



Environmental Protection



Hidden in the Wisdom
of our Roots

What is Indigenous Knowledge (IK)?

Do you ever sit down with your grandparents to listen to stories and songs about the past? How they grew up? How they survived? How they treated illnesses before hospitals existed? Regardless of our culture and language, all



Namibians enjoy sitting around a fire. Here we can learn through oral storytelling. These stories contain knowledge which are valuable life lessons. Today this knowledge is referred to as indigenous knowledge.

What is Indigenous Knowledge (IK)?

Indigenous knowledge is the local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society within a specific area. It is the basis for decision-making in many communities. IK is based on teachings and experiences passed on through generations often based on practical common sense and old traditions.



Many different subjects, that have links with the environment, are covered including:

- General survival skills
- Shelter
- Medicine
- Hygiene
- Food and nutrition
- Veld management

This knowledge helped our ancestors steer through life. It also taught them important environmental lessons such as:



- How plants and animals live
- The relationships between living things and their surrounding environment
- How to take care and respect our natural resources

Today we can still take valuable information from these lessons and combine it with new research and knowledge. This will better protect Namibia's environment.



Proverbs are old familiar saying that usually give advice. These were used a lot by our forefathers when giving life lessons to the young. On the bottom of each page, there is an African proverb. Do you understand the meaning? If not, approach some elders to find out if they can give you more insight.

IK & the Environment



We depend on the environment for everything! The food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, the materials we use to build our homes are all from the natural environment.

Many of our ancestors did not live in cities and were more in touch with the natural environment. Many understood that their survival depended on a healthy environment so there were rules in place about reducing waste and protecting resources.



Development & the Environment

Industrialisation and modernisation provides us with many benefits and conveniences. However, the way we use them is costing the planet. Many of our actions have resulted in mismanagement of the environment which has created a number of pressing issues such as:

- Food security • Waste production and littering • Water waste and pollution
- Personal health • Climate change • Energy waste and pollution
- Deforestation • Desertification • Poverty

Can indigenous knowledge help us address these issues and protect the environment?



The Environment, Indigenous Knowledge and I

There is no doubt that our quality of life will reduce if we continue to destroy the environment. We depend on it. We are part of it. We are one.

GET IT, KNOW IT, USE IT

IK is vital in environmental protection. However, if you don't know it, understand it or value it, well, it will not work. Let us explore and learn some of this knowledge and see how and if IK can help us address some of the common environmental issues.

IK is Diverse

Each culture's knowledge and lessons are unique. Let us value the diversity and bring back important conservation lessons into our daily lives.



Even though an old man is strong and hearty he will not live forever!

IK for Food Security



One of the most important human basic needs is food. Sadly there are many people that go to bed hungry every day for many different reasons! There is extreme weather like a drought or flood, rapid population growth, changes in agricultural practice and unemployment. There is also unequal distribution of food.



Grandpa, what did you do to ensure that you always had enough food?



I still do it! I look after my land by keeping my soil healthy. I do not waste water. I grow many different crops and find plants from the veld.



IK is OK



- Traditional, indigenous green leafy vegetables were eaten because they have nutrients and minerals important for a healthy body. Only the leaves should be harvested to allow the plant to regrow.
- Many cultures ferment milk. The fermentation process improves the nutritional value.
- Seeds of maize and millet were mixed with ash to prevent insects and pests from destroying them.
- 'Scare crows' were put up in the field to scare away birds that would eat the plants.



Today so many people no longer grow their own food. Many have moved to urban areas and feel they cannot grow food in their backyards. Many young people want to have fast, easy food and do not consider where it comes from and how it has been processed. In other areas there are no choices as access to food is scarce.



What can we do?



- Use natural methods to preserve seeds
- Eat traditional and healthy foods to promote local growers to increase supply
- Make scare crows with recycled materials
- Compost for healthy soil



Instruction in youth is like engraving in stone.



IK for Water Access



Clean water is essential for healthy living. Namibia is an arid country with limited fresh water supply. Some people today still do not have access to clean water and many of those that do have access, carelessly waste it. Have they forgotten the importance and the privilege of clean water?

In the past, people living in the north of Namibia got water from rain, rivers and oshanas. During the dry season we dug wells.



