**CF4 - Interview regional councellor Ovitoto - 9-2-2023**

**Now it started. Is that OK?**

Yeah, that's fine. I was also a tour guide.

**OK, alright.**

I used to meet another firm clients from Netherlands, from Germany, from all around the whole world, so I'm open. And I mean you can ask me questions you wish I say what I have or what I know.

**So mainly we are we are interested in the in the Bush and problems faced around the Bush so maybe. Could you tell us  bit more about the issue of the Bush here in this this region which account slope.**

All right, no. Obviously we are encroached. I mean, you could have seen that for yourself by traveling through. And I must say from government side they East or Stroke was a moratorium. That all communal areas should not at the moment should not, you know, cut bushes. And I mean in terms of debushing or thinning? When we were mentors, we did not talk about debushing because that's a very sensitive word. It might lead to deforestation. And the degradation of the soil as well. So we used Bush thinning as a term which was smooth. You know a little bit too, you know, like controlling. The encroachment so and we have invader species that we know. Such as a single Bush mellifera. All those are Acacia trees, but obviously the Earth does not allow us to cut grown trees. But Justin?

The small trees and just to open up to allow grass to grow to allow animals to pass through, and so forth. Because we need to protect the soil as well, but obviously we have a lot of bushes that are encroaching now. We need to do something and one of the things that we have introduced as a method is just what I said. Now the thinning method, whether mechanical or it needs to be noted that we need to be selective on the type of wishes that we have. Removing we cannot just and also because when you pull out a tree from the soil, what you leave behind is a vulnerable soil. So when water comes, the topsoil will then be washed away. When the weed come? So and that is where the method of manual debushing or thinning was one of the methods that was adopted at the government level. But of course in private farms you will see a lot of people with machineries, the big one. But when you look at the forest act it is not allowed. So, but then there are kind of consultations to see as to how best this can be done? We have an association, the Charcoal Producers Association. Which is trying to come up with the necessary policies, in consultation with the government of the day, looking at the Constitution of the Republic, also so that we know exactly that what we are doing is in the best interest of the country and its future. I'm saying that because in our Constitution, the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia. So there is a mention of environmental Protection. So that is why it is necessary for us to come up with policies that is guiding us as to how this encroachment should be dealt with? But obviously we have it has become a problem. It's at a point where we are saying we need to do something already yesterday. So, but the methodologies is what we are, what we need to agree on, so that when it comes to communal areas, I said that there is or was a moratorium on communal areas. So meaning the communal areas is government land. So and you cannot just allow people to go around and start to cut, they might cut protected species as well. So and that's where we need to have kind of a model that we are using and wellness and beings. Also the people are away on from the sensitivity of our environment so.

**And what do you think should be the conditions for, yeah, sustainable harvesting then in communal areas? What is needed to? To do this in a sustainable way.**

As I said, it's we need to have a lot of awareness campaigns and we need to come up with a model that is, I mean some standard modules. If even if it's not 1. What are the possible modules that can be used? And then awareness should be raised amongst the people we have consequences, yes. And these people must do that through the consequences, because it needs to be monitored. Otherwise, people will be cutting and chopping all the trees left, right and center. So it it's something that needs to be done under supervision and guidance. And whoever is doing it because there's money at the end of the day, we might forget about the our environment and think about the aspect of money and chop all the nice trees that we have around and just for the sake of money. So that's, that's where the sensitivity part comes in.

**And are you involved in changing that policy or thinking about models that could work here?**

Myself, I am not directly involved, but you know certain occasions people will come to us and doing some researches or consulting or, you know, including traditional leaders as well and because as I said, this is something that is in our Constitution, so it the protection of our environment and all natural resources. So therefore we need to be, to acquaint ourselves with that as our guiding documents and of course also develop policies now for you know the, what is it? To avoid encroachment or to control, should I say because we need to control it? Too much is not good, but also we cannot survive without bushes.

**And we understood that you've been at least here, there have been some pilots bush the feed projects, yes, there been other experiences as well by doing something with the bush or?**

But that was just a pilot project. It did not. Because actually, what we partnered with Nast. The Namibia University of Science and technology. So they were testing the implements so they, the main objective of the pilot project was to try and identify the best tools to be utilized for that purpose. So we did not go up to, you know, harvesting and like the value addition part or whatever. So it was just the pilot project which ran for few months. Just to test the implements of the machinery studies to be utilized because, as I said, we needed to have manual tools.

