# **FU3 - Interview farmers union NAU, Windhoek - 25-1-2023**

# Transcript

P1

The Namibian agricultural union is a members organization of commercial farmers, so we represent more or less just over 50% of all commercial farmers in Namibia. So not all of them. And then the Namibia Charcoal Association is affiliated to the Namibia Agricultural Union to my company, and I am a director on the charcoal association. So up to now, our main focus on debushing was from a charcoal perspective because as you might just well know that charcoal is one of the biggest export products in Namibia which has been exported to a wide variety of countries overseas, Europe, Asia and so. So that is quite yeah, the charcoal is quite big in Namibia.

I1

**And you said you represent about 50% of all commercial farms. How many Members do you have?**

P1

Currently, about 2100 main members means individual farmers.

I1

OK.

P1

So then we've got other categories like the spouses are family members and staff, then the members becomes more so more or less just over 2000 farming units, we represent this.

I1

**OK. And how how is it structured? Are there sort of also regional unions where they unite in a more local level?**

P1

We've got 10 regional unions, farmers unions. So which covers the entire commercial part of Namibia. So it's excluding the communal areas in the north. So it covers the whole country. And then under each regional farmers Union, they are farmers unions, so the farmers unions are about 65, so we've got 65 farmers unions. Which then resort under thin regional farmers unions. And those regional regions, the 10 regions, they form part of our board. So they are our executive Council, you could say, yeah.

I1

**And since when are you like, when did you start with this organization?**

P1

I'm here now for 11 years and my current position is the manager administration, so I'm responsible for the finances. And all the administration we are renting the building out so building maintenance all that stuff and then also human resources. So I'm also the personnel manager. But then I'm also the principal officer of the Agricultural Employers Association. So the agricultural Employers Association is a registered employers association, like Employers union with the ministry of Labor. So my function there is to advise all the farmers on labour relations, so I'm also the the HR guy for all individual farmers. They phone me and the farms and tell me ask you know, about our contracts and what they can and what cannot do and. We advise on salaries. We also are responsible for the minimum wage for farm workers, and it's being adjusted from time to time. So yeah, that's my main portfolio, yeah.

I1

**And what are the main activities that the that the Agriculture union offers to the members?**

P1

With the service industry, so for the commercial farmers. We then provide as service functions, so we are the representatives with government and then we've got affiliations like the charcoal association. The newest affiliation, about a month ago is the Bees Association of Namibia, so they start farming with bees also in Namibia. And then we've got the Livestock Producers Association, which is the big one that looks after the cattle farming and the lifestock farming. And then we've got the poultry, it's also a separate association. Then we've got agronomic. That's the people that's producing crops and stuff. So that's a separate also commodity. So we've got all these commodity organizations within us. With the management committees, so we manage the meetings and all the information. So we act actually like a Union on behalf of our Members, but then we've got all these instruments which we can use of the different commodities, yes.

I1

**And then do you offer training? Or do you do lobby and advocacy?**

P1

Yeah, yeah lobby and advocacy and as I've mentioned, the, for instance, the minimum wage for farm workers, we are part of that. So here we give input from commercial farmers perspective and say this is what is affordable. This is what farmers income has increased with over the past, say, two years, so this is what the expenses looks like over the past two years, the inflation on that so that kind of inputs and then we agree on and then we sign that and then yeah we serve from all kinds of bodies on behalf of the commercial farmers, be it power supply. We are part of the Nampower committees, be it roads. We are part of also, the advisory committees offer road authority, so government acknowledge us as the only representative of commercial farmers because there's no other union or body. So if commercial farmers are involved, they invite somebody from the agricultural union. And then we represent and give input there on all kinds of stuff that's involved in in farming business.

I1

**And what is about the average size of the farms your Members?**

P1

The average size of farms. It varies from the northern parts where the rainfall are much higher than from the south, but on average the average farming unit is between 7000 and 8000 hactares. That's on average. So in the north you find that, you know, an economical unit will be perhaps 4000 hectares and in the South, down in the South where it's more desert like you'll find that an economical unit will be at least 20,000 hectares, but this is now the average for the whole country. So you will find the farmers and the South are very big because of the carrying capacity of this low rainfall, but in the north it's a different story and then if you go economic and agronomic farm then. You only need say 100 hectares. Where you can produce the same as on a stock farm of 20,000 hectares in the south so if it varies quite.

I2

**And how many workers would you say work at a farm or depend on, say, on livestock farming?**

P1

Yeah, on average it's the same pattern. So on agronomic farms there's big numbers 50 to 100 from time to time, but then in the South. It comes down to two or three so average it is more or less 7.5. That was the latest salary survey that we've done. So on average on all commercial firms. If you have divide the number of employees. On the farmers in 7.5 farm workers per farming unit and then of course is also. Their spouses and children, which makes it even more people depending on the farms. But the people who work in 7.5 per farm.

**I3**

**Just one question, so among this farmers 2100 farmers. How much of them are livestock dependent? How much of them are horticulture?**

P1

OK, the vast majority arelivestock farmers so. Cattle in the north. And then if you go South of Marital, it's more sheep, sheep, goats. But what we've seen is that most there's almost every farmer's got some cattle, some sheep. Even if they are in tourism or something. You will find there's some cattle walking on the farm, so yes, the diversification of income over the last few years has quite increased. So people are trying different modes of income also on the farms, like the charcoal. Yeah, the charcoal is active from north, went to central, north and east and the South is not is not really charcoal producing and the same for biomass. It's more or less the same so. If we talk biomass, we talk central, Northeast. But not South here.

