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The Men Who Would Be President

Graham Hopwood¹

On Saturday 3 April 2004, the Swapo Party Central Committee announced the names of three candidates for the party's presidential nomination for elections due on 14-15 November 2004. Delegates to Swapo's Extraordinary Congress, set for 28-29 May, will have the chance to choose between Foreign Affairs Minister Hidipo Hamutenya, Higher Education Minister Nahas Angula and Lands Minister Hifikepunye Pohamba. Considering Swapo's dominance at previous elections (President Sam Nujoma won 77% support in the 1999 election), the candidate who triumphs at the May congress will be seen as a shoo-in to replace Nujoma when he stands down on 21 March 2005. This opinion paper profiles the three candidates in an attempt to encourage debate about their track records and qualities in the run-up to the Congress.

Hifikepunye Pohamba

"In May 1962, I called a meeting and told those present that I needed two volunteers to go on a mission to carry out political mass mobilisation inside Namibia. Comrades Lucas Hifikepunye Pohamba and Eliader Muatale ... volunteered first. When Hidipo Hamutenya put up his hand I told him he was still too young and I wanted him to go for study."

Sam Nujoma in his autobiography 'Where Others Wavered', p.125, Panaf, 2001.

"I don't have personal successes. My life has been one of collectiveness with others."

Hifikepunye Pohamba quoted in *New Era*, 16-19 April 2004

When President Sam Nujoma recommended Hifikepunye Pohamba as a presidential candidate, he was once again reaffirming his trust in his most loyal lieutenant. The nomination on 3 April 2004 was part of a pattern that stretches back over 40 years.

Pohamba was a founding member of Swapo in 1960. He first left for exile the following year after being flogged by the tribal authority in Ohangwena for his Swapo activities. Yet in 1962 he volunteered to return to Namibia as a Swapo organiser (see introductory quotation). The potential perils were great. He was initially detained in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and then for five months in Windhoek, before being 'deported' to Ovamboland and placed under house arrest until 1964, when he travelled back into exile.

Risking arrest and possible long-term detention, he again chose to return to Namibia in 1966 – this time with Nujoma – as the two men attempted to test South Africa's claim that the Swapo president and his comrades abroad were 'self-exiled' and could return to Namibia at any time. "However, our Swapo representative in Lusaka, Comrade Hifikepunye Pohamba, would not allow me to travel to Windhoek alone and volunteered to go with me," Nujoma writes of their mission in 'Where Others Wavered' (p.138).

On their arrival in Windhoek, the two men were locked up and then deported 16 hours later.

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Pohamba became Swapo's Secretary for Finance (from 1977) and the head of operations in Luanda, Angola (1982-89) – positions that may have required less bravura than his 1960s exploits – but nonetheless ones that showed that Nujoma and his senior comrades placed a high degree of trust in him.

Musical Chairs

Since Independence, Pohamba has held three ministerial portfolios – Home Affairs, Fisheries, and Lands – without really stamping his mark on any of them. From 1998-2000 he had the anonymous-sounding title of Minister without Portfolio – seemingly underlining the impression that while his reputation as a 'tried and tested cadre' required a ministerial status, it was difficult for Nujoma to find him a ministerial role he could fulfil. The title did, however, enable him to continue having a ministerial salary for part of the time he was Swapo Secretary General (1997 to 2002). Significantly, during the period he was a Minister without Portfolio, he played a leading role in paving the way for President Nujoma's third term.

In September 1998, amid debate in the media about plans to change the constitution to allow a third term, he gave a lengthy address on television in which he attempted to head off criticism of the move: "I call on the Namibian people ... not to be misled by people who do not wish our country and people well. We must all go on a full campaign drive to have His Excellency President Sam Nujoma re-elected by popular vote for another term of office."²

The admiration is mutual. As part of his positioning of Pohamba for the presidential role, Nujoma made sure the Swapo Congress in 2002 knew of his track record when he nominated him as party vice-president. "This man," he said turning to Pohamba, "risked his life two times." He went on to tell how Pohamba had been whipped in public and then arrested and imprisoned in the early 1960s before returning with Nujoma in 1966 to defy the then apartheid administration. "So history is made by man. Twice he risked his life, but in the final analysis we have won," he concluded to applause.

