Republic of Namibia

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE SECOND CONSULTATIVE FORUM ON DECENTRALIZATION

Windhoek, Khomas Region    July 25, 2019
Director of proceedings
Hon. Derek Klazen, Deputy Minister of Urban and Rural Development
Executive Directors and Chief Regional Officers present
Senior Officials from Offices/Ministries/Agencies and Regional Councils
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good morning to you all!

It gives me pleasure to officiate at this important occasion of the Decentralisation Consultative Forum of the key stakeholders in the implementation of the Decentralisation Policy, referring here to the Ministry of Urban Rural Development as coordinator of the implementation process, Decentralising Line Ministries and Regional Councils as implementers, as well as other partner government institutions. I would like to acknowledge the presence of representatives of various Offices, Ministries, and Regional Councils who despite your various commitments still found time to attend this important meeting.

Director of proceedings,

It is important, from the onset, to remind ourselves that decentralisation in Namibia is an important government policy initiative aimed empowering sub-national governments by transferring certain functions, decision making powers, along with
related resources from central government to sub-national government level in order to improve government’s ability to render public services in an effective and efficient manner. I would also like to emphasise that Namibia being a unitary state there must be harmony between the local and national development priorities and equally important, the relationship between central government and sub-national governments must naturally be characterised by the spirit of cooperation and common purpose rather than competition in our quest to serve the Namibian citizens.

Director of proceedings,

It must therefore be acknowledge that sub-national governments, meaning Regional and Local Authority councils, are strategically established to serve as conduits for development and public service delivery due to their unique knowledge of local needs and proximity to local communities. Additionally, the efficiency of a government is to large extent determined by the effectiveness of its local structures. In this respect, Regional Councils must be responsive to the needs of local communities by providing timely and quality services. Moreover, there is need to nurture a culture of mutual cooperation and communication between Regional Councils and decentralising Line Ministries through define official channels and mechanisms.

Director of proceedings,

Decentralisation is a complex government reform and as such, it is expected that some challenges will be encountered along our implementation journey. However, such challenges should not be
construed as impossibility, but rather as lessons and opportunities to upon which we must build to refine our decentralisation implementation approach and systems. I am encouraged to note that the purpose of this consultative workshop is to reflect on the progress we have made and the challenges being encountered, and most importantly, to share ideas and device strategies on how to overcome the challenges.

**Director of proceedings,**

I believe that we are all aware of the state of the economy in the country and as well as the prevailing severe drought situation which resulted in His Excellency President Hage Geingob declaring the State Emergency during May 2019. The combination of these two factors has put immense pressure on government’s fiscal capacity to address the ever-increasing demands and needs of the citizens as well as on the performance of decentralised function. However, Government’s obligation towards the improvement of the general welfare of the Namibian society remains its first priority. Therefore, there is need for innovativeness in the utilisation of the available resources and more so, closer collaboration between central government and sub-national governments to ensure optimal utilisation of the resources at our disposal and that no Namibian should perish due to the drought situation.

**Director of proceedings,**
As you may all be aware, His Excellency President Hage Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia has also declared 2019 as the year of accountability. This calls for utmost prudence, honest, transparency and professionalism in the execution of our duties and in our dealings with members of the community. In this respect, I would like to appeal to all officials refrain from and guard against wasteful expenditures, the abuse state resources and to resist the temptation of engaging in corrupt practices. It is thus advisable for all of you to demonstrate true servant-hood in the performance of our duties by putting public interest above personal interest.

**Director of proceedings**

I have taken note that a number of critical functions, namely Rural Water Supply and Sanitation, Primary and Secondary Education, Communal Land Management, Maintenance government infrastructure, Early Childhood Development and Community Development, among others, have been decentralised (by delegation) to regional councils. I commend those Ministries that have decentralised for their demonstrated commitment towards the implementation this national policy. Moreover, while this level of progress is commendable, we need to remind ourselves that the transfer of these functions from the centre to sub-national level must not be construed as the end in itself. It should rather be understood as the means to achieve an impactful decentralisation that will improve government service processes to positively transform the livelihood of our local communities.
Director of proceedings,

I am also aware that there are some Ministries with functions earmarked for decentralisation, but they have not yet decentralised such function for various reason. I would like call upon those Ministries to accelerate their decentralisation plans in order to give effect and meaning to our national policy of decentralisation. Furthermore, as we take stock and reflect on the journey we have walked thus far, let our pre-occupation and mind-set be about how we should improve and consolidate on the gains achieved thus far. In the same spirit, I call upon all of us, that is Line Ministries and Regional Councils, to resolve to make decentralisation in Namibia a success for the common good of our citizens, and particularly, those communities who are residing in rural areas.

Director of proceedings,

While I am aware that an involved national process such as decentralisation cannot be without challenges, I believe that if we all join hands and pull in the same direction, no challenge will be too difficult to overcome. As Tony Robbin once said, "Remember, anything you want that is valuable requires you to break through short-term pain in order to gain long term pleasure". I trust that in our pursuit for a fully decentralised government system, we shall always be motivated by the long-term benefits of decentralisation as articulated in our national policy.
At this juncture, I wish to thank my staff and the Office of the Prime Minister for their continued leadership, guidance and support to the decentralizing Ministries and Regional Councils.

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with words by Neil Strauss who said “Great things never come from comfort zones”.

Director of proceedings,
It is now my pleasure to declare this Consultative Workshop on Decentralisation officially open.

I thank you for your kind attention!