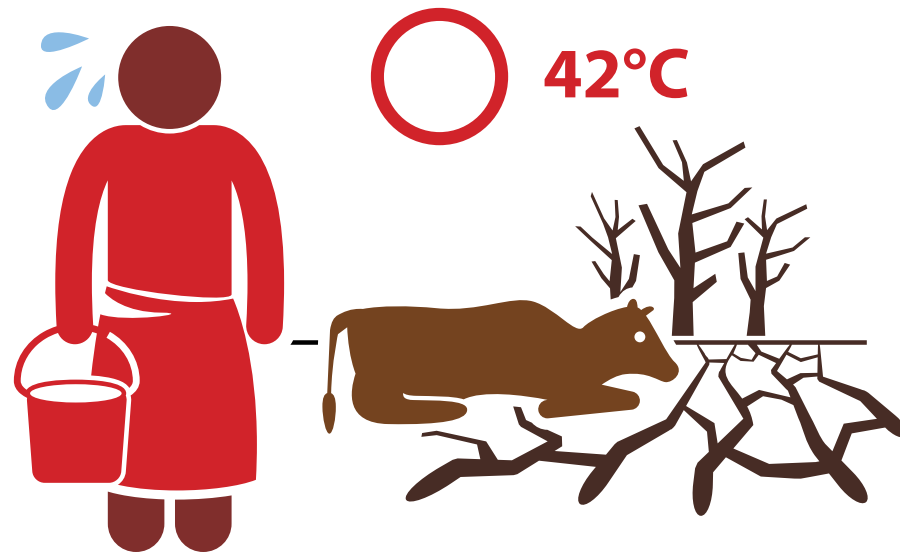


# TIME TO BELIEVE IN CHANGE

AS WITH SO MUCH ELSE IN NAMIBIA, CLIMATE CHANGE IS ALL OVER POLICY DOCUMENTS BUT RARELY FEATURES WHEN IT COMES TO GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE IMPLEMENTATION. TIME HAS COME FOR THIS TO CHANGE, WRITES **DIETRICH REMMERT**



Pope Francis recently made international headlines when in June he published an official 'Encyclical' document on the environment. Specifically, the leader of the Catholic Church in principal supports the dominant scientific consensus that climate change is occurring and that rapid global warming can be significantly attributed to man-made activities. Consequently, the pope called for more environmental awareness and sustainable lifestyles to avert and mitigate the looming threats and impacts of climate change. While his message seemed to be directed all of humanity – highly unorthodox for an encyclical – he also called upon policymakers to do more.

Apart from fanning the flames of the climate change debate and humanity's role in contributing to it, the papal document has somewhat refocused international attention on the environment, a topic that had been shoved aside by 'Grexist' angst and Islamic State terror news.

In Namibia, environmental concerns are pertinent issues since many economic activities are so closely intertwined and dependent on the country's unique ecosystem and natural resources. Yet it can be argued that concepts such as conservation and water management are far better understood, accepted and addressed by the public than the vague sounding notion of 'climate change'.

Nevertheless, the occurrence of rapid global warming during this century is by now a widely held view within the global scientific community. Even conservative projections predict considerable global climate changes affecting rainfall patterns, temperature, natural breeding cycles of animals, soil quality and so forth.

## QUESTION IS ...

As a nation already situated in a mostly dry and hot corner of the African continent how will Namibia's ecosystem be affected by global warming and perhaps even more important what is being done about it?

Contrary to what many might believe Namibia is not completely unprepared. Indeed, much thought and work is taking place both in the public and private sectors on how to address climate change. Much of these efforts to date, however, have focused on the development and production of policies, strategic plans, pilot projects and research.

A draft research paper commissioned by the local office of the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) lists no less than 24 completed government policies and strategies that either contain guidance on or deal exclusively with environmental concerns. The author of this research paper, Dr Justine Braby said in an interview that while GRN has many flaws it has been and continues to be very active and forward thinking with regards to climate change policy

and environmental regulation.

She further stated that the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) has especially been essential in driving forward the climate change agenda in Namibia.

Braby's opinion is echoed by Lesley-Anne van Wyk, project coordinator of a new environmental awareness and climate change project initiated by HSF. She pointed out that in the African context Namibia is in the forefront of addressing climate change. For example the National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) published in 2011, was one of the first in the SADC region and at that time, offered an example to other African nations.