Matters of Principle

At independence, Pohamba was not cut out for a ministerial post in the way that Angula and Hamutenya were (both were given portfolios that more or less matched their politburo titles). It is not clear why Pohamba ended up at Home Affairs in 1990, except that it was a senior Government post.

Possibly it had something to do with his moral character. Even his critics acknowledge that Pohamba is widely regarded as a principled man, who on a personal level finds it hard to tolerate dishonesty and corruption. For some he embodies old-fashioned values, given expression, for example, in his outspoken distaste for the Windhoek Observer's back page 'girls'. He has also consistently objected to the introduction of gambling in Namibia. Such a moralistic approach strikes a chord with traditionalists and will be part of his appeal to older and religious Swapo members. He told *New Era* newspaper in a profile ahead of the Congress that he was a Christian and felt comfortable in any church.³

His move to Fisheries in 1995 had little obvious cause or effect. By this time Nujoma's policy of 'rotating' his ministers was coming into effect. As few had specialist skills, they were moved from time to time with no reasoning offered and sometimes no advance notice. Pohamba loyally served in both ministerial positions without making any waves. Although the posts might not have been natural vocations, they almost became such because of his loyalty to Swapo and commitment to completing any task the President gave him.

His attitude to his ministerial work was summed up by his comment when he was handed the Lands portfolio in January 2001. On being asked whether he had been appointed to initiate a Zimbabwe-style land-grab, he said: "I don't intend to do anything apart from what is in existence and the procedures followed by my predecessor." He will, as the clearest candidate for continuity, have much the same approach to the presidency if he is named as Swapo's candidate at the end of May.

² Hifikepunye Pohamba, address on NBC-TV, 28 September, 1998.

³ 'Hifikepunye Pohamba – He has stood the test of time', *New Era*, 18-19 April 2004.



Testing Times

There is little doubt that the Lands job has been his most difficult task since independence. With the Government's land policy coming under fire at the turn of the century for being too slow and muddled, Nujoma once again turned to his faithful cadre.

However, since then the two most important announcements on land policy have not been made by Pohamba – but by Nujoma and Prime Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab. It was the President who announced plans to expropriate 192 farms at the Swapo Congress in 2002 and nearly 20 months later the Prime Minister who confirmed that Government would proceed with expropriation plans in a special address on television. Pohamba, when he spoke about the plans a few days after Gurirab's TV address, seemed only to confuse matters further by suggesting that any farm could be taken for resettlement.⁴

As with his remark on being appointed, many of Pohamba's comments on the land issue have seemed naturally cautious – stressing the rule of law and opposing farm invasions. However, at other times he has appeared blithely unaware of the impact his statements and the actions of his Ministry might have internationally. He has therefore, perhaps unwittingly, contributed to Namibia's reputation as the next Zimbabwe, despite the clear evidence that land reform has been approached very differently here. The latest clutch of international media reports on 'Namibia turning into Zimbabwe' have in part been fuelled by Pohamba's own unclear comments and the decision to invite Zimbabwean experts to assist in evaluating land for expropriation.

All this indicates that Pohamba is not naturally outward looking and would have less to offer on the international stage than his competitors.

Old Man Mk II

There is no doubt that of the three would-be presidents, Pohamba is closest to the existing one. Historically, he has been Nujoma's right-hand man since that moment when he put up his own hand to volunteer to return to Namibia in 1962.

Pohamba is 68, just four years older than Hidipo Hamutenya, who turns 65 in June, while Nahas Angula is 60. Yet Pohamba is sometimes referred to as the 'Old Man Mk II', while Hamutenya and Angula are seen as younger candidates. This, indeed, could be his selling point at the Congress – while all three candidates are, in Swapo's terminology, tried and tested cadres – Pohamba is the most tried and tested and the most similar to Nujoma.

He could be portrayed as 'a man of the people', whose uncomplicated, fatherly demeanour and lack of a formal education puts him in touch with aspirations of the ordinary people. In contrast, some delegates might view Hamutenya and Angula as intellectuals lacking the common touch. There are signs that Pohamba will stress an anti-poverty agenda as Congress approaches. He told the National Assembly on 14 April that Government should do more to tackle poverty through fast-tracking job creation and industrialisation. But the key to Pohamba's potential success at the Congress is Nujoma's blessing. Much will depend on how vigorously Nujoma campaigns for his candidate. A clear instruction to vote for him would weigh heavily with many delegates.

