

Confident Women

Nam's Environmental Enthusiast

A S co-founder and Director of one of the country's most vibrant environmental organisations, Viktoria Keding, constantly finds ways to make life greener by sensitising the public on how to achieve a balanced and sustainable ecosystem. She looks forward to her work in the future, as she strives to expand the Namib Desert Environmental Education Trust (NaDEET), to spread its 'green' message.

Viktoria's passion for the environment started at a young age, when in primary school her science teacher took them to a centre where they learned how to estimate the age of a tree using core sampling and how to measure its height by using a shadow. *Confidente's* Marianne Nghidengwa, caught up with the friendly Viktoria, who was recently nominated for NBL's Conservation Category, to talk about the establishment of NaDEET, its opportunities and challenges and spending some quality time with her husband and two daughters.

Give us a snapshot of who you are?

I was born in Vienna, Austria to German parents. I grew up in the United States, outside of New York City and completed all of my schooling and my university degree (Environmental Studies) in the US and then came as a young graduate to Namibia. I have lived in Namibia ever since. I married here and have two Namibian children. In short- a German heritage with an American education and Namibian heart. As a person, I am very direct and have always known what I want to be and achieve. I like to work hard to make a difference to the environment and the world around me.

Briefly tell us about your upbringing, would you say that played a role in who you are today?

My parents provided me with a wonderful childhood with lots of opportunities to express myself and learn about the world around me. They gave me a solid base in a sense of citizenship and being part of society, especially in regards to our rights and responsibilities. It definitely has shaped who I am today.

Briefly tell us about your education, what are your qualifications and where did you obtain them?

I have a Bachelor's of Arts in Environmental Studies from Bowdoin College in the US and I am currently working on my Master of Science in Sustainable Development, through the University of London.

You are the Director and co-founder of NaDEET, how did the organisation come into existence and what's its nature?

NaDEET is an environmental education organisation. Our aim is to empower Namibians to understand their environment better by gaining knowledge and skills in order to take positive action. The first step is having the right attitude. We have a lot

of different projects- (all on our website) to achieve this. I started teaching environmental education in 1999. At that time the education that I did was very focussed on one topic and the centre, where I taught, was beautiful but not truly environmental. (This is still very common for most Centres). I realised that if we want people to start living differently than we need to practice what we teach. We cannot teach about solar energy and use a diesel generator, or teach about recycling and then litter. It doesn't make sense. NaDEET therefore, was born to be a centre that is truly a model of sustainable living that closes the gap between what we teach and what we practice. The learning that takes place at NaDEET therefore, is not

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- Viktoria Keding

Ever since I was about 12 years old I have been passionate about the environment. I felt that job in life was to do something to protect it. It is just so beautiful and provides us with everything that we need that I never understood why it should be threatened. I can still remember that the very first "nature's classroom" that I went on for a day when I was 8 years old. Our science teacher took us to a centre where we learned how to estimate the age of a tree using core sampling and how to measure its height by using a shadow.

Just what does your job entail?

My job today unfortunately entails mostly fundraising, administration

sador. Has that reality sunk in yet and are you confident you will win? How will you make a difference with the honour?

Thank you. I am thrilled to have been nominated and a bit surprised. I, of course do hope that I will win and believe that it will help inspire many more young Namibians to go into the field of environmental education and to realise that it does make a difference.

In general, would you say Namibians care for the well-being of our environment and act accordingly?

That is a hard question to answer because yes and no. There are many things that Namibians do that help the environment and that we should be proud of- for example, organise environmental events and school clubs. But there are areas where we need to do more, we need to work together more when we take action that it starts to influence more people. We need to always take action, it doesn't help that on one day children are involved in a litter clean-up campaign with their school and on the next it is the same learners throwing their litter on the ground. And, we need to realise that when people raise questions about the environmental impact that development has, that it is not that development is bad but the way it is being done. If developers are required to also include trees, open public spaces and opportunities for people to be in the outdoors, recycling services, water saving toilets, energy efficient lighting and heating, it will make developments truly sustainable as our constitution calls upon us to do.

What projects is NaDEET busy with to sensitise the nation about environmental matters?

Three main projects: Centre, Outreach and Environmental Literacy. These are on-going.

What are social consequences associated with environment degradation?

I think that we are beginning to see it already with gender-based violence and the breakdown of our families.

Would you say mother earth and her offspring will survive in years to come especially with the many challenges in the field?

It must. We have to do whatever we can to make sure that it is protected.

What advice do you have for little ones who want to join this field of work?

Work hard, don't laugh at others and be a role model.

Just what do you do for a little fun?

I love my family. I enjoy going for walks or riding my bike with my children and husband. A bit out of the norm, of the rest of who I am, I really like to watch rugby.



The Keding family in Etosha



Viktoria on top of Losberg in 2003



Viktoria and Andreas Keding in front of a centre being built



Viktoria receiving an EcoMedia Award in 2008

just theoretical or practical in the classroom or outdoor activities but also while participants cook food, wash dishes and take a shower. This is because we have solar powered hot water used in bucket showers, solar cookers to cook our meals and water saving devices and practices. NaDEET Centre is our core project at the moment and is based on the NamibRand Nature Reserve, where the magic of the desert gives lots for participants to immerse themselves in.

What are challenges and opportunities facing NaDEET?

The major challenge for NaDEET

is to get enough funding. Because we are an NGO we must minimise our costs as much as possible and therefore, we spend a lot of time working out logistics of operating an environmental education centre in the middle of "nowhere". A major opportunity is for us to expand and up-scale our activities. We already reach a lot of people but with additional funding and staff we could reach out other parts of the country. We know that our model for environmental education does work so it would be great to have more centres.

What triggered your passion for environmental issues?

and management. I wish an organisation like this could run itself so I could spend my time doing environmental education but it is satisfying to know that I have trained many staff, which is now able to teach many more people, than if I did it alone.

What would you say you enjoy most and least about your job?

Most- definitely writing one of our publications such as the Bush Telegraph or our recent "It's Time to Work" and least, not having enough time for everything

Congratulations on your nomination as Conservation Amba-