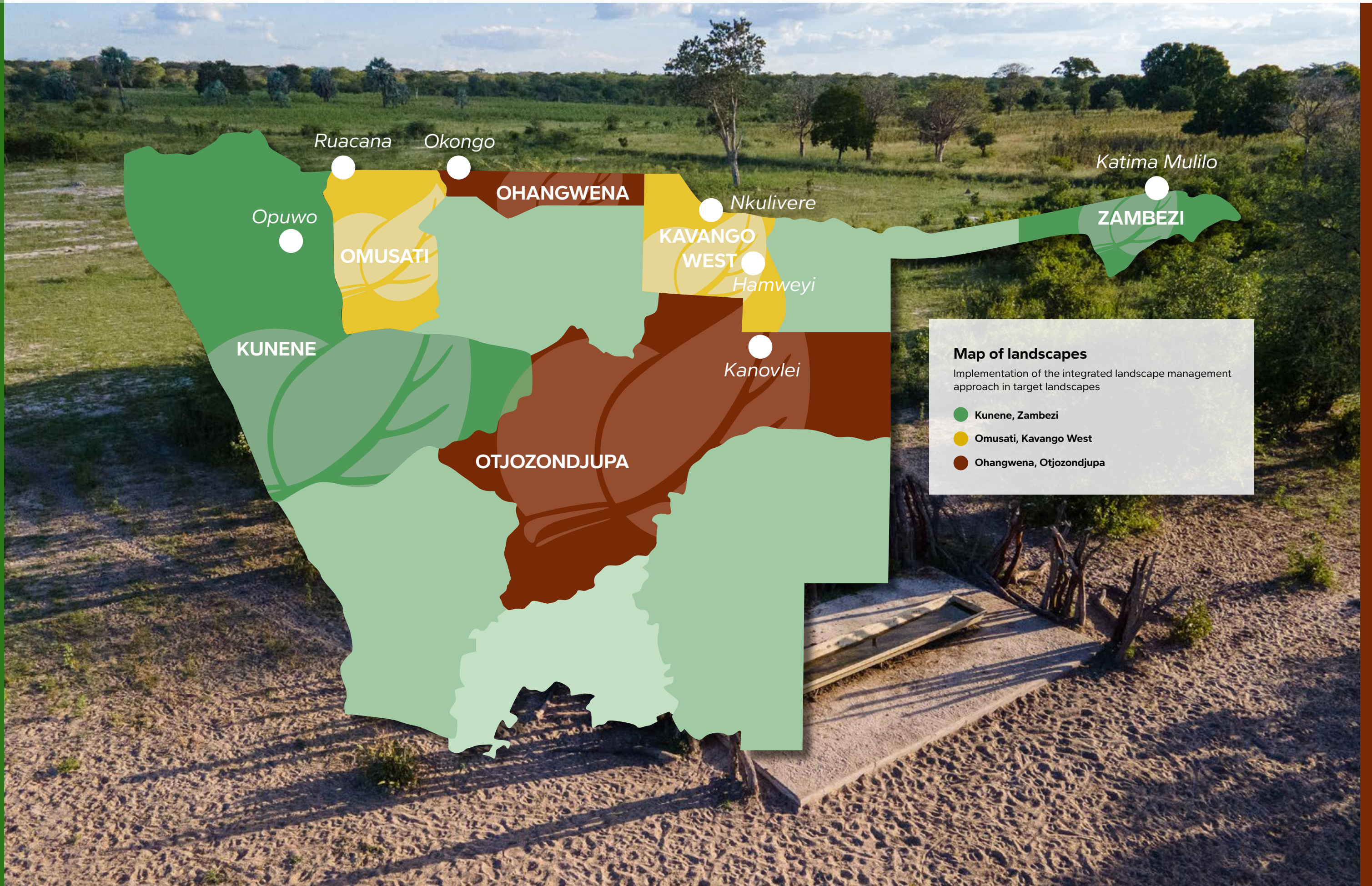
Ruacana landscape: Spanning both Omusati and Kunene Regions, Ruacana boasts a diverse topography, from mountainous terrains to flat river basins. Livelihoods range from livestock farming to crop cultivation, with ethnic groups like the Ovandongona, San, Ovatusa, Ovahimba and Aawambo making it their home.

Okongo landscape: In the far eastern Ohangwena Region, Okongo stands out with its flat terrain, woodlands and a mix of livelihoods centred around livestock, dryland cropping and forestry. The Ovakwanyama and San communities are the heart of this landscape.

Nkulivere landscape: Located in Kavango West Region, this flat landscape features sandy soils and woodlands, supporting rural livelihoods rooted in livestock, cropping and forestry. The Ovakwangali call this landscape their home.

Zambezi landscape: Situated in the eastern part of the Zambezi Region, this flat landscape comes alive with the rhythms of the Zambezi and Chobe rivers. Livelihoods here include livestock, dryland cropping and the vibrant world of tourism and wildlife conservation, with the Mafwe and Masubia people at the forefront.

NILALEG is not just a project; it is a vision. A vision to transform the landscapes of Namibia, to uplift its people from poverty and to conserve its breathtaking natural heritage. As we journey through the pages of time, let's keep a close watch as NILALEG weaves its magic, balancing the scales of prosperity and preservation in this remarkable corner of Africa.



REVOLUTIONISING ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

NILALEG's impact in Namibia

In a groundbreaking initiative aimed at bridging the gap between nature conservation, agriculture and governance, Namibia is witnessing a transformation in the management of its rural landscapes. Venture Media, in collaboration with the Namibia Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance (NILALEG), has launched a podcast series to shed light on this innovative project. Jonas Nghishidi, the project leader, recently shared insights into NILALEG's ambitious mission to foster a harmonious coexistence between people and the environment.

Funded by the Global Environmental Facility and the United Nations Development Programme, NILALEG is a five-year project that has entered its final phase. It targets the improvement of environmental governance by integrating agriculture and forestry management across five regions in Namibia, with the aim of enhancing the livelihoods of over 20,000 people.

Among the notable successes is a grant awarded to a farmers' cooperative in Okongo, which has significantly increased their income by upgrading livestock marketing facilities. Such initiatives not only promote sustainable development but also reduce pressure on the land, illustrating the project's impact on local economies and environmental preservation.

NILALEG also places a strong emphasis on gender mainstreaming, aiming for at least 50% of its beneficiaries to be youth and women. This approach acknowledges the critical role women play in natural resource management and seeks to empower them as key stakeholders in environmental conservation efforts.

Partnerships play a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of the NILALEG project. Collaborations with the University of Namibia, the Environmental Investment Fund and regional councils have been instrumental in advancing research, sustainable financing and continued service provision beyond the project's lifespan.



NILALEG is not just a local effort but a strategic response to global challenges such as biodiversity loss, climate change and land degradation. The project aligns with international goals and conventions, including the Rio Convention and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), addressing over ten SDGs and contributing significantly to global and national environmental targets.

