

## Mashare - Para-ecologist Robert Mukuya



**Fig. 1: Robert Mukuya** (photo: V. S. Mtuleni).

My name is Robert Silarius Mukuya (Fig. 1). I come from the north-eastern part of Namibia, the Kavango Region. The region is well known for its environmental attractions like the Kavango River, which forms the border between Angola and Namibia. The Kavango Region is also well known for its wildlife and amazing scenery.

I speak Rukwangali, which is my first language. There are four local languages in the Kavango Region: Rukwangali, Gciriku, Sambyu and Mbukushu. These four languages are very similar, like dialects. This is why we can understand each other, which makes it easy to communicate. My second language is English, which I learned in school. In addition to this, I also learnt Afrikaans and Nyemba, an Angolan language, through friends and in the streets.

I was born in the suburb called Kaisosi, situated approximately 7 km west of Rundu, where I stayed with my parents, three brothers and a sister until I was five years old. My father worked at the diamond mine in Oranjemund as a pay master while my mother was unemployed. I stayed with my grandparents on their farm 80 kilometres from Rundu, called Mutwegombahe, which means “Head of a giraffe” in English, where I started my primary school while I was also a part-time

cattle herder. After 3 years of herding cattle after school, one of my aunts took me to the town Rundu where I continued with my education at Rundu Junior Primary School until grade 5. After 15 years I met my father again and he took me to Mupapama Combined School at the village where we stayed until he passed away in October 1997. After my father's death I went back to Rundu to complete my Secondary School, which I did at the end of 2000.

After I finished high school, I started working for the BIOTA Africa research project as a part-time translator. Meanwhile I was studying part-time at Namibia College of Open Learning (Namcol) to upgrade my marks for grade 12. In August 2004 I was employed as a BIOTA para-ecologist for the remaining two phases of the project until 2009. During this time of employment, I attended six para-ecologist training workshops that were conducted annually. The trainings were focused on various research aspects and it was very hands-on, e.g. the use of computers and other technical skills, how to take good pictures of plants and animals for scientific purposes, the use of GPS devices, data entry, how to prepare and present oral presentations, and different methods of qualitative and quantitative data collecting. My last contract with BIOTA as a para-ecologist terminated in October 2009, when the entire project came to an end.

In October 2011 I was employed by The Future Okavango (TFO) research project as a para-ecologist based on my work experiences. My current work is focusing on:

- Conducting interviews.
- Doing translations for the researchers (from English to Rukwangali and vice versa).
- Downloading data from automatic weather stations and sending them to relevant authorities.
- Assisting in organizing and facilitating community meetings and workshops.
- Assisting in conservation agriculture techniques.
- Assisting in collecting data and samples

for the soil scientists.

- Assisting in collecting data for the microbiologists.
- Introducing researchers to the local cultures, what to do and what not to do.

Through my many years of work experiences, I have been involved in various scientific projects about the impact of climate change and land use on the environment. I have learnt about the importance of our environment for people's livelihood and what will happen in the future if we do not change our behaviour towards natural resources. We have to become more sustainable with regard to the use of water and air, the cutting and burning of trees as well as hunting wild animals. We have to prepare to adapt agriculture to climate change conditions in various ways, like by conservation agriculture.



**Fig. 2: Robert Mukuya during a training course in Seronga / Botswana** (photo: U. Schmiedel).

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Responsible author: R. Mukuya

