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Address to the NEEN delegates at the Namibia Environmental Education Network Conference (B2 Gold Mine Namibia / Otjikoto Nature Reserve EE Centre) 03 – 06 May 2018

THEME: Innovative strategies to develop peaceful co-existence with the endangered wildlife

Dr LO de Sousa, 2018

Welcome and acknowledgements

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, honoured guests of the Namibia Environmental Education Network, Representative of Hon. Bernadette Maria Jagger (Deputy Minister of Environment and Tourism), Mr Mark Dawe (MD B2 Gold mine Namibia) and B2Gold management AJ and Simeon, Mr M Namutenya (NEEN Chairperson), Ms Nalisa Simasiku, Rev. Joseph Hanghome, Dr Alex Kanyimba and his team who organized this important event, and a very special welcome to all teachers, Namibians representing different Ministries, Non- Governmental Organisations, higher education institutions and youth groups. I am Dr Luiza de Sousa and on behalf of the North-West University I am delighted to be able to address you as a guest speaker today.

I stand in respect, owing to what I have read (and have seen last night) of how B2Gold is committed to the conservation of biodiversity and integrated approaches to land use planning at their operations. I wish to offer a short reflection on environmental education, education research and strategies that we can adopt to develop peaceful co-existence with endangered wildlife within the context of overwhelming global changes that affect how we see ourselves here, and why we matter in the world.

Address

I would like to begin my talk by focussing on the relationship between education, development and a peaceful co-existence with endangered wildlife. Education plays a critical role in society. Families and communities place immeasurable confidence in the state's education system and teachers are under pressure to create opportunities for learning, and thus to provide for learners the means to unlock their creativity and imaginations, develop their capacities and interests, and initiate a generation of critical thinkers.

The honourable Founding Father and former President of Namibia, Dr Sam Nujoma, when launching of the save the Rhino Trust Fund booklet in November 1990 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.”*

The words of a true visionary for the inclusion of environmental education in teaching and learning. He goes on further to say that education is the primary means by which the State enables its economy to become skills-rich, rather than labour intensive. Education enables people to better respond to the challenges faced by a developing economy (Nampa-Reuters, 2011, 15). It is my opinion that an educated nation can lead to a developed nation. Furthermore, I am of the opinion that by developing green skills a nation can build capacity for a sustainable future. By developing the green skills of a nation through education and the development of skills one can take care of Namibia’s water, waste, clean energy, biodiversity, and also its endangered wildlife.

I have read in the National report on development of education in Namibia that for any nation to prosper, it is important that its human resource development is of a high standard to ensure that it is able to compete with the rest of the world. Namibia has inherited an undeveloped human resource base, and I have read that Vision 2030 has set in motion challenges that all sectors of the Namibian society will have to overcome so as to have a well-developed human resource base that is capable of competing internationally. Education and training is one of the driving forces towards the achievement of this target. As Namibia continues to reform its system of education it is hoped that with target interventions, it will be able to achieve this goal as per the Human Resource Development Plan that is set out in Vision 2030 (National Report on Development of Education in Namibia, 2004:12).

All key stakeholders in the education sector have been assigned unique and key roles towards the implementation of the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP) of which the Ministry of Education is not an exception. The Ministry opted to develop a Strategic Plan to harmonise various planning and

strategic documents into one plan, which will inform the education Chapter of point 4 of the National Development Plan (DP4). Therefore the Strategic Plan is an internal document that outlines the Ministry's strategy, direction, purpose, strategic themes, strategic objectives, strategic initiatives and decision-making on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy.

The Ministry of Education identified five Strategic Themes in which the Ministry must excel. These Strategic Themes are the "pillars of excellence." They will be operationalized through the development of strategic objectives that describes specific things that the Ministry of Education must achieve to realise the vision, live up to the mission and deliver value to the stakeholders. The STRATEGIC THEME that I feel is most instrumental is that of teaching and learning, and its two strategic objectives that most interests me are 1.3 Ensuring quality relevant learning content; and 1.5 Building educators' skills and competencies (Namibia, Strategic PLAN 2012 – 2017, 2011:9).

The point I want to make is that professional teachers who as masters of their subject areas are the most effective champions there are who can champion the cause of sharing new knowledge about the state of endangered wildlife, and who can develop skills and an interest in learners toward fulfilling a green skills sector job. The best people to pass on the message are those who teach. Teachers can and should enrol in short learning programmes. North-West University has Environmental Education short learning courses. Fundisa for Change runs such short learning programmes tailored specifically to enhance transformative environmental learning through teacher education. Fundisa's core objective is to strengthen the teaching of environmental concepts in schools.