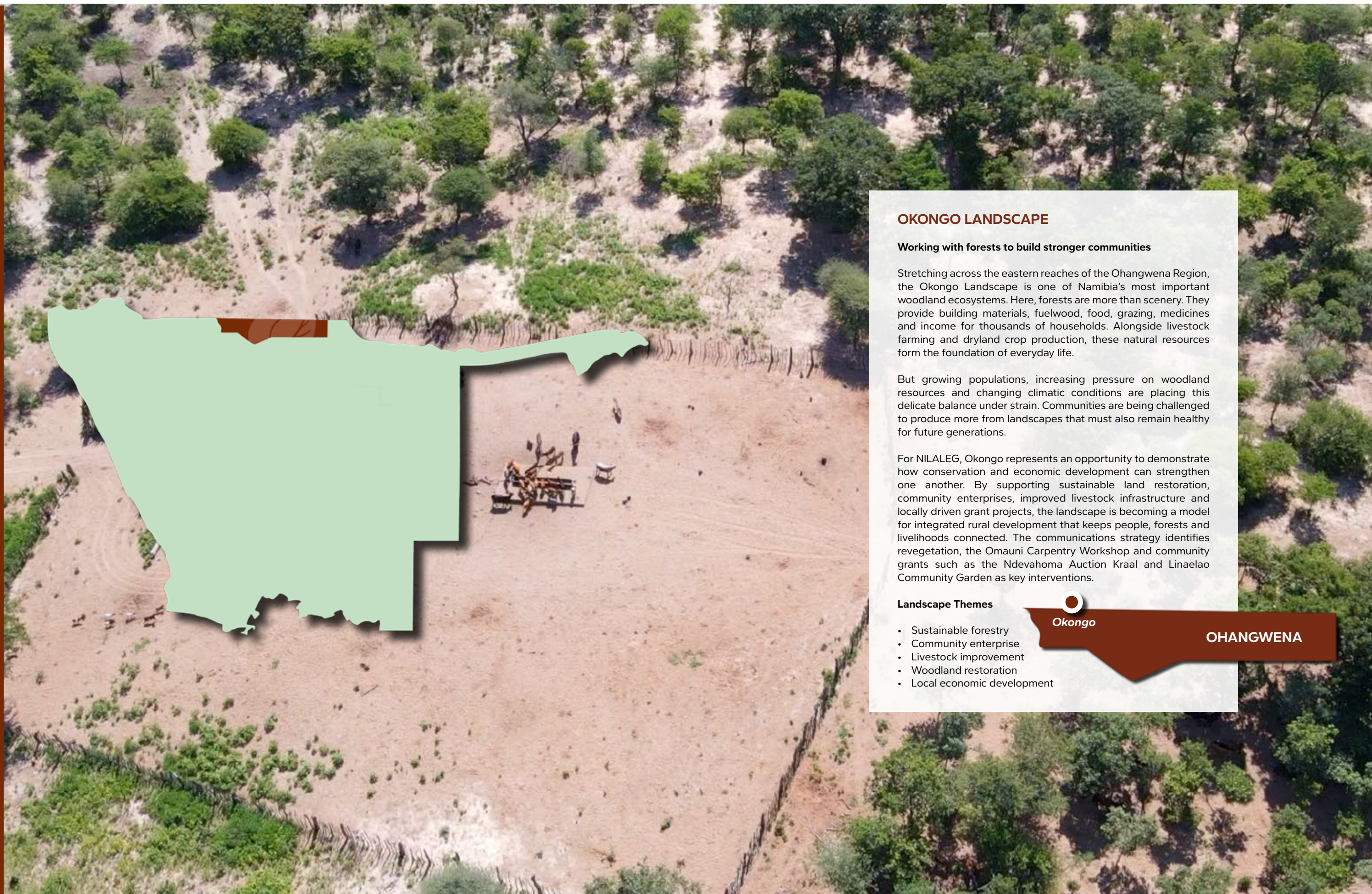
At the heart of NILALEG's approach is the concept of integrated landscape management, which emphasises the interconnectedness of different land uses within a single landscape. This method seeks to balance the social, economic and environmental needs of the community, promoting sustainable development and conservation after addressing basic livelihood needs.

One of the key strategies for engaging local communities and ensuring their active participation is through a multi-stakeholder coordination structure. This allows for planning and executing activities collaboratively, with the government playing a central role in providing essential services. Additionally, NILALEG has implemented a grant mechanism that supports community-driven projects in forestry, agriculture and mixed-income activities linked to natural resources.

As NILALEG nears its conclusion, the lessons learnt and the frameworks established promise a lasting impact on Namibia's environmental governance. Alongside its environmental goals, the project's commitment to address basic community needs, such as water provision, sets a precedent for future conservation efforts. With the ongoing support of the government and the community, NILALEG stands as a beacon of hope for sustainable development in Namibia, paving the way for a future where humans and nature coexist in balance and prosperity.

Scan the QR code to listen to the first episode of this new podcast series as Venture Media sits down with NILALEG project coordinator, Jonas Nghishidi.





OKONGO LANDSCAPE

Working with forests to build stronger communities

Stretching across the eastern reaches of the Ohangwena Region, the Okongo Landscape is one of Namibia's most important woodland ecosystems. Here, forests are more than scenery. They provide building materials, fuelwood, food, grazing, medicines and income for thousands of households. Alongside livestock farming and dryland crop production, these natural resources form the foundation of everyday life.

But growing populations, increasing pressure on woodland resources and changing climatic conditions are placing this delicate balance under strain. Communities are being challenged to produce more from landscapes that must also remain healthy for future generations.

For NILALEG, Okongo represents an opportunity to demonstrate how conservation and economic development can strengthen one another. By supporting sustainable land restoration, community enterprises, improved livestock infrastructure and locally driven grant projects, the landscape is becoming a model for integrated rural development that keeps people, forests and livelihoods connected. The communications strategy identifies revegetation, the Omauni Carpentry Workshop and community grants such as the Ndevahoma Auction Kraal and Linaelao Community Garden as key interventions.

Landscape Themes

- Sustainable forestry
- Community enterprise
- Livestock improvement
- Woodland restoration
- Local economic development

Okongo

OHANGWENA



BUILDING RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS IN OKONGO

In Namibia's densely populated northern regions, livelihoods and landscapes are deeply intertwined. When land is overused or poorly managed, the consequences ripple outward, declining forest cover, loss of biodiversity, depleted soils, and growing poverty. Without integrated management of rural landscapes, communities like Okongo face increasing inequality and environmental degradation, threatening both present survival and future sustainability.

In Okongo, NILALEG is responding to this challenge by supporting systems that link environmental stewardship with sustainable livelihoods, ensuring that nature-based resources become sources of long-term resilience rather than depletion.

For Esther Hamukwaya, a San woman and beneficiary of NILALEG's livestock programme, this support became a turning point. After receiving eleven goats from NILALEG, her household economy began to change. The goats provide meat for her family, income through sales, and animal compost used to enrich her fields where she grows mahangu and other crops. What began as a livestock intervention has evolved into a regenerative cycle, livestock supporting agriculture, agriculture strengthening food security, and both reducing vulnerability to poverty.

In the nearby village of Omauni, NILALEG's investment is visible in timber, tools, and opportunity. The Omauni Wood Carving Carpentry Workshop, established in 2015, originally operated without electricity or machinery. In 2023, NILALEG equipped the workshop with electricity and wood-cutting and carving machines, transforming it into a fully functioning production space. Now managed by Penehambeko "Penny" Johannes, the workshop produces bedframes, cupboards, chairs, headboards, and custom wooden furniture, primarily using high-quality birdplum wood.

Beyond production, the workshop serves as a centre for skills transfer and employment. Young people from the community are trained in carpentry, many arriving with no prior experience. One of them is Robert Leonard, a young San man who, through mentorship and hands-on training, can now independently operate machinery. For many of the young men who pass through the workshop, these skills provide a pathway to income, stability, and the ability to support their families.

Forest use is guided by ethical and sustainable practices. Selective harvesting and forest thinning promote healthier tree growth, reduce wildfire risk, encourage biodiversity, and contribute to the restoration of native ecosystems. Community members are included throughout the process,



including during tree sourcing, where participation is compensated, ensuring economic benefit extends beyond the workshop itself.

NILALEG's work in Okongo also addresses critical infrastructure needs. Across the area, the project has constructed seven boreholes, providing reliable water sources for domestic animals in a region often affected by dry conditions. These boreholes support livestock health, reduce pressure on natural water sources, and strengthen rural livelihoods.

At Ndevahoma, NILALEG transformed what was once a community kraal into a functioning livestock auction hall. The monthly auctions allow farmers from Okongo and surrounding areas to sell cattle at fair market value, generating income and strengthening the local livestock economy. The auction hall also creates employment for young men who manage the facility and care for the animals, earning wages that support daily needs. During auction days, local vendors sell traditional food and drinks, further expanding economic activity within the community.

