# **F1 - Interview commercial farmer, male, Windhoek - 25-1-2023**

# Transcript

I1

**Could you please start with an introduction for yourself and also of the company you're working for?**

P1

I must make a distinction. As a stakeholder Nbig, I'm speaking from a farmer's perspective. It is a family farm that is located 25 kilometers north of a town called Otavi. And that is our relationship from a stakeholders perspective with Nbig. And when you say introduce ourselves our relationship with Nbig started several years ago whereby some of the research and initial pilots of NBig were conducted on our farm We are traditional type of farmers and we are also maize farmers and we have been farming in that area for 20 years and we have seen the effects that bush encroachment has had on the land and on the grazing capacity of our lifestock. As a result, we believe that there is a win win relationship between US and Nbig and that was the basis of our relationship and with time, we've become a lot closer and we've had been able to what I'd call win win situations whereby they've got machinery and we obviously land owners with considerable amount of bush.

I1

**So how many hectares is your farm?**

P1

6000.

I1

**Six thousands, OK. And how many cattle do you have?**

P1

Numbers are quite private. But have we got about upwards of 250. Yeah so that is not too big in Namibian context, but I'll guess not too small.

I1

**And then how many hectares of maize?**

P1

Maize we planted. It's not a yearly thing. It is dependent on the La Nina. If it is going to be average or above average rainfall and this year it is La Nina and we have planted 150 hectares of mass of dry land mass rainfed maize.

I2

**And what have you done for like the bush encroachment? Have you sold your biomass or?**

P1

Well, as I mentioned, the basis of our relationship with Nbig was that they conducted the pushover, and they also took the bush. And for us our primary objective is with cattle farmers and as a result it was a win win because they removed the bush, which is actually pest for us, which then resulted in the promotion of grass and they took the bush, so that was the relationship to begin with. But what has become quite clear over the last recent years that there is significant value in the bush. Whether it be in the form of conducting charcoal or even, as I see it now, even firewood, whereby of course we've had. The last two years we've had the invasion of Ukraine that has spiked up gas prices and whilst I have not yet sold product to the European Union, I do know that there's a market for such. So we are currently in the rainy season and come March, April, I will look to engage with Nbig a bit further whereby we can then look to send some of that biomass to European or even Middle Eastern nations, that where I can fetch a higher price for these goods.

I2

**For firewood?**

P1

Would it be firewood? Would it be charcoal? You know, ideally, it's firewood because there's a ratio of 1/4 tonnes of wood is required to make one ton of charcoal, and as a result you opt to if the price is favorable of course to. Look to as a commodity from a commodity perspective to look to sell firewood as opposed to charcoal, but it all depends on the market. And again, I'm speaking from the perspective of a farmer whereby you're looking for different streams of income.

I1

**And are currently also producing charcoal?**

P1

At a very small I mean very small scale. We also produced a very what has a new form of charcoal called. Have you heard of Mashari? Have you heard of a different method by the name of the earth mold method of producing charcoal? Yes, I will be able to show you some photos and videos. Yeah, just how it is conducted. The wood and the charcoal is really secondary for us. And it's a pest. Well, when I say it's a pest it is. It's not a first line of business.

I1

**So the main interest is to get rid of it?**

P1

And then promote cross. Yes, because you might also remember that traditionally most farmers well it's a bit of a generic statement that are cattle farmers, most Namibian farmers and cattle farmers, and with us being a country that serves from drought, you want to make sure that you have got enough grass to sustain your livestock over the tough years. So for that reason we look to remove the bush so grass can grow.

I1

**And since when are you? Doing this like removing the bush?**

P1

The I can't remember, but I'd say for 10 years, but it's also not wholesome. I mean it's a small area and you go to another area you know. It is not to say that we're so aggressive with all the bush, so. Yes, yes, the vast majority of it is still very much bush encroached.

I1

**And what are the methods that are currently using to clean the bush?**

P1

The machine that is rented out by Nbig. OK, it is the. I think it's just a chipper, not a chipper, but like it clips. I'll be able to show you some videos thereafter.

I2

Yeah, I've been seeing pictures.

P1

So that that is the way we use and then when we have done a little bit of firewood and we also use chainsaws just to debark the trees so that they're a little bit more manageable to work with.

I1

**And how many workers are involved in the debushing or like the bush thinning?**

P1

Well, I mean when it is done mechanically, it's only one. And it's all based on how we do it, I mean some, I think at our peak we had about 8 chainsaw workers working. And maybe four or five that were dealing with removing the bush and things.

