



MAIDEN SPEECH IN THE 8TH NAMIBIAN PARLIAMENT 8TH APRIL 2025

BY

HON. MARTA ITOPE, MP

SWAPO PARTY

**Honorable Speaker
Honorable Members
Members of the Public
Members of the Media**

I am Marta Itope, and I am delighted to give my maiden speech at this August house and contribute to this important debate. I have been a district Coordinator for the SWAPO Party in Karasburg West Constituency //Kharas Region since 2014 to 2025, a member of the SWAPO Party Youth League Central Committee Member from 2017 to 2022 and a Member of the SWAPO Party Women's Council CC from 2022 to date. My nomination and being elected as a Member of Parliament is a symbol of hope from the people of our mighty ||Kharas Region and the nation at large.

As a new National Assembly member, this is a historic and momentous occasion. I represent the residents of the ||Kharas Region and the Namibian people in general.

The voters expect more from us, and our performance should instill confidence, hope, and trust in them. We should perform our work and remember that we stand before those who came before us. They built a foundation that we could all cement.

HONORABLE SPEAKER
HONORABLE MEMBERS

//Kharas region, in particular Karasburg West, Noordower and Aussenkehr, is an agricultural industry producing crops such as grapes, dates, citrus and vegetables. It is at this juncture I would like to point out the following:

Aussenkehr is a billion-dollar industry; however, the farm workers in the vineyards live in harsh conditions, lacking access to clean water and sanitation. Residents fetch water from the river directly, which is often contaminated.

Although health care is an essential service, the health facility there is understaffed, which compromises the quality of health care delivery and leads to poor patient outcomes.

In addition, fire breaks have always posed a significant threat to the Aussenkehr community. Almost every month, a fire disaster breaks out and destroys property due to the flammable reed used to construct houses and the lack of nearby fire stations.

The situation highlights more significant systemic issues and raises questions about the responsibility of grape companies.

The government should intervene since this problem has been overdue for decades now. We have to prioritise improving the living and working conditions to ensure the well-being and dignity of all individuals involved

in the industry. Fire brigade vehicles should be sourced to curb the situation in Aussenkehr, while sanitation should be addressed.

The Orange River Irrigation Project [ORIP] is a commercial farm of the Ministry of Agriculture; the Project is situated in the //Karas Region in Aussenkehr, about 55 km West of Noordewer. The Project produces a variety of grapes and dates; however, the environment is also ideal for producing vegetables. The farm management has always been under various companies that manage the farm on behalf of the Ministry. The farm has 20 small-scale farmers farming on units of 4 hectares each, totaling 80 hectares. The 4 hectares of each farmer is divided as follows: Grapes are 2 hectares, while Dates and vegetables are 0.5 hectares each.

ORIP is a 520ha government-owned farm. Currently, the farm has 166 ha under production, of which 86ha is for commercial farming, while 80ha is under small-scale farming. In 2001, the farmers entered into a three-year training agreement with the Government. They were trained by the Namibian Development Corporation (NDC), a service provider that manages the commercial part and provides services to small-scale farmers.

Respectively, as the management company service provider to set up grape vineyards on 520-hectare State-owned land at Aussenkehr. After completing their training, plans were that each farmer would be allocated a 99-year lease agreement as part of the Government's, which has never materialised to date.

It should be noted that all grapes at ORIP were uprooted four years ago for the following reasons:

(a) The grape trees were more than 20 years old, and 20-year-old grapes are no longer fertile for production

(b) Sultana (Thompson), Sugraone and Flame as the only cultivars that were at this farm and are no longer of market demand

The Ministry of Agriculture, Water, Fisheries, and Land Reform should intervene on the following ways to start production and enhance our food security and job creation.

1. Address the lease agreement of small-scale farmers.

The small-scale farmers have been trained and farming in these units for decades. On this note, the lease agreement for small-scale farmers should be reviewed and addressed. The initial plan was a 99-year lease agreement after the completion of the training they completed way back.

2. grants and planting of new grapes

The small-scale farmers need assistance in the form of production grants to purchase fertilisers, chemicals, and new grapes to plant in the uprooted fields.

It should be understood that the production of grapes, dates, and vegetables is particularly labour—and capital-intensive. To ensure high productivity, certified seedlings need to be purchased from reputable suppliers outside the country. In 2015, Agribusdev took over the management of small-scale farmers when the government terminated an agreement with Cool Fresh Namibia to render marketing and plantation services to them. The current situation is substandard.

It's critical that if we want to thrive in agriculture and enhance food security and sustainability to help these farmers, we should address the following;

- Ordering Grape Vines (seedlings) from Certified Nurseries in South Africa or other countries with reputable records of supplying high-quality, disease-free planting material.
- Grapevines must be ordered at the right time since the Nursery prefers that vines or plants be requested at least 6 to 12 months in advance.

- Only 2-year-old grapevines can be purchased to ensure they start bearing fruits during the first year after transplantation.
- Orchard materials such as poles and wires must be sourced according to the correct standards and quantities for the measured hectares.
- The new Grape Vine structures/Trellis and irrigation system will need to be installed for the measured hectares before the planting of the grape vines per farmer
- All Fertilizers and chemicals must be procured from approved factories/suppliers in Namibia and South Africa, as recommended by qualified Agronomists.
- **Soil analysis** for hectares to be planted should be done, and an Agronomist will provide the fertigation programme for each crop.

Table Grapes

The cost to establish a Table grape farm in Namibia is around N\$650,000 per hectare, with an additional N\$400,000 per ha in operational costs. This would generate an average income of about N\$640,235 per ha. An operational cost will be required, which is N\$400.000 per ha x 40 hectares of grapes for small-scale farmers. This is interpreted as plus/Minus 16 million in total.

As I conclude

A nation that cannot feed itself will forever remain vulnerable; henceforth, I call upon all relevant ministries, agencies, and stakeholders involved to go on the ground to familiarise themselves with the actual situation and renew the agricultural sector..

Thank you!