And there are practical reasons why Pohamba may be seen as the right man to inherit Nujoma's mantle. Pohamba and Nujoma – given their long combined history – would work best together, while an Angula or Hamutenya presidency would be bound to create more tensions with the man who is set to lead Swapo as a party until 2007. While according Nujoma the necessary respect, neither Angula nor Hamutenya are likely to simply do his bidding, even if he still is party president. A Pohamba presidency, however, may be seen

⁴ 'We'll take any farm we need: Govt', *The Namibian*, 4 March 2004.



as a weak one, with Nujoma as the real power behind the throne. This could still create tensions, as other formations seek to assert themselves, especially the Cabinet.

The Anointed One

Pohamba is the least ambitious of the candidates. He appears to have been nominated because others, principally Nujoma, felt he should stand rather than because of his own personal desire to do the job. For his backers he represents continuity and stability from the Nujoma era; for his opponents he represents stasis, and possibly stagnation. He is bound to pick up support from older delegates, but it will be Nujoma's approval that could bring him the wider support that would seal his victory.

Hifikepunye Pohamba – Fact File

Born: August 18, 1935 at Okanghudi, Ohangwena Region.

Education: Holy Cross Mission, Onamunama (1947-54). Social and Political Studies course in USSR (1981-82)

Career: Swapo Vice-President (2002-present). Swapo Secretary General (1997-2002). Minister of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation (2001-present). Minister without Portfolio (1998-2000). Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources (1995-98). Minister of Home Affairs (1990-95). Member of Constituent Assembly (1989-90). Head of Administration for Swapo election campaign (1989-90). Swapo Secretary for Finance (1977-89). Worked in Swapo Headquarters, Luanda (1982-1989). Head of Swapo operations in Zambia (1978-1981). Swapo Chief Representative in East Africa (1973-77). Swapo Deputy Chief Representative in North Africa (1970-73). Opened Swapo office in Lusaka as Deputy Chief Representative (1964). Worked in the TCL mine at Tsumeb (1956-60).

Founder member of Swapo in 1960. Initially left for exile in 1961. Swapo Ongulumbashe Medal for Bravery and Long Service, 1987. Member of Politburo and Central Committee.

Legislative Interests: Dialogue and multi-party law making.

Nahas Angula

“How could we turn Namibia into a rich country with rich people instead of being a rich country with poor people? ... The answer to these pertinent questions seems to be found in a development strategy which aims at increasing the national capacity to use knowledge.”

Nahas Angula in a paper delivered at the National Forum on Human Capital Development and Knowledge Management for Economic Growth with Equity, 29-31 January, 2003

“Nahas Angula is a fine guy, a very likable personality and smart, but his chances for presidency might be better after this round of presidential elections.”

Vekuii Rukoro, former Attorney General and now MD of Sanlam Namibia, commenting on the succession race in *New Era*, 8 April 2004.

Nahas Angula is the nearest there is to a wild card in the race for Swapo's presidential nomination. If the choice facing the Congress at the end of May were based on the candidates' political charisma alone, then Angula would win hands down. He is the most comfortable of the three candidates on a public platform and the most capable in open debate, which he appears to relish.

If the voting for the party's Central Committee (CC) at the 2002 Congress is used as a guideline, he also emerges as the favourite. In that election Angula came first with 395 votes (Hamutenya came in eleventh place with 352 votes, while Pohamba was already on the CC after being chosen as the party's vice president).



Yet, despite these apparent strengths, Angula comes across as not quite as ‘heavyweight’ as the other two contenders, and some observers see him as an also-ran, albeit one that could have a great deal of influence on the final outcome⁵.

At 60, he is four years younger than Hamutenya and eight younger than Pohamba. While all the candidates would be either retired or on the verge of retiring in any other profession, it may be that Angula’s profile as the youngest candidate will help him pick up support among younger Swapo members. If delegates at the congress are looking for a transitional candidate following the Nujoma years then firstly Pohamba and secondly Hamutenya would be more cautious choices, but if they favour a different style of leadership, then Angula could pick up more support.

