

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
BY
HONOURABLE DR. RICHARD NCHABI KAMWI
MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
ON THE OCCASION OF
THE MAYEYI ANNUAL CULTURAL FESTIVAL
SANGWALI
03rd AUGUST 2008

Programme Director

Your Royal Highness Shikati Mukando Shufu,

Hon Chiefs

Hon. Ngambela Zekias Shakwa

Bishop Hendricks

Distinguished guests from Botswana

Hon Traditional Leaders

Hon Senior Traditional Councilor

Distinguished invited guests

Members of the Media

Comrades and Friends

I was most humbled to receive an invitation to address you on your Annual Cultural Festival. Indeed, it is with a sense of humility that I take pleasure in being here in my capacity as Minister of Health and Social Services and also as a son of this region.

Secondly, allow me to convey to you salutations and fraternal greetings from His Excellency President Hifikepunye Pohamba and also from Cabinet Colleagues who have not found time to join you in recognising and celebrating your true cultural history and identity.

The theme of your choice **“Mainstreaming Education; HIV/AIDS and Poverty in the Cultural and Traditional Practices to Influence Change”** is indeed a well thought-out theme that fits well with the mandate of the Ministry of Health and Social Services.

Allow me to break down this theme into identifiable areas for defining the theme and making it clearer to all of you.

- First there is an aspect of mainstreaming education to avert poverty.
- Secondly, there is a relationship between Poverty and HIV/AIDS.

Therefore, the role of education in empowering and changing the traditional values, traditions and cultural practices to break away from the vicious cycle of poverty and as a mitigating effort for the spread of HIV/AIDS is crucial.

I would therefore like to begin my statement from the premise of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which was adopted by the 33rd General Conference of UNESCO in October 2005.

Cultural expressions promote dialogue, strengthen the link that unite our diverse communities and contribute to Namibia's economic vitality.

I must admit that the theme you have chosen is important for this occasion because it covers over two main social sectors of Education and Health. As a health practitioner I will be explicit in elucidating to you on matters of HIV/AIDS and how the spread of this disease is linked to poverty and also to the traditional and cultural practices in our communities.

I will also attempt to define mainstreaming broadly and to put it in the context of education.

Mainstreaming simply refers to the practice of effecting policies, systems and processes for the provision of equal opportunity to all.

The overall purpose of mainstreaming is equality and fairness in the planning, implementation, resource allocation and evaluation.

Mainstreaming education therefore implies making quality education accessible to all. I must state that as a people centred government, we have had successful implementation of a global initiative and plan of Education for All (EFA). We also have policies that allow a fair distribution of educational materials in all schools of this country.

We consider that education is the only social equaliser and therefore recognise the need for providing school feeding programs to the most poverty stricken communities to allow children to have the energy to attend school.

We are also mindful of the social deprivation in many communities where parents cannot afford to pay hostel and school development funds for their children. We have institutionalised the understanding that no child shall be denied education because of the inability to pay school fees.

These considerations point out clearly that we have policies that are accommodative, fair and provide opportunities to all.

Programme Director,

I appeal to you as a legitimate and development centred traditional authority to ensure that all children in your community seize the opportunity to go to schools. I also appeal to all teachers and the regional education authority in this region to ensure that children are provided with the best education and paying more attention to Mathematics and Science.

It must be noted that poverty is not only a lack of essential commodities like money, food and shelter but it is also a deliberate consequence of the denial of people with good quality education.

It is my humble submission to you all today that ensuring that our children go to schools and get quality education is but the most important achievement in breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and tackling the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Education is the only weapon that enables our communities and people to live a competitive life filled with the combination of indigenous wisdom and scientific knowledge.

Educated communities have wider understanding of issues and indeed make informed choices on existing values, traditions and cultural practices.

Educated communities have a sense of ownership for their culture and indeed develop the capacity to align their cultural practices with the dynamic world in which information and technology has now taken the centre stage.

I advocate that we must begin to reconsider some of the traditional and cultural practices that had formed the basis for our livelihood a century ago.

Today there is no reason to believe that you will have more money and afford to buy a car if you bewitch your son or daughter or relative.

It is also not true that having many wives is a sign of wealth. It is also not correct to argue that HIV infection is associated with a curse cast upon someone or being bewitched.

The world we live in is changing and we cannot simply afford to deal with the modern issues with the kind of thinking and

traditional beliefs that our grand parents employed a century or two ago.

We need to begin to change our behaviour towards ourselves and our changing world. The eminent spread of HIV infections in this region is not a consequence of a failing advocacy campaign in the region.