I1

**And then do you also apply aftercare after?**

P1

Yeah, I mean, not as much as I would have liked to. And that is also a result of lack of funds. And luckily for us, we have been also and I think I might want to put you in touch with them. There's a gentleman that has been conducting his PhD research in rangeland installment a gentleman by the name of Mr. doc Doctor Jerome Bios, I think it would be worthwhile that you go see him. You look, it looks like it's the name you've heard before.

I1

Yeah, I'm thinking maybe we have spoken with him before.

P1

Yeah, you have spoken to him?

I1

**He is now currently also working at the minister of agriculture?**

P1

Yes, that's just them, so.

P1

He conducted a fom his personal perspective, not from the Ministry of Agriculture. He's also doing a PhD where he did a trial area on our farm where he does some aftercare that was applied there and those results have been. Yeah, he's got those results, but that is again on a very miniscule area and I would have loved to have done it on a large area. But of course, that's all down to cost.

I1

**So currently it's not viable like economically viable to do?**

P1

Well, I mean to be honest, I haven't even. Investigated the prices towards that. Simply because you know I've got other the other priorities on the farm, you know, whether it be carving cows or, you know, diesel prices have gone up. So we've gone through our maize production, so it really is an afterthought and our farming could be different. Somebody else's. Farm that are doing it also as different method and as I say, we. The debushing was done in the bid for Nbig to remove the. So it was it was. They were doing it on their cost. So as a result, we also want incentivized to put in aftercare. I may have a different perspective. If I was to raise capital and then debush, yeah. But it's looks something on our on our agenda, but it's quite an I would assume it's quite an expensive exercise.

P1

Hope I'm not talking too much

I1

Can say no, it's great. We like to hear from you. That's what we are here for.

I1

**So what, what would you say are the biggest challenges as being a commercial farmer?**

P1

I think if you ask five families, it will be you might get 5 different answers. I think on our perspective personal perspective it is I mean. It always ultimately down to finances. It's always ultimately down to finances and for example, it might sound like a petty complaint, but I am in an area where there's a lot of water underground water and it's called the caste area, and a lot of my neighbours have got water. And they use that to produce products for income. But I don't have water. So I can't produce on mass crops for income. So that's my personal pet peeve. That I've Got a borehole but not strong enough to produce aggressive irrigation. Not aggressive, but I wouldn't say an industrial, but you know to get a pivot what they call you know the sprinklers don't have enough for the. So that's my personal. But I think if you're asking from a general perspective of Namibian farmers, drought will be one. So it's wet now, but drought definitely is 1 access to market. OK, where sometimes the farmers are going to sell their products wherever it is, if they're going to a market. Yeah, those are probably the biggest ones. And then access to capital, you know, because we need machinery and things like that to get things done. And sometimes some people don't have it and some people do. So that's what I'll say for the general, but. For me, I can tell you a lot of stories. About what I wish I had and what that.

I1

**And are you also, because this morning we spoke with the Farmers Union, and you are you associated with them?**

P1

I'm well aware of them, and no, I'm not a member. I should be a member but it's just one of those things that. Out of sight, out of mind kind of thing. I do know. They offer things like for anthropology and perspective. But from a social perspective, they offer medical aid to some employees. I think they've got some sort of scheme I don't know, and I should be more attentive to it that, but you know, and I think I'm like. As a farmer you just so many things going on. That you couldn't care less about something that's invented when you're 4. 100 kilometers away, so yeah. But I'm aware of them. I'm aware of them. I'm aware of Nbig, I mean. Please don't tell the Nbig guys this because this, but I we've been dealing with nbig for such a long time, but I only became a member with them. Last year, you know. So I mean that's so now the NAU is so far away, so you know so and I've been dealing with Nbig for such a long time so. Yeah. No, it's just. It's not because I don't want to. Just because.

I1

**And on your farm, how many workers do you?**

P1

We have 12. Yes, 12. Yeah, I think you should say 8 to 12 because some of them are seasonal. For example, now as I said, we're planting maize. So there's a gentleman that is driving the tractor. For the for that period and then we will we? Will let them go once that is done.

I2

**Now they're living on your farm?**

P1

Yes

I1

**And do they have like what kind of contracts do they have?**

P1

We've got seasonal and we've got permanent. So all the there's a lot of people that have been rhere for more than five years. They've got permanent contracts whereby Social Security is offered and there's also a scheme for some of them for medical aid, but some of them opt not to take it.

I1

And are all of them male?

P1

No, there is male and female, we are likely that we also do have some water to do some irrigation and the females normally work with the garden, whereby they conduct a lot of pitten of the crops and then the males normally do more manual in a way to be fencing or dealing with the cows or some of the more. What's the word? Like heavy duty? Yeah, things like that.

