

**A CONTRIBUTION TO 2008/2009 BUDGET
BY
HON. MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
DR. RICHARD NCHABI KAMWI, MP**

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members

Allow me to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister of Finance, her Deputy and their efficient team for tabling a budget that addresses the diverse needs of our people. I am aware of the demands put on the national budget to allocate the limited resources, and the dilemma the Honourable Minister faces in trying to achieve an equitable allocation of our limited resources.

This is an enormous task that you Comrade Minister have executed with fairness. I join others in congratulating you for doing an excellent job and for ensuring sustainable fiscal policy and macroeconomic stability, so that the next generation does not inherit debts from us. Over the past few years, you have demonstrated to us that this, indeed, can be done by bringing a deficit of as high as 7% to a surplus of 3.3%. This is an achievement that all of us should applaud.

I am aware of the risks we face in sustaining our expenditure in light of the likely decline in SACU revenue; I have no doubt that under your able leadership Honourable Minister, the Ministry of Finance is well positioned to ensure that the government has enough revenue to carry out its programmes as we head towards the realisation of Vision2030.

Indeed, the Honourable Minister and her team are worthy of the highest and most sincere praise for sticking to the SWAPO-Party programme, in particular for addressing the priority areas of health and education. Two striking examples are the provision of funds for the construction of classrooms in terms of education, and for the advancement of the fight against HIV/AIDS in terms of health. Honourable Minister, You have been consistent and persistent in your translation of the required means to address these urgent needs into measureable amounts with which we are implementing dedicated plans of action.

Honourable Speaker,

I wish to thank the Honourable Minister of Education for his resolute response to the calls of the SWAPO-Party Youth League, SWAPO-Party Elder's Council, and SWAPO-Party 2007 Congress in permitting Grade 10 students to repeat the academic year should they not succeed in passing their final examinations.

Clearly, for the Honourable Minister and his team to accomplish and sustain this mammoth task, they require unwavering support and commensurate financial resources.

Indeed, to put it simply, health and education are as important as they are expensive. It is no wonder, then that both Ministries “enjoy” the same amount of public attention, concern and commentary. Happily, our shared overlap does not end there.

The balance of the national budget and its component allocations requires cooperation between Ministries. The Ministry of Health and Social Services and the Ministry of Education remain partners in the training of much-needed health professionals.

18 years along the line has not been sufficient for this country to have her own medical practitioners to accommodate all our 33 hospitals, 257 clinics, and 43 health centres. Therefore, while we rely on our partners and friends to assist us, we are embarking on an aggressive training and re-training programme for Namibian health professionals. Currently, we are training 29 categories of health professionals from medical doctors, pharmacists, dentists, registered nurses, social workers, environmental health workers, optometrists, medical rehabilitation workers, clinical engineers and so forth.

Until last year students in these fields pursued their studies through loan schemes at the expense of government and were expected to pay back their loans after completion of their studies. Indeed, through this provision we recognise the positive results that have seen numerous young Namibian health professionals return from their studies and enter the workforce to the service of our nation. However, we take note that government's investment has been at a loss: in efforts to hold up their end of the deal and repay their loans, a good number of medical professionals have entered the private sector.

Therefore, thanks to Cabinet and my senior colleague the Honourable Minister of Education, as of last year, students receiving financial assistance from government to pursue studies in the medicine will sign a contractual agreement binding them to repay the financial investment in them through service to the nation. That is, upon graduation medical doctors are now expected to do community service for 2 years and serve within the Ministry of Health and Social Services for up to 6 years.

Honourable Speaker

This brings me to my next point. Indeed, the Ministry of Health and Social Services remains one of the most complex Ministries in government with a diverse composition of professionals. In order to administer these professionals, provide the Namibian nation with quality service and protection, government, through the Ministry of Health and Social Services established the Health Professions Councils under Repeal Act #3 of 2004. The principal function of the Health Professions Councils is to protect and promote the interests of all Namibians as relates to health and social services care and services.

