

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM



STATEMENT BY HON. NETUMBO NANDI-NDAITWAH, MP

MINISTER

**AT THE INAUGURATION OF INFRASTRUCTURE AT MAHANGO
STATION, BWABWATA NATIONAL PARK**

**4 MARCH, 2011
10h30**

**Mahango
Kavango Region**

Director of Ceremonies

Honourable Governor of the Kavango Region

Your Excellency the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany

Fumu Erwin Munika Mbambo of the Humbukushu Traditional Authority

Councilor of the Mukwe Constituency and other Councilors present

Executive Board Member of KfW

Managing Director of WWF Germany

All other delegates from KfW and WWF in Germany and Namibia

The Regional KAZA TFCA Coordinator and Secretariat Staff

Director of Parks and Wildlife Management and all Ministry Staff

Staff of the BMM Parks Project and SPAN Project

Representatives of line ministries

Representatives of support organizations

Communities residing and neighbouring the Bwabwata National Park

Members of the media from the Federal Republic of Germany and Namibia

Ladies and Gentlemen

A year ago, His Excellency Ambassador Egon Kochanke, of the Federal Republic of Germany and myself were here for the ground-breaking of these buildings. Today we are here again, to share in the joy of the work completed and on time. I am particularly pleased to share the treasures of the mighty Kavango Region with our esteemed guests from afar,

specifically the wonders of the Mahango Section of the Bwabwata National Park.

Our world- renowned national parks are one of the key tourism draw cards in Namibia. The tourism sector contributed about 14 percent to our GDP in 2009, and accounts for about 81 000 jobs nationwide. Traditionally, visitors have flocked to see the wildlife around Etosha Pan, the dunes at Sossusvlei or the seal colony at Cape Cross.

But there is a demand for new destinations, routes and products. Tourists are keen to discover our best kept secrets. These include the Bwabwata, Mamili, Mudumu and Khaudum National parks here in the Kavango and Caprivi regions. These parks have the potential to bring in maximum yields for the country as they offer new areas and routes for tourists to explore, generating new tourism products packages.

Already, there are various tourism initiatives in the region. Along this stretch of the river, from the Angolan border to where we stand today, the nine accommodation establishments registered in 2008 provided 217 jobs and generated a wage bill of three and a half million Namibia dollars (N\$3.5 million). Nearly two thirds of these tourists were from overseas, while the rest were either SADC visitors or tourists from our own country, domestic Tourism.

Director of ceremonies

Esteemed guests

Let us consider for a moment the history of Mahango and Bwabwata National Park. This area was proclaimed as the Mahango Game Reserve in 1989. It was proclaimed as a breeding sanctuary for rare species and is well-known for its elephants, sable, roan antelope and occasionally lions. It also conserves the Kalahari and riverine woodlands and Kavango Valley, which are a haven for more than 400 bird species.

While today the pristine nature of this park is its comparative advantage, tourism was relatively unknown in this area at Independence. Biodiversity had suffered due to the effects of war. The Namibian Government, however, recognized that our parks were engines for development, poverty alleviation and job creation.

The mandate of MET is to manage protected areas, habitats and species as well as to support rural development, Community-based Natural Resource Management and tourism. Therefore, Integrated park management was needed to ensure that a holistic approach to conservation and development would lead to a win-win situation for people, biodiversity and tourism.

Recognizing the potential of the north-eastern parks as far back as 1995, an agreement was reached between the Republic of Namibia and the Federal Republic of Germany to support these parks. This was part of a greater umbrella of Namibian – German Development Cooperation.

Our ongoing cooperative agreement aims to foster conservation and socio-economic development in the Kavango and Caprivi regions. We also strive to establish these parks as viable tourist destinations that will benefit both the people who live alongside them and inside their borders.

With this support from the German Government through KfW, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism then established the Bwabwata Mamili Mudumu or BMM Parks Project in 2006. Among its achievements, the project has developed management and tourism plans, and focused on infrastructure development and support the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA).

As part of a new vision for the north eastern parks, Mahango was combined with the area previously known as the Caprivi Game Park and the area known as the Golden Triangle, to form the Bwabwata National Park as approved by Cabinet in 1999, and the area was proclaimed as Bwabwata National Park in 2007.

The park is unusual in that nearly six thousand people live inside its borders. Various communities, such as the Kamutjonga and Mashi Communities, live on its borders. The Bwabwata Technical Committee was set up to give all stakeholders, especially rural communities neighbouring and living in the park, an opportunity to participate and consult on how best the Park can be zoned, managed and developed in the national interest and for their benefit. Communities take part in natural resource monitoring, through activities such as the Annual Game Count and anti-poaching patrols.

Benefits to residents include rights to harvest veld foods such as Devil's Claw. Last year, residents earned nearly N\$280 000 from the legal sale of Devil's Claw.

Recently, the Kyaramachan Association, which represents park residents, was awarded trophy hunting concessions. These are expected to yield about four million Namibia Dollars (N\$4m) a year, half of which goes directly to the communities through the Association. Twenty (20) full-time local jobs, opportunities for skills development and social investment are some of the other benefits. The Association is also expected to reap substantial benefits from the development of a new tourism destination in the region at White Sands, overlooking Popa Falls on the Kavango River. Projections are that this will attract private investment of about twenty million Namibia Dollars (N\$20m). Concession fees should exceed about half a million Namibia dollars (N\$500,000) annually at maturity. In addition, White Sands will create about forty (40) new jobs for people from the area.

Increasing benefits from wildlife conservation has encouraged people in and around the Bwabwata, Mudumu and Mamili National parks to become even better custodians of wildlife.

