



BI-ANNUALS, JANUARY 2024

By Russell

In our latest community gathering, a spirit of understanding and partnership was obvious as we dug into the status of the conservancies' efforts. With a constructive approach, our senior members opened a dialogue that invited transparency and shared perspectives. Acknowledging the winding path, the Conservancy Vice Chairperson offered an honest reflection, "Yes, we still have some work to complete." This honest admission set the stage for a constructive conversation about our collective commitment to community conservation. Lina Kaisuma emphasized the importance of continuous progress and the necessity of open communication at these platforms. Her leadership in steering the session highlighted the value of collaborative effort in overcoming challenges.

As the morning discussions came to a close, the gathering transitioned to a much-anticipated lunch break. The communal meal featured a delightful serving of stewed meat and oruhere or porridge.



Sitting in the deep shade of the lush Mopane trees, enjoying lunch. I listened as Lina explained the concept of the Bi-Annals to me. The full name is actually Bi-annual Review and Planning, a twice-yearly event designed to assist Conservancies in giving report back on activities during the previous six months, explaining the challenges they are experiencing and also planning the next six months activities. IRDNC facilitates the whole event and process.



It is a logistical exercise of magnitude! Responsible members of the involved conservancies, normally Committee members or senior staff members, need to be fetched from all corners of northern Kunene and brought to a central hub. At the January 2024 Bi-annuals, some 18 different conservancies were represented. Each event is at a different site, allowing conservancies to take turns in hosting this important event. This time, it was the turn of Okavango Conservancy. Numbers of people present hovers around 150 at these events. Water, food, cooks and even pit latrines are prepared for the attendees.

The people and communities are very direct and honest with each other, Sometimes even brutally so. Honesty is expected and any embellishment or twisting of the truth frowned on. Experienced, mature conservancies are invited and provide valuable input on how they tackled issues and progressed to their current status quo. A range of different topics are aired. These include, training, challenges, rainfall, tourism potential, conservation, poaching, animal reintroductions, staff issues and development.

The Bi-annuals have evolved into a significantly larger platform. Invitations are extended to the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, the Kunene Regional Council (specifically the Directorate of Planning and Development Services), the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform, the Namibian Police, and Constituencies Councilors. The opening session serves as an opportunity for sharing information relevant to the local people and area, effectively reaching a broad segment of the rural population. The event also offers a valuable opportunity for networking and engagement among attendees, allowing the host conservancy to showcase their environment and people.

It represents a highly important week on the calendar!

