

Tourism potential & opportunities

INTERVIEW WITH HON NETUMBO NANDI-NDAITWAH

MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



NETUMBO NANDI-NDAITWAH has been Minister of Environment and Tourism since March 2010. A member of Swapo since 1966, she served as Chairperson of the Swapo Youth League (SYL) in northern Namibia and later in exile in London in 1974. On returning to Namibia for independence she first served as Director-General of Women Affairs in the Office of the President from 1996. In 2000 she became Minister of Women's Affairs and between 2005-10, she was the Minister of Information and Technology. She holds a Masters Degree in Diplomatic Studies from Keele University and a post-graduate Diploma in Public Administration and Management from Glasgow College of Technology.

What are the main objectives and policy priorities of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism?

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism is guided by 5 strategic themes or priorities namely: environmental management and regulation; developing and supporting tourism; developing and supporting Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM); rural development; managing protected areas, habitat and species. These strategic themes are to give effect to MET's mandate which is derived from Article 95 of the Namibian Constitution which stipulates that the State is required to ensure "the maintenance of ecosystems, essential ecological processes and biological diversity and the utilisation of living natural resources on a sustainable basis for the benefit of all Namibians, both present and future".

Policy priorities are the protection and conservation of our natural resources whilst ensuring the sustainable use of these resources.

Namibia is endowed with significant tourism natural resources and biodiversity. What are the key points of competitive advantage in the tourism sector?

The frame conditions that gives Namibia a competitive advantage are the following:

- vast open spaces and wilderness areas
- abundant and diverse biodiversity and wildlife populations that are well adapted to Namibia's harsh climatic and physical condition and have extremely high direct & indirect use value
- uncontaminated meat and fish products
- rich cultural diversities and heritage
- efficient service industries
- excellent and modern infrastructure network

Namibia has the highest dunes at Sossusvlei in the world. It has the oldest desert in the world, the Namib. We have wide open spaces where you can drive for hours only accompanied by the pristine wilderness and unspoiled spectacular beautiful landscapes. Namibia is blessed with the second largest canyon in the world: the Fish River Canyon and contrasting landscapes because you have desert, semi arid; savannah and rainforest all in one country. The comparative advantages of Namibia are manifold and together with our political stability, peace and security, positions us as an excellent destination of choice.

What are your most important tourist markets and what are policy initiatives that are in place to develop these markets?

Our number one tourist market is South Africa. This is mainly because of historical ties. Until 1990 South Africa illegally occupied Namibia. Our number one overseas tourist market is Germany. Again this is mainly due to the historical ties, because Namibia was colonised by Germany from 1884 until after the First World War. The rest of our visitors come from the UK, the USA, France, Netherlands, and Italy. Regional tourism is also very strong with South Africa in the lead followed by Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana. There is a need to expand our market base in the rest of the continent.

We have also made significant inroads into the American, Russian, Chinese and Brazilian tourism markets. India is one of the emerging tourism giants and we are already busy developing marketing strategies in order to capture and establish a presence in these market as well.

Our leading marketing and promotion agency, the Namibia Tourism Board, has put into place different marketing strategies in order to grow the traditional source markets while expanding new markets. These strategies include, amongst others, road shows in Europe and East Asia, attending national, regional and international tourism fairs. NTB has marketing offices in Frankfurt, London, Johannesburg and China and is in the process of opening one in China and the United States.

Sustainable Tourism is an important objective in the global tourism industry. What steps are being taken to minimise the environmental impact of tourism in Namibia?

Namibia is largely a nature-based tourism destination with most of the main tourist attractions in the environmentally fragile areas. Namibia, therefore, advocates for low volume high impact tourism. In order to achieve this objective the Ministry of Environment and Tourism has developed a Environmental Management Act, which requires that any development (urban, rural) must carry out an environmental impact assessment and must have an environmental management plan before it will be issued with a clearance certificate. This tool enables the Government to ensure that there is no mushrooming of tourism enterprises in the (most) fragile area which will attract hordes of tourists and that such ventures are environmentally stable.

