

**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**



**STATEMENT BY MR. BEN NANGOMBE, PERMANENT  
SECRETARY MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL  
SERVICES ON THE OCCASION OF A GENERAL STAFF  
MEETING.**

**01 AUGUST 2019**

**WINDHOEK,  
KHOMAS REGION**

**Director of the Programme,  
Dear Colleagues,  
Good Morning,**

On this day, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018, I joined the Ministry of Health and Social Services as Permanent Secretary. As we all know, the job title of Permanent Secretary has since been changed to Executive Director. It was, it is and will always be a great honor for me to have been assigned the important task to lead the team which is task to ensure that the Namibian people receive quality, reliable and timely health care services.

I will always cherish the warm welcome and the goodwill extended to me since I joined the Ministry. Your co-operation and willingness to join hands have made it possible for me to grasp and better understand the task at hand.

It has been twelve months of learning, understanding, interacting and finding solutions to challenges that face the Namibian public health sector. From policy matters, to legal issues, to general management it has been a time true discovery. Discovering there are things that work. And things that do not work. And things that ought to work but, they have been left not to work. It has been twelve months of seeing the possibilities and the low hanging fruits that we can reap to improve the delivery of better public health care in Namibia. I convened this staff meeting for a number of reasons. **(By the way, when did you receive invitation about this meeting?)**. One year is a good milestone to look back and assess where we are

since I took over. I also want to share with you some of my thoughts as we move forward.

I want to listen to your concerns and your ideas. Of course, we will not be able to address all concerns in a space of a few hours. We will not be able to provide all the answers because the issues are complex. But what I can tell you is that the Management Team and I are here to listen... and not only to listen, but to listen in order to find solutions. And durable solutions at that.

On my arrival here, my message to the Management and general staff was that “we need to do the basic things right”. What did I mean by that? I mean we need to ensure that we have a strong foundation as a way of ensuring that the work that we don here achieve the necessary impact. It means that each of us doing our work correctly the first time and always.

Director of Ceremonies,

What I have observed over the past twelve months can be summed up as follows: this Ministry has many good plans, many good policies, many good ideas to address the challenges we face. The problem has been execution. The problem is taking our plans and our initiatives to their logical ends, to their logical conclusion. This is the weakest link in the chain.

Let me turn to some of the critical areas in the Ministry’s operations:

## Human Resources

Our staff members in different operational areas, whether clinical, technical or administrative, are the lifeblood of the Ministry. They are the energy that powers public health care delivery in the country. Without them, there will be no public health services in the country. Thus, it is our duty as management, it is my duty as Accounting Officer to ensure that our staff members at all levels and in parts of the country are fully motivated, and well taken care of in order to do their work.

In this regard, I am concerned by a tendency I have observed in a number of instances where, instead of helping juniors, some seniors, whether it is administrators or medical professionals, treat juniors in a less than dignified manner. This is counter-productive and self-defeating. Our Ministry can only rise and we can only win if we join hands and work as a team. I am convinced, and you will agree with me that all of us want the Ministry to succeed, to do better, to be institution which we are proud to work for. In this regard, I can assure you that we are working flat out to ensure that, within the resource envelope at our disposal, we sort out the challenges in this area. Only last week, a workshop, which I had the privilege to officially, was held to validate our Strategic Plan for Human Resources for Health to guide us in this area up to 2030.

We have placed more than 140 professional interns in different facilities across the country. We have recruited nurses who were trained through the National Health

Training Centres. And we have started to receive more health graduates from abroad. They will add to our HRH compliment and help to improve and broaden health care delivery in the country. I wish to site two examples: very soon the Katutura Health Centre will start to operate on extended hours. Another good news is that we have managed to recruit and place two Medical Officers at Okongo Hospital which did not have Medical Officers for several years.

## Finance and Financial Management

Finance is to the operations of the Ministry, what engine oil, is to a running engine. Without it, the operations will stall. In this regard, it is of critical importance for us to manage our engine oil, our finances with utmost prudence. **At N\$ 6.4 billion, we have one of the highest budget allocations of all Offices, Ministries and Agencies in Namibia.** This is a huge responsibility. For many years, the Ministry has received qualified audit opinion from the Auditor General. This means... We are working flat to address issues identified and the areas where we have not done well in order to get a clean audit report. This means our financial reporting procedures and other processes must be respected and adhered to. Are you ready to work and ensure that we get a clean audit report? I count on you...