I1

**And what would you say are the biggest challenges faced by commercial farmers?**

P1

Well, it is input costs input. You see, like the fuel prices has gone up now and it's affecting farmers because of the distances, you know, so because of big distances between our cities and the farms, so it's quite a costly factor for farmers to you know to produce, to get their produce, whatever be charcoal be it cattle. So that that's always a factory number. Is the cost of that. And then because we are an importer of the majority of also feed and like other countries where they produce their own feed for animals and stuff. Due to our lower rainfall, we must import that and then we must compete. So you see, if you start a chicken farm here, you must import all the food for the chickens. But you compare with South Africa or some other countries with the chicken farm produce their own. Chicken feed, which we cannot do the same with pigs and sometimes the same. With yeah, but, but what we try to promote worldwide is a niche market. So we say in Namibia we go the you know, the environmental clean route. We talk about free range cattle free range, so it's not you know sheep and cattle that just stands. So they walk freely. And the same, you'll see in our supermarkets here, free range eggs or free range chickens, you know, because it's not these chemical kind of supported stuff where you just get production out of out of food so. So that's the kind of market with the meat and everything that we that we try to promote in Namibia also this GMO of those hormones that they put into to crops to get more. We are at this stage against it, in a Namibia. So the maize and the stuff that we produce is GMO free also. So that's what we try to promote our products from Namibia. It is more environmentally clean without chemicals and that kind of stuff.

I1

**So you mentioned the the input costs as a challenge. Could you mention also other?**

P1

Yeah, the input cost and the low rainfall. And apart from the low rainfall it is, it is very unpredictable. So you know you one year you get good rains and then another year. You don't get enough rainfall, so droughts is also part of Namibia's history over the years. So it is a desert country. So look on ways that they can do sustainable stuff. So more and more people are drilling boreholes and then they put these, what you call these open, that's poppens, you know, for sprinklers because then you can control the rainfall. But so there's also a concern that the water underground is not guaranteed that it will be last forever, but at this stage people are.

I2

And can they just drill a borehole without obtaining permit?

P1

. No, no, they supposed to get permits, but at this stage the Water Act of Namibia has been there for control purposes, but it's never been implemented yet, so they are struggling for. Well, since I'm here for more than 10 years, we are struggling with government to implement that extra that is controlled because we are concerned that people in this dry Kalahari part, that they subtract too much water, they because currently is not enough control there. So you can just report, but there's no mechanism to go and first measure what is the underground abilities you just they just report and they said yes we want approval and because there is no act in this as you can proceed so there's not really control over that, but yeah, that's. That's something else.

I1

**And what are the issues faced with the encroaching bush by the by the commercial farmers?**

P1

Yeah, the encroaching bush is a big problem because the carrying capacity of farms has been reduced. The clever people say by 2/3 in big parts of the country. So they said if you can get rid of the majority of bush. Then you your carrying capacity can be increased by at least 60 to 70%. So yeah. Or actually I. think some is more by 200% if you talk about, yeah, yeah.

I2

**Do you know, roughly how many farmers are doing the bush control?**

P1

It's difficult to say, but I would say more or less half because the charcoal association has got about 1000 members. Which is just charcoal producers. So, but there are other ways of bush control also so. Over the thumb I would say 50% and if you take then the southern part of the country part of the southern half of the country out, then it will be 70% of farmers that that's trying or some kind of bush control, yes.

I2

**And the farmers that are part of the charcoal association, do they harvest the bush themselves and then sell the charcoal? Do they make the charcoal themselves too?**

P1

Nowe there's a lot of charcoal producers that is like independent contractors, so they go to the farm and they say. OK, we will do the bush. We will do charcoal for you. You'll get part of the profit and I take the rest of the profits. So there are those also. So what farmers normally do, they get charcoal producers to come with these workers. And do the juggle for him. And then the farmer will pay them per tone. So that is charcoal produce, but what they do on the farm then, they do the charcoal they fix the trees and they do the burning and the cooling down. And then about 30 tones is the normal units that the trucks come out then take to one of the factories. They are more than 20 buyers charcoal buyers which have got factories in Namibia like jumbo charcoal or as I said, they are, there are a lot of them throughout the country. And so they then process and they've got the contracts with the overseas to deliver the.

I2

**And do you know if this when they're doing all the biomass harvesting? Are they doing it in a sustainable way? Do they look how much they should harvest?**