Together, these initiatives reflect NILALEG's integrated approach to landscape management—one that recognises the interdependence of people, land, and livelihoods. By aligning environmental restoration with economic opportunity, NILALEG's work in Okongo contributes to reducing poverty, protecting biodiversity, and building inclusive, sustainable growth rooted in nature.





RUACANA LANDSCAPE

Building resilience where every drop matters

Bordering the Kunene River and spanning parts of both the Omusati and Kunene regions, the Ruacana Landscape is one of contrasts. Mountainous terrain gives way to open plains, while communities rely on a combination of livestock farming, crop production and natural resources to sustain their livelihoods. Several cultural groups, including the Ovandongona, San, Ovatusa, Ovahimba and Aawambo, call this landscape home.

Like many semi-arid regions, Ruacana faces increasing challenges from soil erosion, water scarcity and climate variability. These pressures threaten agricultural productivity while placing additional strain on already vulnerable households.

NILAEG's work in Ruacana focuses on practical solutions that restore both landscapes and livelihoods. Erosion control, improved water infrastructure, community nurseries and support for marginalised communities are helping strengthen resilience while improving access to the natural resources upon which local people depend.

Landscape Themes

- Sustainable harvesting
- Forestry
- Nature-based enterprise
- Community governance
- Water security

Ruacana

OHANGWENA



Gabriel Kajakurapo



REVIVING RUACANA

How solar-powered boreholes are transforming landscapes and livelihoods



Imagine being a subsistence farmer in the Ruacana area of Namibia – if you do not live near the Kunene River, Namibia's northwestern border with Angola, your primary water source is likely to be the local borehole. The only way to extract this water is with a diesel-driven engine. As a subsistence farmer in the mopane-dotted landscape, money is hard to come by, yet every month you must make a contribution with the rest of the community to buy diesel to power the engine and pump water for each household. Sometimes the engine breaks down and needs to be taken to far-off Opuwo for repairs, leaving the community without water for several days. Your much-valued goats and cattle cannot access this water, as it would increase diesel costs. Instead, livestock must be taken to a water point 15 or more kilometres away – a journey made even more challenging by the scorching summer temperatures, which can easily range from the mid-30s to over 40°C.

Through the Namibia Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance (NILALEG) project, communities like these have been targeted to achieve the project's main goal of improving living standards by reducing land degradation and integrating agriculture and forestry management. The beneficiaries are part of the Ruacana landscape, one of five landscapes identified in the country's north as part of the project. The Ruacana focal landscape features two distinct topographies and stretches over parts of the Omusati and Kunene regions.

NILALEG rehabilitated three existing boreholes in the villages of Otjovanatje, Okauapehuri and Ongete and drilled a new one in Ombambihaka. The project included the installation of solar panels, electric water pumps, water tanks, troughs and protective walls around the installations in these Ovahimba villages.

"The situation was tough because we were using a diesel pump. It was difficult to buy diesel and to go fix the engine in Opuwo. Now, with the solar system, everything is very easy. We have constant access to water, our livestock drink daily and the farmers' association also benefits through the garden project," says Gabriel Kajakurapo, the chairman of Ongete's water committee.

Another initiative of the project was to set up water committees for each village. "The water committee was introduced to protect the water points at the borehole. We make sure all the livestock in the community get access to the drinking troughs and have a turn to drink water. We also ensure everything is in working order so that the community always has water," explains Mavejaruka Tjiuma, the vice chairperson of the water committee at Okauapehuri.

In addition to being a member of the water committee, Mavejaruka is a grateful member of the community whose life has been greatly improved thanks to the project. "Due



to the lack of water points, we sometimes had to fetch water from other villages. It was a struggle to go about our daily activities at home, doing basic tasks like cooking. We now have a water line that runs to the village, where everyone can collect water. We can make food on time now, and it is easier to feed our children," she says.

Not only do the households benefit but farming practices have also been simplified. "Our animals no longer have to travel long distances for water. No one has to spend long hours with the animals in the veld searching for water. Our livelihoods are improving as we now have constant water close to the village, and our livestock numbers are increasing," says Uaraja Kavari, the chairman of Okauapehuri's water committee.

Funded by the Global Environmental Facility through the United Nations Development Programme, NILALEG is a five-year project which was officially launched in 2020. Through the implementation of natural resource management solutions, the project has reached more than 20,000 direct beneficiaries across the five focal landscapes.

ONGETE FARMER'S ASSOCIATION



The Namibia Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance (NILALEG) is an ambitious project aimed at improving the livelihoods of rural communities while promoting sustainable land management. One of its target areas is the Ruacana Focal Landscape, which stretches over parts of northern Namibia's Omusati and Kunene regions. This landscape is home to communities like the Ongete Farmers' Association, which has been a direct beneficiary of the project's resources and training programmes.

The primary objective of NILALEG is to enhance living standards in these rural areas by addressing land degradation and integrating sustainable agriculture and forestry practices. By providing communities with essential resources such as water tanks, pipes, infrastructure for an enclosed nursery, seeds and training on crop production,

the project enables local farmers to grow food for themselves while also generating income. This approach not only improves food security but also builds resilience against the challenges posed by climate change and drought.

Gabriel Kajakurapo, a member of the Ongete Farmers' Association, explains that the project has made a significant difference in their community. Through NILALEG, they received training on soil preparation, crop planting techniques and how to care for different types of crops. "We now grow food for our households, and the surplus is sold to nearby communities," says Kajakurapo. "Previously, if we needed something like tomatoes, we had to travel to Ruacana, which is far from here and costly due to transport. Now, we can sell our produce locally, reducing the cost for everyone."

In addition to traditional crops like tomatoes, green peppers, carrots, spinach and onions, the project emphasises the cultivation of indigenous trees such as moringa, bird plum and jackalberry trees. The trees are grown in the nursery from seedlings and replanted in the veld to repopulate the surrounding area with these species, which have become scarce. The project should prove valuable for future generations, as some of these trees also provide food for livestock, especially during droughts. The project not only helps preserve local biodiversity but also creates new opportunities for income generation, as trees are sold to the community.

Another important aspect of the NILALEG Project is its emphasis on community involvement and governance. Jeremia Katambo, secretary of the Etoto Farmers' Association, highlights the role of the farmers' associations in coordinating the project and serving as a link between NILALEG and the Ongete Farmers' Association. "We engage with the community and traditional leaders to seek permission for what NILALEG intends to do on the land," Katambo explains. "The farmers' association is responsible for recruiting workers, such as nursery caretakers, and ensuring that the project is inclusive of everyone, including women, elderly people and individuals with disabilities."

The nurseries, managed by six local caretakers, provide a vital source of income for these workers. Each caretaker receives a monthly allowance of N\$1,000 which helps them support their families. In the long run, the goal is for the nurseries to become self-sustaining through the sale of fruit, vegetables and seedlings.

In addition to crops and trees, the project has also established a grass seed bank to address the needs of livestock farmers. Hardy perennial grasses have been identified as suitable for producing seeds, which will be planted in selected areas after the first rain to provide nutritious feed for animals, especially during dry seasons.

Overall, the NILALEG Project integrates agriculture, forestry and community governance to create a more sustainable future for rural Namibian communities. By reducing the distance to markets, restoring degraded land and fostering local food production, NILALEG is helping these communities build resilience in the face of environmental challenges while improving their quality of life.





NKULIVERE LANDSCAPE

Where healthy forests create lasting livelihoods

The woodlands of the Kavango West Region are among Namibia's richest natural landscapes. Towering trees, abundant indigenous plants and productive forests support communities that have depended on these resources for generations through livestock farming, crop production and responsible harvesting of natural products.

These forests are also economically significant. Products such as Devil's Claw and mangetti nuts provide opportunities for rural households to generate income directly from nature, provided they are harvested responsibly and managed sustainably.

NILAEG's work in Nkulivere focuses on ensuring that conservation delivers tangible economic benefits. Through sustainable harvesting programmes, community carpentry workshops, forestry partnerships, improved water infrastructure and stronger landscape governance, the project demonstrates that protecting forests can also improve livelihoods. Earlier project stories highlight sustainable Devil's Claw harvesting, the Mutjimangumwe Carpentry Workshop, revolving livestock support and multi-stakeholder coordination as core components of this approach.

