

Address by Mr. Tarah N. Shaanika, Chief Executive Officer of the Namibia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI) on the occasion of the opening gala dinner for the Kavango Trade Fair

Rundu, 05 November 2014

Director of proceedings

Hon. Dr. Samuel Mbambo, Governor of Kavango East Region

Hon. Sirkka Hausiku, Governor of Kavango West Region

Your Worship, the Mayor of Rundu

Hon. Regional and Local Councillors here present

Distinguished members of the business community

Distinguished invited guests

Members of the media

Ladies and gentlemen

Allow me to express my delight to be here this evening and join you at this very important event marking the beginning of this year's edition of the Kavango Trade Fair. It is very satisfying to note that there is growing interest and enthusiasm among the Namibian business community to take advantage of the numerous opportunities for investments and business promotion presented to them by this fair annually. There is no doubt that business in general attach a great value to trade exhibitions because of the opportunities they create for networking, marketing and promoting goods and services. Trade fairs are recognised the world over as excellent platforms for market penetration and showcasing opportunities for investment.

It is therefore commendable that the Kavango Regional Council together with other key stakeholders have assumed the responsibility of organising this annual fair to provide an opportunity not only for businesses from Kavango East and West to exhibit what they can offer in terms of goods and services but also for businesses from other regions and even beyond our territorial borders to come and market themselves in this region. It is also an excellent platform for showcasing investment opportunities found in this region.

It is important to acknowledge and underline the fact that we have made so much progress as a nation since our independence almost 25 years ago. We have entrenched a democratic culture in Namibia and maintained peace and stability which are among our most important assets. We have created and maintained a rule of law and the political and economic climate is very conducive to profitable business undertakings. We are continuing to improve our environment and keep up with changes taking place in the world.

Namibia has also built world class infrastructure which are very strong foundation upon which we can built a thriving economy.

What remains to be done is to begin to find practical solutions to the socio-economic challenges facing us such as employment creation, closing income inequalities, achieving food self-sufficiency and industrialising our economy among others.

There is no doubt, Director of Proceedings that this region has vast unexplored investment opportunities in key sectors such as agriculture and agro-processing, tourism, fish farming, timber and manufacturing which can be promoted to potential investors at platforms such as the Kavango Trade Fair. We must therefore not lose opportunities such as this is to tell the world of investors loudly and clearly that this region is not only full of investment opportunities but is more than ready to welcome and host investors who wish to take advantage of the existing opportunities.

There is no reason why we should not work with the domestic and foreign private sector to develop agriculture in this region to its fullest potential. One wonders why Namibia is still a net importer of food and we even struggle to produce 50% of our maize, wheat and vegetable requirements despite the availability of vast tracks of underused arable land in Kavango West, East and Zambezi regions.

I believe that by and large, the challenges of poverty, unemployment and food insecurity on the African continent are self-inflicted. We cannot have so much arable land on which we can produce food to feed ourselves yet we constantly complain of hunger, poverty and unemployment. In Namibia, we must resolve to utilise all our arable land to produce sufficient food to feed ourselves and export the rest to the world. This can be done, it's a good business opportunity and it provides us with food security and employment opportunities.

But we must remember that to become a net food exporter of note and create massive numbers of employment and income generating opportunities, we must be prepared to change our attitudes and become more innovative in finding solutions to challenges inhibiting growth in the economy.

Firstly, we must address the bottleneck in our land delivery process and ensure that investors have easy access to land for production. Most of the fertile land in this region and its neighbours of Kavango West and Zambezi is occupied by various communities in a communal fashion. It is clear that such land is not used maximally and it is difficult to attract large scale investments which can produce larger amounts of food in its current form. Our Government and traditional authorities are therefore challenged to find innovative ways to avail agricultural land in communal areas to investors in a manner that unlock investment opportunities in agricultural production while at the same time economically empowering our communities which have been living on such land for decades if not centuries. This is a challenge which will be tough to overcome.

me but which is clearly not insurmountable.

The second change which we must embrace is the transformation of our people from being lazy armchair critics to hard working patriots. I cannot believe how fast we have changed from once hardworking people to a lazy, alcohol abusing nation. As we hold this year's fair under the theme: "Promoting regional Development for Sustainable Economic Transformation", we must reflect on the fundamental challenges inhibiting regional and economic development.