But it is water from the rivers and pans not unhealthy and polluted?



Yes it is true that some of our pans and rivers were unhealthy because they became polluted. But, we had ways of minimising that pollution and keeping our water clean.

IK is OK

In order to have enough water, people would make a natural pan deeper. In Oshidonga it is called 'omuthima'. This hand-dug well can be 10-50m deep. It is very respected and has many restrictions to ensure the water stays clean, including:

- Children should not play and swim there
- Everyone knows that the water is for drinking or important household chores
- Livestock are kept away by erecting fences around the pan
- Toilets are located far away from the pan.



In our deserts there is little free standing water. These 'ghaap' (Hoodia sp) plants are thirst quenches when chewed.



Today there are more people and each person is using more water!

Many have lost the respect for the value of water. This is especially true when people have access to water from a tap. It seems like they have forgotten that the tap can run dry!



What can we do?



- Respect water as our most valuable resource
- Only use what you need and do not pollute water
- Collect rainwater
- Fix taps that are leaking
- Speak out if you see people wasting water.
- Use IK stories to educate others.



It takes a village to raise a child!



IK for Health



A strong, healthy body is important. For that we need good nutrition and we need to treat sickness and diseases. Luckily plants can help us to do that.



Why do people go to hospitals and use pills if plants can heal us?

Well, not all illness can be healed with plants. But actually most modern medicine is derived from plants. Modern medicine can be very "convenient" as lots of different medicine can be put into one pill. But sometimes today we forget that we can deal with a stomach ache or a common cold better by using IK.



Really? Like what?



IK is OK

Leaves and roots of the bitter bush were used to treat colds, fevers, stomach ailments and some skin diseases.

This was simply done by:

1. inhaling steam to treat colds and fevers
2. rubbing the fresh leaf for healthy skin
3. boiling the roots and drinking the water for stomach-ache



MEDICINAL PLANT ACTIVITY



What other plants do you or your family know that are used to treat illness?

Plant (name in any language)

Illness

How is it used?

1.

Wild Camphor Bush

blocked sinus and headache

inhale smoke from burning green leaves

2.

3.



The problem nowadays is that we are no longer learning about plants from our elders. Plants are also being destroyed when land is cleared for development projects or are taken over by alien invasive plants.



What can we do?



- Grow medicinal Namibian plants
- Avoid clear-cutting and bulldozing
- Spend time in the veld



Knowledge is like a garden: if it not cultivated, it cannot be harvested.

IK for Climate Change Adaptation



Climate change is one of the biggest global environmental challenges. We now know it is caused by many human activities such as our industrial, fossil-fuel based lifestyles and overpopulation. The impacts are all around us.



I have heard about climate change, but I don't know how it impacts me.

Some of the impacts are inconsistent rainfall, increased flooding and droughts, extreme temperatures and increased evaporation rates.



So what IK practices might help us cope with these extreme problems?



IK is OK

In Zambezi people rely on the floods, but a severe flood can be dangerous. Here is a story told by the Basubiya people: "...When we see that the nests of birds are built on the reeds or twigs of shrubs... above the levels of the Zambezi River or its tributaries we begin to estimate the level of the water that is coming. The higher the nest is built on the reed, the higher the body of water. The lower the nest the lower the level of the water that is coming... therefore prepare for floods or not..."

Adapted from Indigenous Knowledge of Namibia 2015



It is challenging for many people to accept change. But with climate change we have no choice. We have to take action to maintain our ecosystems that they can support us. Every action that we take makes a difference.



What can we do?



- Keep our environment intact by:
- Maintaining wetlands to control floods and prevent erosion.
 - Maintain our savannas through veld management
 - Sustainable energy use (renewable and efficient)
 - Plant trees and ground cover
 - Prevent building on flood plains



Wisdom is like fire, people take it from others.