Landscape Themes

- Sustainable harvesting
- Forestry
- Nature-based enterprise
- Community governance
- Water security

Nkulivere

KAVANGO WEST



NKULIVERE RISING

A Closer Look at NILALEG's Sustainable Development Initiatives in the Kavango West

In the verdant expanses of the Nkulivere landscape in the Kavango West Region of Namibia, a transformative initiative, managed by the Namibia Nature Foundation under NILALEG, is taking root. The NILALEG project is at the forefront of pioneering development, aiming to uplift local communities through sustainable natural resource management by integrating environmental stewardship with economic growth. I recently had the opportunity to discuss this initiative with Werner Mbongo, the project coordinator for NILALEG's Nkulivere landscape, as we sat on the banks of the Okavango River just outside Nkurenkuru.

At the heart of NILALEG's mission in Nkulivere is the integration of community-based projects that not only support but also enhance local livelihoods. Werner detailed several initiatives that are tailored to the unique needs and potentials of the region. Among these is a dynamic Woodcarvers' Cooperative, which benefits from a newly constructed carpentry workshop located next to the Mpungu Constituency and Regional Directorate of Forestry offices. This cooperative, composed of an organised group of community members, facilitates local craftsmanship, while its collaborative efforts with the constituency and Directorate

of Forestry ensure sustainable wood-harvesting practices that are respectful of the region's rich forest resources. The establishment of the Mutjimangumwe Carpentry Workshop is a testament to this initiative's success, providing a dedicated space for woodcarvers to hone their skills and produce valuable products like furniture which can be sold to communities, schools, hospitals and more, which in turn boosts local income.

Agricultural support is another cornerstone of NILALEG's efforts. The project has introduced an innovative approach to livestock farming with a revolving small-stock programme. This initiative provides local farmers with goats, which they grow and then pass on some of their herd to other farmers in the community, creating a sustainable cycle of wealth and resource sharing. This method not only enhances livestock production but also strengthens community bonds and resilience.

Moreover, Werner highlighted innovative support structures to agriculture that involve the construction of boreholes and earth dams. Through this additional infrastructure, NILALEG is addressing the perennial challenge of water scarcity in Nkulivere. These projects enable the development

of community gardens that provide food and a source of income, with the added benefit of using irrigation to reduce dependency on unpredictable rainfall, ensuring that agricultural practices are not solely reliant on erratic rainfall but are supported by sustainable water management techniques.

In addition to these agricultural endeavours, NILALEG supports the harvesting of local natural products like mangetti nuts and devil's claw, both of which offer significant economic potential. The devil's claw project, in particular, is a stellar example of sustainable resource use, where harvesters are trained to collect parts of the plant in a way that ensures its continued growth and availability.

Crucial to the success and longevity of these initiatives is NILALEG's focus on establishing multi-stakeholder engagement structures. These collaborative platforms bring together a variety of stakeholders, including government and non-governmental organisations, to ensure that the projects continue to benefit the community long after the initial phase of NILALEG concludes. This structure not only leverages existing expertise and infrastructure within government and non-government institutions, but also fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among local participants.

Werner also shared insights into the challenges faced, such as aligning the diverse perspectives of various stakeholders, including regional councils and traditional authorities.

However, he remains optimistic about overcoming these obstacles through continued dialogue and collaboration, reinforcing the community's capacity to manage and expand on the work initiated by NILALEG.

As NILALEG approaches its planned conclusion in 2025, the focus remains on ensuring these projects are sustainable and self-sustaining. The short- to medium-term plans include continued support for existing projects like the carpentry workshop, as well as expanded training and resource management plans to enhance the output and benefits of projects like the mangetti nut processing and devil's claw harvesting. Furthermore, a collaborative effort toward establishing a regional forestry reserve is also in the works.

Our conversation with Werner, under the shade of a leadwood tree, was a firsthand look at the tangible impacts of thoughtful, sustainable development efforts. In Nkulivere, through the diligent work of the NILALEG project and its many partners, the threads of tradition, community and sustainability are woven into a basket, which holds the key to improved livelihoods and environmental stewardship. As this project continues to unfold, it stands as a compelling model of how integrated, community-focused conservation efforts can make a significant difference in the lives of many.





Dried Devil's Claw
(*Harpagophytum procumbens*)

SUSTAINABLE HARVESTING OF DEVIL'S CLAW

A Lifeline for Communities in the Kavango West

In a groundbreaking initiative aimed at bridging the gap between nature conservation, agriculture and governance, Namibia is witnessing a transformation in the management of its rural landscapes. Venture Media, in collaboration with the Namibia Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance (NILALEG), has launched a podcast series to shed light on this innovative project. Jonas Nghishidi, the project leader, recently shared insights into NILALEG's ambitious mission to foster a harmonious coexistence between people and the environment.

Across vast northern Namibia, the NILALEG Project orchestrates a series of conservation and community upliftment efforts across five main landscapes, each hosting unique activities aimed at sustainable development. Among these, the Nkulivere Landscape in Kavango West stands out for its strategic focus on many nature-based sustainable use projects, among them the sustainable harvesting of Devil's Claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*). This peculiar plant, recognised by its hook-like fruit, is not only celebrated for its anti-inflammatory properties but also as a cornerstone in the project's mission to enhance local livelihoods through the controlled and sustainable utilisation of natural resources.

Werner Mbongo and Mukoya Nyangana, project coordinators with the Namibia Nature Foundation, are at the helm in Nkulivere. They explain the initiative's dual goals: ecological sustainability and economic empowerment. "The main objective is sustainable livelihood improvement," Mukoya says, noting the rich abundance of Devil's Claw in the area which catalysed the project's inception. The NILALEG team supports local harvesters with everything from training workshops to essential harvesting tools, ensuring that the plant's extraction is managed carefully to avoid depleting its wild populations.

For local residents like Shapi Sakeus and Haiyambo Regina Kapango, Devil's Claw harvesting has become a lifeline. Shapi describes his journey into harvesting: "I harvest Devil's Claw because I would like to improve my life. When you sell Devil's Claw, you can pay your children's school fees and buy food for your house. We can live from it." Regina's experience echoes this sentiment, "It changed my life a lot. Now I can start a business," highlighting the project's profound economic impact.

However, sustainable harvesting presents its own set of challenges, particularly in market dependencies. Mukoya highlights a critical issue: "There is only one buyer...when you engage community

members, you hear issues like they need diversity." This limitation not only affects pricing flexibility but also exposes harvesters to the risks of market downturns. In response, the project promotes broader buyer engagement and combats illegal harvesting, which can both economically and ecologically undermine their efforts.

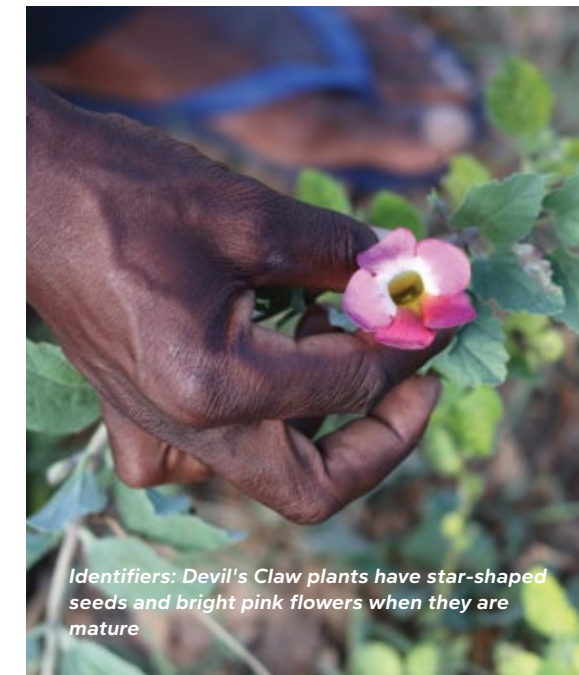
Central to the project's strategy is a robust training program. Werner details a peer-led education model that ensures best practices in sustainable harvesting spread throughout the community. "We train a 12-member committee from different villages on sustainable Devil's Claw harvesting, and then they become trainers themselves," he describes. This approach not only fosters community resilience but also ensures that sustainable methods are deeply ingrained across the region.