I1

Alright, so we would like to show you this image. It's like the concept that we're working on. It's called the biohub. And the ideas that they're here like there are multiple farmers that are producing biomass. So in this case, it's the encroacher bush and supply that to this biorefinery and for the bio refinery. We are now investigating a technology that can produce four different products. The main product is a bio oil that's in the end can be used in shipping industry. This will be your investigating, but it can also have other uses. Other one is the biochar that can be utilized as fertilizer or water purification. And then there is a wastewater stream and also gas stream that can be utilized in the facility.

P1

**When you say you investigating who you're investigating as a student or as a business that is sponsored by a shipping company?**

I1

And now we are research projects. But we also collaborate with industry partners, but we have another colleague in the Netherlands, he's doing experimental work on this technology, but it's still sort of early stage technology.

P1

I was just about to ask how far this is.

I1

Like the technology readiness level is 4 to 5, but there is also already a plant in Norway where it's already a bigger scale, but it's still sort of early stages.

P1

Maersk is from Denmark, not Norway, is it is from. Denmark, I think.

I1

I'm not sure which.

P1

Maersk the shipping company, they're one of the. Bigger ones? I think it's Danish I think.

I1

So just to be clear, this is really your research project, it's not an industry project, yeah.

P1

No, that's fine.

I1

**And we're really trying to find out how could this concept work in the context of Namibia? What scale should it be? What benefits should it generate, but also what are the challenges?**

P1

**Out of interest, have you found that ever since the Ukraine war that there has been more interest here?**

I1

I think there's definitely more interest in the renewable energy and different sources.

I1

**So from your perspective as a as a commercial farmer, how do you how do you view this concept and also do you think you would participates in that?**

P1

No, I think this is what we've all been waiting. For I think we're waiting for things like this where they is. I mean the fact that you remove this bush and it becomes a fertilizer it's just so we are very I mean I think it's amazing. I once asked Mr. Boyce, for example, I asked him. I've asked him several years ago. But if this becomes a commodity, what happens to all the trees? I mean, surely it's just going to be commercialized and, you know, people are just going to rip out every single tree that's there and hope. And please don't quote me on this about him, but he said that this there's so there's so much biomass that maybe that it would take 20 years or so. Yeah, I mean that's, I'm not sure that's the case, but I mean.

I2

Well, of course we'd be looking from a sustainable perspective.

P1

Yes, but obviously that that puts yes, I mean there's always a jeopardy and a different market. That comes out whether it be a black market or you know and policy can also change. So I'm no, I'm not. I'm not advocating for one or the other, but I'm saying that it is possible.

I1

**So it should be monitored, but we also heard that that could be a challenge. And do you see certain conditions under which you would participate?**

P1

Like for this, yeah. I think it's. Difficult to say now because it is so new and it would have to like in any industry a marketplace would have to be established and market rates for different bush would need to be understood. But I don't think that is something that happens overnight. I think that takes time to really, you know. Yeah. And you know and Namibian farmers are difficult people they are cautious of what people want from them, you know. So I think in that with that in mind, it will take some time to really establish that marketplace.

Speaker

OK.

I1

**And of course there could be multiple ways in which this could be harvested and brought to the refinery. So do you have preferences there like to do it yourself or that one company would come to your farm and do the harvesting and everything and transport or?**

P1

I think obviously I wouldn't be able to do it myself because I don't have the equipment to do that and you know to your earlier question, I would only do it myself, if the marketplace was established and I knew if I do X, I'm going to get Y. So it only makes sense for somebody else to come do it, and from to begin with, and you know I get all the farmer gets remunerated for that, but I think that this industry from a personal perspective and kind of answer your question, I think it's going to boom very fast. But I can't tell you how it's going to boom. I think there are multiple ways that it could boom. I wouldn't be surprised if a big shipping company comes and becomes this guy and then he gives and then he also becomes, you know, the guy who's doing the removing of the bush and he creates a monopoly. Or it could be multiple guys that are doing that. So I really. I do know it's going to become a big industry, but I don't know how it's going to become a big industry. I was focused to answer the question but we have been dealing with and Nbig for a long time and it's becoming more and more clear that biomasses is something real, you know. I wouldn't be surprised if you hear one day that tomorrow there's a billion dollar investment in this. So that doesn't come as a surprise for me, but how it's going to happen. Whether someone's gonna come to my farm, whether he puts out. You know he flies to say that farmers bring me product, you know that I don't know, no. But I do know that it's gonna boom. One day, yeah.

I1

**And do you see challenges if we would want to develop such a concept here?**

P1

Not massive challenges. I think it's just that establishment of that marketplace, you know, what are the parameters of doing business? If I'm going to employ people, what am I going to get at the other end? You know those basic questions to you know, everybody wants to have some clarity in what they do. And I think once that clarity is established, it won't be difficult. I don't foresee it being difficult.