P1

The control is actually very good because for charcoal you need to obtain harvesting permits from forestry. So before you can do any job and you must get harvesting permit and that harvesting permit, I think it's valid for three months only. So what forestry must do, and then the harvesting permit has got a lot of conditions and no trees bigger than this size and all that kind of stuff and not bigger than this. I think it's 500 hectares per year that you're allowed to get rid of the bush per farm and then if you want to renew your harvesting permit then forest it is supposed to go out and first see if you've complied with the conditions before they issue the next permittee so they are in the process. They've got already the equipment anything do they ingest by Google Earth, do the inspections because currently they haven't got really the manpower to go out to every farm before they renew, but in general I think we've I think 40% of the charcoal market is FSC I don't know if you are aware of the FSC Standard. Those farmers has got very strict audits, internal audits and external audits from Europe, where they come and visit, so we are quite happy that the charcoal is very is well controlled because you cannot get the harvesting permit, you cannot get the marketing permit. Sorry, without proving that you had harvesting permits. Whereas other kinds of mean I can now come and buy a lot of harborosites and I can get a plane and they can kill all the bushes and I have to. I don't report it anywhere. So. But in charcoal you cannot get rid of your charcoal if you haven't got all those papers in place and forestry in place. So the charcoal is well, you know is very good then one other thing is they yeah we we've had fights with environmentalists over the years, we said we've got a bush encroachment problem. So if we talk about sustainable harvesting of bush. We don't want to have the same growth back in five or ten years. We want to get permanent, you know, loss of that bush. So what we what we our thing is say is you want to get rid of 80% of the bush. So our advice to farmers is to not get rid of all the bushes. To leave patches and that's why the inspections are there in only parts of the farms. But those parts which you have cleaned you don't want bush to grow back there. Some environmentalists wants you to farm with bushes. And we said we are not. So we don't want to rehab us over 5 or 10 years at same bushes again. So if you talk about sustainable we mean from commercial side that the grasslands. Range lines will be there permanently after the Bush control. So what we've what is important once you've harvested the bush, then you must control the regrowth so that they normally do with harborsides with no new stuff. Otherwise about three to four years you're back in the same position.

I1

**And would that be the same like if maybe at one point the bush can also offer an extra income stream? Do you think that farmers will think the same like we should get rid of it and you don't want it to regrow? Or if it can regrow in five years, and you can earn money with it. Would that position change?**

P1

I doubt you see the bushes at this stage are so many that there's at this stage no chance that they will need the regrowth of that because the income from bush is much less than the income from 2/3 more cattle on your farm. So the other and a big thing also on bush harvesting is that you get a lot of unwanted people on your farms sometimes, so that is a big challenge also in their current bush harvesting be it for whatever purpose is. There's a lot of Angolans also doing foreigners. That's doing that work because they are good at it. And then, but then the crime, the stock saved theft and you know they are killing all the game on farms. So that is a big challenge to us. So if you get on your commercial Farm 100 charcoal workers, they must be fit and normally they surrounding farmers. They complain that they are killing animals from their farms so they are stealing here and they sell. Crime is always hand in hand with a lot of, you know, workers on your farm which isn't well controlled. So that is also a concern.

I1

**Because usually now with the charcoal production, there's another company coming and doing the harvesting and they also take their workers along. It's not the workers that already work on the farm?**

P1

Yeah. No, for charcoal, because charcoal is quite the skilled job. The normal farm workers. They are not good at the charcoal. So what we've seen is. It is kind of a specialist job in the sense that at first you must be a strong person. So what we've seen the smaller kinds of tribes, like the Nama and the Bushmen and the they, they are not strong enough for that work so currently, the majority of people are or shivambu, Kavango and Angolans. Those are because they are much bigger built than us. You know, they're big, big people. Strong people. It's physically quite, quite, quite hard.

I1

**Because it's a lot of manual labor then?**

P1

Manual labor yeah, so the government has also promoted that, at least to create jobs. But the best would have been if they can mechanize with machines and stuff, but that's also too expensive once you're getting machines, it's not sustainable income for the farmer, again, because the machines are so expensive.

I1

**And for an average farm of like 7000 to 8000 hectares to harvest or to produce charcoal in that plot. How many workers would you need for that?**

P1

I would say the average number of charcoal workers is I would say 20. Yeah. So normally we they really want income from charcoal then you you'll have 20 charcoal workers more or less.

I1

And for how long are they working on one plot?

P1

I think it's more or less 6 month periods, so they work for six months and then they go back to the north where they've got communal land be and Angola or be it in the Kavango or Shavango. So they make a lot of money for six months, then they sell the charcoal and they get paid and then they go back for a few months. So they're not permanent workers, yeah.

I2

**And when these charcoal workers go to the farm, whose responsibility is it to house them?**

P1

It is the format that that then if the farmer gets them on the farm, he must provide housing for them and sanitary and water, yes.

I2

**Are there issues there like performers not providing adequate housing situations, did you say?**

P1

Not really. Not on the commercial farms. We've got problems that on the communal farms, they're also doing harvesting for, for money and stuff. And then they're the people the standards are not the same, you know, they will just live there under sheets but on the commercial farms we. Part of that the conditions on the permit is that they must have access to water and pollution so at least they have the minimum standards for housing and water and pollution. They will tell maximum of so many people in one apartment and then for every say 10 people, they must be at least a separate shower and a separate toilet whatever at the housing, so as once again in the charcoal industry it is quite good controlled. The problem is they stay here on your farm they this is the house. But then during the day. They go into the feeld, which is 3 to 4 kilometers from where they stay, and then there from time to time they you know do some killing of animals and stuff where they put these in African she called it sterka. You know these wire things which they catch the animals with all kinds of types of trap for the game, so that that is a concern to the people. But they are, they are really. I would also say the majority of charcoal workers are well controlled and they behave good and they get a good salary and I think the income of charcoal work is, I would say, 40% better than the average farm worker, so it is hard work. But the income is better or the cash income, let me say the cash income, so they've got money which they can go left on for a few months before they come back for this.

