

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM



BY

Minister of Environment and Tourism, Hon. Uahekua Herunga

**On the Occasion of the 1st Anniversary of the Environmental
Investment Fund**

Country Club, Windhoek

13 February 2012

Director of Ceremonies

Members of Parliament

Board Members of the Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia

Representatives of the Private Sector

Staff members from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism

Development partners

Esteemed members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am joyful to join you here today to celebrate the 1st Anniversary of the Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia. **Happy Birthday!** Like I always told my kids, we will have to wait until the Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia is **21** years before we pop the Champagne.

On birthdays and anniversaries, I like to remember beginnings, talk about victories, and look to the future. So let's do that, by starting with the birth of the Environmental Investment Fund.

After 22 years of leading the Namibian Struggle for Independence in exile, the Founding President of Namibia, His Excellence Dr. Sam Nujoma returned home and immediately noticed extreme ecosystem degradation that took place during the fight for liberation. In 1991, work commenced on the Green Plan and recognized that Namibia, as a direct result of its pre-independence policies of not investing in environmental protection, had inherited an "environmental debt" which must be addressed appropriately. The Founding President, His Excellence Dr. Sam Nujoma presented the Green Plan to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, in 1992 Rio Conference. It seemed like a simple concept, but this kind of thinking, on a global scale, supported our efforts at home. It was proposed that an environmental investment fund be set up to help with the financing of the "environmental debt". This culminated to the Promulgation of the Environment Investment Fund of Namibia Act, 2001 that established the Fund to support of environmental sustainability and natural resources management in Namibia.

His Excellency, President Hifikepunye Pohamba officially launched the Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia on the 13th of February 2012. In his own words, President Hifikepunye Pohamba desired to see a functional Fund that does not only invests in biodiversity management but also creates economic opportunities from the sustainable utilisation of natural resources. The Environmental Investment Fund has since begun to respond to these vision and aspirations of our leaders.

Turning to the victories

There is a saying that every successful business starts from humble beginnings. The Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Benedict Libanda was the first employee of the Fund. I am told he executed all functions during the first three months; as a secretary, front desk, driver, etc. As I speak today, the Fund is fully established, with a functional structure of competent professionals and operational procedures in place. I would like to congratulate the Chief Executive Officer for setting a good foundation and wishing him more productive times ahead.

Ladies and gentleman, I am glad to learn that the Board of Directors and Management of the Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia have prioritised prudence and good governance principles from day one. Excellent financial services and accountability in the management and administration of funds are essential in such an institution. In view of the role in financing projects and businesses, the Fund has addressed these fiduciary issues by means of developing effective internal financial policies, due diligences procedures, and other measures.

Today, we celebrate a principle we should remember and that is sustainable utilisation of natural resources for development. For example, when you give people a stake in resources where they live. In return, here's what you get: you get sustainability, you get efficiency, you get wealth, and equity. Namibia, therefore continue to be a global leader in promoting environmental democracy and equitable access to natural resources. Since the launch of the Fund, over **Two Hundred and Fifty Five** project proposals have been received to the value of **N\$ 89 Million**. The Fund approved **18 projects** worth **N\$ 7.4 Million**. About 3200 community members and individuals have benefited from the grants with at least 138 people employed on the supported projects.

Some of the highlights of the success stories include:

- Sharing experiences on Environmental Fiscal Reform on an international stage during the Rio +20 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Brazil.
- Producing of the Strategic Business Plan that describes the main focus of the Fund during the next four years.
- An international prestigious award received by the Eazy Stove Project for helping to curb greenhouse gas emissions or helping people to adapt to climate change. The award was presented by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat in December 2012.

I also want to acknowledge the contribution of the Environmental Investment Fund during our national bid to host the Green Climate Fund last year. Although we were not awarded to host the Green Climate Fund, we were able to put Namibia on the global map.

Director of ceremony

The biggest challenge to achieving sustainable development is financing. Most Namibians have little access to capital and therefore have not directly benefited from our endowed resources. Empowerment of our citizens is the best way to reduce poverty. It is against this background that I appreciate the work of the Environmental Investment Fund and its mandate. Today we have witnessed the handover of the second round of grants to our citizens. Resource allocations are the basis of power and wealth, freedom and prosperity. I therefore would like to request grant recipients to be prudent in the use of these resources. They must be exemplary to their neighbors.

So we have briefly looked back on beginnings, and we've celebrated successes. Before I close, let's take a moment to think about the future.

The Fund contains a forward-looking approach. This year, new developments are coming in the environmental sector. What are these developments?

- The Fund has designed different financing and disbursement products to support natural resource based enterprises in the form of concessionary loans, interest rate subsidies on green loans, and guarantee schemes.
- Furthermore, the Fund will actively support education, research, science, scholarships, and job training programs.
- Key investment in green technologies, tourism development, and Community Based Natural Resource Management including climate change adaptation is envisaged.

All of these developments are tied very closely to the aims and objectives of the Namibia Development Plan 4 and I say with confidence that the Fund is strategically placed to support low-hanging fruit that will enable us to attain the NDP 4. This is an exciting time, full of possibilities.

The Fund together with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and other relevant stakeholders will continue to pursue different options on how to effectively implement environmental levies in Namibia. We are now working strategies for long-term funding through partnerships and leveraging with other financial institutions, tools and investment structures. The Environmental Investment Fund will be busy consulting stakeholders on these issues.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A lot has been done in the past year, but we still need more progress. Our wellbeing and our environment require the Fund, and our economy will definitely benefit from it. I hope I have given some indication of the direction of the Environmental Investment Fund in the coming year.

I thank you for listening.