Angula is an educationalist who, as Swapo’s Secretary for Education and Culture between 1982 and 1989, was at the heart of planning Namibia’s post-independence education system. During his tenure at the Ministry of Education and Culture from 1990 to 1995, he oversaw the creation of a unified education system and the introduction of a new curriculum. A national examination system was developed in collaboration with the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate (UCLES), and the Higher International General Certificate for Secondary Education (HIGCSE) and International General Certificate for Secondary Education (IGCSE) were introduced as school-leaving exams.

Some critics have blamed consistently poor exam results since on the abruptness of the switch to the ‘Cambridge system’. In 1999 the Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training concluded that, while “Namibia had made commendable progress in improving access to basic education, the same cannot be said of equity and quality”. Yet, the Commission praised the introduction of the new curriculum from Grades 1 to 12 (which was not completed until 1998) and the establishment of a professional national examination system, both started while Angula was in office.

With the major changes to the education system being introduced after 1993, President Nujoma’s decision to shift Angula to a new Ministry of Higher Education in March 1995 was surprising. The justification for a separate Higher Education Ministry was not clear at the time and by 1999 the Presidential Commission was recommending that it be merged with Basic Education and Youth and Sport to form a unified Ministry of Lifelong Learning (essentially back to the situation in 1990).

The Intellectual

Angula considers himself a Pan-Africanist intellectual. Some years before the inception of the Pan Afrikan Centre of Namibia (Pacon), he was extolling the virtues of Pan Africanism in newspaper articles.⁶ Unsurprisingly, he is an ‘eminent board member’ of Pacon.

Angula sees a nation’s knowledge accumulation as crucial to its economic growth. Speaking of his concept of a knowledge-driven economy, he told a national forum last year: “The establishment of a knowledge base, comprising of intellectual capabilities, technological capacity, and an innovation infrastructure, is critical to our national efforts of moving Namibia into the stage of an emerging economy.”⁷

⁵ The election rules for the Congress had not been announced at the time of writing. It is conceivable that a third-placed finisher in an initial election round could throw his weight behind another candidate in a run-off vote between the top two if this system is used.

⁶ *The Namibian*, May 24 and 31, 1996.

⁷ ‘Engendering the Contribution of Human Capital Development and Knowledge Management: Where The Challenge Lies?’, paper delivered by Nahas Angula at the National Forum on Human Capital Development and Knowledge Management for Economic Growth with Equity, 29-31 January 2003.



From some of his comments he would appear to be the most left-wing of the candidates. In 2000 he argued that the same forces of capitalism that led to the “emasculatation of Africa” 400 years ago have “metamorphised themselves into the neo-liberalism of the privatisation and structural adjustment creed”.⁸

Yet, in 2002 he suggested, to the ire of some of his parliamentary comrades, that loss-making state-owned enterprises (SOEs) could be liquidated or sold off. It will be interesting to see if in the run-up to the Congress he courts those in the party who still hanker after a socialist future or maintains the non-ideological pragmatism that has marked much of the Government’s policy-making since independence.

Speaking Out

Angula does not shy away from controversial issues. In a National Assembly debate on SOEs he revealed the salaries of several top parastatal bosses, while stating that some did not deserve such high wage levels.⁹ He has also called for a judicial inquiry into the debt-ridden and Government-owned Windhoek Country Club and Resort.¹⁰

But his outspokenness has at times brought him into open conflict with other Swapo members and even fellow Cabinet members. In September 2002, he told the National Assembly that the Government’s plans to devolve powers to regional authorities reminded him of the ‘Bantustan’ system. He was upbraided by then Local Government Minister Nickey Iyambo who wanted to know why Angula was questioning a plan that, as a member of Cabinet, he had earlier approved. “It’s unheard of, it’s unfair, it’s unpatriotic,” said Iyambo.¹¹

Such public conflicts between senior members of Swapo are rare and Angula’s willingness to tackle some issues in a very blunt manner may not sit well with some older delegates who would want to see a more guarded approach.

Angula’s forthrightness may prove to be a double-edged sword for his own presidential ambitions – while in some Swapo quarters he is seen as the most open-minded of the candidates, to others, schooled in Swapo’s traditionally closed way of dealing with internal issues, he may be viewed as too unpredictable.