I2

**And when during the stay, who’s responsible for feeding them, or they're supposed to do their own food?**

P1

They are supposed to buy their own food on the farms the farmer will make up food packets for them and they will send it to them. So that they pay from their price per tone, but done that they make they must pay for that as well. But that is also a kind of a concern in some areas that the farmer then is killing the game because cattle is too expensive to just, you know, use that for feed. So there was a concern from our this association, that there's a lot of charcoal workers. They must all be fed and the majority are fed on game meat. But yeah, it's not a proven concern. It was just concerned there is last year last year. So what we then said, well, we haven't got really proof of that. What we can just do is advise the farmers to manage their game on their farms, also sustainable, that they do not reutilize that for charcoal purposes.

I2

**So is that basically the reason why the charcoal workers are poaching?**

P1

That is the that is the big thing also, because if I poach, I don't have to buy the food so they can buy the meat from the farmer. But if they if they don't buy the meat from the farmland they've poach they there's more money in their pockets.

I1

**And what type of contracts do these workers have? Is it like a flexible contractor for projects or how is that arranged?**

P1

It is a kind of the contract is more about the price per tone. So there's not, they work flexible hours, so it's up to them themselves. So there's not that you must start this time in the morning and. You must have a lunch break and you must do that. So what we've got a standard kind of contract from the charcoal Association with broad guidelines. We just say that your price per tone that you get for charcoal already includes overtime and Sunday time and leave because it's impractical for if you pay a person with some charcoal say that we have to leave by now you see. So that's why we’ve given guidelines and we we've signed with the unions also that charcoal workers, they don't get the benefits like other employees separately like leave and working hours that kind of stuff because it's impractical. So it's up to every individual. How late I want to wake up in the morning when I want to start work, because at the end of the month I get paid for my tons of charcoal produced.

I1

**And what is the price per ton of charcoal, the income that they receive for a ton?**

P1

The income is about, I would say 800 and 900 per tone.

I1

**And how many hours work would that be normally on average to get that to get one tone?**

P1

I would say the average charcoal workers can do, I would say 5 tones a month.

I1

Month 5 tons a month.

P1

So you can do 5 tons a month so. For that 5 tons a month, I would say you work, I think 60 hours a week. But as I say, it's not forced you'll get people that tell you know this guy if you wake up in the morning, you hear him that tucked in the bush there and tonight when the sun’s down he's still down another person. That guy will do 10 tones a month. And another person that will only work 8:00 o'clock and. 5:00 o'clock and say I'm done. He will perhaps only do three tonnes a month. Performance based structure work. Yeah, but our contracts say you were flexible. The house is in your own hands. You just get paid by the end of the month for what you've produced.

I1

**Are these workers also organizing unions or workers associations?**

P1

No not the charcoal workers. Yeah, not the charcoal workers, as I say, because they are not permanent workers. They come in on a on a contract basis and then when they come back. After six months and then they were completely different area again and then they on another farm again. So yeah, so there's it's impractical for them to be organized because they're not permanent workers.

I1

**And is it different for the farm workers?**

P1

Farm workers, permanent workers, they stay permanent on the farms and. But in Namibia there is a farm Workers Union, NAFU Namibia agricultural farmworkers Union. That would be agricultural farm Workers Union, so that is a registered union for farm workers. As a result of the big distances. You know of the farms and on the majority of farms is at least seven average 7 workers. They only concentrate on big farms. They will concentrate on the great farm where there's 2000 workers. Or instead of that or they. Will go to the. Economic forums, where there's 200 workers in the north. That kind of stuff. So at this stage. I would say they only represent 5% off all farm workers, the Farm Workers Union.

I1

**And these farm workers today have more permanent contracts?**

P1

Yeah, yeah. The farm workers, they are permanent. They are permanent employees. The labour act makes it difficult for you to not appoint a worker permanent if you exceeds a year of service. So if he's the exceeds. If you stay on a farm for an extensive period, say a year or more. Then there's no reason. Then the act regard you as permanent, irrespective of your contract. So if the worker go and they are complaint, they will say no, you owe this worker leave. You owe him. You must register him at social Security. So all the farm workers. Must anyway be have all the benefits of a permanent worker, OK, if they exceed the month of service. So all our excess if a worker is longer than a month in your service, you must register them with Social Security and you must pay their over the insurance there you must register for weapons compensation. For injuries on the job and then they also qualify for leave two days a month. Irrespective, whether they are temporary or permanent, so our ex has been the ex, have been adjusted to actually ensures that the majority of workers get all the benefits of a permanent worker irrespective of your company.

I2

**And then there's the farmer pays the social securities, right? Just what were the social securities again?**

P1

Yeah, the one is the MSD fund. It is medical sickness and death benefit so when everyone is registered there and you deduct. 0.9% from the employee salary. And the employer also contributes 0.9%, so 1.8% of his basic salary is the monthly fee for Social Security. And then they are entitled to claim from Social Security sick benefits, maternity benefits death benefits, yeah. And the other fund things that employee compensation fund. That is where all the workers must be insured for injuries on duty. And that's a separate one. That's only an annual thing. Where you once a year say this was my payroll and then. They made an assessment on that and say OK, for this payroll you must pay this amount then all your employees are covered for the next year. Is the MSD fund is a monthly contribution. But it's the small amount, it's. Not it's not big. It's cheap insurance.

