

After the clean-up – What’s next? - Klaus Schade

Namibians turned out in numbers on Africa Day for a clean-up campaign initiated by the President, Dr. Hage Geingob. The clean-up focussed in Windhoek mainly on the informal settlements and north-western suburbs indicating that there is seemingly a bias in the waste removal and recycling infrastructure toward the formal and better-off areas of Windhoek. This needs to be addressed. Likewise, there is a need to create more awareness among consumers and producers about the sustainable use of our resources. Domestically for instance, plastic bags and other refuse end up in the guts of livestock causing health problems. Globally, the plastic patch in the Pacific Ocean covers already an area almost twice the size of Namibia and micro particles enter the global food chain not only of through fish, but plastic particles have been found in drinking water as well. Hence, there is a need to recycle, since our industry and household refuse is not just waste, but most often a valuable raw material that can be used for the production of new products. China has demonstrated over the past years, how access to cheap recyclable material increases competitive advantages.

However, since China, globally the main importer of recyclable materials ranging from scrap metal to plastic and clothes is closing her borders for imports, we need to develop our own recycling capacities locally and in the region. This creates new business and hence employment opportunities as well as opportunities for import substitution, since domestically available recycle material can replace imported raw materials including oil products.

Moreover, however, the amount and content of refuse is only the symptom of our consumption and production patterns and therefore, we need to go a step further in order to address the volume of refuse we generate. This is where the private sector plays a crucial role. There is a need to invest more into Research, Development and Innovation in order to produce products with a longer life span and that can be repaired when they are broken rather than have to be discarded. In addition, products have to be designed and produced in such a way that they can be easily recycled. Furthermore, there is need to research and invest in the production of biodegradable packaging material that is less polluting than current materials.

The clean-up campaign should therefore be taken a step further and lead to a review of our consumption and production patterns and aim at the shift towards a greener and more sustainable economy. This is in line with and supports our Growth at Home policy, the Fifth National Development Plan, in particular the pillars ‘economic progression’ and ‘environmental sustainability’, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals of the Agenda 2030.

Published in Business 7 – 6 June 2018