



Speaking up for Nature

Though nature has many things to tell us and many ways of telling it, who speaks up for nature? And how? We may wish to delegate responsibility for the environment to government or to environmental experts, and we like blaming them as well as industrial developers for degradation of nature, but in fact each one of us is nature's custodian. But what can a person do so that humankind collectively – the remaining 7 billion – does not mess up with nature?

As every Namib toktokkie knows, these beetles and their fellow creatures have had this desert virtually to themselves for over 60 million years. They expect continuing to prosper while not hindering the people of Namibia to come to realise their dreams of prosperity. Goals for both conservation and industrialisation are expressed in Vision2030, which guides the course of Namibia's development. Are these differing visions realisable or are they pies-in-the-sky, nightmares or Utopia?

The above questions can be resolved through the interactions of interested and affected parties, aka stakeholders. Stakeholder interactions help generate options and should also prompt that the consequences of all options are properly considered. It is easier for planners to make wise decisions when there are many good options, and when decisions are challengeable in open discourse. So, the key is option generation by all concerned. Each option incorporates environmental factors and impacts on them. The idea is that interested or affected persons can inject concerns and potential solutions for the functional living world into socio-economic developments. But does this work? Do stakeholders really have a say or are industrial planners and politicians merely paying lip-service to let people think they have a say in the collective future?

Option generation is a good way for planning to proceed. It brings together inputs from many different areas – indeed, it must ensure that as many bases as possible are covered. The developers and authorities thereby tap into the collective knowledge, experience, ideas, views and dynamic interconnections of all citizens willing to speak up not only on behalf of themselves and their fellow people and businesses, but especially on behalf of our living world. In this way everybody has a chance to influence decisions and nature has a voice. If the value and viability of options are evaluated on merit, not on their origin or popularity, there are better chances that decisions will be wise, and that the functions of our natural world will benefit or be least degraded.

The latest example of option generation is the scoping process for Vision Industrial Park which shows how difficult it is to go the way of open discourse. However, the active participation by all stakeholders in the debate should improve the likelihood of overcoming conflicting issues.

Knowledge, ideas and designs affecting the future of nature are no longer confined to closed boardrooms. They are also no longer confined to being unvoiced potential options in the heads of concerned people. Everybody is responsible for speaking up for nature.

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