And that's what, according to my understanding, that's what Nast was trying to come up with, to see which tool would be the best to be utilized so not to spoil this well. But just to cut selected bushes, yeah. Of course we understand the axe is going to be, you know, heavy and it requires a lot of energy, but if you have another twin that you can just maybe come to a tree and chop a very thick tree like this. So it's not going to be labor intensive.

**OK. And that is that was like the only project that you've been involved with? So far regarding Bush.**

Now we've tried a lot the myself. I initiated one when I was a mentor. And that's where I said we were more on. It was also a pilot project. More on finding the right methods on thinning. That was now authentic and creating more space for grass to grow for the animals where we went on to try and identify the problem bushes first. Make sure that these are the bushes that we need to remove. So and then of course you need to know the distance between one tree to the other one for you to know that OK this is, you know, the required distance, so this one will cut this one not. And also the size of the tree. Because as I said, when you remove your hole through from the soil, you leave a hole. That soil will be vulnerable. So that that was the first pilot project and then of course we were not only looking at the Bush, also looking at the soil terms of the soil that have degraded. We needed to try and do something on it, maybe replant some grass seeds tramble this well using the animals themselves. You know when you put like a leaf block that they will then tremble the swirl and then when the rain comes, water will then be able to infiltrate through this. So those were the type of methods that we were looking at.

**And from all these experiences, what are the main learnings or the main challenges faced around this violence and projects? Is that the challenge still remained that?**

Encouragement is still there. We haven't done anything to it. We need to do something, because it it's at an alarming rate. And so far we don't have clear cut policies that will tell us or guide us as to say this is what you need to do straight forward. So the we are still in like developing this. So if there were clear cut policies and those rights should have been given to the consequences already. Or the modalities as to how they should go about in terms of keeping the problem of encroachment, but up to now they're still developing. Trying to craft some policies also on the other side, trying to be, you know, very cautious on the issue of solid erosion and. So yeah. But I still strongly believe that if we find that method it will be done at a very nice bit and obviously we know that the Bush that we have to harvest can be utilized for something that is also you know giving back into I mean to this society in terms of money, in terms of the, what is it?

**The fuel, yeah, yeah.**

Fuel yes, if fuel and wood and charcoal and all this? Yeh. So we undertook certain trainings that was done by Ick and also other associations or institutions that are in the charcoal industry. But you cannot do all those without understanding the arrangement management. So you need to understand that. And you need to. Be, you know, selective in whatever you do and that is that is where we are a little bit stuck. I think even those ones who tried first. They, as I said, they started with these big machines and then it was realized that these are not the best tools to be used because they destroy the soil. That's my understanding. I think you are invested where they the whole information from big and Hollis, the charcoal produces.

So, but I think that is that is the challenge now, even though some people at their private farms, they are doing it in at the very high end. Should I put it because you cannot. Talk as if what they are doing is legal in terms of the legality of it and need to be guided. But what I understand is that the way they are doing it. They are thinking more on the Bush, but forgetting about this. The damage they're doing to this world. So clearing an area. It's fine you think I've cleared my area. A lot of grass can grow and whatever and whatever but is the soil stable. Or is it vulnerable now? What if the rain comes? What if the rain does not come for maybe two years. Then obviously you have drought and what will happen to this world hot and dry.

**And in the current legal framework from the government, are you allowed to harvest in this community? We've heard that you have to first form a community forest and then can get your permit to harvest as a communal.**

That's how it is and that's why we I mentioned the consequences because the Community forest will then be registered or you apply as a Conservancy. You apply for a certain portion as a community, as your community forest to be declared a community for it. So and then if you are for instance, an individual, there's no way that you will be allowed to do that so the Conservancy needs to apply for that. The debt office for them to give you that authorization. Seven steps needs to be taken before you are allowed such as the awareness. Which is very critical and core at this point in time of  course. Also, the identification of that as a problem area declaration of the Bush encroachment as a problem, and that particular area for you to start to harvest. So you cannot just come like for instance in this yard. And you say no, I want to cut this Bush because I want to make charcoal, for instance, there's only one maybe 1234 trees in this yard.

So that is not a problem, it should be declared a problem where you have a thick bush where you can't even pass through, or the animals can't even pass through or no grass is growing. And then that area will then be declared the problem area. And the experts will then also be sent out, as I said, through our what we did through our first pilot project, which is the identification of the problem. Bushes that you need to remove because we have a lot of species. And even before I did that pilot project, my understanding was the single bush is a problem. Only to realize that when we went there. No, the syllabus was not a problem at that particular area. But then the umbrella come. What's the problem? So you see, it's tricky. You can never say we have this type of species. That is including everywhere, so it's area specific.

