



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, WATER AND LAND REFORM

**CONTRIBUTION TO THE MOTION ON THE UNDER UTILIZATION OF OUR
PERENNIAL RIVERS, NAMELY, THE ZAMBEZI, KAVANGO, KUNENE AND
ORANGE RIVERS COMPARED TO OUR NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES.**

BY

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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (PARLIAMENT)

WINDHOEK

Honourable Speaker;
Honourable Members;

I rise to contribute to the Motion that was tabled by Honourable McHenry Venaani, Leader of the Official Opposition, PDM on the under-utilization of water resources for irrigation development in Namibia.

Firstly, I would like to thank Honourable Venaani for raising this important matter on the development of irrigation in the country, putting particular emphasis on the support of irrigation development for small-scale farmers. In general, I agree with some points that were raised by Honourable Venaani. However, it is important to put thing in the correct perspective when we are discussing irrigation in Namibia and the utilization of our perennial rivers for irrigation purposes. Allow me, therefore, to contextualize and clarify some points with respect to the content of the Motion under discussion as follows:

1. It is essential to acknowledge the complexities inherent in comparing Namibia's agricultural landscape to that of our neighboring countries. Namibia's arid and semi-arid climate, and its unique geographical position on the Continent, as well as her topographical and agro-ecological features present distinct challenges that cannot be directly equated to the environments of Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Angola, and South Africa. While these countries may have made significant strides in irrigation and agricultural development, it's crucial to recognize that each nation faces different circumstances and constraints.

2. Namibia does not have a single river that runs within its territory. All our perennial rivers are located along the international borders and are, therefore, shared with other countries. As a consequence, this makes their usage difficult and complicated because of water allocation and use agreements between the riparian states. Where feasible, government is making efforts to capture and harvest water from some of our perennial by constructing Dams in order to ensure water supply security. In this regard, Government is in the process of constructing a Dam at Noordoewer/Vioolsdrift, jointly with South Africa, with the objective of securing water for human consumption and mining activities as well as agriculture development along the Orange River. In addition, the Noordoewer/Vioolsdrift Dam, will provide water to the planned Tandjieskoppe irrigation Scheme in the Karas Region, which will also make provision for small scale irrigation farmers to set-up projects.

3. Moreover, as part of National Water Supply Security Master Plan, the Government will put-up a water supply Scheme sourcing water from the Kavango River to the Central Areas of Namibia through the Eastern National Water Carrier that runs from Berg Aukas to the Von Bach Dam. There is, therefore, no doubt that there will be off-shoots of large medium and small-scale irrigation projects along the pipeline that will stretch from the Kavango River to Central Areas of Namibia.

4. Last year when I was answering the question by Honourable Venaani on drip irrigation, I informed this August House that Government identified, through studies, pocket areas amounting to 52 000 hectares in different regions of the country that could be developed for agricultural production under irrigation. This includes the 5000 hectares that have been recently acquired for the development of Phase II of the Neckartal Dam. These identified areas are the irrigation potential of Namibia and formed the basis of the establishment of the Green Scheme Projects that the Ministry has been implementing in different regions. It is important to note that the Green Scheme Policy and the Green Scheme Programme make provision for the participation of small-holder farmers. Over the years, the Ministry has been hard at work to develop irrigation projects in Namibia, including small-holder irrigation initiatives. However, the limitation of financial resources has not allowed the implementation of the Green Schemes to move at the required and optimum pace.

5. The allocation of budgetary resources to the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reform must be understood within the context of Namibia's broader economic priorities and fiscal realities. While it is understandable and justifiable to advocate for increased funding for agricultural initiatives, it is equally important to ensure that such allocations are feasible and aligned with the country's overall development objectives. The Ministry of Finance and Public Enterprises must navigate various competing demands for resources, balancing the needs of agriculture with those of other critical sectors

such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. What needs to be done is for the agriculture sector to be elevated to number one position on the appropriation priority list so that it can be allocated more resources because none of the other critical sectors that I have mentioned can function without adequate nutritious food.

6. Furthermore, the challenges associated with implementing small-scale irrigation projects in Namibia cannot be understated. Our arid and semi-arid regions require innovative and context-specific solutions that may differ from those implemented in more water-abundant environments in other countries. Factors such as water scarcity, land tenure arrangements, and infrastructure limitations must be carefully considered when designing irrigation schemes in Namibia. While we recognize the potential benefits of small-scale irrigation, it's essential to approach such initiatives with pragmatism and a thorough understanding of the local context. I wish to highlight that the cost of water and agriculture development investment in Namibia is very high and has been one of the main prohibitive factors for the development, promotion and implementation of small-scale irrigation projects. The financial facilities for agriculture that are available at different financial institutions are expensive, and hence unaffordable for Small-scale Farmers without government subsidy and direct intervention. In addition, financial institutions require collateral which most of the smallholder farmers do not have.

7. The motion by Honourable Venaani, highlights the disparities in irrigation development between Namibia and the neighbouring countries, particularly in the Zambezi and Orange River Basins. While it is true that other nations might have made significant investments in irrigation infrastructure, it's essential to note that Namibia's approach to water resource management may differ due to factors such as water rights agreements, environmental considerations, and national development priorities. Comparing Namibia's progress to that of other countries without accounting for these nuances oversimplifies a complex issue.

