



United Nations
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Success Stories

Namibia: Sustainable living in the desert

by Absalom Shigwedha



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Deep in the Namib Desert, in a dune valley in the south of the NamibRand Nature Reserve in Namibia's Hardap region is an environmental education centre that is helping Namibians to live sustainable lifestyles.

Established in 2003, the Namib Desert Environmental Education Trust (NaDEET) has embraced Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The overall aim of the Trust is to inspire Namibians to participate in finding viable solutions to local and national environmental issues in order to create a healthy and sustainable future for all.

NaDEET offers a variety of well-established environmental education programmes tailored to Grades 5-12 and based on the Namibian National Curriculum for Basic Education. Approximately 4 500 schoolchildren have attended the programme since 2003.

At the primary level, the centre takes children on nature walks in the dunes and teaches them about the advantages of solar cooking for environmental protection, the use of bucket showers and the “recycle, re-use and reduce” principle. Children also learn about biodiversity and how to measure their environmental footprint.

The secondary-school programme promotes critical and creative thinking skills. Pupils reflect upon the environment and their personal impact on it.

Karley Drumm from NaDEET believes the organization is sowing seeds of awareness by educating young people about the importance of environmental protection. “This is really having an impact on the young ones”, Drumm says. “Bringing in secondary learners means encouraging them to take action on a personal level to protect Mother Nature.”

When people become aware of the importance of protecting the environment, they are in a position to make better decisions to help them to live within the finite share of the earth's resources.

NaDEET does “practice what it preaches”. The trust's education centre is built in an environmentally friendly manner, on an elevated wooden deck to ensure a minimal impact on the environment.

Food is cooked with solar cookers and fuel-efficient stoves using recycled fire bricks made from waste paper, thus helping preserve the environment and contributing to the fight against deforestation. During cloudy weather, strict measures are taken such as unplugging the refrigerator and freezer. By 9 p.m., all energy-saving bulbs are switched off. NaDEET saves water by using a bucket shower which only takes about 12 litres.

Veronika Katjikuri, a community organizer and shop owner at Maltahöhe saves 80 namibian dollars on her electricity bill every month by using solar energy. She is one of the local community members who have learnt how to prepare food with solar cookers, solar ovens and fuel-efficient stoves at NaDEET. All of them are grateful that they no longer have to travel several kilometres a day to collect firewood or spend money to buy wood.

NaDEET's adult community group programme was launched in 2010. So far, a total of 200 community members have been trained. Participants are mostly well-established community members, willing to drive change in their communities. They come from towns such as Rehoboth, Mariental, Keetmanshoop, Bethanie and Maltahöhe.

"This year, we will have four groups," says the Director of NaDEET, Viktoria Keding. Keding is one of Namibia's Ministry of Environment and Tourism Climate Change Ambassadors. She explains that the training is very practical, running from Monday to Friday. "Only one hour is for theory, such as classes about climate change." Participants learn about causes and impact of climate change as well as energy efficiency, comparing fuel sources and stoves. "The rest is practical. Participants also learn how to solar cook and make fuel-efficient stoves," she adds.

As a complement to the training, the centre has donated 80 parabolic solar cookers to participants in the community programme.

After the first trainings in 2010, NaDEET undertook an evaluation to measure the success in implementing a sustainable lifestyle among rural Namibians in the South. At Mariental, community member Ingrid Kanguatuako taught her elderly mother how to solar cook and now the whole family prepares all their meals in this way. She hopes to recruit more female domestic workers, heads of households and other interested community members.

At Rehoboth, Zita Mouton operates her parabolic solar cooker at a clinic providing baby formula for HIV-AIDS positive mothers. She says, the solar cooker offers opportunities for demonstration in the community as well as to generating income for the clinic through having bake sales.

To promote and encourage environmental learning and literacy, NaDEET produces a biannual youth magazine (Bush Telegraph, circulation 15,000), the "Its Time To..." booklet series for bringing sustainability messages to a larger audience, and a newsletter (The Golden Mole). The publications cover topics such as biodiversity, recycling, climate change, forestry, waste management and sanitation. In 2008 and 2010, NaDEET's Bush Telegraph won the first prize in the Eco Media Awards publishing Category, and in 2009 took the third prize.

UNESCO has financially supported the production of five issues of the Bush Telegraph.

UNESCO's Windhoek Office and NaDEET have collaborated on a number of initiatives on ESD, such as a the Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) Khomas-Erongo, the Namibia Environmental Education

Network (NEEN), and are jointly initiating a project on Greening Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET). NaDEET has contributed to several UNESCO/United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) publications such as the YouthXchange guidebooks on Biodiversity and Lifestyles and on Green Skills and Lifestyles, as well as the YouthXchange toolkit on responsible consumption for African learners.

UNESCO has made a significant financial contribution to NaDEET in recognition of its commendable work towards implementing Education for Sustainable Development. After the official inauguration of NaDEET in 2003, the UN agency – through its Associated Schools Project Network (ASPNet), financed the travel of schools to NaDEET in 2004 and in 2005.

“NaDEET is a very, very good initiative as it helps Namibians to solve environmental problems, such as depletion of natural resources”, says Absalom Vilho, an environmental educator at NaDEET. He would like to see more awareness about NaDEET so it can attract schools and interested groups from all corners of Namibia. He is happy that the Ministry of Education is now helping schools with transport, as lack of mobility is currently the main challenge they face. “It should not just be schools from Hardap region. Everyone should get a chance.”

Further information:

www.nadeet.org

As lead agency for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), UNESCO promotes an education that allows every human being to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future.

Education for Sustainable Development means including key sustainable development issues into teaching and learning; for example, climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty reduction, and sustainable consumption. It also requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behaviour and take action for sustainable development.

Contact:

Section of Education for Sustainable Development

esddcade@unesco.org

www.unesco.org/education/desd

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