One of such fundamental challenges is that of alcohol abuse and sheer laziness. This country has unfortunately been robbed off its a large number of its people by alcohol and laziness. It is shocking to see people in their productive ages, gathering at cucashops as early as 7am or even earlier at times, consuming tombo and other alcoholic beverages when they can spend their time cultivating the land and producing food for themselves and for income generation. Imagine a situation where all those people you find sitting at cuca shops were working on the land every day, even if they only put in six hours daily. Clearly, we will yield much bigger harvests from our land if all those idling and drinking tombo every day begin to work on the land.

When I was growing up, you will be laughed at if you are found with uncultivated land during cultivation time or if you start drinking early morning hours. But today, its considered acceptable for people to just hang around cuca shops and waste themselves with alcohol and gossiping. It makes me very sad to see how we have lost our culture of hard working and have allowed alcohol to take over and control our lives. The reality is that economic development cannot be driven by lazy and drunk people who only criticize and blame Government without taking initiatives on their own.

We must begin a revolution against alcohol abuse and reclaim our culture of good work ethics. The current phase of our struggle to emancipate ourselves economically should be waged with a high degree of discipline and competitive work ethics. Our youth must take greater responsibility in this revolution by taking education and training very seriously because unlike in the first phase of our struggle for political liberation when young people were armed with weapons to fight the colonisers militarily, our young people today should be armed with skills and expertise to revolutionalise this economy and make Namibia a globally competitive nation and the best place to live in on this planet. Other nations have done it and succeeded to build strong economies where unemployment is not a problem and where poverty is cut into unrecognisable pieces. If our fathers lived poor lives, we as young people must reject such life and resolve to create a better and more meaningful life for ourselves and future generations.

As we build a better Namibia, it is important for every Namibian, leaders and the population at large to strive to do the right thing at all the time. We must thrive to crush

all evils in our society, such as corruption, favouritism, nepotism, selfishness, laziness, alcohol and drug abuse. We must build a society on a foundation of integrity, sound work ethics and competitiveness in everything we do. It is very disturbing when businesspeople constantly tell me how it has become nearly impossible to get land for their businesses from local authorities without having to pay bribes to Local Authorities officials. They tell me that officials will sit on your land application until you pay bribes or until someone else who is prepared to pay bribes emerges and he/she will then get the same piece of land you have earlier applied for.

Businesspeople also tell me that they hardly get public tenders without having to provide some oil to lubricate the machinery that do the approvals for such tenders. It is shameful if indeed we have such shamelessly corrupt public officials who are enriching themselves at the expense of hardworking taxpayers. If indeed we are living in a society with such people, then we need to identify them and rid our society of such evils.

Our actions as leaders and as citizens of this country should be guided by the common good of our society but not by selfish interests of individuals at the expense of the larger society. Only when we can prove that we are trustworthy, hardworking and committed that capital will flow into our economy and build competitive businesses which can deliver us from the jaws of unemployment, poverty and hunger.

I appeal to the business people taking part or visiting this year's Kavango Trade Fair, to see this trade fair as a unique opportunity to tell the world that this region is ready for investment. We must use every avenue to market opportunities for investments, especially in agriculture and tourism. This region can save Namibia from poverty and hunger and the onus is on us all to ensure that its potentials are unleashed.

To conclude my intervention, let me end on a positive note. Namibia has been officially declared as the fastest growing tourist destination and the second best country to visit. Government and private sector cannot allow this opportunity to pass without capitalising on such a promising window. We must go out and remind the world, make everyone out there aware that the travelling community prefers Namibia for holidays among others. We are doing certain things right and the world must know that.

For this region and Rundu in particular, opportunities are massive. We struggled to find accommodation when we came and there is no substantial car rental service although there are regular scheduled flights. Entrepreneurs must work on getting these gaps filled.

As for me personally and NCCI as an organisation, we are looking forward to be part of this journey, towards making the Namibian economy thriving, growing and creating massive numbers of employment opportunities. But let's maintain the principles of hard work, integrity and patriotism. These are the principles which must guide this second ph

ase of our revolution.

I thank you for your attention!