**And do you think for this community like establishing a community for us and doing it via that way, that could work and that it can like, be a good model to harvest sustainably?**

Yes, definitely. Definitely.

**And you also see challenges for that. In that system.**

Challenges will only come when it's not controlled, yes, or when awareness is not created. Awareness should be created. People must understand. We all know for a fact that we have a problem of bush encroachment. How to go about it? That's the issue.

**So and we also learned that here not everyone is connected to electricity. Yes, in the village. So what are the issues there like why ? Are not, yeah.**

Yes, yes, yes, that's the issue of our budget.

**The budget.**

Yeah, because the government is the one. You know, bringing electricity closer to the people, so that obviously they have a program that they are running or we have a program or the program that we are running as government. So and every financial year, there is a budget that is allocated towards that. But it cannot be done, you know. Just at once, you need to. You have done a little bit here and leave it there because the country is vast. So and like I'm saving my 7th year now since 7th or 8th. OK, probably 8, but in in during my term I witnessed four villages already in in that they have been electrified during my so which is a very good and when we have we only have 6 left.

**Six that need to be OK.**

Yeah, six villages. Left amongst the 203 villages that we have, so which is not too bad.

But obviously everybody needs it. So we cannot turn a blind eye on that one.

**And apart from that, what are other challenges faced here in the communities?**

Cool water crisis.

**Water crisis.**

It's only that now we have received sufficiently already. I can already say that positively so. That this rainy season is it's a good one. It was a good one. Yeah, otherwise we faced a lot of challenges with water. We don't have enough underground water in this area. So and a lot of villages depend on boreholes. So when it's dry, it becomes a problem. The roads infrastructure. Maybe you have seen it's another challenge. Network coverage it's another challenge. Even for the they are trying to oh, oh, that one.

You can say again every year we are experiencing field fire every year so. And it is the other year 2021. I was almost 90% of the whole village burned down. We tried and tried but it was you see the topography of the area. It's very mundaneness. So you, we could not go everywhere and try to extinguish the fire. We only have access to certain areas. Cannot go as far as top of the mountains, even when you try. While you are out trying to go up the fires already. Down coming to you. So in almost every year we experience a fire which is now the cause of drought in many instances.

**And we've heard that unemployment is also an issue, right or?**

A lot. That's that's country wide. Yeah. Because you see our, youth, don't make it through great. 10th grade eleven grade 12. Where do they go? Out in the street. Where will they possibly find a job? Close to zero. We have people with degrees who are sitting on the streets. They don't have jobs. So unemployment is definitely an issue amongst the youth. So if you have a lot of youth without employment. Then that that leads to other social issues as well. Yeah, substance abuse. Teenage pregnancy.

**You just said that there are many children that do not finish their school. Or did I understand that correctly? Or why is why is?**

As an example, you would have, say what is then 50,000? Countrywide, I mean, in learners in in grade 10 as an example. But only about maybe 30-40% makes it. Through to the next week, what will happen to the rest? The 6th yes or no? So that means. They are out of the system. So they either have to go through vocational training centers vocational training centers nowadays. They also requires you to have certain marks. No, not everybody you know. All the lenders makes it. So if they don't make it when, then what, what? What happens? They are out in the streets.

**And do you know what are the reasons why they don't make it because.**

And some people are still like that nature. You cannot. Very much blame on the system or very much blame on the teachers or whatever, because you know the same teachers are the teachers that told those other ones that passed also. So it's a matter of, you know, we need to, perhaps have parallel, other opportunities. Which does not require you to have those higher marks such as you know new work such as you know like in a farming industry. There's a lot of opportunity and there's a community here we 70 or 80%. People live from farming so. Why don't we find ways to projects such as this one that you are talking about now? Bush to feet or whatever. So these are this we need to have industries. That consume a lot of youth. That's the only solution, but of course we cannot just have if you have youth that are ending up there. What will happen in the next? 10-20 years. We need to have doctors. We need to have professors we have, you know, people who are very well educated, so we need to do something with our system. We cannot just try to create jobs. What type of jobs are we creating? You know we need to educate our youth. For them to become something. For them to have a better future for them to you know for us to have better leaders in the future. So it does not end up with job creation. We need to have a system that is somehow educating these people also to become experts in. Whatever it is.

**Do you have questions for us?**

Yes, I might have few questions. Because when I'm when I'm listening to your questions. You obviously you are here for you are doing a research on something but. If I may ask you, what's your impression? What, in terms of the answers or the response that you are getting from all these different stakeholders that you went to interview. Well, but what's your feeling about that.

