

A bright future

By H.E. CHARLES MOORE

BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER TO NAMIBIA



CHARLES MOORE was appointed as the British High Commissioner to the Republic of Namibia in January 2021 having previously served in Zimbabwe, Oman, Botswana, Indonesia, Switzerland, Ghana, Trinidad and Tobago, and South Sudan. He has worked on diverse issues including Hong Kong, resource management, national security and the Korean Peninsula. In 2010, he joined LOCOG as head of the Dignitary Programme for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, leading a team of 600 staff and volunteers to coordinate attendance at the Games by over 120 Heads of State and Government, and 500 UK Dignitaries.

The Republic of Namibia gained independence from South Africa on 21 March 1990, and is the third youngest of Africa’s 54 countries. For 30 years after independence, Namibia was not well known in the UK: businesses and investors with an interest in Southern Africa would flock automatically to South Africa which, with a population over thirty times larger than Namibia, appeared to make good business sense. Namibia found it hard to compete throughout its early years, lacking South Africa’s vast and long-established business experience. But that is now changing: Namibia has now grown up. She has become more mature, educated and qualified, and she means business.

All the basics are in place. Namibia is one of Africa’s most stable, democratic countries. The capital city, Windhoek, is one of the cleanest and healthiest cities in Africa. Namibia has the best roads in Africa – better too than Italy or Belgium – and is arguably the most beautiful tourist destination in Africa, offering two deserts, a coast, wildlife, multiple cultures, and scenery that is both unspoilt and unmatched.

Opportunities for trade and investment are realistic, plentiful and attractive, and the doors are wide open.

The Namibia Investment Promotion and Development Board (NIPDB) was created in January 2021. Its predecessor, the Namibia Investment Centre, sat within the Ministry of Industrialisation and Trade, but had

no real authority to drive cross-governmental change. The NIPDB, however, now sits within the Office of the President with a team of over 60 staff, led by Nangula Uaandja, a hugely energetic and immensely effective CEO. Transformational change is underway, with the NIPDB promoting Namibia on a global platform and driving activity to make bilateral trade and investment easier and more attractive, by identifying and eliminating bureaucratic red tape. Such activity is now really starting to pay dividends – although it remains a work in progress after only two years.

Whilst trade and investment opportunities exist in a wide variety of sectors, the principal focus is on Green Hydrogen. Namibia has ambitious and credible plans to develop itself as a regional producer and supplier of Green Hydrogen within the next decade. Some might consider that Namibia has an exceptionally good record on planning, but not such a good record on delivery. On Green Hydrogen, however, the bar has been raised, with comprehensive and clear plans, and timelines (to date) being adhered to. Credit for much of this is due to James Mnyupe, the Green Hydrogen Commissioner for Namibia (and Economic Advisor to President Geingob) – a role also created within the Office of the President in 2021. James’ commitment, energy and enthusiasm towards Green Hydrogen appears limitless, providing confidence and credibility to potential partners and international investors.



Photo: Charles Moore

Windhoek,
Namibia’s capital

Complementing the Green Hydrogen project, Namibia offers excellent opportunities for other clean energy investment. The abundance of land (in the world's second least-densely populated country), sun (over 300 days per annum), wind (arguably the world's best offshore windfarm potential) and sea (over 1500km² of largely empty coastline) all combine to offer significant opportunities for clean power generation and infrastructure. Other key sectors for potential investment include education, healthcare, infrastructure, logistics and extractives – all sectors where the UK has a wealth of experience. And (dare we mention) oil, following the offshore discovery of potentially one of the world's largest deposits. If developed into full-scale production, this could in itself transform Namibia's economic character, providing income to invest in Green Hydrogen as well as addressing the country's dire levels of wealth inequality (currently the second worst globally).


Tourism is another sector of fundamental importance to the Namibian economy. Like the tourism sector in many other countries, it took a serious battering through the COVID-19 global pandemic, resulting in the closure of many lodges and tourist establishments. The sector is beginning to show signs of recovery, with the UK slowly regaining its place as the third largest nationality of visitors (up to 30,000 annually before the pandemic). Much of the tourism on offer is "high-end": Namibia can be an expensive destination even for a self-drive camping holiday – but it is at least guaranteed to be the trip of a lifetime, and a truly unforgettable experience.

In Namibia you can find the world's largest population of free-roaming cheetah and black rhino, and half the world's population of giraffe. Then there is the world's oldest desert (the Namib), with giant dunes running into the ocean – and the world's largest

sand dune, some 75m taller than the London Shard. The world's oldest canyon, second only in depth (but not length) to the US Grand Canyon. The oldest and largest meteorite, and largest meteorite field. The world's largest underground lake. Etosha salt pan, which is visible from space. And so much more.

It is an exciting time to be in Namibia. The country is emerging from its relatively shy obscurity, and generating substantial interest both regionally and internationally. The next few years could see the emergence of a new African economic success story – a country that no longer needs development assistance (which, with its "on-paper-only" status as an Upper Middle Income country, it currently barely attracts anyway); one that moves from importing 60 per cent of its energy needs to exporting over 50 per cent of its energy production; and one that reduces its appalling rates of poverty (60 per cent) and youth unemployment (48 per cent) to enhance the levels of wealth equality nationwide.

In the interim, however, the country is heading towards Presidential and General Elections in November 2024. The Presidential elections will mark the end of an era, as President Geingob steps down after his second term. He was Namibia's first Prime Minister back in 1990 and, in my personal opinion, is an individual who is deeply and personally committed to enhancing the prosperity of his country, and the lives of its people. His government will be looking for serious delivery and positive results over the next 12 months, as well as keeping minds focussed on the massive potential that this fabulous country offers, and keeping up the momentum on key issues including employment, housing and investment.

The future is bright. As a long-term friend and partner, the UK will be keen to support Namibia on its journey, and to celebrate its success. 

The abundance of land, sun, wind and sea all combine to offer significant opportunities for clean power generation and infrastructure

Photo: Charles Moore



Wild animals congregate around a waterhole in Etosha National Park in northern Namibia