He is a combative speaker on the hustings and has been used prominently in Swapo’s election campaigns, not least in 1999 when he launched a vituperative attack on Congress of Democrats leader Ben Ulenga, essentially branding him a traitor.¹²

At times his rhetoric has a populist appeal. In April 2000 he criticised the budget for not addressing “redistribution and wealth creation”.¹³ He continued: “Development should start with the people, not with a highway, railway line or other infrastructure.” Yet within the confines of his Higher Education portfolio, he has had little chance to pursue such issues. In 2000, the title of his Ministry was changed from Higher Education, Vocational Training, Science and Technology to Higher Education, Training and Job Creation, possibly to give him a wider, more meaningful role.

Angula has managed to persuade the Finance Ministry to increase Higher Education’s share of the budget from 3.2% in 1995/96 (when it still fell under the Ministry of Education and Culture) to 4.9% in 2004/5. However, half of the Ministry’s funds are transferred on to the University of Namibia (Unam), the Polytechnic and vocational training centres. This has created the impression that Higher Education is to a large extent a clearing-house for funds rather than a dynamic ministry in its own right.

⁸ ‘The Emasculation of Africa 1500-1600: Pre-colonial African Society’, essay by Nahas Angula in *The African Origin of Civilisation and the Destiny of Africa* (Gamsberg MacMillan, 2000).

⁹ ‘Minster targets State fat cats’, *The Namibian*, 20 June 2002.

¹⁰ ‘Nahas calls for probe over hotel’, *The Namibian*, 6 November, 2002

¹¹ ‘Regional move sparks AG8 fear’, *The Namibian*, 30 September, 2002.

¹² *The Namibian*, 5 November, 1999.

¹³ ‘Budget needs to shift focus’, *The Namibian*, 17 April, 2000.



Angula has criticised the University of Namibia for “uncontrolled and unplanned growth”¹⁴ (Higher Education’s subsidy to Unam has increased by 293% since 1996/97), but has not directly intervened to ensure his Ministry’s money is better spent.

This may be due to strained relations with Peter Katjavivi, who served as Unam’s Vice-Chancellor until late 2003. Angula has admitted to having “professional differences” with Katjavivi, but has denied that a personal feud has resulted in him working more closely with the Polytechnic than with Unam.¹⁵

Young at Heart

Although nominated by the oldest member of Cabinet, Andimba Toivo ya Toivo (79), Angula’s appeal is largely to the younger members of the party. He is fondly remembered as a teacher by many who grew up in exile (despite some reports of him being a harsh disciplinarian). In addition, his pan-African philosophy will appeal to those who see themselves as the young intellectuals of the party. Those who think along tribal lines could vote for him as an Ndonga to prevent a Kwanyama presidency. He may also pick up support from the unions and those on the left of the party, who view Hamutenya as a revisionist and Pohamba as representing the status quo. Another consideration is whether delegates want a one-term or two-term president. Hamutenya at the end of his first term in 2010 would be 70, Pohamba would be 74, while Angula would be a relatively sprightly 66.

Nahas Angula – Fact File

Born: August 22, 1943 at Onyaanya, Oshikoto Region

Education:

Tertiary: MA, M.Ed Columbia Teachers College, New York, USA (1977-78). BA (Education) University of Zambia (1973).

Secondary: 1963-69 - Ongwediva Teachers Training College (Junior Secondary Level), Oshigambo High School and Mkumbi International College, Zambia.

Primary: 1955-62 - Onyaanya Lower Primary, Oniipa Boys School and Engela Senior Primary School.

Career: Minister of Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation (2000-present). Minister of Higher Education, Vocational Training, Science and Technology (1995-2000). Minister of Education and Culture (1992-1995). Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport (1990-91). Member of Consituent Assembly (1989-90). Swapo Secretary for Education and Culture (1982-1989). Swapo Secretary for Information and Publicity (1981). International civil servant at the United Nations, New York (1978-80). Founder and teacher, Namibia Education Centre, Lusaka, Zambia (1976-77). Teacher at the College of Art and Commerce, Lusaka, Zambia (1975).

Joined Swapo in 1964 and left for exile in 1965.

Legislative Interests: Education and technology

¹⁴ ‘Angula attributes Unam crisis to wrong priorities’, *The Namibian*, 13 March 2002.