I2

**So the farmers now pay the charcoal or producers to come on their farm or whoever understood wrong? Or how does that work? Do they get paid for the biomass or?**

P1

Yeah, they normally get paid per tonne. So as I say, I'm only used to charcoal because that is currently the main source of biomass in Namibia and the standard custom is to that they get paid per tonne.

I2

**OK. And how much is that roughly?**

P1

That is the 800 to 900 dollars per tonne

I3

And I would assume for every tonne of charcoal you would require at least three tonnes of wood or something.

P1

Yeah the charcoal Association people will tell the people in the charcoal industry will tell you know exactly how many biomass you need for a tonne charcoal. I would now lie because as I said, I'm only on the finance part of it.

I1

**So this 800 to 900 per ton of charcoal, that's what the farmer gets for their charcoal?**

P1

No that’s what the worker gets the farmer gets 1800 per tonne up to 2400 which is for FSC produced charcoal that is more or less 400 dollars more than non FSC charcoal.

I2

**And as the farmers decide if it’s going into FSC certification?**

P1

Yeah the farmer must decide. I want to do FSC and then he, you know, he registers and then they come and inspect all the things that you've got. And then they said, OK, you know, registered for FSC and then you can produce and then as I said then the farmer gets more and then that workers always the FSC workers will get $900 for instance, and the non FEC will get $800.

I2

Do you know how long that the FSC lasts per certification. It is kind of a permanent thing once you are FSC, you remain FSC, but they are I think there are six-monthly audits. That need to be done. So as long as you say you are still in it in the internal audits, come and they do it and they like reports. And then once a year the Europe audits come also and they do the audits.

I2

**The aftercare is mostly with herbisides right?**

P1

Yeah, that's the most effective one yeah. Because other methods are quite costly, very costly because the regrowth is quite extensive you know, we've seen farms here to the north where they've cleaned, beautiful, everything. Four years back, it now looks again. It's completely bush encroached. Because, I mean, that's those switches that come out like this again. If you don't control them and then it's the same thing here. And the reason why we've got the Bush encouragement because when I was still a child, it wasn't like that and we had some range lands and stuff. But then because the farmers are so well organized. And they prevent fires very successful in Namibia, so the lack of fires, felt fires and that that's some of the things that they, you know, promoted this bush encroachment. So yeah, and then overgrazing also. Where the farmers who were grace, they felt instead of time staying there. Because if you over grace. The majority of perennial grasses are dead because then. And then these more you know, then the bushes starts coming into your film because. Perennial grasses have been literally pulled out of them ground by the by the hungry animals.

I1

So are there also guidelines on sort of the maximum amount of cattle that you can have on your land to be sustainable.

P1

Yes we've got that yes. The whole Namibia map is available for that for each area based on the rainfall they will tell the carrying capacity in that area is this per hector of large stock of small stock etcetera.

I1

So we'd like to show you an image of the concept that we are working on. It's called the biohub. The idea is that here in this area there are different communities of farmers that produce biomass. So in this case it's the encroachers bush. So it can be multiple farmers that provide that to a biorefinery where we are investigating a technology that can produce four different streams. So first one is a bio oil. That can be used eventually for the shipping industry. That's something that we are investigating. That's the bio oil. You can also use for other purposes. The second one is biochar.

P1

That one I know yes. The charcoal association is also involved in that.

I1

In the biochar. OK. And it can have multiple users again. Also in this farming area, such as fertilizer or maybe water purification. And then there is an aqueous stream of wastewater stream and a gas stream which can be utilized again in its facility and what we are. Yeah investigating here is.

P1

Sorry, what do you mean by the gas stream?

I1

So that is like a byproduct of the of this process.

P1

Because I know that in Nbig is also involved in the bio biomass to electricity.

I1

Oh, yeah we heard about it.

P1

They want to use the wood chips for electricity generater plants.

I1

**And we would like to, yeah, to find out here while we are here. So how would this concept work in the context of Namibia? What should be the benefits? How should the product products be utilized but also what are challenges and hurdles that that could be faced so?**

P1

I think the biggest challenge will be the harvesting methods. So how are you going to harvest? Are you going to harvest with machines? Or are you going to harvest with a lot of unwanted people on the farm. As I've mentioned earlier, you know foreign people on the farms, he's quite a challenge sometimes. That is one and then the cost. To make it viable, I mean if you've got a company that provides the that you know the equipment, the big mechanical equipment to harvest, then the farmer. Well, only let him harvest on his farm if he can also get something out of it. They thought in the in the beginning, but the benefit you get is you get range land, but we've seen if you don't pay the farmer said no, then I don't want your my farm. It's my bush and I want to sell them. So even if you get the big machine that harvests it. If I don't get the direct benefit from it. You can try another farm so that is what we've seen in the past, which is quite a challenge to make the finances then viable, yeah. It's there expensive equipment to harvest. But then the owner of the bush product also wants something out of it. So but it mean it can be done. So I could say that the people would prefer that kind of mechanical use where the people come in with big machines and you tell the farmer you will only be on the farm for two months, then everything is done here. Then you can go to the next farm so there is not a foreign activities on your farm for too long. So if that can be done, we've had kind of projects, I think the cement factory in the north, they had a system like that where they've got these big tractor harvesting things yeah, that harvest and then they make the biomass chips already in the machine. It's factory kind of truck. But it's very expensive stuff. So and then what they found is it was viable when they've done the farms in the. Say 50 kilometer radius around this cement factory, but the moment they must go further and further, you know where the trucks then they become. Then it became not viable anymore. So that is the big challenge once again is the distances and you know the transport cost, be it whatever way of transport.

