



Nature is best Business Partner

The Greek orator Demosthenes enthused that “small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises”, and, indeed, people do have a knack for turning creative ideas into grand developments. However, great enterprises have to include Nature, lest Nature ultimately excludes people from its world. It can also happen right here in the Namib.

As every Namib toktokkie knows, ecosystems are complex, composed of different species, ranging from bacteria to trees, elephants and whales, that are connected and structured as communities. Various processes, such as fluxes and cycles of water, energy, nutrients, and organisms, enable ecosystems to function properly. They are viable systems if their composition, structure and function are self-sustaining. To round off these superb features of ecosystems, they are, to boot, also resilient and able to take a punch or two as we are wont to give with our enterprises.

However, there are limits to the ability for an ecosystem to recover from “a punch or two”, especially if the processes that keep it functioning are disturbed beyond a certain level. It may render an ecosystem unliveable for the creatures which formed it, and it collapses. This not only spells doom to many species, but also causes ecosystem goods and services to malfunction, i.e., they can no longer maintain clean air, clean water, and productive soil. Our enterprises will ultimately suffer.

What can we do? With Nature being a key partner to our enterprise, we would not want to harm it. If impacts of some sort are unavoidable, we try to make these as small as possible and repair the damage as quickly as possible. If significant impacts are impossible to avoid, we endeavour to compensate in some way, e.g., with offsets that improve protection and management of equivalent ecosystems elsewhere, or by conducting research. Avoiding or compensating for impacts are not always options, and we therefore need to focus on repairing or restoring ecosystems.

Ecological restoration is the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed. This begins with rehabilitation, which initiates processes that capture and cycle water, nutrients and energy. Typically rehabilitation entails re-landscaping, mechanical and biological improvements of soil, followed by re-vegetating with pioneer plants. The first bio-engineers are introduced, which are typically burrowing animals such as earthworms, termites or ants, which constantly rework the soil. Upon rehabilitation, ecosystems are still as fragile as new-born babies and need our continued protection and further assistance to stimulate or put in place successive stages until the restored ecosystem is mature, self-sustaining, stable, and has re-gained a level of resilience. Mending the environment requires good planning, adaptive management, knowledge, know-how, a pinch of good luck, plenty of patience and commitment.

Zophosis moralesi points out that this commitment will be repaid manifold, because nothing is better than Nature at capturing and cycling resources, sustaining itself and people. Healthy world means healthy business. Great enterprises cannot do better than having Nature as their very best business partner.

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