The economic and social benefits of the project are undeniable. Mukoya proudly states, "Our harvesters, when they do the harvesting, sell and the income is used at household level, improving their lives." He points to the increased adherence to sustainable methods and the growing number of locals registering as harvesters as key successes.

As the sun sets over the Nkulivere landscape, the promise of growth and sustainability looms large. With ongoing efforts to expand its reach and deepen its impact, the NILALEG Project is poised to set a global benchmark in sustainable natural resource management. Here in the Kavango West, through the roots of Devil's Claw, a humble yet powerful plant, a vibrant future is being cultivated for Namibia's local communities. This project is more than just about harvesting — it's about nurturing a sustainable future.



Tate Shapi Sakeus identifies
a Devil's Claw plant



Identifiers: Devil's Claw plants have star-shaped seeds and bright pink flowers when they are mature



Scan the QR Code to watch a video on the Devil's Claw harvesting project.





ZAMBEZI LANDSCAPE

Where rivers, wildlife and people thrive together

Unlike Namibia's more arid landscapes, the Zambezi Landscape is defined by water. The Zambezi and Chobe Rivers shape a rich mosaic of floodplains, forests, grasslands and wetlands that support extraordinary biodiversity alongside thriving rural communities. Livelihoods combine livestock farming, crop production, fishing, tourism and wildlife conservation, reflecting the region's unique natural wealth.

This abundance brings its own challenges. Balancing agricultural production, wildlife conservation, ecosystem health and economic growth requires careful planning and strong collaboration between communities and institutions.

NILALEG is helping communities harness these natural advantages while protecting the systems that make them possible. Restoration of degraded areas, improved livestock production, beekeeping, honey value chains and other nature-based enterprises illustrate how healthy ecosystems can become engines for sustainable local development. The communications strategy highlights nutrient hotspot restoration, livestock support and honey production as flagship activities in this landscape.

Landscape Themes

- Wetland conservation
- Sustainable agriculture
- Wildlife coexistence
- Nature-based enterprise
- Ecosystem restoration

Katima Mulilo

ZAMBEZI

CULTIVATING HOPE

NILALEG's transformation of the Zambezi Region

In the Zambezi Region, a quiet yet powerful transformation is taking place. The Namibia Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance (NILALEG) is blending environmental restoration with community-driven initiatives to create meaningful change. By addressing both the needs of the local communities and the degraded landscapes around them, NILALEG has introduced a series of projects focused on beekeeping, maize meal production, cattle farming and fodder production. These initiatives aim not only to improve livelihoods but also to foster sustainable development that protects the environment.

One of the standout successes of NILALEG is its beekeeping initiative, which empowers 21 farmers with the tools, knowledge and training to produce honey sustainably. Though challenges such as drought have reduced the number of active hives, the farmers have embraced innovative techniques like bee trapping to maintain production levels. Having received expert training from a Zambian beekeeper in Livingstone, they are now producing honey for both consumption and medicinal use, creating vital income streams for their families. Looking ahead, the beekeeping community has plans to cultivate flowering vegetation to support the bees, ensuring a more resilient future for this growing industry.

Similarly, the hammer-milled maize meal production project has become a crucial pillar in enhancing food security in the region. Managed by skilled miller Oscar Bulundu, the mill processes locally harvested maize, saving residents the need to travel to Katima Mulilo. The introduction of a new machine has improved local skill development and increased production capacity. However, Oscar notes, "Last year, we didn't have a good harvest due to low rainfall, so sometimes it doesn't meet the demand of locals." Despite difficulties such as reduced rainfall and high maintenance costs, the project continues to supply maize meal to local and regional markets, supporting both economic growth and food security.

In Kalimbeza Village, the cattle farming initiative has had a profound impact on Rosemary Inambao's life. After receiving a bull from NILALEG, she started with just two cattle and has successfully grown her herd to six. Despite challenges such as limited grazing land, water shortages and pest infestations, Rosemary says, "It provides my family with milk and helps us plough our fields." With additional support for fodder, veterinary care and infrastructure, her herd has the potential to grow further, benefiting both her family and the wider community.



By investing in skills development and empowering local communities to manage projects independently, NILALEG is ensuring long-term sustainability while preserving the region's natural heritage for future generations.

The pilot Bush2Feed project, led by passionate local gardener Manga Lubanda, has also flourished. Despite adversity such as a broken tractor and inadequate irrigation, Manga has transformed high-demand seeds, like lablab beans and cowpeas, into thriving crops. Her work not only supplies cattle feed to nearby farmers but also serves as an inspiration to the community through informal training. With the introduction of proper irrigation systems, her garden could reach its full potential, providing even greater support to her community.

NILALEG's success lies in its ability to overcome challenges such as resource limitations, fluctuating environmental conditions and infrastructure setbacks. Field coordinator Regina Mwinga emphasises the importance of strengthening collaborations with government ministries, enhancing community-driven maintenance systems and securing additional funding for sustainable infrastructure. "Going forward, the project should focus on landscape restoration, particularly addressing degraded rangelands overrun with thickets and invasive species that affect both communities and wildlife. Exploring the potential to produce fodder from these species presents an exciting opportunity," she adds.

By investing in skills development and empowering local communities to manage projects independently, NILALEG is ensuring long-term sustainability while preserving the region's natural heritage for future generations. Through its holistic approach, NILALEG is cultivating hope and resilience in the Zambezi Region by transforming landscapes, uplifting communities and paving the way for a sustainable future.





SEEDS OF STRENGTH

Cultivating Resilience
with NILALEG's
Bush2Feed Initiative



Under the unrelenting Namibian sun, a flourishing garden emerges as a testament to resilience and hope. In Katima Mulilo Rural, where nature's rhythms blend seamlessly with the pulse of daily life, Manga Lubanda leads the Bush2Feed pilot project. Supported by the Namibian Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance (NILALEG), this initiative addresses the pressing challenges of drought and food insecurity by transforming arid land into a productive oasis that supports local farmers and their livestock.

NILALEG's support has empowered a local gardener, Manga Lubanda, with seeds for essential crops such as lablab beans, cowpeas, and lucerne. These crops provide critical cattle feed to neighbouring farmers grappling with barren grazing lands and nutrient-deficient livestock diets. Having received formal training in Kalimbeza Village, Lubanda has turned her garden into a hub of agricultural activity, supporting both her family and the local farming community.

To meet the constant demand for livestock feed, she employs a strategic planting system, cultivating vegetation at three stages: seedlings, maturing crops, and almost-ripe harvests. This approach ensures a steady supply of feed even in the face of challenging conditions. Alongside seeds and fertilizer, a milling machine provided by NILALEG has become integral to Lubanda's operation, allowing her to prepare high-quality feed such as sunflower-based chicken feed, Nipier grass, and Teff grass. Often mixed with salt to enhance nutritional value, these feeds are milled three to four times a month, depending on demand.

Manga's dedication goes beyond her personal achievements. Through actively mentoring community members in sustainable farming practices, she inspires others to unlock the potential of their land, fostering collaboration and growth in the region. "I always encourage my community to start their own gardens. I'm happy to offer short training sessions and share my knowledge," she smiles, reflecting her passion for empowering those around her. Her garden also serves as a source of employment for two young men, contributing to job creation and skills development. Through these efforts, Manga empowers her community to adopt innovative agricultural solutions, strengthening collective resilience against environmental challenges.