Protection of Indigenous Knowledge



Namibia and many international bodies have recognised the importance of IK. They have plans and policies in place to help document, preserve and protect indigenous people, their knowledge and cultures. Here are some examples:

National Indigenous Knowledge Systems Council (NIKSC), Namibia

The National Commission on Research Science and Technology (www.ncrst.na) established the NIKSC. The council is tasked with carrying out the following directives:

- ◆ Facilitate the development of the national agenda related to IKS
- ◆ Develop a national policy on IKS
- ◆ Provide strategic direction on matters related to IK
- ◆ Promote IK research and development
- ◆ Facilitate the incorporation of IK into the national education system
- ◆ Facilitate value addition to IKS for the benefit of the rights holders in particular and for the national economy in general



WIMSA, Southern Africa

The Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA) protects the rights of marginalised indigenous people. They work closely with the San people living in Namibia, Botswana, South Africa and Angola. The San people are one of the oldest living tribes and nowadays are one of the highly marginalised groups.

WIMSA therefore

- ◆ Coordinates and represents the San people's interests
- ◆ Coordinates efforts that ensures that they receive an education



The United Nations

A majority of nations around the world voted for the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People in 2007. This



declaration is recognising the rights of native people to protect their lands and resources to ensure that indigenous people to maintain their unique cultures and traditions. The Declaration addresses:

- ◆ People's individual and collective rights
- ◆ Their cultural rights and identities
- ◆ Their rights to education
- ◆ Their rights to proper health care
- ◆ Their rights to employment
- ◆ Protection and preservation of native languages

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.



Personalities in Conservation



Knowing the right plants to use to manage diseases or having the ability to track animals are some of the important skills that cannot be taught from a book. Meet some ordinary people that actively practise IK regularly and are passing it on to their children! They too are personalities in conservation!

Medicine Magrietha Swartbooi, Rietoog What are you cooking?

I am busy boiling a Sambokbossie. Why are you boiling it? I will use the water to take a bath. The plant has



medicinal uses, it eases pain. It can also be soaked in water instead of boiled. In my culture it is also known to cast away bad luck if the soaked water is poured around the house.

Message to the youth

I have taught my children how to properly use this plant. If there is a chance to learn and practice traditional ways of doing things, take the chance to learn, so IK is not lost.

Shelter Anna Riedt, Uibes What do you use cattle dung for?

Cattle dung has many uses. For example I use it as fuel, compost for my plants and most importantly, I use it to fix holes in the hut.

How can cattle dung fix holes?

Just like cement!! I mix it with clay soil and water and let it stand for a day or two. The mixture is good for building. After it is dry, it can withstand rain.

Message to the youth There are a lot of natural products that are useful and free. They are however neglected, especially by young people. Use what is available before spending any money.



Clothing Willem Klaase, !Gamxab, Gochas How do you use animal products besides for food:

I process the rest of the animal further, especially the skin.

How?

I keep it in a deep hole filled with sand until it is soft enough to remove all the hair. I thereafter clean it, carefully, not to tear it. I smear animal fat on it and flatten it.

What do you do with the processed skin?

I cut the skin into squares; sew them together to make pants for the traditional Nama attire or into bags. I also make strings of



different sizes that I use to fix shoes and to make horse/ donkey whips.

Message to youth

Avoid wastage, take only what you need and use everything valuable.



All interviews translated from Khoekhoegowab

IK Activities

WORD SEARCH

Complete the word search below by finding the words listed below. All the words have been used in the previous pages.

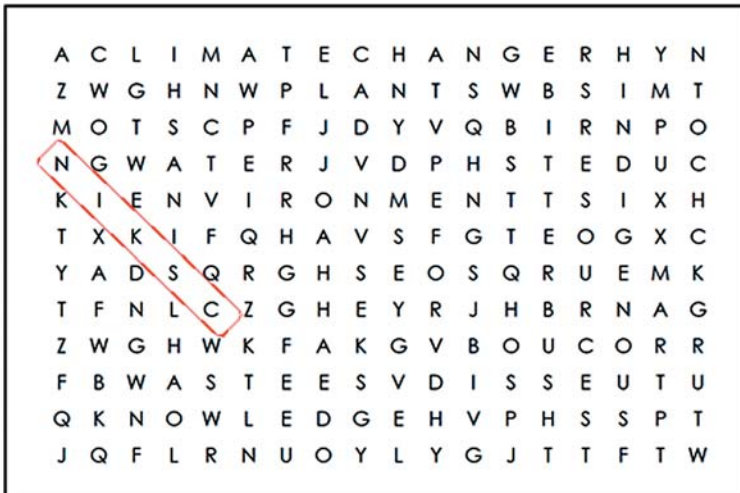
The hidden words are → ↑ or ↗. One has been done for you.

