



Republic of Namibia

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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MINISTER OF URBAN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

ON THE OCCASION OF

ANNUAL DECENTRALISATION FORUM

Swakopmund, Erongo Region

23 April 2024

Director of Ceremonies,
Executive Directors of various offices/Ministries/ Agencies present,
Chief Regional Officers of Regional Councils,
Senior Officials and staff members representing various Ministries and
Regional Councils,
Members of the media,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning to you all!

Allow me, **Ladies and Gentlemen**, to first of all, thank you all for finding time out of your busy schedules to be with us during this session of the 2024 Annual Consultative Decentralisation Forum under the theme "*Towards the full implementation of the Decentralisation Policy in Namibia*". Indeed, your presence is a clear testimony of the importance you attach to the decentralisation course in general and in particular, service delivery through shared responsibilities between and at all levels of government.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me, from the onset, state that upon the adoption of our Constitution in 1990, the government of the Republic of Namibia embarked on a pivotal journey towards empowering local communities and that of fostering sustainable development across our beautiful country. The government's resolve in this regard was demonstrated through the swift establishment of sub-national government structures in the form of regional and local governments and the subsequent adoption of the Decentralisation Policy of 1997 as well as the enactment of all other enabling legislations in place.

This consultative platform provides an opportunity for us (MURD), Regional Councils, Decentralising Line Ministries and other partner government institutions, as key role players in the implementation of the Decentralization Policy, to reflect and assess the progress made thus far, share best practices and ideas, discuss challenges that are being encountered and most importantly, to collectively formulate strategies and remedial measures to overcome any such challenges going forward.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As key stakeholders in decentralisation, we have a collective responsibility to ensure that all the people of this country are provided with the quality and quantity of public goods and services they need as near as possible to where they live, go to school, and/or where they work. Therefore, it is of vital importance that we continue to harmonise and strengthen our multi-levelled coordination mechanisms between the central and subnational organs of our government. It is a commonly accepted fact that proper coordination removes duplication of efforts and wastage of resources on the one hand, whereas on the other hand, it promotes efficiency in resources utilisation and synergies across and between sectors. This position is so much in harmony with the general principle of shared responsibility, and complementarity as well as cooperation between different levels of government as stipulated in the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development.

Director of proceedings

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Decentralisation lies at the heart of democratic governance, as characterized by the principles of subsidiarity and local autonomy. It is further considered as the cornerstone upon which equitable distribution of resources, efficient service

delivery and participatory decision-making are built. Therefore, by decentralising decision-making powers and service responsibilities to regional councils and local authorities, government strives to empower communities to shape their own destinies and to address their unique needs, aspirations and challenges with swiftness and based on the understanding of their own local circumstances.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the past years, we have witnessed a steady transfer of service functions and related resources from various decentralising Line Ministries to regional councils. In this regard, I would like to once again acknowledge and commend those Ministries in the forefront for their unwavering spirit of partnership, cooperation and commitment towards realising and advancing the objectives and principles of decentralisation in Namibia.

In this respect, I am referring to the Ministries of Education, Arts and Culture, Works and Transport, Information and Communication Technology, Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, as well as that of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform. I am also pleased that the majority of the said ministries have also started to conduct periodic assessments on the performance by regional councils of decentralised functions as part of their continuous monitoring and evaluation function, which is further demonstration of their commitment to ensure successful decentralisation.

Your dedication and passion is indeed an inspiration for us all to strive for excellence and to never lose sight of our shared and ultimate goal which is, a Namibia where decentralisation will not just be a policy document, but a lived reality that will transform and enrich the lives of all who call this beautiful land their home.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the same spirit, I call upon other ministries that are still in preparatory stages of decentralising identified functions to double their efforts and expedite the transfer of all those functions eligible for decentralisation to regional councils.

I am reliably informed that some of those ministries are in their final preparatory stages and we will soon witness the handing over of more functions to regional councils. Among others, these are the Ministries of Health and Social Services, Youth, Sport, and National Services as well as some additional functions from the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform.

I once again urge you to steadfastly pursue and realise the decentralisation agenda during this year 2024, *as the Year of Expectations*, for the common good of all citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Namibia's Decentralisation Policy embodies government's commitment to democratic governance and inclusive development. Enshrined in our Constitution and bolstered by a robust legislative framework, the policy envision a government system where the voices of those at the grassroots level are amplified and the needs of the most marginalized are prioritized.

However, we acknowledge that our journey towards the full implementation of this policy is not without its own challenges. The challenges may range from, among others, capacity constraints at sub-national level to financial resources limitations. Yes, the path towards full decentralisation may have challenges, yet, we believe that within and beyond those challenges lie boundless opportunities for innovation, cooperation and progressive change. It is only through our

collective efforts and shared vision as stakeholders that we can overcome these obstacles and realize the full benefits of decentralisation in our country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe that the realization of our decentralisation dreams is largely determined by our willingness to make a success. As a certain **Niccolo Machiavelli** once said, “*where the willingness is great, the difficulties cannot be great*” and in the same vein, **Thomas Fuller** was once quoted as saying “*Nothing is easy to the unwilling*”.

I would, therefore, like to encourage you all to hold hands and confront common challenges that lie ahead as a collective with steadfastness.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As a demonstration of government’s resolve to ensure that the decentralisation policy is effective, MURD commissioned a study through an independent consultancy to assess the national status of the implementation of the decentralisation policy as per the Harambee Prosperity Plan II which is expected to be completed during the third quarter of this financial year 2024/25. The consultants are currently in the field and I encourage you to provide them your support and cooperation as they come to your respective regions and institutions. Furthermore, MURD will continue to provide capacity building support to RCs staff members, particularly in the areas of Financial Management, Leadership and Development Planning. In the meantime, MURD will press ahead to ensure that required amendments to the Regional Councils’ Act of 1992 as submitted to Cabinet are effected to address administrative and other issues identified for the smooth running of the RCs affairs. Moreover, MURD facilitated the revision of guidelines governing the human resources management of seconded staff

members as well as the Financial Accounting Policy and Procedure Manuals for RCs which will be rolled out during this financial year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At this juncture, I would like to once again call upon regional councils' leadership, both technical and political, to lead their institutions and manage decentralised responsibilities with diligence and by applying principles of good governance, namely professionalism, accountability and transparency, at all times. This is important in order to inspire trust and confidence in the subnational government system.

Director of proceedings

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we continue to strive towards the full implementation of the Decentralisation Policy, let us envision a future where every Namibian, regardless of their background or geographic location, has equal and easy access to opportunities, adequate and quality public services. Let us therefore use this platform to seize the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to and bolster our efforts towards the full implementation of this noble policy.

In conclusion, let me once again extend my heartfelt gratitude to you all for your presence as we look forward to your active participation and valuable contributions during this session.

With these remarks I would like to thank you for your attention and wish you fruitful deliberations.