



Sustainable development is a long-term balancing act

Toktokkie's head is spinning with all this talk of so many new developments in so short a time. Walvis Bay and Swakopmund are growing in fits and starts as ever more industries find this coastal area to be a fitting place to start. Until recently, this part of the Namib Desert has been minding its own business, but now things are changing. On the one hand there is good economic growth which can propel our society to new heights, and on the other hand there is concern whether the environmental impacts will destroy our foundations.

As every Namib toktokkie knows, brief good times in the desert are followed by long periods of *vasbyt*. Toktokkies are masters of opportunism – capable of drinking, eating and being more active in order to reproduce more during good times and increase populations. They are also masters of tenacity, with the ability of enduring whatever the desert may throw at them in terms of thirst, hunger, heat and sandstorms, again and again over long periods of time. Toktokkies follow one sure strategy that takes them through all the unpredictable boons and hazards: they bank on the long-term. These small creatures live for as long as six years, which is Methusalistic for such tiny active animals. Their longevity and endurance enables them to sustain populations through thick and thin. For them the long-term net effects of all the short-term gains and losses are what count.

Banking on the future, have we not heard that before? Yes, of course, it is sustainable development, i.e. development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability has four aspects; these are biophysical, social, economic and political. The biophysical aspect comprises nature, earth, atmosphere, water and all related natural resources that we require for health and prosperity. We may be using and abusing our biophysical world to meet present needs, but in the long run we need to ensure that the world can continue. We can ensure that by keeping impacts small enough not to be fundamentally damaging and managing impacts such that nature retains the ability to recover.

So, while we contemplate the implications of the good times brought by growing industries and business boom along the Namibian coast – prosperity in terms of conducive politics and increasing wealth, health, education and many other opportunities for our society – we should also remember that ultimately this is thanks to our natural environment. It is not only the beauty of the Namib and Benguela that makes us appreciate them. Nature performs many crucial functions for us, and it would be disastrous if we only begin to appreciate this when nature has been irreparably damaged and our children are left without a viable world.

Toktok talkie's moral to the story is to bank on the future, living today as if we are our children, thankful for the wonderful world we have prepared for them.