Bitterbush
Indigenous
Resources

Climate change
Knowledge
Waste

Environment
~~NEKSC~~
Water

Proverbs
Plants



KNOW YOUR PLANTS

Look throughout the pages to match the plants to the correct names. One has been done for you.



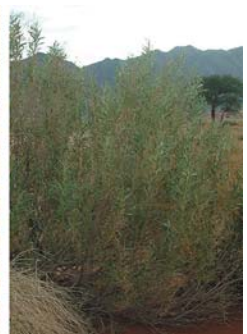
Ghaap



Wild Camphor Bush



Bitter Bush



Sambokbossie

HOLDEN'S HANG-OUT



Holden Mole is the name. NaDEET's my hangout spot. I love Namibia. My number one job is to get the basics - my food, water and shelter. "Education is the key"- I know everyone says it, but it is true. So if you don't know, ask me.

Holden Mole, NaDEET, PO Box 8702, Swakopmund
email to: admin@nadeet.org or post them on NaDEET's Facebook page

Dear Holden

What is the best thing one could do for the environment?

Dear Carla

Carla from Windhoek

There is so many simple things that we can all do for the environment, starting in our homes. They are all equally good and important for their respective purposes.

Some of these include:

- * Reduce, reuse, recycle and compost
- * Save water
- * Walk and/or cycle more
- * Save energy, use energy efficient appliances
- * Do not cut down trees, plant more trees
- * Invest in locally produced goods
- * Eat organic, buy locally grown fruit and vegetables



There are many more things that we can do for the environment, this starts with our attitudes towards the environment.

Holden

Updates from Last Issue

Page 4: Zoom in (A vs B):

Two tire tracks vs one tire track
No bullet shells behind the rhino vs one bullet

Cloth/plastic caught onto the tree vs no cloth/plastic

Three rhino horn shavings vs two shavings

Zoomout: Answers may vary

Page 5: Zoom in:



Elephants should be protected. If your property is damaged by wild animals, government should compensate. Besides we need them for tourism.



There are many elephants, but also very many hungry people. It is the elephant's fault and they should be eliminated.



Properties should be properly fenced off and wild animals will not force their way in. Farmers should work through conservancies to get assistance.

Zoomout: Answers may vary
Potentially everyone affected (involved) other than farmers, government officials and conservancy representatives.

Page 6: Zoom in & Zoom out
(Answers may vary)

Page 7: Zoom in (Answers may vary)
Adults: Electricity prices go up: save energy

Young people: youth vocal at energy meeting

Zoom out (Answers may vary)
Adults are most likely to choose radio, TV and/or magazines
Young people: internet and TV

1st place winner: Eco Media Awards "Publishers House" category 2010
Official youth magazine of the Roan News

Written by: Viktoria Endjala **Edited:** NaDEET staff **Proof reader:** J. Kemper
Graphics & photos: M. Gaugler, C. Mannheimer, D. Heinrich, S.Oonona

Sponsored by:



This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of NaDEET and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

NaDEET Centre: A Sustainable Living Experience



NaDEET Centre offers week-long programmes for school, youth, educator & adult groups in the Namib Desert.

NaDEET Head Office: Tel: +264 (0)81 367 5310
 Fax: +264 (0)88 655 2669
 P.O. Box 8702, Swakopmund, NAMIBIA
 admin@nadeet.org ~ www.nadeet.org



JOIN THE BUSH TELEGRAPH READER CLUB
 The Bush Telegraph is distributed twice a year for free.



BUSH TELEGRAPH READER CLUB SIGN UP/UPDATE FORM

Fill in the information below or write it on a piece of paper or send us an email.

Surname: First name: Female Male

Postal address: Town:

Email address:

Please send me the Bush Telegraph: per email per post both

Profession:

Learner: age grade..... school

Student: age year of study institution

Other:

Are you a teacher, an educator or a community officer?

Multiple copies of the Bush Telegraph are available for you to use for education purposes.

Please circle the number of copies you wish to receive: 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 150 or 200

Institution: Postal address: Town: