



A Budding Seed in Maltahöhe

Seeds have power – they emerge from the soil and grow into something beautiful. Their journey from soil to surface offers a beautiful analogy that resonates with the **RuralRevive – Building a Desert-Based Economy** project coming into bloom in the Hardap District south-western Namibia.

A transformative and well-rooted project, **RuralRevive** was conceptualised under *Wolwedans Vision 2030 – The AridEden Project*, a sustainability framework that focuses Wolwedans’ sustainability journey ahead. It is a medium- to long-term development and community revitalisation project taking shape in Maltahöhe, a settlement that is marred by high unemployment, destitution, pollution and social disintegration – like so many other small villages in rural Namibia that have seen better days.

Maltahöhe is one of those places that is slightly larger than the “blink and you might miss it” varieties, but small and sleepy enough for one to wonder where everyone is... Villagers recall better days when droughts weren’t as frequent nor as severe, when the Karakul sheep farms were thriving, and when youth weren’t forced to seek greener pastures in the country’s larger centres.

Yet just down the road (by Namibian standards), the oldest desert in the world and UNESCO World Heritage Site of Sossusvlei draw travellers by the thousands. With travel and tourism contributing nearly 15% to the nation’s GDP and accounting for a similar percentage of total employment (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019), one can’t help but wonder how much of that is benefitting the people of Maltahöhe and surrounds.

For example, tourism business supply runs cross right through the village on their way to and from Windhoek for operational supplies, yet little, if anything, is sourced in this strategically located potential distribution hub. In response, the Wolwedans Foundation embarked on the **RuralRevive** initiative in partnership with the people of Maltahöhe.

RuralRevive’s overall objective is to revitalize the local economy through a number of development opportunities that match the demands of the tourism economy in the region. Although it will and has already evolved organically, five initial focus areas are in the planning and implementation phases:

- **Maltahöhe Laundry:** solar powered with grey water recycling to enhance sustainability, the laundry will offer a service to tourism operators in the area.
- **Horticulture:** capacity building with local farmers and youth, as well as greenhouse and irrigation infrastructure provision to grow organic, fresh produce both for the tourism market and to improve local food security
- **The Barn:** an essential distribution hub and physical marketplace to centralise supply and demand, combined with a digital app to communicate what is on offer (or in demand) and provide a cashless trading environment.

- **Clean-up:** reducing landfill and landscape pollution through “Trash-to-Treasure” concept to re-use and re-purpose discarded items into marketable goods, simultaneously creating a healthier living environment and small-scale livelihood opportunities
- **Desert Runner:** transport service to “connect the dots”, providing compartmentalised delivery and collection of laundry, fresh produce, and waste.

Overarching activities include enterprise development / diversification as well as *EconoMix* training – a tailor-made, entry-level business basics offering to empower aspiring entrepreneurs in the emerging desert-based economy.

The direct beneficiaries of the **RuralRevive** project are the marginalised women, smallholder farmers, youth and entrepreneurs in the communities of Maltahöhe as well as the surrounding Daweb Constituency. The indirect beneficiaries are lodges and tourism enterprises in the NamibRand and Greater Sossuvlei areas, that tap into services delivered by the desert-based economy.

Through a well-represented Steering Committee, the project has managed to build collaboration, community trust and ownership, while seeking to connect the different socio-economic groups to the following benefits:

Skills Development and Capacity Building in Horticulture, Business, Media and Entrepreneurship

--> Residents including women and youth (multiplier-trainees) have been partaking in technical horticulture workshops as multiplier trainees to encourage and support the establishment of more community gardens. The project aims to capacitate more than 150 communal and commercial farmers within Maltahöhe and surrounds. Complementary media literacy workshops have been held with local school groups to enhance communications and promote RuralRevive and related storytelling by nurturing local reporters.

Job Creation

--> Construction and renovation of infrastructure secured under the project has employed several young men and women. This is expected to increase with the official opening of the Laundry, The Barn and future Recycling Collection Point, all of which will provide direct employment to local residents. In fact, on the 21st of January 2023, the RuralRevive laundry opened its doors to the community, with the potential for employing about 14 staff members from the community once fully operational.

Economic Advancement

--> Local micro-businesses as well as lodges will derive mutual economic benefits from services made available and emerging entrepreneurial opportunities – connecting smaller goods and service providers to the demand of larger enterprises.

Nutrition and Food Security

--> Residents will have access to healthy and nutritious food produced through the locally available food system, made possible by the horticulture training programme and establishment of backyard and community gardens and the price guarantee system – a benchmark price for buying surplus from producers, to donate them to orphanages, schools, soup kitchens, and even churches dealing with vulnerable groups.

RuralRevive is an ambitious undertaking and one that will call on the support of tourism operators across the Greater Sossusvlei-Namib Landscape. But in an age of increasing economic inequality, it presents an opportunity to collectively shift our focus as tourism stakeholders and do things differently, creating more resilient, inclusive conservation tourism economies along the way. It is a seed that will organically grow to transform the community of Maltahöhe.



"RuralRevive is very organic and rooted in our community. I appreciate the fact that the project offers a shift from a "hand out" approach. I see an abundance of opportunities with respect to fresh produce production. Markets have been a big challenge, so RR provides a vehicle. We are putting the pieces of the puzzle together and this is the start. On the tourism side, the transport solution will provide the linkage to local produce and fill the gap. RR is the vehicle to bring opportunities together."

~ Marika Raves, Owner of Maltahöhe Hotel and Member of Steering Committee

The purpose of the **Wolwedans Foundation** is encapsulated in our vision and mission:

- **VISION** We have the development of Namibia and the wellbeing of its people at heart. Since its inception, Wolwedans has been guided by an approach where people, planet and profit are equally important. Over the last decade, the Wolwedans Foundation, through its vocational training programmes, has trained in excess of 250 young Namibians as part of its corporate social responsibility (CSR).
- **MISSION** People Matter. We want our team and Namibians as a whole to enjoy improved livelihoods and practice sustainable lifestyles. We commit ourselves to this goal by prioritizing human resource development, social upliftment, sharing economic opportunities and encouraging others to help build a better tomorrow. As a responsible corporate citizen, we are committed to continue our investment in human capital development. To broaden the scope and increase trainee output, The Wolwedans Foundation seeks like-minded partners who can come on board and assist us in achieving our goals – for the benefit of our country and its people.

RuralRevive updates available on www.ruralrevive.org, while requests for more information, ideas, and offers of support can be directed to info@ruralrevive.org.