**The general one?**

About the responses or with respect to the project yes. But you know what? What we are giving you will give you a picture of the country. And obviously also the. Whether there is an opportunity in that area where you are now doing the research on which is now.

**Yes. Today, Sir. Yes, yeah. Maybe I can I can start and then my colleagues can add on that. So we actually spoke with different stakeholders, wide range, right around the Bush we were able to get the context and each person's each stakeholders role and how they are either affected or connected. Participated around the Bush. They had their own challenges, which is very much acknowledgement from our side and those kind of things. And that's what makes it. Things also really you know, there are a lot of learnings done, a lot of folks have been done, a lot of learnings has been done. But at the end of their first thing is you have lot a huge resource database, right? Like huge resource bushes everywhere out there. But in order to 1st consume that even if you have to make an impact. You need to have something really big, but to have something big. You need to make sure you have the all the support system in place to have something big. It can be capacities. It can be technical, know how it can be infrastructure. It can be a system, it can be policies. Right, so this has to be in place to have something big in place which can consume and make a dent on. You know Bush as a whole. But yeah, we have to do it. What we aim to do. It is not just like I don't know how it was done before. It's we are not looking for just a business model to there you go have a business cut the cut the Bush produce this one no, we want to make it an inclusive man. So that's also brings in a lot of you have commercial farmers. You have resettled farmers, you have communal farmers. How to bring them all together? You know, that's also something it's, yeah, we don't have an answer yet, but something which, but we do see a lot of potential because every stakeholder group has an experience with pilot projects and that's not something you see every other day in every other region. Farmers, they participated in pilots government. They initiated pilots, FSC. They did some pilots charcoal, they did some pilots. You have Bush to feed you have cardboard. I mean the Acacia fiber boards you have. Wood chips. You have biots are coming. You have lot of different interest. The interest is not lacking, but The thing is, there should be some other thing to make it sustainable and to take it to the next level for that. Like I said, the support system that has to be all the challenges to implement the support system has to be addressed. That's what we learned. At least my impression so far.**

**I think one of the main challenges. Most of the stakeholders mentioned is this management system. How do you manage and how do you make sure that it's sustainable and you don't harvest enough? Sustainable seems the biggest. Biggest hurdle but.**

B**ecause let's say if there are thousand projects done, it's everything. Everything stops at the pilot scale. Everybody gets frustrated, other people will say OK thousand projects have been done. Everything failed. So there's no potential and the from farmer side, they will be like you are just one in 1000 who is just coming and going and asking questions and then yeah, nothing is happening at the field. But The thing is that is not happening. Because of some reason. So that has to be understood and that has to be taken further, but that cannot be done alone by just the people who are coming to do projects. That sustainability comes or long projects should be given birth in the local region, yeah. Or else this will be a repetitive story and this will not stop. It's a vicious cycle, to break that cycle. Yeah, things have to be done in a in a local people, yeah. Obviously, I completely agree. It's not just, yeah, money and investment is a big thing, but I won't say that or even the people who are investing, they won't believe that money is the only problem. There should be lot of other things in place has to be developed along with the money. Right. Or else if they are just? Money, and if nothing happens, it will be counterproductive. Nobody else will come because those investors talks among themselves. So it's like, OK, yeah, I invested in that one, didn't have pan out, so others will don't even try to venture into that region. If I was a businessman, I would think like that anybody would think like that. Everybody needs proof of concept. Partners needs proof of concept. They need to see things happening. If it's successful, they do it right. Same with investors. If they were going to invest, they need success. If they are not seeing any successful stuff, they are not going to invest. Nobody else is going to invest so. I think the knowledge sharing everything has to be done and things will take time, but yeah, but also on the other hand, you don't have time to do a lot of things, it's a very complicated scenario.**

But I what I'm getting now from you is that you know. The good thing is that you have gone around to meet the different stakeholders and they have piloted.

**A lot. A lot.**

And the pilot projects have got whatever is ours, which gives you some doubts whether this is going to be sustainable or not. And for a reason, is it, you know, Namibia. Is it's a capital country. So everything that we do, we do it on length. So and that is our resource, the biggest resource that we have for our animal, for our agricultural businesses. So for them to thrive. We need to take care of that resource and that that is what is giving a problem. Because when you come and you want to have a Bush. So OK, now it's a problem. Will it be a problem in the next 10 years again. When you start to harvest, probably not. Because by that time you have harvested enough of the problem bushes. So, but then do we are we now going to say no, we are going to put some manure and water for these trees to grow back again so that we can harvest them again or what are we saying so and I think that was the issue in commercial farms.