I1

**And do you foresee also any negative impacts or harms like if this system will be implemented here?**

P1

In theory it's really a good system if it's possible that that one can produce or get some kind of cheaper kind of equipment that can do the harvesting or the chipping so that can be attractive to farmers, that you tell the farmer. OK, no, we will provide the equipment, but you can do it with your own people and then we will buy back the wood chips or whatever. The buy back that you produce. We will be back it and in the buyback price is then that you pay back that machine that we've provided for you to harvest. So yeah, I think the any harvesting method where the farmer can get something back is a good a good method because if you just throw harborosides, then the farmer don't get anything back immediately you must just pay a lot of money for those harborosides, but if you do charcoal or if you can sell the biomass, then at least you can convince the farmer. Listen, but there's something for you in it as well. You know, you could get rid of the bush so it's a win win, but then we will also pay you. You can make some little money also with it to be attractive. Because what we've seen is just to tell the farmer at the end you will get better range lands. That hasn't motivated the farmers in the past. That's not enough then, they said. You know, then go to the next door neighbour. I'm not interested. So to get the farmers interested. In that there must be some or. Other you know reimbursement for them to make it attractive. But in theory it's really. We've got the biomass, absolutely, we've got it and I think Europe has got the urge for it or the assumption for it. I can imagine in all kinds of ways we eat for eating or whatever, yeah.

I1

**And do you foresee any competition with because you're now in the charcoal production business, do you see any conflicts there? If there will be new value chains?**

P1

Well, not really. I think the bush encroachment is big enough. And what we've seen is the charcoal has perhaps the ability. To do, I would say over. The thumb only 10% of you know. Getting rid of bushes or 10% contribution to rangeland creation, the people that really created range lands, they get in a big bulldozer or they do the harborosides by airplane and then just got if you do it by charcoal. So charcoal is a good thing, but it takes years to get the I would say to get a 7000 hectares farm to make it arrangements again by only charcoal. It'll take you 20 years. So I think there's scope for it need not be competition and if it can be a cleaner job, for instance, where you use equipment that's not this hard work, then then the physical work then that charcoal production. Then it can be a good alternative which a lot of people will definitely consider especially if it need not be many workers on the farm. If it can be mechanical driven then I think it be sound.

I1

**And we would also like to understand a bit the different stakeholders that are involved or would be involved in in this system and their position in terms of the power that they would have in making decisions around this and also the interest that they would have in participating in in a value chain like this. So we plotted them on this power interest grid, so if they would have high power and high interested, they're here. And if they have high interest but lower power, then we put them here. So yeah, how do you see the position of these stakeholders here? Do you think they are more or less correct? So would you change something?**

P1

I would say definitely the government has gotten high interest in this. Yeah, because they've got two functions. The one is they are responsible for the environment, so they must see that whatever is done on the you know on the land is not damaging the land. So that's why you've got all these AIE environmental impacts certificates that you must do before you really go big into things. So I think currently it is structured in that way our forests react is structured in that way that they have got a major role in power. So because currently they exist for harvesting over more than I think 15 hectares. You must obtain a permit from government. So currently it is struck. So government is definitely high and.

I1

**And for example, the commercial farmers, yeah, put them now here?**

P1

I would say the commercial farmers is definitely high because it's a make of make or break. They've got the biomass. And if you don't get their buy in then the project is dead. I mean you cannot force the farmers. The government cannot bring out a net. This country say you will deliver biomass, do this factory, so buy-in of farmers is crucial to a project like this. So they interest and buy in this is, to my mind it's definitely high. And then transport is also. We've seen in this country it is. Also a big factor because of the cost. You just can workout clever people the transport costs due to the fuel price, currently of biomass because biomass, whatever you see the charcoal, then it's kind of kind of produced to a more fun product. But if you if you use wood chips or stuff the transport will be quite significant because you cannot, it's impossible to get 50 tonnes of by biomass in the truck. The volumes will be too big, 30 tonnes of truck on one truck. Yeah, but the biomass, I would say perhaps 10 ton on the truck and the volume will be too big to carry or whatever. So transport in this country we see is a big. So yeah, this kind of projects in. The past we've seen. The clever people, they say it's viable if you just work on a radius of maximum say 50 to 100 kilometers around that factory. The moment you go further than that, and then the biggest challenge is to get people in that immediate vicinity to buy into this enough people to buy in. Because if you, if you go this route, you want to be ensured that enough farmers will partake in this to you know, to make it viable. In theory it is something that really can work here.

I1

**And how is your relationship with because we also spoke with two other farmers unions with the representing the communal areas and resettled farmers. How is your relationship with those other unions and other types of farmers?**

P1

Now our relationships are very good with him because we always tell them where there is a mutual interest in. So what benefit the commercial farmer also benefit the communal farmer and the other union, their upcoming farmers. So yeah. So, so our relationship are good with him on all the forms of government we represent commercial farmers. Normally the other two unions are also part of that and they are also there, but normally we speak out of one of farmers and it's like for instance the minimum wage for farm workers, the agreement that we signed with the three other unions, the two unions. Unions of the communal farmers and the upcoming Farmers Union and the 4th one is the Farm Workers Union. So we've got these big unions in farming, it's commercial farmers, communal farmers, upcoming commercial farmers and in the farm Workers Union. Although they are small but they are also part of all the things that we want to approach government with all. On the fronts, so something like this, we will get all of them around the table.