Prior to the assumption of duty within or alongside the Ministry of Health and Social Services, any and all medical professionals, be they Namibian or foreign, are required without exception, to apply for registration with the relevant Health Professions Council. These councils are 1) Medical and Dental, 2) Pharmacy, 3) Nursing, 4) Social Work, 5) Psychology, and 6) Allied Health Professions. Clearly, therefore, bogus, dubious, unqualified or unidentified doctors in whatsoever name or capacity are not allowed, by law, to practice in Namibia.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members,

Allow me to return to and remain on this point, the well-being of the nation. Despite the fact that the Ministry of Health and Social Services ranks #2 in terms of budget priority, we remain constrained with challenges related to the ailing, wear and tear of our infrastructure, coupled with the need for more new health facilities, clinics and mortuaries in particular.

It must concern this esteemed House to know that many Namibians still travel up to 50km to reach their nearest health facility. Furthermore, upon reaching the health facility, clinics in particular, it is most disturbing that they would have to seek healing at a facility that is aged and rundown and itself in need of 'healing' so to say.

I therefore, place an urgent appeal to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resources and Community Development to find time to visit health facilities deep in the remote and rural areas. You will see the situation for yourselves, and thereupon I hope that you will resume support in the joint endeavours, importantly linked to our National budget, to renovate and build up health facilities nationwide.

Honourable Speaker,

There is a general consensus that the current rate of economic growth averaging between 3.6% - 4.5% is not sufficient to address the socio-economic challenges we are confronted with such as unemployment, poverty, disease and skewed distribution of wealth.

Indeed, we are faced with an immense challenge as relates to the disease burden of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the TB emergency. As many of you are aware, the Ministry of Health and Social Services employs the primary health care approach in addressing these challenges. This approach involves the community in decision-making and implementation of programmes designed to improve the quality and quantity of health care services.

In this regard, I would be remiss to not most sincerely thank the Honourable Minister of Finance for her understanding and prompt response to us when we approached her last year regarding constraints for outreach and emergency transport. To our great delight, the Honourable Minister impressively acquiesced to and assisted the Ministry of Health and Social Services with an earmark of N\$44million for ambulances alone. Further to this, we are grateful that the 2008/2009 total transport budget has almost doubled from last year, to the tune of some N\$70million.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members,

We are united in our goal as delineated in Vision 2030 and progressively outlined in each of our National Development Plans. I wish to urge us to stay the course, following the notable example of the Honourable Minister of Finance. First and foremost, we must learn from, and reflect on, NDP2 and ask ourselves whether there was indeed sufficient structural transformation of the economy over that period and if not, why not, and how we can improve upon the shortcomings if any. Then we must implement NDP3 with speed and efficiency and ensure we have competent people to drive the monitoring and evaluation process to fast track our socio-economic development.

Honourable Members, we all have a responsibility towards the nation and therefore need to support the government & Minister of Finance in her effort to diversify our revenue base and sustain our national programmes.

I would have failed in my duty to inform the Honourable Members that we are currently faced with an epidemic of cholera, never before seen in this country. To date we recorded 896 suspected cases, with 16 confirmed as cholera, and 4 deaths.

It is equally important to note that all along it was confined to Engela District, whereas as of last week, we are recording cases of cholera in Eenhana District where we had the 4th death. More than 15 health facilities are inaccessible and the means of drug supply and transportation of patients on referral is heavily relied on the Ministry of Defence 2 helicopters. For this, I wish to use this opportunity on behalf of the Ministry, and indeed myself, to thank the Honourable Minister and the uniformed men and women who are engaged in this very important task. Having said that, it is bothersome to note that of the pilots serving in this regard, only 2 are Namibian. There is need to value what they are doing

Honourable Members,

With this impressive budget without efficient and well-motivated civil servants we are likely to score very little in terms of service delivery. Public Servants owe it to the general public. With my wide experience as I travel in this country, by and large the commitment by some civil servants remains questionable. In my view, this is because accountability is not in place. As political office bearers, we find ourselves on the receiving end while we do not operate independently – we rely entirely on those tasked with implementation.

For this reason, I wish to conclude by appealing to the Right Honourable Prime Minister to consider expediting the amendment to the Public Service Act #36 of 1995. The Act should enable the actual service we as Public Servants render, and the marked benefits thereof, to be the true measure of the quality of our work. In addition, the Act should allow that those who are not delivering be chipped and booted out.

I thank you.