



Remarks

By

Ms. Anita Kiki Gbeho

UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative

Official Launch of the African Drought Conference

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Arebbusch Lodge

Windhoek, Namibia

Hon. Christina //Hoebes, Deputy Minister, Office of the Prime Minister

Hon. Tommy Nambahu, Deputy Minister of Environment and Tourism

Hon. Anna Shiweda, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Water and Forestry

Mr. Immanuel Mwilima, Chief Executive Director, Namibia National Farmers Union (NNFU)

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Senior Government Officials

Media

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I give this speech on behalf of the UN family in Namibia, and in support of the launch of the African Drought Conference. Allow me to start by expressing appreciation to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism for the invitation.

The conference is opportune, as East and Southern Africa are currently facing one of the worst droughts in over 50 years¹, induced by El Nino.

Humanitarian and Development partners estimate that over 52 million² people will be food insecure in East and Southern African countries, and that this number could rise. The situation is so dire that in March this year, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Council of Ministers, recommended to Member States, that they declare a regional drought disaster.

El Nino is taking place in a world already dramatically affected by climate change, and where more extreme weather events are expected.

Therefore, response Aid is not enough; a longer term approach is required in order to build the resilience of the most vulnerable.

Namibia, one of the driest countries in Southern Africa, has also been affected by this drought. In Namibia, rainfall often evaporates before it reaches the ground. Only 2% of the rainfall ends up as

¹ United Nations World Food Programme

² UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

surface runoff, and 1% becomes available to recharge groundwater. 97 % of the rainfall is lost through Evapotranspiration³.

Critical water shortages are impacting harvests and the livestock industry in the agricultural sector, which sustains about 70 percent⁴ of the Namibian population.

Continued episodes of drought, threaten to unravel the gains made in poverty alleviation, and thus drought is an issue that needs collective response.

The recently adopted sustainable development goals, accord primacy to the people, planet and prosperity.

And SDG 13 calls for strengthening resilience to climate change. To achieve this, addressing climate change will need to be integrated into national planning and policies. Education and capacity on climate change will need to be improved. Early warning systems will need to be strengthened.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Namibian government and people have demonstrated leadership in preparedness and response efforts.

³ Namibia's Third National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

⁴ Bank of Namibia Quarterly bulletin

Whether you speak about the “Namibian Helping Namibians” campaigns, where ordinary citizens respond to their neighbour’s needs, or the Government spending about N\$ N\$ 127 million⁶ over the last year to assist farmers and communities during times of extreme drought, action has been taken.

Namibia, with support from the UN system is also implementing clear policy directives. These include mainstreaming climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and food and livelihood security, into development planning. Work is also underway to raise awareness; and a knowledge management strategy, is also in place.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite these efforts, challenges, not particular to Namibia, still exist.

These challenges include: the fragile nature of the agricultural sector, which employs a large number of the African population; malnutrition, which in Southern Africa is exacerbated by HIV/AIDs; or the lack of robust systems for early warning, early action and resilience building.

Therefore, moving forward, there is an urgency ‘to debate so we can innovate’ when it comes to enhancing resilience to drought.

Questions such as:

⁵ Campaign by the Red Cross Society of Namibia aimed to raise funds from citizens as well as the private sector to support drought-related activities

⁶ National Disaster Risk Management Committee

- how we promote the use of drought-resistant cereals;
- How we advance “green economy” strategies that ensure low carbon emissions⁷ as we develop;
- how we develop early warning, monitoring and response systems, that for example, provide farmers with real-time information by cellphone, and
- how we make drought insurance schemes more wide spread need to be answered.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, as we pledge to wage war on poverty, not only in Namibia, but across the entire continent, (so that no one is left behind); let me assure you, on behalf of the UN system in Namibia, of our commitment to work with Government and partners to find answers to these questions. Answers in support of a drought resilient Africa; and answers in support of a drought resilient Namibia.

I look forward to continued partnership, dialogue, and action to make the ideas of today, into a reality for tomorrow.

Millions of lives and livelihoods depend on it!

⁷ Refers to the release of greenhouse gases and/or their precursors into the atmosphere over a specified area and period of time