Despite her successes, Manga Lubanda faces ongoing challenges. Water scarcity remains a major barrier to expanding her garden, and some grasses struggle to thrive in the harsh climate. "I am pleading for help with drip irrigation or sprinklers so that I can extend my land," she explains, emphasising how such support would enable her to meet the high demand from local farmers. Currently, this demand often forces her to harvest grass before it has fully matured. Additionally, livestock such as goats and cattle frequently invade the garden at night, causing significant damage and losses. Seasonal threats from migrating elephants exacerbate these issues. Implementing proper

fencing would provide a long-term solution to protect the garden from domestic animals, ensuring its sustainability. Maintenance costs for the milling machine, particularly for oil, further strain resources, as the machine can only operate for six to seven hours a day before overheating. Manga Lubanda's story is a powerful testament to determination and hope, demonstrating how passion and support can turn challenges into opportunities. Her thriving garden not only provides sustenance for her family and community but also highlights the importance of perseverance and innovation in overcoming resource constraints. While grateful for the progress made, Lubanda remains optimistic about the future and advocates for continued investment in essential infrastructure like fencing and irrigation to broaden the garden's impact. By tackling these challenges, the Bush2Feed initiative has the potential to evolve into a sustainable model for agricultural growth and resilience in Katima Mulilo Rural and beyond.

Other than addressing immediate agricultural needs, the Bush2Feed initiative also serves broader environmental and economic goals by providing a sustainable source of livestock feed. This effort alleviates pressure on natural grazing lands, fostering land restoration and conservation. With unwavering dedication and support, Manga's vision for a greener, more sustainable future is within reach.



BUZZING

Sikanjabuka's Rise in Beekeeping

A few kilometres outside Katima Mulilo, in the northeastern Zambezi region, lies Sikanjabuka, a small rural community embracing sustainable development. Through the Namibian Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance (NILALEG), beekeeping has become a transformative initiative, merging environmental restoration with livelihood improvement. Today, 21 trained beekeepers generate income while strengthening the community's resilience.

Sikanjabuka's flowering vegetation, nearby water sources, and tranquil setting provide optimal conditions for beekeeping. Beekeepers carefully suspend trapping boxes in shaded, flowering trees to attract wild bees, which are later relocated to the apiary for honey production.

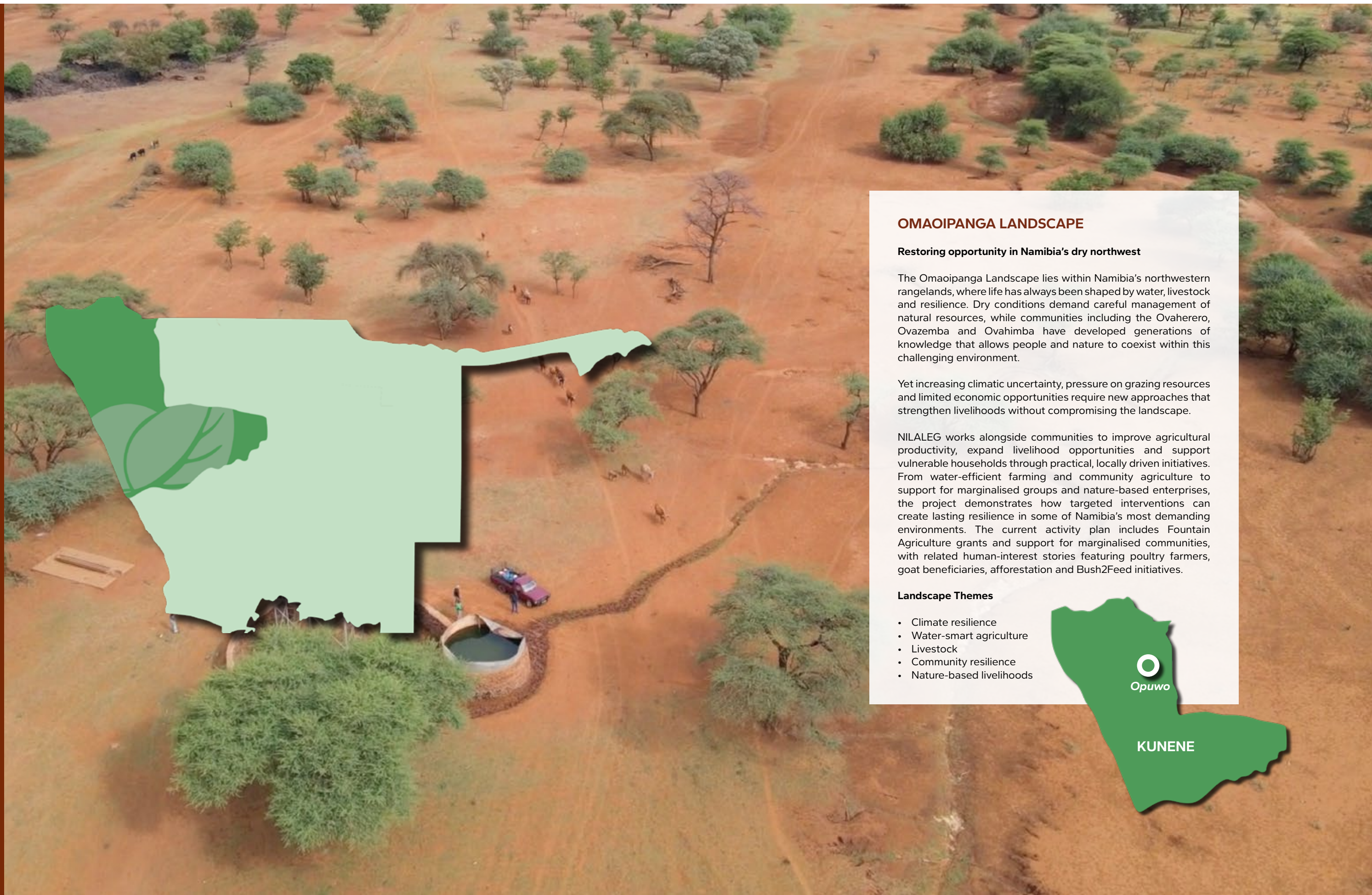
While honey production offers great potential, it is heavily influenced by seasonal cycles, with rainfall fluctuations directly impacting output. Josephine Sinvula, Vice



Secretary of the Sikanjabuka Community Forest and a dedicated beekeeper for four years, shares, "Due to last year's poor rains and the ongoing drought, many bees have absconded, leaving us with just one active hive." To maintain colony strength during times of low nectar availability, beekeepers resort to supplementing with sugar syrup feeding.

Apart from these obstacles, Sikanjabuka's beekeepers remain committed, expanding trapping sites near riverbanks where cooler conditions and blooming flowers support bee activity. By planting more flowering vegetation and investing in local skills, the community is building a stronger and more sustainable beekeeping industry. Through NILALEG's support, Sikanjabuka is not just producing honey — it's safeguarding its natural heritage for future generations.





OMAOIPANGA LANDSCAPE

Restoring opportunity in Namibia's dry northwest

The Omaoipanga Landscape lies within Namibia's northwestern rangelands, where life has always been shaped by water, livestock and resilience. Dry conditions demand careful management of natural resources, while communities including the Ovaherero, Ovazemba and Ovahimba have developed generations of knowledge that allows people and nature to coexist within this challenging environment.

Yet increasing climatic uncertainty, pressure on grazing resources and limited economic opportunities require new approaches that strengthen livelihoods without compromising the landscape.

NILALEG works alongside communities to improve agricultural productivity, expand livelihood opportunities and support vulnerable households through practical, locally driven initiatives. From water-efficient farming and community agriculture to support for marginalised groups and nature-based enterprises, the project demonstrates how targeted interventions can create lasting resilience in some of Namibia's most demanding environments. The current activity plan includes Fountain Agriculture grants and support for marginalised communities, with related human-interest stories featuring poultry farmers, goat beneficiaries, afforestation and Bush2Feed initiatives.