The Ministry does, however, recognise the challenges associated with living alongside a park. For this reason we have finalised the National Policy on Human Wildlife Conflict Management in 2009. Last year, we also developed measures and guidelines for the implementation of the policy. We are also finalizing the Protected Areas, Neighbours and Resident Community Policy which will guide our efforts and that of the communities in contributing to the improvement of conservation efforts of Namibia's protected areas, provide greater social equity in accessing benefits from protected areas and stimulate local economic development through creating business opportunities linked to protected areas.

We are pleased to note that some communities are taking active measures to minimise human-wildlife conflict. We have, in the Guidelines for the Implementation of the National Policy on Human Wildlife Conflict Management, identified mitigation, protection and preventative measures that we need to implement together with communities, line ministries, Regional Councils and other stakeholders to reduce or avoid human wildlife conflicts. One example is the use of chilli, which several communities are using, the same as is used in Tabasco sauce, to deter elephants from their crop fields. Several projects are underway to expand the use of chillies through training and education. Training and education is important to ensure proper handling of chillies and avoid health risk. We need also to look at placement of fields, and avoiding known wildlife paths and preferred feeding areas of wildlife. For the coming season, we are assessing the use of vuvuzelas to chase away elephants from people's crop fields, in other words, many other measures are being put in place. While the Government will continue to assist communities, they themselves should also take initiative and implement similar measures.

Please remember, the animals that are sometimes seen as a nuisance are also your diamonds. Elephants, lions, buffaloes, African wild dogs, crocodiles and many others are all species that tourists will cross the globe to come and see right here in Mahango. They bring with them opportunities for income, employment thus contributing to poverty reduction.

Director of ceremonies

Ladies and gentlemen

Of vital importance are the staff of MET. Under their guidance, and due to their hard work, dedication and commitment, working hand-in-hand with park residents and neighbours, these treasures are conserved, and I commend them for that.

The Government through MET, recognise that Ministry officials need appropriate tools and equipment to conduct their day-to-day activities effectively. For some time, they have had to do with poorly constructed houses with basic office facilities. Nevertheless, they have endured these hardships and continued with their day-to-day patrols, office work, and maintenance and community liaison. I therefore want to thank them and say, you have shown your commitment to nation building and fight against poverty.

Today, I am happy to say, through the bilateral Namibian German cooperation agreement; we have invested in new infrastructure for some of our most remote stations which are under served. These include Mahango, where we are today, Susuwe, also in the Bwabwata National Park on the western banks of the Kwando River and Ngenda Station in Mudumu National Park. At this stage, on behalf of the Namibian Government and its people, I thank the German Government for their support and we look forward to the continued cooperation between the two peoples and governments.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism, through its own budget and capacity, is upgrading some key tourist roads in the Mahango Core Area of Bwabwata National Park. We are also replacing and electrifying the entire park fence. This should reduce the incidence of human-wildlife conflict with

neighbouring communities. It will minimise the risk of the spread of foot-and-mouth disease across borders as Mahango has a good population of buffaloes.

As the next Inter-Governmental negotiation is set for May 2011 in Germany, MET is working closely with the National Planning Commission to prepare a new proposal for future cooperation. I can already inform you that our proposal will include the development of the Bwabwata Ecological Institute and Environmental Education Centre that will provide wildlife conservation research, education and training to our game Wardens, Rangers and Scouts as well as neighbouring and resident communities and schools, all with the aim of rural development and poverty reduction. This proposal will include Integrated Park Management for Mangetti National Park in the Kavango Region, which is part of the North East Parks, and Sperrgebiet National Park in the Karas Region.

Improved infrastructure and community involvement through integrated park management helps Namibia to be placed firmly in the heart of the KAZA TFCA initiative. This seeks to join fragmented wildlife habitats into an interconnected mosaic of protected areas and transboundary wildlife corridors, which will enhance the free movement of animals across international boundaries.

The German Government, through KfW, is also supporting the KAZA TFCA initiative and we are very thankful for that. In addition, we appreciate that WWF are also supporting this initiative. This continued support will help us foster trans-national collaboration and cooperation among the partner countries of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, in

implementing ecosystems and cultural resource management through the development and management of KAZA.

This will allow partner countries to enhance ecosystem integrity and natural ecological processes by harmonising natural resources management approaches and tourism development across international boundaries, as well as developing mechanisms and strategies for local communities to participate meaningfully in, and to tangibly benefit from the KAZA TFCA initiative. We look forward to your continued support. Let me also thank DGIS, PPF, and SDC for their support.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism expresses its heartfelt thanks through His Excellency Ambassador Egon Kochanke, to the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, for their continued friendship and support. I am also grateful to KfW for making sure that the funding is managed well and that projects are implemented accordingly. I am pleased that we can meet here again to see the fruits of our shared vision, and I once again look forward to a long and prosperous continued partnership.

I also express my appreciation to the staff or Project Management Unit of the BMM Parks Project for their hard work in the implementation of the Project, along with the SPAN Project and to those who have designed and built this facility.

I wish to express gratitude to my own staff, from the Management cadres to every rank including those working in our parks and regions, for their ongoing commitment to the protection of the environment, wildlife conservation and community development. Your work contributes to the

prosperity of the communities surrounding our parks, the national economy, but also to the national and global biodiversity commitments. You deserve to be applauded.

At the same time, I want to remind you to care for these facilities as if they were a new-born infant. Energy and millions of Namibian dollars are spent to provide these facilities for you, you are more privileged than many of your peers in the country, and all eyes will be watching you to see how you mother this child.

Last but not least, I thank the traditional authorities, regional councils and local communities for being the custodians of our precious biodiversity.

These riches, conserved by residents of Kavango and Caprivi regions, are no longer our best kept secret. We are sharing these treasures with the world. We invite visitors to come and share the tranquility and splendor of one of the earth's most bountiful wildernesses.

I thank you all.