

Combating Desertification in Nico-Noord

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The story starts when I met a young man called Hendrik Bock and got married in 1981. My husband was employed at a railway station on a salary of 500 Namibian dollars (US\$ 50) per month. He was the only one earning a salary in the family and it was not enough. That is the reason why I decided to take up farming in order to generate more income. After we both decided to take up farming, we decided to move south to Nico-Noord. We officially started farming there on 2 April 1982. We didn't have enough livestock but just a few goats (15) and sheep (7), and no large livestock such as cows. As I mentioned earlier, only my husband was earning a salary and it was barely enough. So I decided, although we had little livestock, to go and work for other large livestock farmers in the area. I was working as a herder and was paid in kind with one bottle (1 litre) of milk per day. I could not give up the job because at least it contributed to the household income. After some time, the farmers for whom I was working, realized that I was providing them with a valuable service and decided to raise my wages in kind to one lamb per month.

When my husband and I arrived at Nico-Noord in 1982, there was nothing but a windmill and a one-bedroom house. Grazing areas were very bad because the previous farmers had overgrazed the land with their large numbers of livestock. Owing to the lack of grazing land we were forced to gather grass and branches from trees and bring them home for the animals to eat.

The number of livestock grew and I could send my two children to school. Rain became regular and there was enough grazing available. We did not mind looking after the grazing area because we thought that there would be enough fodder for the animals and it would remain there for good. But signs of drought showed and hit us very severely.

At the beginning of 1990, we therefore started a farmers' league and I was elected as chairman of the organization. In June 1990, there were clear indications of a drought. At that moment, as the chairman of the organization, I was willing to ask for assistance from the government. Additionally, I organized an auction. Farmers were requested to sell at least three-quarters of their livestock. I also organized a food-for-work programme, which entailed repairing roads, fences and many other small things.

In 1992, as part of the Sardep programme, I started to measure the farm's area, to install rain meters, to take pictures of the grazing land and to manage the grazing areas.

In 1993, the drought got worse and the livestock began to die at a fast rate and none of us could help each other. There was no grazing land and trees were cut to feed animals.

I think the drought affected women the most because they could no longer send their children to school, and the men had to go and work for the railway or very far from home.

In 1995, we started a campsite project and other small projects. The campsite, of 28 members at the beginning and now 14, could not generate income at the beginning, so we used funds from other projects to build it up.

I also started a nature protection fund with the money that I received from the NNF (Namibia Nature Foundation), with the aim of combating desertification. The campsite and its sub-projects depend on me because we have few financial resources to help the project. The farmers I started with in the 1980s are now very old and young people tend to leave for bigger cities.

Right now we are preparing a practical farm management project at Nico-Noord and DRFN (Desert Research Foundation of Namibia), which is one of the agencies implementing Namibia's UNCCD national action programme, is a big help. I just pray that the Lord will grant my wish to restore communal areas/land and make life easier.

I want to help improve the land because only that can help us. We need to use natural resources properly so they will be there for generations to come.