¹⁵ ‘Angula dismisses talk of feud with Katjavivi’, *The Namibian*, 7 March 2002.



Hidipo Hamutenya

“A steadfast policy of step-by-step acquisition of the means of production by the state, which goes hand-in-hand with a programme of massive training of professional and skilled workers, holds for brighter prospects and promises for success in the construction of socialism in Africa, and, I believe, this is the way forward for socialism in Africa, Namibia included.”

Hidipo Hamutenya in an address to the Namibia National Students Organisation (Nanso), January 1990.
Published in *The Times of Namibia*, 17 January 1990.

“By and large the major means of production are still in the hands of the private sector – we’re talking about minerals, fishing, commercial farming, tourism – those are the four pillars of our economy. That the Government has not interfered in these is a demonstration of its commitment to the private economy and to a system that allows the private sector to do its own thing on the basis of its own profit motives.”

‘Face to face with Hidipo Hamutenya’, interview by Robin Sherbourne, published in *The Namibian* 25 September 1998.

Hidipo Hamutenya has been referred to as Swapo’s “leading hardline ideologue”¹⁶ – a reputation he appears to have gained in exile, partly because of his role in drawing up Swapo’s 1976 Political Programme with its commitment to ‘scientific socialism’. But from the standpoint of 2004, and with a nine-year track record at Trade and Industry available for examination, is the view of Hamutenya as a hardline ‘bogeyman’ really sustainable?

Once Were Socialists

In 2003, Hamutenya was named as *fDi* magazine’s African personality of the year for leading “Namibia’s crusade to attract FDI for nine crucial years”. The magazine quoted Hamutenya as saying: “To achieve a breakthrough you need to hone your investment tools. This means a professional response to investors’ enquiries and having the facts and figures at your fingertips.”

This was someone who thirteen years earlier was railing against transnational companies and recommending a gradual transition to socialism in Namibia. In fact, by 1996, Hamutenya was pushing through a ‘no strike’ provision in the legislation governing Export Processing Zones (EPZs), to the initial annoyance (but eventual compliance) of the Swapo-affiliated unions.

His acceptance of capitalism and globalisation as facts of life is not that surprising, given that the collapse of the Eastern Bloc took place at the same time as Namibia’s transition to independence and that at heart Swapo was a nationalist rather than a socialist movement¹⁷. Like many of his comrades at the helm of Swapo, Hamutenya is far more of a pragmatist than he ever was a socialist in the Marxist-Leninist sense.

By 1998, instead of arguing that Government should control more of the economy, Hamutenya was talking about limiting the pace of privatisation until the developmental role of agencies such as NamPower and Telecom had been fulfilled and the previously disadvantaged were able to “participate meaningfully in this process of privatisation”.¹⁸

The common thread between his 1990 exhortations about socialism and the free market orientation of 1998 is a concern for social justice. While the aim “of balancing out ... addressing the inequity in the economy” may be unaltered, the means have clearly changed. In the recently released White Paper on Namibia’s

¹⁶ Swapo’s *Struggle for Namibia 1960-1991: War By Other Means*, by Lauren Dobell, (P. Schlettwein Publishing, Switzerland 1998), p.85.

¹⁷ Sam Nujoma in his autobiography, *Where Others Wavered* (Panaf, 2001), states: “[Most of the whites in Namibia] mistook our decision to confront the South African administration to mean that Swapo was a communist-inspired organisation. We were not. We were fighting for our rights and the freedom and independence of our country.”

¹⁸ ‘Face to face with Hidipo Hamutenya’, interview by Robin Sherbourne, published in *The Namibian* September 25 1998.



Foreign Policy (a document that clearly bears Hamutenya's imprint), it is argued that foreign investment is key to achieving poverty reduction. Creating a conducive environment for investment and marketing Namibia to foreign businesses is seen as crucial to this.

Now his catchphrase is 'economic diplomacy', with an export push being seen as central to Namibia's development. But who would have envisaged 14 years ago that the stages along the way to achieving social equity would include privatisation and no strike clauses?

