

PRESS RELEASE

High-level Talk on Benefits of Biomass for Namibia “The next frontier for job creation”

Windhoek, 5 August 2020. How can Namibia realise the benefits of bush biomass in the context of climate change and economic development? This was the guiding question in a high-level talk at NUST today. The event was hosted by the Environmental Economics Network of Namibia (EENN) in cooperation with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) / Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) Bush Control and Biomass Utilisation Project (BCBU).

Dr. Michael Humavindu, Deputy Executive Director, Ministry of Industrialisation and Trade (MIT) informed on the government approach. Biomass is the government's 11th growth focus sector and a vital pillar in developing the overall bio-economy sector in Namibia. In this context, Humavindu called the biomass sector “the next frontier for job creation”.

He also acknowledged that biomass value chains are dynamic and complex, including seasonal variety, technology development, and the lack of skills to finance the value chain. MIT is active on a number of levels to develop the sector. Private public partnerships are a crucial tool, Humavindu said. Together with Agribank, an equipment financing scheme has recently been developed, for example.

Joseph Hailwa, Director of Forestry, Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism stressed the importance of forest resources for the basic needs of Namibians. Utilisation of biomass must therefore be properly guided to ensure that future generations will also benefit from these resources. “We need to balance economic gain and environmental sustainability,” Hailwa pointed out.

Reagan Chunga, National Coordinator for the National Communications and Biennial Update Reports to UNFCCC (MEFT) gave an overview of Namibia's greenhouse gas emissions. However, the lack of data is a big problem in accurately calculating emissions and sinks, such as forests.

Michael Dege of the Namibia Charcoal Association presented updated facts and figures around charcoal production. Today in Namibia, 45 million hectares are severely affected by bush thickening and the process is still ongoing at a 3.2 growth rate. Charcoal is currently produced on 1.3 million hectares and the area is expanding. Charcoal production has seen very good figures over the past months due to international demand for the product. However, Dege points out that “markets are volatile and we cannot predict what will happen next year”. In this context he stressed the importance of FSC certification which benefits the environmental, economic and social context. NCA and a public private partnership initiative currently focus on technology improvement (smoke reduction, efficiency, faster processes etc.) and development of co-products such as biochar, wood acid and tar.

At the event, two policy briefs were launched. Klaus Schade, Economist, presented his findings on the charcoal and animal feed value chains which the first policy brief is based on. Today, charcoal production creates around 10,000 jobs in Namibia and is the third largest agricultural export commodity. In addition, charcoal creates jobs at processing companies (1,200 workers) and in the manufacturing sector. The value chain also increases efficiencies in the transport sector as trucks from Walvis Bay now have return loads.

In regards to bush-based animal feed, Schade pointed out that domestically produced bush feed has the potential for foreign exchange savings, considering that the value of animal fodder imports rose to NAD 1.2 billion in 2019. A lot of research and innovation is currently taking place in the sector. Demand for a wide range of equipment ranging from chipper mills to combined machines is rising and Namibian manufacturing companies are profiting.

Johannes Beck, Project Advisor on Climate Change, presented a report by UNIQUE Forestry (2019) on the greenhouse gas relevance of bush control and biomass utilisation. The second policy brief is based on this report. Namibia is a greenhouse gas sink due to bush encroachment. Bush thinning therefore has an impact on the greenhouse gas balance of the country. For the study, six different bush management scenarios were developed and their impact on greenhouse gas emissions in the next 20 years estimated.

The study shows that most practices that promise economic value via are associated with net greenhouse gas emission. However, these emissions can be minimised through innovative technology. In addition, rangeland restoration has been identified as a key mechanism for carbon sequestration. Clean, innovative technology as well as rangeland restoration therefore need to be mainstreamed into the bush biomass sector, Beck pointed out.

Both policy briefs are available online at www.dasnamibia.org

The event was life-streamed on facebook.

For additional information and questions kindly contact:

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