I1

**And this agreements on the minimum wage for workers. Can we find that on your website?**

P1

It is there, but if you give me your e-mail, then I can forward you the latest one.

I1

Yeah, please send it.

P1

Intrested what I can also forward you just for interesting sake is every two years we conduct a salary survey amongst our Members, commercial farmers, so that we then we provide a report on labour on commercial farmers, that's where I get the figures of this is the average size of a farming unit in the country. That is, the average number of workers and they will see the difference between the North Central and the South, the sizes, everything is in that.

I1

That would be very interesting.

P1

50 page report and that report reflects the current actual salaries, average salaries. Not the minimum wage because the actual salaries of commercial firms are 70% higher than the minimum wage minimum wage is just an entry level wage for farm workers. Unlike in most other countries where the minimum wage is actually the guided wage and everyone who did that with us, it's just the entry level wage and then workers with experience, they earn much more than that. So in Namibia the Farm workers minimum wage working works very good.

I3

**I'm just trying to understand because this also has to do with understanding the mindset so commercial farmers, they want to get rid of all the bush at least 80%, right, because it's their in their farm and they want to actually increase their carrying capacity. So they really want to debush everything?**

P1

We've got studies where they've indicated the percentage of bushes that must be left so that we also provide to the farmers so that they you've got these little drones that can do bush counts for you, and then they tell if you leave the bigger bushes on the farms and then they can do a bush count again and then they say the ideal is say 20%, bushes which is that must remain on the farm, and then all the big trees. So our harvesting permit, no big trees are to be harvested. If the diameter is more than then it's 15 centimeter of a tree. Then it's not to be harvested even if it's a bush so if it's a big bush it's not to be harvested.

I3

And commercial farmers follow that? Light harvesting?

P1

Yeah, as I say, the system is in place where before they issue a next harvest permit, they must go and, you know, inspect the farm and see and there’s big cut-off things here in the farm. They say no we don’t give you. Normally there is complaints also the farmers, they are checking one another so. Normally we get complaints we there is an open door when they come where they can report farmers that damage the environment and be from time to time we get that. We then report them to the charcoal association or to forestry and we said send out your inspectors to that area. We see that they chop off these big trees there and they go and then they close their farms.

I3

**And also to understand that my next question is how the relationship between the farmers and the workers. Because you said there's a threat. Because people don't want for yeah, the workers to be there in the in the land. So a commercial farmer has a land he has lot of bush. And he want to harvest them, right. He has two options. One is equipment and another is workers. As a commercial farmer, I do not want equipment because it's really costly so I cannot buy it. My only way is, however, I want to really debush this thing so that I can increase my carrying capacity in my land. Right? So which means the only way is workers right? In my case, I would see this as a vulnerable position for the farmer because he is dependent on these workers, not the other way round for their. Even if the workers realize if it's not this farm, I can work on another farm this farmer is end up with this bush problem right?**

P1

And that is exactly the current situation. There are some farmers. They still sit with the bushes because they said I don't want those workers on my farm. So they just stuck with the bush. So that is that is one of the challenges, but especially when the drought came. Then we saw that a lot of farmers are of need of cash. They've moved too much charcoal, so the charcoal has been a growing industry over the past three to four years every year. With the people. Well then, see well, it's now drought I don't get cannot, you know, sell any of my animals. But the bushes, they don't want the drought. So at least I must try this thing now. And they said OK, come. But I first want to see check this out and then when they get their first. Bring some more workers so we've seen a dramatic increase using workers for getting rid of bushes during the drought, which was two seasons ago. So all of out of desperate need for cash money because charcoal is I would say a cash geese. You know, you get within two months, you get cash, you sell your charcoal. From when the workers are on the farm with you too much you get enough cash to at least sustain your expenses on the farm and pay your electricity bills and stuff and then get and then a lot of farmers after the drought they seen that. Well, this is now another income stream. So I I keep the workers here.

I3

**So power dynamics is evolving then?**

P1

Currently we estimate that it's between 7000 and 8000 charcoal workers that we've got in Namibia I will not say how many are Angolans but anyway a big chunk of them.

I3

So now I'm just confused because the I won't understand the power dynamics between them.

P1

If it wasn't for the drought then charcoal industry would have been 1/3 smaller then currently. But the drought forced them to look at other ways of income. And then I tell my neighbor. But listen, man. I've got workers they can do for you also charcoal. You can get this and then they get exposed to it. And then they said now at least I see it works.