The evolution of Hamutenya's views since 1990 reveals a man who is able to shift out of traditional patterns of thinking and action. He has indicated that Namibia as a whole should be ready for similar imaginative leaps. Addressing an audience of pan-Africanists, not usually sympathetic to globalisation, at the end of the 1990s, he stated:

*"If we are to become beneficiaries of the new age of globalisation, we must fundamentally alter the way we have traditionally done things ... Part of this purpose must be to enhance both our capacity as well as attractiveness to foreign investors. We need expertise and capital to accelerate economic growth and development. In this connection we must develop enabling environments, including relative price stability, fiscal discipline and competitive tax regimes."*¹⁹

Whether Hamutenya is a born-again capitalist or still a socialist who is biding his time is a question that should be raised in the run-up to Congress

The Learning Curve

When he was moved from the Trade and Industry portfolio in 2002, Hamutenya could boast of several milestones passed during his tenure - including Anglo-American's massive investment in the Skorpion zinc mine in the south of the country, the establishment of the export processing zone in the mid-90s, and Namibia's acceptance under the terms of the US Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (Agoa), which was followed by the arrival of the Ramatex textile factory and thousands of jobs.

Despite the general acclamation over Hamutenya's accomplishments, he has not always been regarded as having a safe pair of hands. Indeed, in the early 1990s, it seemed that he had the opposite of the Midas touch. Almost everything he touched turned to dust.

Having perhaps sensed that the Information and Broadcasting portfolio was not as important in post-Independence Namibia as his Information and Publicity post in Swapo had been, Hamutenya was switched to Trade and Industry in 1993. It is not clear if he had sought the new position, but ultimately it worked to his advantage.

When he took over at Trade and Industry, Hamutenya was criticised for overreaching – perhaps in an effort to make his name and set himself up to take over the presidency at the end of Nujoma's second term. Grandiose, but barely credible investment schemes from overseas were greeted with hardly deserved fanfares.

The one that still lingers in the public memory some 10 years later is the Projects, Industrial Development and Investment Company (Pidico), whose planned investments were among the biggest since independence. These included a N\$200 million free trade zone at Walvis Bay, a N\$100 million print works in Windhoek, and a huge agricultural project in the Caprivi. Nothing came of any of them and Pidico left only a rusting steel arch in the desert near Walvis Bay, supposedly the entrance to the mythical free trade zone.

¹⁹ Africa and the World Economy by Hidipo Hamutenya in *The African Origin of Civilisation and the Destiny of Africa*, (Gamsberg MacMillan, 2000).



Hamutenya was ridiculed for having bought the Pidico line – even having his first name altered to ‘Hidipidico’ in newspaper columns. Yet he still trumpeted other projects that never materialised – including a cotton ginning project at Rundu, a tomato paste factory at Tsumeb, and an Indian jeep factory.²⁰

Hamutenya was also a key player in the formation in 1992 of the Development Brigade Corporation (DBC) which was set up to create jobs for former fighters, but proved to be a costly failure that had to be disbanded in 2001. He has been the chairperson of the Cabinet Committee on the DBC.

As the 1990s progressed Hamutenya appeared to have taken note of the chastening lessons of the Pidico fiasco and was more wary of phantom investors. After his highly visible presence just after independence he took a more low key role, while doing the groundwork that would reap fruit later on.

However, his judgement has still been brought into question on occasion. Hamutenya was seen to be the principal backer of Jafaar bin Ahmad’s appointment as Managing Director of Air Namibia in 1998. Jafaar, who was a former Governor of the Bank of Namibia, was dismissed from his post in October 2001, amid claims that he had been paid N\$1,7 million a year while the airline sank further into debt.

Hamutenya has been the chairperson of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Development and Parastatals during a period in which it was found that sound financial performance was elusive for most parastatals, while there has been “a lack of consistent and regular evaluation” of their performance and service delivery. Government transfers to parastatals rose from N\$79 million in 1991/92 to nearly N\$1 billion in 2003/4.²¹

As Namibia’s first Information Minister (1990-93), he was instrumental in setting up the Namibia Press Agency (Nampa) and the Government newspaper *New Era*, yet 12 years later both are still heavily reliant on Government subsidies and show little potential for commercialisation.

Despite these apparent blots on his record, by 2003 and the *fDi* award, Hamutenya’s overall reputation was clearly re-established. In the citation for the award he was recognised for positioning Namibia in numerous regional and international trade fora. This included playing a role in the negotiations over export conditions to the US for Namibia and Botswana under Agoa and the re-worked Southern African Customs Union (Sacu) agreement.