## Health Facilities Maintenance and Capital Projects

This area is fraught with challenges. Many of our health facilities are aging to the extent that it is no longer possible

to event effect maintenance or to renovate. The walls and foundations of the Maltahohe Clinic which was built in 1951 and whose roofing was blown, are so old that it is no longer feasible to renovate it. This is true for other health facilities.

While some facilities have aged, we have built new health centres and clinics across the country. Other were renovated and upgraded. Kaenda Clininc, Okaku, Okatope, and others. New facilities will be built at Mariental, Onamafila etc, contracts have been awarded. We are working flat out to ensure that the management of capital projects is improved dramatically. **Nothing which is as it is, will remain as it is.**

The undeniable truth is that **if an approach does not deliver results, it must be changed.** In this Ministry too, we cannot hope to achieve results, with the old ways of thinking. We must think and propose new solutions and new ways, we must innovate. We must find new more effective solutions. It is for this reason that, very soon the Ministry will conclude an Agreement with the Namibia Training Authority to bring in the Production Units of the Vocational Training Centres across the country to do basic maintenance of our facilities. We will bring in personnel from Namibia Correctional Services to assist. It is our way of contributing to the rehabilitation of offenders. This will result in significant cost savings. Leaking water taps, broken light fittings, broken door handles, curtain rails, a broken furniture must become something of the past.

Medical Equipment and Pharmaceuticals

The lack of medical equipment and pharmaceuticals has become chronic. It is a serious concern to us as a Ministry and the nation at large. We are working on plans to address this dual challenge. For the Central Medical Stores, we are implementing a Turn Around Strategy which will see a total change in the operations of CMS, better and more strict reporting, improved forecasting, improved management of logistics and our cold chain and better management of our overall stock. I am confident that before this year is out, the availability of pharmaceuticals in Namibia is going to change dramatically.

I want to say this though, there are some officials, who are failing to do the basic things right, with respect to the ordering of medicines and clinical supplies. Even before they confirm with CMS or Regional Medical Depots, they report to me or to newspapers about stock outs. Few weeks ago, there was an outcry about shortage of tablet bags in Omusati, patients were being issued their prescriptions in folded newspapers. At the same time, more than one million tablets bags were sitting at Oshakati Hospital. Again, some months ago, there was a report of the shortage of health passports at Robert Mugabe Avenue Clinic, while the stock was available at the Regional Stores, less than two kilometres away. This means we are lacking co-ordination.

The day before yesterday, there was an SMS in the Namibian Newspaper saying the Executive Director of Health must shape up because there are not surgical

gloves of a particular in theatres. These complaints are valid. And it is not only the ED who must shape up. It is all of us. Regardless of the cumbersome procurement process, let us ensure that we forecast properly and procure on time so that items are not allowed to completely run out. We are dealing with people's lives here and we must never do anything to compromise them.

Director of the Programme,

Let me talk briefly about other operational issues in the Ministry. I have in mind things like cleanliness or lack thereof of our health facilities, catering services, management of our vehicle fleet, filing of documents and procurement. These, in my view, are some of those basic things that we should not fail at. These are the things that demonstrate our commitment to work as staff members and our pride in our Ministry. Cleanliness is a must. We must not compromise on that. We are the Ministry of Health. Not the Ministry of Filth. It is our duty all of us to adopt habits that reject filth and untidiness. As promoters of good health, we must lead by example at all times. Let us make sure that all our facilities are spotless at all times. I have seen for myself and received positive feedback on cleanliness at many of our facilities: Katutura Intermediate Hospital, our host, has done very well. Great improvement. Give them a big hand. Others include, Rundu Hospital, Opuwo Hospital, Kanono Clinic, Chinchimani, Okaku Clinic, Okatope,

There has been a lot of talk about the adjustment to the menus for admitted patients and the removal of some

items, teas from the menu. Good progress has been made to implement this decision and we believe that we will see the savings, especially in the new Financial Year.