Because they came in with these big machineries, they started to cut. Yes you. Why are you cutting? Also, the other thing is the understanding. Why am I cutting am I cutting to make. Or am I cutting to create space for grass to grow?

So that the animals can feed on the. Grass so OK, obviously. If you are cutting because of money at one point, you will now want to go to your neighbours farm because you don't have any. Your resources are gone. So that's where the issue of sustainability is coming in.

**True, maybe I can just to make a remark on that. 10 years down the line or 20 years down the line. One of the things which we should or any business model or anything has to be done is constant adaptation and change. You should be willing to do that or else you get stagnate. Or yeah, you won't evolve or you won't grow. So 10 years, let's say, for example, 10 years down the line, if they harvest all the Bush and make yeah have money and then nothing to do with then. What? Yeah, what is the? Like you said, they should know why they are clearing in the 1st place, right? But the system should also be flexible enough and they should be also flexible enough to change. OK, now is not the time for the Bush. Now, whatever grows, we make something out of it. Then you have a lot of sprays, which means a lot of grass will come. You change to livestock then. Your all other system should be based. Based on that, you cannot have a single bullet like a single silver bullet to address. OK. There you go. This will solve everything for next 100 years. Sorry to say the world is not moving in that way. And it's. Yeah, it will not be that that way. It has to constantly evolve and change, just imagine. I don't know. I don't know how long this bush has been here for, maybe 1000 years, maybe 2000 years, but before that how it was, it took some time. You should understand it took some time to grow to this level and though you should also respect the trees, Sir, they have done their job to evolve and to become resilient and to spread this much. So it will take time to. Control them as well. You cannot just come.**

Yeah, it won't. And you know what we were. Getting is that where you have a problem? Then you must know that there is kind of imbalance.

There's an imbalance where there is a balance, you will not have encroachment in terms of animals that are supposed to grace or browse. In that particular area, so and that was one of the model that was also proposed to say. Because everyone was looking at this as our problem, but not as an opportunity, you must understand that part. Because what we have are animals that needs to fit on the grass. Or leaves, but if we have all these problem bushes. Maybe we need to introduce some browsers to the area. So that they can do their job. But then how many of them? Where even if you bring them here, when some people see a culture, they see meat. They don't even see the hair or whatever. They see the meat. So and that's the problem. You don't want to create another you know problem. So let's think of, what is it that we can do with bush immediately. Charcoal was one of the reason wood Boucher animal fittings. Fit and all this came. But is it sustainable if I cut the Bush down like he rightly said, how many years is another Bush the seedling? How many years is the seedling going to take to become a victim? So are you going to sit there? The next waiting for the tree to grow so that you can so. Yeah, and and obviously. The one thing that we were also faced with as this challenge was the after game. Because as I said, we were looking at this as a problem, yeah. So even some people went as far as to banning. I banned my whole farm. Trying to control a Bush. Push encroachment. But then what happened thereafter after. You, you, you you killed. This problem with fire. Another problem comes now. What you have is just encroached bushes coming up everywhere, some of them were just where you have a big tree. Nothing will grow under the tree. Now when you remove this one, so every seedling could now have an opportunity. So they will now come where there was one there would be 10. So those are the challenges. And and I think and that is why? For now, I can say the the business of charcoal is failing. The other ones I'm not so sure. I'm not so sure. The Bush to feed once the whatever wants. At the certain point, even if we take it 10 years. For these ten years, it will thrive. If we find the modalities. It will thrive, but after 10 years. We will start to question the taking. They obviously when you create suspicions to say, OK, there is a market for our wood. In the Netherlands, for example. So we will supply you with wood, OK? How many times do you need per year? For how many years? Where will these turns of woods will come? Will they come from? We don't know. OK, fine. Maybe five years.

It's not an, it's a thing, if if there was something to say. OK, we remove your problem. In this maybe 10 years. We'll give you another 10 years period of recovery. We go there another 10 years and then another 10 years there in 20 years when we come back. We will get something. But otherwise, obviously when you when you start, it will be spread across because there are a lot of people who are interested in because it's a new it's, a modern way of, you know, trying to cut the cost of say for instance fuel and all these other things. Electricity and stuff, but it's just not sustainable. If I was selfish, I would say, Oh yes, for the rest of my life I can do that. Maybe in 10 years I would be gone or 20 years. I'll be gone. But then what will happen to the future generations?

**Well, thank you so much for all these inputs. Yeah, love things we can.**