But it is more of a cultural issue that requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders especially the traditional authorities. We must desist from seeing HIV/AIDS as a health problem. It is a developmental and social agenda and indeed a global challenge.

Programme Director,

I argue that it is not good to simply limit our understanding of culture to matters of race, tribe and the institutionalised values and norms of a specific society but it must be a concept that should be broadened to encompass the spirit of humanism “ubuntu” and the greater struggle for the elimination of colonialism and slavery and bring about unity among our people.

Let us move away from the belief that when your sister dies or your brother dies you marry the widow or widower in the same family without due consideration of the exact cause of death.

I am not saying any widow or widower is a victim of HIV/AIDS. But I strongly advocate that time has come for all residents of the region to get tested in order to know their HIV status. This will give you the added advantage to live positively and also to benefit from the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) and from ARV therapy.

It is about time you begin to join the world in recognising the danger of HIV/AIDS and take drastic steps to remain informed and to ensure that you move from the premise of voluntary counselling and testing to determine your patients' HIV status before seeking assistance from traditional healers where many of the residents for this region end up spending thousands of dollars without buying good health.

I ask you Your Royal Highness to guide your communities in accepting to do away with the stigmatization of all those that are affected or infected by HIV/AIDS.

We need the support of traditional authorities who are custodians of our traditions and cultures to edit and audit wrong values in our communities and ensure that we all live to uphold the values of oneness and love for all those who are victims of HIV/AIDS.

Our children have since moved out of control and choose to have premarital sex something that was considered a blasphemy or taboo in our culture. I urge parents to keep their children informed about marital matters so that they make the right choices. I further seek the counsel of the traditional authorities to legitimise cultural values and practices by ensuring that our youth get married at the acceptable ages.

Programme Director,

I further wish to state that the SWAPO led government recognises the developmental efforts that you, Your Royal Highness, have made in consolidating peace among your people with all other traditional leaders in the region and also having forged close cooperation with government.

Of lately, there had been some negative reports related to tribalism in Caprivi Region. This is indeed worrisome. We know that

tribalism breeds only people who are uncouth, barbaric and backwardness practice tribalism. Please, shun people. We know who they are and you know them.

Our beginning as a country was not easy. We were divided by the defunct South African regime. We were taught to believe that we were different, so different that we had nothing similar to embrace together and that even our thinking was different.

Their aggressive beginning was to decolonise our minds to see one another as tribal groups that had no common values. In as much as they admired our customs and traditions they despised our commonality and attempted to make us see our values and norms as practices of backwardness and being uncivilised.

This phenomenon was not easy in making us shed the dehumanization that was meted against our culture and our people. I urge you today to be proud as citizens in a free and democratic country. You must be proud to be under the leadership of a government that recognises cultural pluralism.

For many decades in Namibia discrimination based on race, religion, creed or culture was rampant. Soon after independence,

through the SWAPO Party, a Cultural Policy was given an important role to play.

The SWAPO government felt and still feels that culture lies at the heart of the creation, development and democratization of a nation. Hence the recognition of traditional leaders as custodians of various cultures that forms the foundation of our existence as a rainbow nation that is imbedded in our principle of unity in diversity.

It is our humble and considered belief as a government that our country's culture enables our citizens to define themselves, know who they are, share the values rooted in our common history and shape our future as a united people.

This principle became part of the Namibian Cultural Policy that was drawn in 2001. As a people centered government we strongly uphold to our constitutional provision under Article 19 that everybody is entitled to their own culture as long as it does not impinge on the rights of other cultures.

The aim is to encourage mutual understanding, respect and tolerance for national unity. We have managed, over the past

18 years of our freedom and independence, to celebrate our cultural differences and embraced one another as a united nation.

Namibian history, arts and culture now forms part of our school curriculum. The idea is to teach our children to know about their culture but also to know the true history of their country.

I commend you for your tenacity, thoroughness in seeking counsel with government over all matters that affect you and your community and pledge that the SWAPO led government is indeed your government of choice and is prepared to listen and address the most pressing challenges of your people.

Director of Ceremonies, Ladies and gentlemen

SWAPO Party believes in democracy. We hold general elections every five years to choose new leaders of your choice. 2009 will be general elections year for National, Regional and Local Authorities. The time is now to prepare yourselves to be looking around to field in candidates who will bring development to Sangwali, Katima Mulilo town, Caprivi Region and to Namibia at large. The ball is in your hands.

For now thank you, Your Royal Highness and through you to all your esteemed subjects for your patience over all matters and proposed projects that we as a sector of health have not been able to fulfil in your area of jurisdiction.

I thank you