Predicting Namibia's near and far future weather conditions is challenging. Accurate estimations are hard to come by due to limited local data and the already highly variable regional climate. The National Climate Change Strategy & Action Plan 2013-2020 (NCCSAP) states that Africa "is expected to face even greater droughts, floods, rising sea-levels, food-insecurity, loss of biodiversity and depletion in the water supply".

## COMPLEX TOPIC

Current predictions for Namibia foresee a significant warmer and dryer climate. But it is not as simple as that. Given the country's highly variable climate the NCCSAP also points out that there will be more frequent weather extremes.

Namibia will increasingly face more droughts and floods potentially pitching the nation from one weather extreme to the next.

Bearing in mind research gaps, predicted, sector specific consequences make for sobering reading. Academic research focusing, for example, on the agricultural sector details a wide range of ecological changes that are most likely to occur. Most of these will be very negative especially for traditional land usage in Namibia centred on livestock and crop production. Productive and revenue from these activities will most likely decline substantially. A study on commercial farming by Louise Helen Brown from 2009 estimates that the then annual revenues per hectare could decrease by as much as 42% by 2050.

While such projections are very disconcerting, it only paints a small part of the picture. Van Wyk stressed the fact that climate change is a highly complex subject that impacted on an extensive range of sectors. By virtue of the country's already severe climate some sectors have by now enacted measures to minimise environmental degradation. And their respective economic activities have been adapted in order to be less weather dependent. Many farmers have invested in tourism and the utilisation of natural wildlife as opposed to livestock. Both of these activities are slightly less vulnerable to climate change.

Yet individuals in this sector primarily are concerned with sustainable farming practices and conservation tourism rather than climate change. This in itself is not a problem but it does highlight a current deficit with the overarching national approach to climate change.

Dr Braby who reviewed the NCCSAP as a consultant, said that MET had published a good NCCP as well as a comprehensive, practical strategy and action plan. Furthermore, MET had established working relationships with other key line ministries, such as Ministry of Fisheries (MoF) and Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF) on the issue. However, she acknowledged that the task of coordinating such a complex response across various sectors by one ministry alone has proved very challenging. Thus many sectors have not been integrated fully into government's climate change response.

Van Wyk made a similar observation noting that it would have been preferable to have situated a coordinating mechanism within the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM).

## PREVAILING DOUBTS

Undoubtedly, the implementation of the climate change policy as well as the NCCSAP has been constrained by the lack of sector integration. It is unfortunately also well known that Namibia's policies do not necessarily translate into effective implementation. With regards to climate change, Braby said that the national drought policy was a case in point.

The NCCSAP outlines four core adaption and two mitigation themes, which it describes as critical to Namibia's climate change response. Some of these have already seen considerable investment such as infrastructure development, however, mostly due to sector specific concerns and not climate change. Other areas it seems have enjoyed far less attention both by policymakers and other key stakeholders.

Khomas region is currently facing a critical water shortage, due in part to poor resource management, yet "Sustainable water

resource base" is a prominent theme under adaptation.

Past projects that have been carried out under the climate change scope have often focused on raising awareness such as the African Adaptation Project in Namibia (AAP-NAM) 2010-2012. Others have sought to build the capacity of rural communities to adapt to climate change conditions through promoting and funding conservation agriculture techniques. Van Wyk noted that these techniques were popular with the targeted communities but that these projects had lost

impetus with the phase out of donor funds.

A positive development in the climate change response has been the establishment of the Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia (EIF). This home-grown fund celebrated its 3rd anniversary in February of this year. The fund focuses on raising finance and funding projects that promote sustainable development. According to the EIF's 2013/14 annual report, the organisation approved projects to a total value of N\$13 million. At the anniversary event EIF

unveiled another eight projects worth about N\$15 million. Nevertheless, the funding amount appears rather small when considering the bigger picture.

It is clear that Namibia has taken strides in addressing climate change on the policy and strategic front. However, it remains to be seen how successful the nation will be in implementing these policies and ambitious plans. Much will depend not just on government but also on the private sector and indeed citizens themselves.

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