I3

**And also another problem you said is so also trying to understand this one, so workers come here and work here for two months. So the usual thing is farmers sell the food packets to the workers, and this food packet, whatever meat is, is actually the farmers actually get it from the animal which are in the game. That’s how they're currently doing it. The thing is my understanding, but also they complain that the workers poach these livestocks. So it's okay that if they can kill their animals because it's their animals. But they don't want the workers to kill them. Even though if it's for the same purpose of feeding food to the workers. Am I getting this correctly or wrong?**

P1

You see the difference is if I've got say 20 zebra on my farm, I said OK, I this year I can get rid of 8 I must just keep 12 so I can get rid of 8 of my zebra. So then they shoot the zebra and they count them and they said OK, now I manage my game. But and what normally happens is the workers don't poach on the farm where they do the charcoal. They poach on the neighboring farm, and that is the biggest concern. So then, if the workers are on my farm the surrounding farms, they don't have charcaol workers. But they see these traps and their farms, and they found the people in the field. What you're doing in my field or they've got them with the wardog that they've been guilty of the dogs and then they get furious about this farmer. The people that doesn't do the charcoal. They actually don't like the charcoal industry, so the neighbors that don't do charcoal. They are continuously on the lookout when can I report them? When do they, you know, contravene some of this stuff and that's why a lot of them also, which is a good thing, get reported the moment they chop off from trees, because I'm going to report you because I don't want these workers on our border.

I3

Yeah okay now I understand what you're saying.

I2

**Are there any penalty for poaching?**

P1

We've got a internal guideline penalty system where they get penalties for dropping off from threes 1st and the 2nd and then you fired or something like that. They've got guidelines like that but normally these workers, you know it's not, it's not worth it to or the penalties, it's not that successful because the damage that can cause is quite big. What also happened is in the dry season in the past, the charcoal workers was causing another felt fires because yeah, they just, you know, there's burning and they don't clear properly around these. And then when the wind blows, then they got these big felt fires. So that was also for the past two years drive and control from the government side to on the on the charcoal workers. So that is also one benefit of some other biomass models where you don't have to do the burning. Because then there's no risk of felt fires, and that is the biggest challenge for charcoal workers. Is to is the risk of felt fires. That's why farmers will definitely consider another proposition, say for woodchips or something where there is not a risk of these felt fires from these problems all over the farm.

I2

**Namibia has a very high unemployment rate, right? So why are there Angolans coming into. Do people not want to do the job?**

P1

They don't want to do the job so the people they don't have education because our school system is. Yeah, you can just read the paper. It's very substandard. So the biggest challenge is that we've haven't got skilled people, so the people that are you know, without jobs are really uneducated people that the majority can't read and write. But because it's physical. It's, you know. It's very physical, challenging job charcoal production because I mean, the job with the axe in the 30 plus degrees sun, you know and. It is just not a work that the Namibians want to do. Even the ministers they've got charcoal on their farms also, when we had discussions with them on the Angolans and they said no on my farm there is also Angolans, I know our own people. They want to sit in air conditioned offices they don't want to do hard work. But the problem of our unemployment is substandard education system. I'm sorry to say but that is South Africa and in Namibia is that the biggest problem, that is one thing that we can really adopt from Zimbabwe. They are one of the poorest African countries these days, but they've got a very good education system. If we could just have taken the education system and give them powers should be more suitable to us, but that's why you'll see also in every in the government everywhere you find Zimbabweans, there's a lot of them working in Namibia. There is a lot of them teachers are common jobs, but they are everywhere because they've got quality education in their country. There's no jobs for them there.

I2

**Do the farmers not have schools on their farm?**

P1

No they are there are schools in the in the rural areas, but like in the farms. The farm children go to a school. But the standards in those schools are shocking. It is absolutely no standard. The teachers are there's no discipline, but you'll get a school where you'll hear from the people, know who the headmaster is drunk most of the time, he's only appearing at school once a week perhaps. So and then half of the teachers are not qualified for the job teachers in front of the class and the teacher even haven't got even grade 12 certificate so previously in the apartheid years, we had an education system where there were school inspectors in all the regions that visited the schools properly, their would go unannounced. They're going to sit in the class and the poor old teacher suddenly the morning when she walks in home, there's the inspector and he is sitting in my class now, so I must be prepared so that is some kind of controls. Now the government, our current government is lacking controls completely. There is no such system anymore. The so-called inspectors just sit in their offices here. But they don't visit the schools. So that is a big concern to us. So you get the results from the private schools. So even the black people, if they want their children to get educated, they send them to the private schools, not to the government, schools or some government schools has bled the nation, really that is. That is a challenge for us. And the other problem is that the biggest part of the Namibian budget goes to education. But because there's no control, there's no I mean the headmasters get appointed on political grounds rather than you know that they that they are really qualified for the job. And then once I'm here because I've got political connections, I get all my friends in as teachers here and then at the end, you, you, the poor old farm children and they go to the school. Grade one, they fail. Then they go to grade 2 to they fail. Then they go to grade three they fail, then they get to grade four they fail, then at grade seven they say. I think you must take them out of school then you see that poor old guys who's now in the school for five years, cannot even write and reads after attending school for five years. And that is the case. I don't know what is being done at the school. But the results you can see that yeah, you know the from the government schools. I wonder if 5% of the people, after completing the track is qualified to go to a tertiary institution like university or college. It's only the private schools. Normally they provide an innovation to the people, which is a pity, but the government is aware of that you can see in our newspapers almost at any pages that prices in the schools and then that links to the unemployment of the people. So because the people are not educated. Big chunk of them. Then the only jobs that can be created for them is labour intensive, low level jobs. If you get the factory that can be the people. Must just do low level work and so yeah. But yeah, that that remains a challenge to us, yeah.

I1

Well, thank you so much for all these answers. It's yeah, it was really insightful.