Landscape Themes

- Climate resilience
- Water-smart agriculture
- Livestock
- Community resilience
- Nature-based livelihoods



OPUWO

Where water, land and livelihoods meet



In Namibia's northern regions, environmental degradation and poverty are closely linked. Irregular rainfall, declining soil fertility, and limited water access continue to threaten livelihoods in densely settled rural areas. Without integrated landscape management, these pressures deepen inequality and erode the natural systems communities depend on. In and around Opuwo, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, through the NILALEG Project, is addressing these challenges by supporting community-driven initiatives that connect environmental restoration with sustainable livelihoods.

In Okorosave, within the broader Omaoipanga landscape, a NILALEG-supported waterhole has become a lifeline in an environment dominated by sand and scattered vegetation. From its edges, narrow manmade channels carry water into nearby community gardens. These gardens, built and maintained by residents, grow carrots, cabbages, red chillies, spices, sugar cane, watermelon, and other crops. The steady flow of water allows the gardens to remain productive even when their owners are away. Families use the produce to feed



themselves and sell surplus for income. The waterhole also serves livestock and wildlife, reinforcing the connection between human livelihoods and the surrounding ecosystem.

A few kilometres away in Okavare, livestock forms the backbone of survival. Brian Katundu became a beneficiary of NILALEG's goat programme in 2024, receiving eleven goats. Although disease and harsh conditions claimed some of them, the remaining goats have significantly improved his quality of life. Erratic rainfall and poor grazing often force him to buy feed, and access to veterinary supplies remains a challenge, especially during breeding seasons. Despite this, the goats provide milk, food, and income. Brian no longer needs to buy milk, can support his children and parents, and carefully records his livestock, treating them as both responsibility and security.

Water access remains critical in Okorosave. The Okorosave borehole, supported by NILALEG, draws hundreds of goats and cattle each day. In an area with only two boreholes and largely dry riverbeds, these water points are essential. To address erosion and manage seasonal flooding, NILALEG installed gabions in the riverbeds. Gabions — structures made from stone-filled wire cages — slow water flow, prevent soil erosion, and encourage groundwater recharge. In Okavare, two gabions were built with stone, while others were constructed by community members using sticks from nearby trees, secured with wire provided by NILALEG.

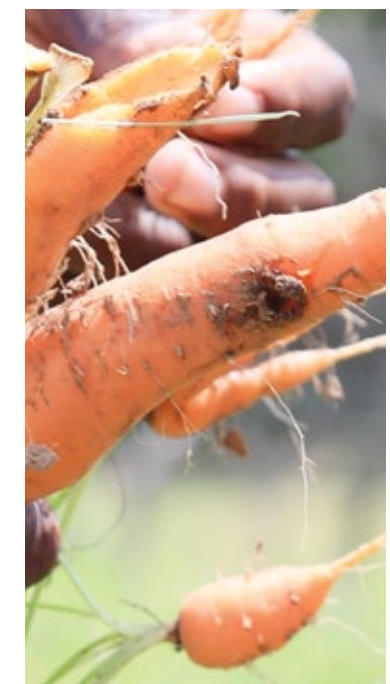
These structures have reshaped how water moves through the landscape. Areas once deeply eroded have stabilised, allowing water to flow in controlled paths rather than spreading destructively. When water levels rise, the gabions also create safer access routes for the community. By slowing runoff and retaining water, they contribute to long-term water conservation, a benefit the community deeply values.

Beyond water and livestock, NILALEG also supports restoration and future food security through the Okovingava Nursery outside Opuwo. The nursery grows guava, mango, lemon, bird plum, and other trees for sale to the community. Covered by a green shade net, the nursery protects young plants from harsh sun, wind, pests, and heavy rainfall,

creating a stable growing environment. The nursery also allows workers to grow fruits and vegetables for personal use, strengthening self-sufficiency.

According to Regional Councillor Ueutjerevi Ngunaihe, NILALEG's strength lies in its approach. Projects are not imposed; communities define their needs, leadership helps guide priorities, and NILALEG responds with funding, infrastructure, and skills training. Just as importantly, communities are encouraged to take ownership — maintaining and protecting what has been built.

Across Omaoipanga, and Opuwo, NILALEG's work shows how integrated landscape management can restore ecosystems while improving lives. By aligning water, land, and livelihoods, these interventions offer a practical model for sustainable rural development rooted in community participation.





Professor Osmund Damian Mwandemele Vice Chancellor, IUM

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

NILALEG spearheads the Integrated Landscape Management Conference

A significant stride towards sustainable development, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry, and Tourism (MEFT), in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is spearheading the Namibia Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance to Eradicate Poverty (NILALEG) Project, which is funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). This initiative aims to revolutionise land management practices across key agricultural and forest landscapes, integrating poverty reduction with environmental sustainability.

In alignment with their goals, the NILALEG Project, in collaboration with the International University of Management (IUM) - Faculty of Environment & Sustainable Tourism (FEST), recently hosted an annual national Integrated Landscape Management (ILM) conference in Windhoek. This conference brought together an array of stakeholders including government bodies, research institutions, and civil society organisations engaged in monitoring and reporting to international bodies like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

Speaking at the opening of the conference, Minister of Environment, Forestry, and Tourism, Pohamba Shifeta underscored the profound impact of environmental

degradation on Namibia, affecting 70% of the population dependent on natural resources. He emphasised that the NILALEG project is pivotal in addressing these challenges by promoting integrated landscape management. Particularly, he highlighted the project's objective of restoring degraded lands to enhance drought resilience — a critical initiative given Namibia's vulnerability to climate change.

UNDP Resident Representative to Namibia, Alka Bhatia, elaborated on the project's successes, including sustainable practices such as the harvesting of Devil's Claw, which has improved livelihoods while conserving natural resources. She also pointed to the integration of innovative digital tools such as geospatial technologies and drones, which play a crucial role in monitoring landscapes and guiding adaptive management decisions.

Shifeta commended the conference for facilitating dialogue among diverse experts, enabling the derivation of practical solutions to environmental challenges. "This approach balances conservation, agricultural practices, and sustainable development, with a strong emphasis on public-private partnerships (PPPs)," he added.

Bhatia noted that "the ILM Conference exemplifies Namibia's commitment to environmental governance and sustainable development, ensuring that our natural

resources support both present and future generations". She emphasised the conference's role in promoting partnerships, knowledge sharing, and the integration of scientific and indigenous knowledge — a cornerstone for advancing sustainable land management practices.

The conference proved a pivotal platform for knowledge sharing and strategic planning. Discussions encompassed the impact of climate change on Namibian landscapes, techniques for rehabilitating degraded areas, and the integration of digital tools for effective landscape management. Participants also explored public-private partnerships for nature-based initiatives. Consistent feedback from participants at the ILM Conference was the need to share what they had learnt here with a wider audience across Namibia, and many spoke of the fascinating discoveries and learnings they had uncovered here.

The NILALEG project and the ILM Conference are a testament to Namibia's dedication to sustainable development. The conference helped lay the groundwork for sustainable land management practices that benefit both people and the environment and demonstrated that by fostering collaboration, innovation, and informed decision-making, Namibia is poised to achieve environmental resilience while uplifting livelihoods across its landscapes.



Minister Pohamba Shifeta, MEFT





FORESTS FOR THE FUTURE

How the NILALEG project is supporting
Namibia's new generation of State
Forest Reserves

In a country where landscapes often define both identity and survival, Namibia's forests remain among its most overlooked natural assets. Yet in April 2026, a significant step was taken toward changing that narrative with the official launch of three new state forest reserves – Hamweyi in Kavango West, Kanovlei in Otjozondjupa and Zambezi State Forest in the Zambezi Region.

Together, the reserves represent more than 175,000 hectares of protected woodland ecosystems. Gazetted in 2022 and now moving into active management, they form part of a broader national effort to strengthen conservation, improve biodiversity protection, and create sustainable opportunities for rural communities that depend directly on forests for their livelihoods.

At the heart of this effort is the NILALEG project – the Namibia Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance – implemented with support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Through NILALEG, Namibia is pursuing a model that views conservation not as a restriction on development, but as a foundation for long-term economic and social resilience.