The area of procurement is fraught with challenges. There are temptations for insider dealings, dishonesty and corruption. There is no room for such in this Ministry. Procedures and oversight will be strengthened. Everything we do in this area must be above board and transparent. Anyone who contravenes the law and the procedures will be dealt with. To increase transparency, bids are now published on the Ministry Website, and the results of adjudications are also published. This must be maintained.

Director of the Programme,

Our President, Dr. Hage Geingob emphasises transparency as a means of creating trust. I am saying to underscore the fact that we should not hide or conceal our failures. If we hide them, we will never improve. If there is a problem, let us call it by name and face it and resolve it. I am saying specifically with respect to the management of the Ministry's fleet of vehicles. We have mapped the challenges in this area and are working on a durable solution, both for head office and the regional directorates. For example, the renewing the roadworthy certificates of vehicles allocated to the Regions at Head Office will come to an end. We need greater efficiency.

Another basic administrative task for any institution, especially one like ours, is to ensure that all official records are filed and preserved properly and according to the provisions of the Archives Act. This must be the practice at all levels, at all facilities. We have no discretion in this regard. We must implement the law as it stands.

## Discipline and Performance Management System

Discipline is the bedrock of success. Whether at personal or organisational level. You will never see success if you do not practice discipline. It is for this reason that in their wisdom, our lawmakers have included mechanisms for the enforcement of discipline in the Public Service Act. The Disciplinary Procedure is specifically designed to assist institutions to hold staff members who violate rules and procedures to account. It is designed to ensure fairness and prevent abuse of victimisation. The application of enforcement of discipline is therefore an obligation of each staff member in a supervisory role. We are exploring the best ways in which supervisors can be trained on disciplinary matters in a cost effective manner. One way being considered is the training of trainers. Staff members will be informed on developments in this area in due course. What should be clear though is that, discipline should not be compromised or undermined in anyway. A supervisor who does not apply disciplinary action when it is warranted, will himself or herself be subjected to the provision of the law.

This brings me to the implementation of the Performance Management System. This is the tool to guide us in the

implementation of our Strategic Plan. I must admit that challenges remain with respect to the proper understanding of this system by some staff members. The revision of our Strategic Plan 2017/2018 to 2021/2022 has been completed and it will soon be distributed to staff members and stakeholders.

Our Plans and Actions must be guided by the objectives in our Strategic Plan and all staff should embrace it. Linked to this is the Directorate-level Customer Service Charters which must also be completed. Currently, we have a Patients Charter which must also be implemented to the letter.

Each staff member is obliged to sign a Performance Agreement and supervisors must ensure that this happens. Staff members are also obliged to declare their interests and any engagement in remunerative work outside the civil service. Furthermore, All staff members are obliged, it is not an option, to complete Integrity Pledges in which they commit to practice and promote integrity, honesty, transparency objectivity, impartiality and ethical behaviour in the performance of their work.

## E-Health

Namibia must harness new technologies to improve better delivery of health care. One way of doing so is through a robust electronic health system or e-health. Last year, we successfully carried out an IT Infrastructure Audit which covered all health facilities across the country to determine the state of connectedness of our facilities. The

Report from that exercise will guide the Ministry to put in place a plan to implement e-health in Namibia.

## Outbreaks and the Disease Burden

Our Ministry must be ever vigilant and awake to deal with disease outbreaks. The Hepatitis E out-break that been rather stubborn, however, the response has been ratcheted up. We hope to see a reduction in the number of new cases as the interventions start to take effect.

Those who attended the Management Development Forum and the Health Assembly last year, heard the Minister talk about the need for team building in the Ministry. Management has started to work on this matter as a way of improving morale in the Ministry.

Our mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of our fellow citizens. Let this be the sole reason for our interventions. The nation is looking upon us with great expectations. We dare not fail them. The solutions to our many challenges are within us.

AS I SAID BEFORE LET US RISE ABOVE OUR CHALLENGES WITH INNOVATIVE APPROACHES AND DO MORE WITH LESS. So far, I have enjoyed the challenge and the journey as Accounting Officer in this Ministry. I look forward to working with you to find practical and durable solutions to the challenges we face.

I thank you.