Teachers have a major role to play in supporting societies to develop the skills they need, to respond to the sustainability development challenge. This bring to mind the climate change challenge that some developed nations decide to ignore whilst other take up the challenge to lessen the effects thereof. Just last week French President Emmanule Macron highlighted differences between the U.S. and France on the environment. He said "By polluting the oceans, not mitigating CO2 emissions and destroying our biodiversity we are killing our planet," and he said. "there is no planet B." The teacher's role is to help build intellectual capital and motivate future

generations to realise that this is the only planet we have. Perhaps more importantly, teachers have a key role to play in using the curriculum to focus on sustainable development, and social and environmental responsibility. Teachers are responsible for including the concept sustainable development and social and environmental responsibility into a wide range of contexts through the curriculum, as specialists in their respective disciplines. Teachers must make use of real world examples, so that sustainability can resonate with learners in their daily lives, and in that way make a positive impact through Environmental Education.

The Namibia National Curriculum Guidelines encapsulates the curriculum needs of the Namibian society. In essence, guidelines 2 and 5 relate to the phenomenon of climate and the environment. It can be noted that, on the whole, the guidelines ensure that learners in Namibia should possess a wide range of knowledge that will enable them to find solutions to the challenges encountered by society. It is evident that learners are being groomed into responsible citizens who are economically relevant and are also conscious about their surrounding environment. Academics have written about (Chang and Pascua (2017:172) the need to include climate change in the education system in order to address the current response to climate change issues and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals to be attained by 2030.

On the African continent Namibia is a leader when considering the Namibian National Policy on Climate Change. Climate change education in Namibia is modelled around Article 6 and Article 9 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and is the Namibian government's official response to the challenges posed by climate change. The policy on climate change was promulgated in 2011 by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. It is a product of local studies carried out on the impact and extent of climate change on the Namibian society (NPCC, 2011:38). All teachers in Namibia need to be knowledgeable about this.

The Namibian National Policy on Climate Change identifies education as playing a major role in the dissemination of climate change information. Thus, learners who are aware of climate change matters are an asset to society because they can teach others and share that information in their neighbourhoods (Amanchukwu, et al.,

2015:71). In this regard, teaching learners about climate change is not only an academic milestone, but it is also a social development and environmental matter because it promotes a widespread flow of climate change information in a society that may not be aware of climate change. Academics (Mfune & Ndombo, 2005:10) have emphasised that education, training, capacity building and other institutions need to strengthen the involvement of well-trained scientific and technical educationists who understand climate change adaptation processes. These ladies and gentleman are where the future jobs are for our youth.

My thoughts about the relationship between environmental education, development, and a peaceful co-existence with endangered wildlife leads me to believe that environmental education together with development forms a powerful influence in enabling people to participate as informed adults in a developing economic democracy. All young democracies aspire to develop a citizenry that is creative as well as critical. Huge state budgets and expenditure in education as can be seen in South Africa as well as Namibia, and teachers need to become conscious of the ever increasing role they play in shaping the young citizens of our respective countries. It is my understanding that all modern-day countries aspire to develop economically and to educate for responsible citizenry that is, creative as well as critical. Yet, it is clear that even with massive state expenditure in education the quality of our life supporting elements such as water, fertility of the soil, and air quality that must support development, is deteriorating. We are living unsustainably and are already in a crisis.

In the *Namibian Institute for Education Development (NIED) Report* of 2004, one of the main objectives stated as part of education policy is to establish:

... teaching and learning that seeks to create a classroom environment where the educator builds on knowledge and experiences of the learners, encourages them to ask questions, focus oncritical thinking, investigation, experimentation and discovery (*NIED Report*, 2004, 14).

Development of skills for identifying and solving environmental problems is of paramount importance for me. If we as educators can adopt education strategies in classrooms we can make a difference in society if we nurture and develop critical thinkers who are aware of the interrelated problems in the environment, and who can

acquire an attitude founded on a set of values with feelings of concern for the environment, thus motivating active participation in environmental improvement and protection. If you call to mind The Tbilisi Declaration's framework, objectives and principles for environmental education, I have just referred to all of the environmental education objectives. They are listed as: awareness, knowledge, attitude, skills and participation.

What emerges further from my reflection is that in the informal sector the simple adoption of education practices from one place does not imply their success in another.

Allow me to illustrate this with an example. My first visit to Namibia in 2014 saw me make a purchase of a responsible shopper bag. It was a joint venture by two retailers to promote saving Namibia's desert lions one pride at a time. This is a prime example of how the economy of a country can benefit from tourism since many countries employ this approach. The shopper bag serves multiple purposes. It is a reusable bag, it contributes to the GDP of the nation, contributes financially to saving the Namibian desert lion fund, and more importantly it creates awareness about the plight of the endangered desert lion, and a change in attitude toward the treatment and the senseless killing of these desert lions. The campaign with the shopper bag served to allow tourists and citizens to gain knowledge of the desert lion's plight and it spread an *awareness* of and sensitivity to the cause of the desert lions. Furthermore, it indirectly resulted in participative action by individuals to work toward resolving an environmental problem. I thought it was a super idea until last year when in conversation with a Master's student of mine from Namibia, I was informed of how Namibia's desert lions are being killed and how cruel individuals bragged about lion braais on social media. I soon realised that in the case of the desert lion the awareness campaign on shopper bags was not effective within the borders of Namibia. I consequently read up about that last year and stumbled upon an article written in July 2017 by Simon Espley. The article was titled *Why Namibia's desert lions are being killed*.