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We are also advocating ecotourism through tourism awareness campaigns emphasising the importance of conserving our environment and by commemorating days such as biodiversity week, Environment Day and World Tourism Day, amongst others.

The Government has adopted the Nature Conservation Amendment Act in 1996, which devolve users right of wildlife and natural resources to the rural communities. This enable the communities to make use of the resource on a sustainable basis while conserving the environment and the natural and cultural heritage.

We also have a voluntary certification process through the EcoAwards scheme through which accommodation establishments apply to be graded and receive certification in the form of stars from 1 to 5 in terms of complying with directives aimed at ensuring conservation and preservation of our environment. For example if your establishment has a swimming pool then you score very low compared to an establishment which does not have a swimming pool taking into account that Namibia has limited water resources available.

Namibia is also a signatory and strong contributor to international environmental treaties and conventions.

There is also the Pollution Control and Waste Management Bill which is under process, which will play a very important role in managing and controlling our waste and pollution to ensure that it does not damage our environment. This will be complemented by the Parks and Wildlife Management Bill which will complete the legislative framework to enable us to carry out our mandate as per the Constitution.

It has recently been reported that US\$4.5 billion will be needed to mitigate the effects of climate change by 2030. Is this a reasonable assessment?

The US\$4.9 billion referred to in your question relates to a recently completed assessment of Investment and Financial Flows required to adapt to, and to mitigate climate change.

Adaptation and mitigation are different concepts in the context of climate change; adaptation refers to coping with the effect of climate; mitigation refers to efforts to reduce carbon emissions and hence reduce the size of climate change caused by these emissions.

The I&FF assessment was carried out by a cross-Governmental team, headed by the MET, including representatives from MTI, MME, MAWF, NPC etc. The aim of the assessment was to attempt to place a cost figure on adaptation for the agriculture sector and mitigation for the energy sector.

The figure cited refers to a combination of estimated costs for both of these sectors and indeed does not include the expected costs to other sectors. The costs themselves are based on many assumptions, but we believe that the costs are broadly accurate.

With regards to the agriculture sector, climate change predictions suggest that it will become harder and harder to farm within Namibia as a whole. The costs related to this sector (US\$1.6 billion) therefore refer to the costs of instigating a number of activities that held to reduce the impact of climate change to farmers and maintain food security for Namibia.

The costs associated with mitigation and the energy sector (US\$3.3 billion) refer to the costs of installing new renewable technologies (such as solar power) in place of more polluting alternatives (coal plants).

Although US\$4.9 billion seems a high figure, these costs simply reflect the widely held belief that climate change is not a small problem that will go away, but an all engrossing problem that requires attention at the highest levels. It is also important to bear in mind that it is a widely held truth, as evidenced by the Stern report, that the costs of inaction now are estimated to be vastly greater than the costs of action now.

Namibia’s tourism infrastructure is developing rapidly. What are the opportunities for the international investors to play in Namibia’s tourist development?

Namibia has many opportunities in the tourism sector, particularly in the accommodation establishments. We are in the process of developing a detailed investment portfolio which clearly will indicate the locations, type and size of the enterprise and the scale of investment needed. This will go a long way in putting Namibia on the international investment map as the place to invested in. Namibia’s infrastructure is only second to South Africa in Africa. This already shows that Namibia is an investors’ dream paradise.

At this point in time anyone who would like to invest in Namibia can without doubt approach the Directorate of Tourism in the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and they will not be disappointed.

Tourism is an important contributor to natural economic development. What impact has tourism made to Namibia’s economy and how is this measured?

Tourism is the third largest contribution to the country’s Gross Domestic Product. In not so distant future it will become the number 1 contributor to GDP. In 2009 it contributed N\$11.5 billion to GDP or 14 per cent. The sector employs 81,000 people which is 17 per cent of total employment in the country. This sector accounted for 87.7 per cent of total service exports.

There is no doubt that the tourism sector plays a very important role in the national economy of Namibia. The sector’s contribution is measured through the Tourism Satellite Account.