Honourable Speaker;

Honourable Members;

It is essential to provide a counter perspective that takes into account the complexities of our nation's current fiscal and agricultural landscape.

8. Firstly, while the examples provided from neighboring countries highlight their successes in irrigation and agricultural development, it is crucial to recognize that Namibia operates within unique contextual challenges. Our semi-arid climate and limited water resources necessitate a cautious and strategic approach to irrigation expansion. Simply replicating the strategies of other nations may not be feasible or sustainable given our distinct environmental constraints.

9. Moreover, the comparison drawn between Namibia's current efforts and those of our neighbors overlooks the progress we have made within our own limitations. The existing Green Schemes, such as the ones in the Kavango Region and along the Orange River in //Kharas Region, the Etunda Green Scheme tapping water from the Kunene River, may appear modest in scale compared to those in neighbouring and other countries, but they represent significant strides towards agricultural self-sufficiency within our means. I agree that we need to do more in terms of irrigation development. However, Government cannot do it alone, and we expect the private sector to come on board. It is important to point out that when we conceptualized and developed the Green Scheme Programme, the emphasis was for the Government of the Republic of Namibia to mainly play a catalytic role by creating a conducive environment for the Private Sector to invest and actively participate in the Green Scheme Programme. However, we were unable to achieve the intended tangible results through this approach, especially with those projects that are situated in communal areas, both the brown field and developed green scheme projects. The private sector has simply not been forthcoming. As a result, Government then decided to put-up the main infrastructure (such as, main Pipelines and Pump Stations) at the Green Schemes with the objective of incentivizing the private sector to participate. Despite these efforts and investment, the interest and response of the private sector in Green Schemes remains low. We would like to believe that this non-response of the private sector could be contributed to, among others, the high investment risk involved in the agriculture sector.

10. Additionally, while advocating for increased investment in irrigation infrastructure is commendable, it is essential to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of agricultural development. Investments in technology and infrastructure must be accompanied by parallel efforts to enhance agricultural education, improve market access for farmers, and address underlying socio-economic factors that influence agricultural productivity.

11. Furthermore, the call for a shift towards smallholder-led irrigation systems warrants careful consideration. While smallholder farming plays a crucial role in our agricultural sector, large-scale commercial farming also contributes significantly to national food production and export revenue. Any strategy aimed at promoting smallholder irrigation should be inclusive and consider the diverse needs and capacities of all agricultural stakeholders.

Honourable Speaker;

Honourable Members;

12. The comprehensive vision outlined in the Honourable Member's Motion is indeed ambitious and inspiring, particularly in its focus on leveraging Namibia's available water resources for agricultural development. However, it's crucial to address the practical challenges that come with such ambitions, particularly the costly nature of drilling boreholes, which is a significant barrier to

widespread irrigation in many parts of Namibia, particularly the remote areas that are far from the perennial rivers.

13. While the potential benefits of irrigation schemes along Namibia's rivers are evident, the upfront costs of drilling boreholes for irrigation infrastructure in areas that are distant from the rivers can be prohibitively expensive, especially in regions where groundwater is not easily accessible. The arid and semi-arid conditions that characterize much of Namibia pose significant challenges to groundwater availability and require extensive drilling depths, often leading to high installation costs. That in itself will make agriculture a very expensive undertaking for smallholder farmers.

14. Furthermore, the sustainability of borehole irrigation systems must also be carefully and cautiously considered, as over-extraction of groundwater can lead to depletion of aquifers, exacerbating water scarcity issues in already water stressed arid regions. In addition, the energy requirements and the associated costs for pumping water from boreholes can be considerably high, adding to the operational costs and environmental footprint of such systems.

15. In light of the challenges that I have alluded to earlier, it means that a comprehensive approach to irrigation development in Namibia should include measures to address the cost and sustainability of borehole drilling. This could involve exploring innovative financing mechanisms, such as public-private partnerships

or concessional funding, to make irrigation infrastructure more accessible to smallholder farmers. Additionally, investments in water management technologies, such as drip irrigation and soil moisture monitoring systems, can help optimize water use and reduce reliance on groundwater extraction.

16. Ultimately, while the vision of transforming Namibia's agricultural landscape through irrigation is commendable, it is essential to acknowledge and address the practical challenges, such as the expensive nature of borehole drilling, to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of such initiatives.

Honourable Speaker;

Honourable Members;

17. In conclusion, I wish to state that while there may be room for improvement in the allocation of budgetary resources and the implementation of irrigation projects in Namibia, it is essential to approach these matters with a sound understanding of our unique challenges and opportunities. The Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform remains committed to advancing agricultural development in Namibia within the constraints of available resources and the realities of our environment. Let us work together to find solutions that are tailored to the needs of our nation and conducive to sustainable growth and development. It is essential to approach this issue with pragmatism and a thorough understanding of Namibia's unique challenges and opportunities as well as environmental

conditions. By leveraging our existing strengths and resources while embracing innovative solutions, we can chart a sustainable path towards agricultural transformation that benefits all Namibians.

I thank you for your attention!