A 2010 report by researcher Dr Flip Stander paints an alarming drop in male/female ratios of the desert lion. Stander's Desert Lion Conservation Project is a long-standing research project, mandated by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism

(MET). The two setbacks described by Simon Espley talks of the selective trophy hunting of large male lions and the ongoing loss of lions to human-wildlife conflict (HWC) with the latter being named as the root of the problem. What makes this situation so desperately sad, is that I have read that Namibia is a shining light when it comes to increasing wildlife populations in the face of human pressure. There are now less than an estimated 150 desert-adapted lions in the arid 52,000 km² rangeland of north-western Namibia. The initial success comes off the back of involving and empowering affected rural communities in the management of wildlife – a strategy I have read that makes Namibia a leader in the field, despite human-wildlife conflict chipping away at the success stories.

Fundamental to understanding the Namibian situation is to respect the fact that rural Namibian communities are the key to solving this crisis. They have to live with dangerous animals in the neighbourhood – animals that threaten lives and livelihoods. For this problem to be overcome the relevant communities have to see benefits that outweigh the costs and risks – their expectations are no different to yours and mine. Again a reference to human-wildlife conflict.

Simon Espley goes on to speculate that it would appear that the key decision makers from a ministry are flying blind, awarding trophy hunting permits without current desert lion population statistics. This he says and I agree is disappointing, considering the comparably stellar record that Namibia has with regard to increasing wildlife populations. Hence, more knowledge is needed about desert-lion population statistics.

Despite losing some of its sparkle, Namibia began to shine in June 1998 when the first four conservancies were legally gazetted and registered in Namibia. President Dr Sam Nujoma received the WWF-US's prestigious 'Gift to the Earth' Award on behalf of Namibia and its many unsung heroes responsible for this remarkable achievement!

In the nearly twenty years since then, the progress has been astonishing. There are now 83 registered conservancies, covering 163, 017 square kilometers of land, and benefiting some 190,000 people. John Ledger reports that the Namibian Association of Support Organisations comprises of funding partners, hunting partners and

tourism partners. The Namibian government firmly supports sustainable wildlife utilisation and trophy hunting. Namibia's wildlife is flourishing, while that of many African countries is in decline (as is the case in Angola, Namibia's northern neighbour). This calls to mind the plight of the West African giraffe that is on the CITES endangered list and the pangolin that is vulnerable on the CITES list.

In the case of Namibia's desert lion most importantly, the vital support and understanding of some rural communities seems to be diminishing, as frustration leads to tension and even vigilantism – a clear and present threat to fragile desert lion populations and other species like cheetahs, rhinos and elephants.

I share the belief that a prosperous society relies on a healthy environment to provide food and resources, safe drinking water and clean air for its citizens, as well as a rich biodiversity that is the heritage of a country. Sustainable management of our endangered wildlife should, therefore, be on the lips of many people, and it should be especially, on the agenda of our leaders and school teachers through Environmental Education.

Teachers play a prominent role in education since teachers enable learners to develop the knowledge, values and skills to participate in decisions about the way that they do things individually and collectively, both locally and globally, that will improve the quality of life now, without damaging the planet for the future. Our society needs to move from where we are now to a state of sustainability. To start with this process towards sustainability the development of new knowledge, skills and attitudes is required. In practical education terms it means finding and using opportunities to include biophysical, economic and social content or considerations in the subjects taught by teachers.

Teachers need to reflect on what they are teaching and how they are teaching, to find and identify the opportunities to integrate issues related to endangered wildlife into what they are doing. Teachers therefore hold the key to enable learners and communities to live more sustainably and contribute to a more sustainable future by introducing issues pertaining to endangered wildlife in lessons that will have an impact on the lives of present and future generations.

Teaching should enable young learners to better understand and respond to the challenges of dynamic and changing environmental situations especially with regard to the human-wildlife conflict since as citizens of the world we are all connected. Teachers must understand that the environmental crises in neighbouring African countries affects us locally be it socially, economically, politically and environmentally, and all spheres of influences need to be identified and inter-relationships addressed in the classroom discussions.

In conclusion

Teachers have a precious opportunity to make each day a chance for a child to learn through the acquisition of new knowledge about endangered wildlife. Knowledge changes the way children and adults think about their relationships with the natural environment. Teachers should know not only more about their work, but more about knowing how to make better use of what they know. When spreading the word about educating for sustainable development and living sustainably, it does *not* begin and end with short-term efforts to save endangered wildlife. What we are actually talking about is the long-term sustainable conservation of all our natural resources for future generations.

I would like to end with a quote by former President Dr Sam Nujoma that I feel teachers and all leaders can live out.

“Our country is abundantly endowed with countless natural resources. We need trained personnel to be able to harness these resources and make them useful to the benefit of our people.”

Graduation Ceremony, University of Namibia, 22 April 1995

I thank you for your attention and your invitation.