



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY THE

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE MINISTRY OF
HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES MR. BEN
NANGOMBE**

AT THE

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF PUBLIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH PRACTITIONERS AND DRAFTING OF POCKET COVID-19 WASTE
MANAGEMENT GUIDELINE; 28 FEBRUARY – 11 MARCH 2022**

10 MARCH 2022

SWAKOPMUND

**Check Against Delivery.*

Director of Ceremonies,
Ms. Naemi Shoopala, Director of Primary Health Care,
Regional Director for Erongo Region – **Ms. Anna Jonas,**
Acting Deputy Director for Public & Environmental Health
Services – **Dr. Ali El Sherif,**
Invited Guests from Training Institutions,
Invited Guests from Local Authorities around the country,
Representatives from all 14 Health Directorates,
Members of the Media,
Ladies and Gentleman,

I deemed it important that, in one way or another, I have to, in person attend this Annual General Meeting of Public and Environmental Health Practitioners, during which a Pocket Covid-19 Waste Management Guidelines is to be drafted. So, despite the fact that the Meeting has been underway for almost two weeks, I drove from Windhoek this morning to be here with you. I must return for another important engagement in Windhoek, just after 14: 00. My presence here is not merely symbolic, it should be construed to demonstrate the importance of your work as Public and Environmental Health Practitioners to the broader health sector.

This annual event aims to promote career development for effective and efficient environmental health service delivery. The environment and health are essential elements for quality of life.

In this context, we should always be mindful that the primary duty of the Ministry of Health and Social Services is the promotion of peoples' health. It is our responsibility to ensure that all Namibians and all persons within the borders of our beautiful country are protected against diseases, hazards or any other factors be it food, water, air and/ or shelter that may have an adverse effect on their health and well-being.

Director of Ceremonies,

Naturally, the issue of environmental health has be addressed as an integral part of environment, public, and occupational health programs.

I am informed that during this workshop the delegates had to develop the Guidelines on Waste Management generated from COVID-19 interventions, including vaccination and also to incorporate the inputs into the Food Safety Bill and Public and Environmental Health Regulations.

A common understanding is that environmental health programs refer to organized methods of solving environmental health problems that have a significant health component by appropriately managing the environment around us. Problems such as air pollution, water pollution, solid wastes, environmental damages,

chemical pollution, food safety, radiation, noise pollution, and shelter are addressed through such programs.

The Environmental Health Practitioners are the first line of defense when it comes to the fight against illness and disease.

Several areas fall under the ambit of Public and Environmental Health. These include:

1. **Control of Communicable and non-communicable diseases.** Here we are talking about targeting the root causes of disease prevalence, rather than simple treatment.
2. **Inspection of food and meat products.** Here we are talking about ensuring that (codex) food quality standards are maintained accordingly in order to protect the nation from the effects of consuming unfit and expired food stuffs.
3. **Port Health. This is vital** to ensuring the control of Imported and Exported products and adherence to World Health Organization (WHO) standards in line with the International Health Regulations of 2005.
4. **Occupational Health and safety at work places. This is a vital component** to ensure that all workers are protected from Occupational Health related hazards and conditions in their working places. This is particularly true in commercial agricultural operations, industrial and mining sectors where many people are likely to be exposed to chemicals and other

environmental factors and agents which may cause ill health.

5. **Environmental Pollution control:** As we all know, many communicable diseases are a major public health problem worldwide, particularly in developing countries like Namibia. They are linked directly or indirectly to polluted environments.
6. **Water sanitation and hygiene (WASH): Water is life. So, it cannot be overemphasized that** we need to ensure that our communities have access to clean and safe water as well as adequate sanitation facilities.

Director of Ceremonies,

Statistics regarding polluted environments indicate that:



Over 23% of deaths in Africa are attributable to avoidable environmental risk factors. Unfortunately, these disproportionately impact the poorest and the most vulnerable groups (who generate the least pollution to begin with);



60% of the vital ecosystems of the planet are being degraded, or are being subjected to excessive pressure. It is these systems that maintain the quality of our air, land and water resources;



Over the years, Namibia has increasingly been affected by natural disasters such as floods, droughts which are caused by climate change.

With that background, it is important to take note of the following:

1. The emergence of new environmental risks such as communicable diseases of zoonotic origin are now an international concern;
2. Industrial expansion and new technologies present new and increasing threats to public health (Did I hear some say 5 G?);
3. Africa is the most vulnerable of all the continents in the face of these challenges and Namibia is not an exception;
4. Well-managed health and environmental risks impact positively on national economies, and may increase foreign direct investments and tourism;
5. The involvement and commitment of all stakeholders is necessary for concerted and coherent action;
6. Health security can be achieved through a healthy environment;

Director of Ceremonies

I am confident that the deliberations and outcomes of this meeting have strongly taken account of the important

issues facing our country today, focusing on discovering new and innovative ideas, analyzing and strengthening existing programmes and finding ways to overcome identified constraints.

To achieve our objectives will require your positive individual and collective commitment as well as your willingness to bring your knowledge and skills to bear, to share experiences, expertise and to operate as one family.

Your commitment should be driven by the lives of thousands of men, women, and children who may be spared, if we deliver our programmes as we should. I wish to remind you that these responsibilities need people with professional commitment and research knowledge in order to respond effectively.

While on the topic of Environmental cleanliness, allow me to reiterate concerns that I express at other fora -regarding the hygiene and cleanliness of our health facilities countrywide. This is worrisome and it needs our concerted efforts to ensure that appropriate plans of action are in place and that our facilities are in a hygienic condition at all times.

Allow me to congratulate the Directorate of Primary Health Care Services for spearheading the development of the Public and Environmental Health Act, 2015, which has now

become law in our country. The Regulations to this Act are yet to be drafted and implemented from this year forward.

Director of Ceremonies

We must continue to strengthen and implement measures to promote public and environmental health in our country. Yes, all public places in Namibia are smoke-free. However, we need to strengthen our campaign on the effects of tobacco smoking.

I, would like to acknowledge your efforts once again on the finalization of the Food Safety Bill, the Drafting of the Covid-19 Waste Management Pocket Guidelines and General Health Regulations.

Director of Ceremonies

One of the areas of concern relates to **Professional Career Pathway of this cadre. In this regard**, the Ministry of Health and Social Services has made strides in ensuring the establishment of health sciences faculties at both the University of Namibia. Today, we have a School of Health Sciences at Namibia University of Science and Technology where a four year Bachelor's Degree program in Environmental Health Science is offered as well as the school of Public Health at UNAM where a Master's and Doctorate Program in Public Health is offered. We also need more PhD holders in the profession to be able to

conduct research work and obtain scientific based information to lead the implementation of programs.

Lastly, I urge you to explore more and get connected to the public health institutions around the world in order for you to expand your research knowledge and be at par with the fast-changing field of public and environmental health. You therefore need to also reach out beyond your profession to actively work with your colleagues from other professions and especially with our communities. I wish to congratulate all of you for taking the Public and Environmental Health Agenda forward by organizing these types of activities and wish you all success in your deliberations.

Remember that our goal is to ensure **Health for all Namibians**. Therefore, I encourage you all to make sure that our population is afforded a safe and healthy and living natural environment.

I now have the honor to declare the Annual Environmental Health Meeting officially opened.

I thank you.