

“It is with mixed feelings that I address you at today’s inauguration of the Tsumkwe Energy off-grid solar hybrid electricity supply system. On the one hand this marks the beginning of a new improved electricity supply solution for the people of Tsumkwe, but on the other hand it marks the end of a unique project for the DRFN.

Based on its first experience of off-grid solar hybrid systems at Gobabeb, the DRFN has established itself as one of the most consistent pioneers in Namibia’s renewable energy sector and is still the only NGO in the country with an extensive renewable energy track record. With this I do not mean to brag about DRFN’s achievements, but rather highlight the continued deficiency that prevents Namibia from becoming a truly inspiring country regarding renewable energy applications. I hope towards a future, where projects such as Tsumkwe Energy are common-place; where renewable energy is incorporated into the mainstream of Namibia’s energy supply; where large utilities and electricity distributors spearhead renewable energy implementation, rather than small NGOs.

The DRFN is a research organisation. We are not primarily dedicated towards infrastructure development. However, sometimes infrastructure development is a vital precondition towards applied research. In the case of Tsumkwe Energy, I see us in a dilemma. The project proved enormously challenging and required technical know-how beyond our ready expertise. This absorbed much of our attention and most of the learning experiences were internal. So what happens now to the research? Are the environmental, social and economic conditions improving over the medium to long term? Is this technology robust enough, both in terms of technical features and day-to-day operations? Is capacity being built to facilitate Namibia’s renewable energy ambitions? Is access to electricity actually improving livelihoods? Does energy awareness and energy demand management increase with reliable electricity supply or does it actually decline? Will cost-reflective electricity tariffs hamper economic development or will it enhance innovation towards economic growth?

So many relevant questions, whose answers can contribute towards Namibia’s future development. The great shortcoming of international development assistance is the abrupt end of projects. For DRFN the Tsumkwe Energy Project has ended, but the questions remain open. This, from a research perspective can be very unsatisfying.

Be it as it may though, the Tsumkwe Energy Project has expanded Namibia’s horizon in terms of renewable energy, energy efficiency and rural energisation. I am indeed proud of this achievement! Being cognisant of the fact that great work is done by people, not organisations, I want to take an opportunity to extend my deepest gratitude and appreciation to my DRFN colleagues who held the reigns of this project. I feel exceedingly privileged to have you in the DRFN. The times ahead will not be easy for you as you distance yourself from nurturing and guiding this project and in some instances also the people that you have so positively affected.

Ladies and gentlemen, with this mixture of sadness and joy, I thank you for your attention.”