

Namibia takes lead on desertification

● SHARON MONTGOMERY

NAMIBIA is the southern African leader in combating desertification and serves as an example for the southern African region and Africa as a whole.

This was said by Dr Helmut Wöhl of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), through which funds from Germany are channelled, during an Information Weekend at Gobabeb research station in the Namib desert over the weekend.

Wöhl said unlike many other African governments, which reacted to pressure from the World Bank through their National Environmental Action Plan and first waited for donor aid, Namibia had taken the initiative to form the Namibian Programme to Combat Desertification (Napcod).

Napcod brings together relevant non-government organisations (NGOs) and Ministries involved in environmental issues and rural development.

This "unique approach of government and NGOs working together in an equal capacity" was the reason Napcod had been allocated N\$5.5 million for the first four phases of its programme.

Other donors, such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the Embassy of the Netherlands, also contributed to the programme.

Dr Chris Brown of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism explained

that during the Rio Conference (1992), Namibia had pressed for a convention to deal specifically with the problems of desertification.

This convention was signed by Namibia in 1995 and is expected to be ratified during the first sitting of the National Assembly this year.

Napcod's steering committee was unique in that it was comprised of two Government ministries (Environment and Agriculture) and one NGO, the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN).

Brown said the DRFN's contribution was highly valued, as the organisation brought with it 35 years of experience in arid land studies.

The committee was subsequently expanded to

include the Namibia National Farmers' Union, Namibia Agricultural Union, Namibia Development Trust and other relevant organisations.

A comprehensive outreach programme was established by Napcod through DRFN to consult with communities directly and to raise awareness through radio broadcasts in the vernacular of those affected by desertification.

In 1994 a workshop was held which included leaders of rural communities, Ministry officials, NGOs and researchers, to establish the main objectives of Napcod.

As wide a base of participants as possible was maintained at the workshop to ensure a comprehensive participation in the formulation of the ob-

jectives.

Drama performances were utilised to communicate the proceedings of the workshop to rural communities, many of which still sing the songs of the plays to this day.

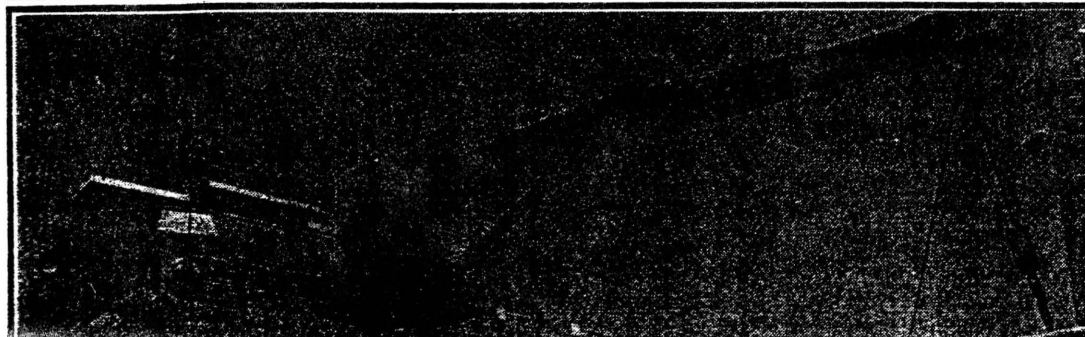
A breakthrough in the struggle for awareness of desertification was reached in 1995, when Desertification Day was marked for the first time.

Outlining the successes of the project, Kahepako Uariua Kakujiha, Outreach Co-ordinator, stressed that the programme made full use of the vast knowledge held by rural communities.

It could communicate specific activities used to combat deforestation and bush encroachment in one region, to the inhabitants of others with the same problems.



DESERT MESSAGE ... The Desert Research Foundation's Kahepako Uariua Kakujiha, Outreach Co-ordinator for the Napcod programme, who gave a progress report during the Information Weekend at Gobabeb.



Plichta blasts 'dynamite story'

● CHRIS NDIVANGA

WORKS, Transport and Communication Minister Hampie Plichta has rejected reports that he interfered with the running of the Keetmanshoop railway station and transported explosives in his Ministerial car.

Plichta turned up at the station and

"I under no circumstances negotiated with or issued any directives to the station master. I did transport Mr J Cilliers, who had difficulty in walking as a result of a recent knee operation, an approximate distance of 75 metres in the empty goods yard to his truck which is a registered to carry explosives, but I must emphasize that no dynamite was trans-