Speaking at the official launch ceremony in Windhoek, Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism Hon. Indileni Daniel described forests as “pillars of economic stability, social well-being and national resilience.” It is a sentiment reflected in the structure of the reserves themselves.

Unlike traditional conservation models that separate people from protected landscapes, these state forests are designed around community partnership. Local communities remain active participants in the sustainable management of the reserves, with continued access to grazing, firewood, medicinal plants, thatching grass and other forest resources. This approach recognises that conservation success in Namibia is inseparable from the wellbeing of the people living alongside these landscapes.

The scale of the new reserves is substantial. Zambezi State Forest spans more than 142,000 hectares, while Kanovlei covers nearly 22,000 hectares and Hamweyi over 11,000 hectares of ecologically important woodland savanna. These forests provide habitat and movement corridors for wildlife species including elephants, kudu and numerous bird species, while also playing a critical role in protecting soils, storing carbon and supporting climate stability.



Through the NILALEG project, the reserves are now supported by structured management plans, governance systems and community engagement strategies aimed at ensuring long-term sustainability. The project focuses on three interconnected priorities – healthier ecosystems, stronger livelihoods and improved environmental governance.

Importantly, the initiative also opens the door to emerging economic opportunities linked to sustainable natural resource management. From forest-based enterprises and eco-tourism potential to future carbon finance and biodiversity-linked investment opportunities, the reserves position Namibia to increasingly view its forests as valuable natural capital.

At the same time, the challenges remain real. Illegal logging, uncontrolled wildfires, poaching, land clearing and unsustainable harvesting continue to threaten woodland ecosystems across the country. Effective management, law enforcement and strong collaboration between government, traditional authorities, communities, and conservation partners will be essential to ensuring these reserves fulfil their promise.

For communities living in and around these forests, the benefits extend beyond environmental protection. The reserves represent livelihood security, sustainable access to resources and greater participation in decisions that shape the future of their landscapes.

The launch of Hamweyi, Kanovlei and Zambezi State Forests therefore marks more than the expansion of Namibia's protected area network. It reflects a growing recognition that conservation, community wellbeing and economic resilience are deeply interconnected.

Through the support of the NILALEG project, Namibia is laying the groundwork for a future where forests are not simply protected spaces on a map, but living landscapes that sustain biodiversity, strengthen rural livelihoods and contribute meaningfully to the country's long-term environmental and economic future.



The key objectives of NILALEG are clear:

Promoting integrated landscape management: Foster sustainable livelihoods and biodiversity protection in key agricultural and forest landscapes, restoring forests as carbon sinks.

Strengthening institutional coordination: Enhance governance and coordination mechanisms for successful integrated landscape management.

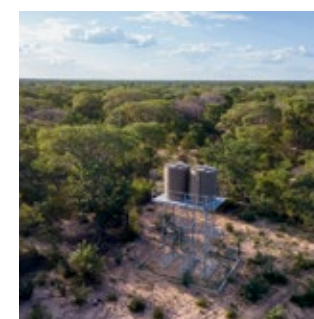
Implementation and upscaling: Implement the approach in target landscapes and secure sustainable financing for expansion.

Knowledge management: Develop a robust system for knowledge management, monitoring, evaluation, gender integration, and impact assessment.



Episode 1: Advancing Environmental Governance in Namibia

In this episode, we take an overall look at NILALEG and explore this transformative project in Namibia. The initiative, led by Jonas Nghishidi and supported by the Global Environmental Facility and the UNDP, aims to integrate conservation, agriculture, and governance to enhance the livelihoods of over 20,000 Namibians. Emphasising integrated landscape management, NILALEG addresses global challenges such as biodiversity loss and climate change, aligning with the UN's SDGs.



Episode 2: Nkulivere Rising

In the verdant expanses of the Nkulivere landscape in the Kavango West Region of Namibia, a transformative initiative, managed by the Namibian Nature Foundation under NILALEG, is taking root. The NILALEG project is at the forefront of pioneering development, aiming to uplift local communities through sustainable natural resource management by integrating environmental stewardship with economic growth. I recently had the opportunity to discuss this initiative with Werner Mbongo, the project coordinator for NILALEG's Nkulivere landscape, as we sat on the banks of the Okavango River just outside Nkurenkuru.

Venture Media in Conversation with



Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism



NILALEG (Namibia Integrated Landscape Approach for Enhancing Livelihoods and Environmental Governance) is a transformative five-year initiative aimed at improving environmental governance in Namibia's rural landscapes. Funded by the Global Environmental Facility and UNDP, NILALEG integrates agriculture and forestry management across five regions to enhance the livelihoods of over 20,000 people. By promoting sustainable development, biodiversity conservation, and climate change mitigation, the project addresses over ten UN Sustainable Development Goals. Central to its approach is integrated landscape management, fostering a balance between social, economic, and environmental needs. Local communities, particularly women and youth, are actively involved through multi-stakeholder coordination and grant mechanisms that support community-driven projects.

Scan the QR code below to listen to the podcast series where Venture Media, in conversation with NILALEG team members, partners and coordinators, unpacks the various projects and successes of the initiative.



Episode 3: Integrated Landscape Management Conference

NILALEG, led by the Ministry of Environment, Forestry, and Tourism and the UNDP, hosted the Integrated Landscape Management (ILM) conference in Windhoek in June 2024. The event united experts to discuss sustainable land management, climate change, and poverty reduction. Key highlights included restoring degraded lands, using digital tools like drones, and fostering public-private partnerships for Namibia's environmental resilience and sustainable development.



WATCH: Devil's Claw Harvesting

The NILALEG Project in Namibia's Kavango West region is empowering communities through the sustainable harvesting of Devil's Claw, a plant with valuable anti-inflammatory properties. Led by the Namibia Nature Foundation, this initiative promotes ecological sustainability and economic empowerment by providing training and tools to local harvesters. The project improves livelihoods, with locals using the income for essential needs like education and food. Despite challenges, the project fosters resilience, setting a global benchmark for sustainable natural resource management.

The Journey Continues

Every project has an end.

But meaningful change should not.

Over the past five years, NILALEG has worked alongside communities across five remarkable landscapes, not simply to implement projects, but to build something far more enduring. The true measure of success has never been the number of boreholes drilled, nurseries established, enterprises supported or hectares restored. It has been the knowledge shared, the partnerships formed, the confidence built and the local leadership strengthened.

Across northern Namibia, communities have shown that sustainable development is not something delivered from the outside. It is something created from within.

Farmers have adopted new practices that protect their soils while improving production. Harvesters are managing natural resources more sustainably. Community enterprises are creating local employment. Traditional authorities, regional councils, government institutions and development partners have learned to work together through integrated landscape management, recognising that healthy ecosystems and prosperous communities are inseparable.

These achievements belong to the people who live in these landscapes.

As NILALEG reaches its conclusion, the work does not end. The community structures that have been established, the skills that have been developed, and the partnerships that have been strengthened now provide the foundation for the future. Local ownership has always been the project's ultimate objective, ensuring that today's interventions continue to grow long after the final project activities have been completed.

There will undoubtedly be new challenges. Climate change, population growth and increasing pressure on natural resources will continue to test the resilience of Namibia's rural landscapes. Yet these landscapes are now better equipped to respond. They have demonstrated that conservation and development are not competing priorities, but complementary ones. When communities are empowered to manage their natural resources wisely, both people and nature flourish together.

Perhaps that is NILALEG's greatest legacy.

Not a collection of individual projects, but a different way of thinking.

A recognition that every landscape is a living system, where forests, rivers, grasslands, wildlife and people are all connected. That meaningful conservation begins by supporting livelihoods. That lasting development depends upon healthy ecosystems. And that the most sustainable solutions are those owned by the communities themselves.

The five landscapes featured throughout this publication each tell a different story.

Together, they tell one future.

A future in which Namibia's landscapes continue to sustain its people, and its people continue to protect the landscapes they call home.





www.meft.gov.na/projects/nilaleg-project/313

