

Namibia Environmental Education Network Annual Conference

The Namibia Environmental Education Network (NEEN) had their annual conference at the B2Gold Otjikoto Nature Reserve and EE Centre from 3 – 6 May 2018, under the theme, *'Innovative strategies to develop peaceful co-existence with the endangered wildlife'*. This theme according to the Master of Ceremonies, Dr Kanyimba, was necessitated by the attack on Namibian wildlife, especially elephants, rhinos, pangolins and other wildlife, and the need for solutions to these problems. Dr Kanyimba also emphasized the importance of education in promoting sustainable development for effective participation in decision making.

Organized by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), and funded by the German Cooperation (Deutsche Zusammenarbeit), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, and B2Gold Namibia, this year's NEEN conference resumed after four years, thanks to all our sponsors.

The four day conference was attended by 118 participants from 11 regions from various ministries and non-governmental organization from all around the country, including the guest speaker, Dr Luiz De Sousa, a lecturer at the North-West University of South Africa. Dr De Sousa in her address highlighted the significance of education in providing learners the means to unlock their creativity and imaginations, develop capacities and interests, and initiate a generation of critical thinkers. She also underlined the importance of education and training in achieving the motion set in Vision 2030, the challenge all sectors of the Namibian society have to overcome for a well-developed human resource base that is capable of competing internationally. She went on to draw attention to the role of teachers, who as masters of their subject areas can champion the cause of sharing new knowledge about the state of endangered wildlife, developing skills, and interest in learners toward fulfilling a green skills sector job. She went on further and quoted our Founding Father and former president, honourable Dr Sam Nujoma who said, *"Nature conservation must start at our schools. Our children must be taught the beauty, value and uniqueness of our environment and our wildlife. They must know that it is their environment and their heritage that they are asked to conserve. It is only when our future generations are informed why they should protect the environment that our struggle against poaching stands a chance to succeed."*

In the absence of Keynote Speaker Hon Bernadette Maria Jagger, Deputy Minister of Environment and Tourism, Mr Olimpio Nhuleipo, Deputy Director in the Environmental Information and Natural Resource Economics division of MET, delivered the keynote address. In her speech, she stressed the importance of wildlife as national assets, not only for tourism development, but because of the ecosystems services they provide in relation to climate, drought and food regulation. The Minister acknowledged that human-wildlife conflict is a multifaceted problem which requires a number of strategies, and one of the strategies being to develop and implement the best appropriate technical solutions for mitigation. This she hopes to be achieved by dissemination of information and training of stakeholders in the use of specific mitigation methodologies, among others. She appealed to NEEN members and partners to

collaborate with Government to attain aims, objectives and strategies contained in the human wildlife conflicts policy and related Nature Conservation Ordinance.



Speakers at the conference (Dr L. De Sousa – top left, and Mr O. Nhuleipo – bottom left), including the Master of Ceremonies (Dr A. Kanyimba) and NEEN Coordinator (Ms L. Nantinda).

The conference brought together learners, teachers, environmental officers, environmental consultants, environmental educators and education inspectors among others, all passionate about sustainable wildlife conservation through environmental education. Everyone present was in agreement that EE is important not only for creating knowledge and awareness, but for changed attitudes towards endangered wildlife. Conference participants aimed to impart and share knowledge on what they are doing in their regions to promote peaceful co-existence with wildlife. EE comes with an understanding that we are all part of a functional environment, the removal, depletion, or destruction of any component of that environment is detrimental to all; wildlife, human and our non-living environment. Conservation starts with an understanding as we cannot conserve what we do not understand. It is this understanding that this platform continues to pass on to learners, communities, farmers, and fellow employees.



Conference participants whom included representatives from government ministries and non-governmental organisations, and learners.

Conference presentations ranged from PowerPoint talks, case studies to role-plays, and included experiences on how to create functional E-Clubs at your school, strategies non-governmental organizations use to promote peaceful co-existence with endangered wildlife, the role of the church in conservation, effects of light pollution on wildlife, and the role of art in waste management, among others. Exhibitions present at the conference included those from the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), Namibia Desert Environmental Education Trust (NaDEET), Namibia Animal Rehabilitation Research & Education Centre (NARREC), and Edu-Ventures, all showcasing what they do to promote peaceful co-existence with wildlife and the environment through EE.





Learners from various schools sharing their stories on how they are promoting peaceful co-existence with endangered wildlife. Top left: St. Boniface E-Club, middle left: Ohangwena Environmental Youth Club, middle right: Dawid Bezuidenhout High School, bottom left: Hochland High School, bottom right: Tjimuhiva Combined School.

The need for peaceful co-existence is not just imperative for humans and wildlife, but for our own peaceful co-existence with each other as humans. We ought to pull in the same direction in order for peaceful co-existence to be achieved, and again this trickles down to understanding the importance and appreciation of not only endangered wildlife, but our entire universe and all that is found it through EE.





Some of the exhibitions tables, posters and banners at the conference.

MET’s Karel Ndumba highlighted how human-wildlife conflicts (HWC) are not new, as they have always existed. The difference today is in the way that we respond – in most cases lethal. Some solutions to HWC can be found in indigenous knowledge (IK). The Himba people for example use elephant dung to treat nose bleeds, and they know and understand the importance of the elephant as a functional member of their community, and the need to co-exist. Whether they (Himba) tolerate the elephant because of the healing incentive its dung provides or, for the respect that the Himba have for wildlife or both, lies in the knowledge and understanding of the importance of the elephant – therefore the need for IK. To this Dr Kanyimba stated, “We do not need to re-invent the wheel. Let us look at what is there and how we can use it to offer advice or solutions to our current problems.” Solutions to the same environmental problems do not always work in the different environments and settings we have, owing to for example, cultural or financial differences. To this end, creative thinking for creative solutions is important in our EE programmes.

As per one of NEEN’s aims of sharing, not only information in this instance, Mr Zacharias Domingo of Ubasen Primary School in the Erongo Region donated two school uniforms to Tjimuhiva Combined School, and will hold this promise for five consecutive years.

Participants had the opportunity to see the operations of the B2Gold mine, on a tour led by Otjikoto Nature Reserve Manager, Mr Rousseau. He explained the mining process and how they get to the finished product, gold.

The conclusion of the conference saw the election of 22 NEEN Regional Network Representatives from participating regions. The elected regional representatives are as follow;

Erongo: Zacharias Domingo, Pandu Haindongo

Khomas: Mitire Tjazamo, Maria Hohannes
Kavango East: Erastus Livingi, Zwelibanzi Z. Maseko
Kavango West: Nyundu Kandjembo, Willem Kotokeni
Ohangwena: Ester Hango, Joseph Hanghome
Omaheke: Christi Mutota, Viviene Eises
Omusati: Eva – Lisa Shituula, Sabina Kleopas
Oshana: Onesimus Nashilongo, Salmi Nangula
Oshikoto: Namene Phillipus, Martin Namutenya
Otjozondjupa: Annetjie Siyaya, Simeon Nampala
Zambezi: Astridah Matomola, Henry Muzumi

A committee from the regional representatives was also formed, to maintain the network activities. The elected committee members are as follow;

Chairperson: Zacharias Domingo – Erongo Region
Deputy Chairperson: Onesimus Nashilongo – Oshana Region
Secretary: Annetjie Siyaya – Otjozondjupa Region
Vice Secretary: Zwelibanzi Z. Maseko – Kavango East Region
Treasurer: Christi Mutota – Omaheke Region
Vice Treasurer: Rev. Joseph Hanghome – Ohangwena Region

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