I1

Yeah. OK. And we would also like to understand a bit more like the different stakeholders involved or that would be involved in a system like this and also their relationships between them. So we've plotted them on this power interest grid. So if you have high power, low power, high interest, low interest. So yeah, I would like to ask you, how do you see this these plots? And do you agree with the positions of the stakeholders or would you change something from your perspective?

P1

I would say I would say that what where is the biomass collectors, where are the biomass processors power. It's going to go here.

I1

That's high, OK.

P1

It's gonna go high and the reason that goes high is because everyone has got one of these. Everyone's got a farm. Yeah, but there's only one guy who's got a refinery. He is the one who puts up the capital to build this and if he puts up the capital and he says today's market rate is $10. Yeah maybe people start supplying them for $10.00, but if he comes out tomorrow and he says today's market rate is $8.00. These guys have got nowhere else to sell their product. They're forced to sell to the processor, so that's why when I at the first thing I was looking for in this. Was who's this guy, you know, he's when he and this is power. This is interesting. This is gonna go up here. I believe it's here. Well here. Yeah, high interest, high power. He's over here, the local communities and unfortunate is here. With low interest low power.

I1

And why would you say that?

P1

Ultimately, I'm maybe a bit crude but money decides the decisions and whoever this is. He dictates the rules and local communities are you talking about here? Because this is a commercial farmer. OK, there's a commercial farmer and then there's the local communities.

I1

So more like in the communal

P1

OK, that could be distinguished in in a few ways. That could even be like the small towns. I'm sure they're going to, you know benefit a little bit, you know, supplying sores or whatever it is. But I was talking about the, let's not say the small scale farmer, but the individual, the guy who's cutting the wood. I'll show you some videos. Those guys and from an anthropological perspective, those guys, unfortunately they don't benefit. No, they don't benefit, they don't benefit and it's a messed up. I'm sure if you're aware if that Namibia is the country with the highest gene coefficient in the world.

I1

Yeah, we heard. Is it the highest in the world?

P1

Or it is the 2nd and with South Africa. But it's it's one or two. So what takes place? And I'm very thankful. You know very thankful I'm just being very honest with you guys, I'm a farm owner, you know, I've spoken about owning cattle. I've owned tractors. But the guy who's working for me. He doesn't own anything. He doesn't own the house that he's staying on in my farm. He's earning a salary that I you know that I give him, which is obviously according to the labor laws. But what I'm trying to say is that he does a lot of the work, the groundwork well, in cases. And they don't get remunerated. A guy from Holland comes here. He brings euros. He puts this up here. And he gets the benefits because he gets to sell to the shipping industry that is going to the Stock Exchange and saying that we're green. We're sourcing this green stuff. Give us more money, but it's this guy. Is this guy benefiting? So that's that. Those are realities in doing business,.

I1

And do you see ways in which that could change where they could benefit from this system?

P1

Yeah, you know it's an interesting one because it's also based on whether things become mechanized or not mechanized and it's become things become mechanized then you don't really need the smaller community. But then again, it's a commercial farmer that is still benefiting, not the small scale guy. You know, look at things like municipalities. I don't really understand how they will benefit. Or what role they play?

I1

Yeah, we still. Need to talk also to the municipality.

P1

These guys benefit a lot interest they because they're supplying products. National government, you see, and people like national government, they benefit because and this is correct interests high and power high because they determine the policy they say OK, you're going to give us taxes or no taxes. But we expect this and we expect that maritime industry also benefits ports I think. Power is high because they also determine the rules to say we're not going to put that on our ship, and if they don't put it on your ship, then you're not getting your product to the market. So you adhere to their rules, communication platforms.

I1

Maybe some party like Nbig they like communicating about the sector and bringing people together.

P1

Yeah, I think that's right. These commercial for biorefineries. So I think this is about right.

I1

**And about like benefiting local communities and sustainability, we also heard that there is like FSC certifications, is that something you work with?**

P1

Well, because I'm not really in that business and it's not something that I've looked into, yeah. Yeah, but I mean, if I do go into it, it's something that I might debate, but I might just debate it because it could be the case that I've got a market in the Middle East that doesn't require FSC and that is paying the same money that someone in Germany or Holland is going to pay me and that's, you know, I mean it is not something what I'm doing because I'm not in that line of business, but I'm sure. It's what is happening in the industry, but I think FSSC. Is something that obviously if you want to get into mainstream supermarkets in Western Europe, it's something that you in Europe really, you know, it's something you have to adhere too. But in the Middle East, I know that. People aren't doing that. More questions?

I1

No, I think that those were our questions. I don't know if you have anything you would like to share?

P1

No. I hope I've been honest and I hope some farmers aren't going to kill me telling you the real the trade secrets.