A Question of Rights

Of the three candidates, Hamutenya is the most closely linked to the ‘spy drama’ that threatened to engulf the liberation movement in the 1980s. Over 1,000 Swapo members were detained in dungeons in Angola, after being accused of being South African spies. They were tortured and forced to make false confessions. Hundreds remain unaccounted for.

Hamutenya at the time was Swapo’s Information and Publicity Secretary and confirmed the detention of a hundred alleged spies at a press conference in London in February 1986. In Siegfried Groth’s book ‘Namibia – The Wall of Silence’, Hamutenya is alleged to have been present during the interrogation of detainees. Later, Swapo distributed videos of detainees making ‘confessions’ in a bid to prove to the outside world that the movement was dealing with a genuine South African espionage ring.

While the May Congress is unlikely to scrutinise the human rights records of the candidates (all Swapo congresses have avoided dealing with the issue of the movement’s pre-independence human rights abuses), the issue of the detainees may come up if Hamutenya becomes the presidential candidate.

²⁰ ‘Drastic steps needed’, *The Namibian*, April 12 1994.

²¹ ‘More Openness Plus Accountability: The Missing Calculus of Financial Sustainability Within Namibian Parastatals’, by Daniel Motinga, IPPR Briefing Paper No. 30, February 2004.



It would seem that as Information and Publicity Secretary he was seeking to limit the fall out from the detainee saga so that Swapo's international reputation remained intact, rather than actively backing or being involved in the abuses. His detractors claim that his connection to the detainee issue reveals a darker side to his personality.

Just last year *Africa Confidential* magazine²², which claims to have the inside track on many African political developments, characterised Hamutenya as "the most ruthless of Nujoma's successors", who was using "his strong support within Swapo, the media it controls plus his backing from the Kwanyama, the largest sub-group of the majority Oshivambo, to race ahead of his rivals".

If Hamutenya really is a ruthless tribalist, then he has hidden these traits so well that they have been barely perceptible since independence. His public comments have largely been measured, but the occasional outburst does give some cause to wonder if he has a streak of intolerance.

As an example, when environmentalists in Earthlife criticised the Ramatex investment he wrote to the press in early 2002, claiming they were running a "sinister" and "subversive" campaign. If he becomes President, he would certainly find himself and his government's policies at the end of some sharp criticism (far more than he had at Trade and Industry). How he would react to this increased pressure would probably only become evident during the presidential election campaign due at the end of this year.

Under the Radar

Hamutenya of all the candidates is the one who covets the presidential job the most. For much of late 1990s he was widely presumed to be preparing the ground for a bid for the presidency by building a network of support throughout the party, the government, and the security forces²³. But unlike his chief rival at that time, then Prime Minister Hage Geingob, he kept his campaigning very much at a subterranean level.

While some may see this as a sign of his 'secretive' approach to politics, it has to be remembered that visible campaigning for party posts was viewed as against the inner party culture and not acceptable to Nujoma. Geingob came undone at the party congress in 2002 partly because he organised his campaign for the top post too openly. There has been speculation in the past that Hamutenya too might be demoted as a means of putting him in his place, but this has not happened and, as Geingob was dropped in August 2002, Hamutenya was promoted to a higher profile position by Nujoma.

Hamutenya has many years of experience in international diplomacy, having been involved in negotiations concerning Namibia's independence throughout the 1980s. He played a leading role in the restructuring of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in 2001, when he was chairperson of SADC's Council of Ministers.

Hamutenya's supporters see his presidency as a move towards a modern, technocratic style of leadership, while recognising that their candidate remains steeped in the history of the liberation struggle.²⁴

He will vie with Angula for much of the support of younger delegates at Congress. He may have moved too far away from his socialist pronouncements to retain the support of the unions and the few radicals in the party. Much will depend on whether the network of support he has put in place remains solid and whether Nujoma, in his bid to back Pohamba, openly distances himself from Hamutenya.

²² *Africa Confidential*, Vol 44 Number 6, 21 March 2003.

²³ The President of the county is also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

²⁴ Hamutenya wrote the words to the national anthem, 'Namibia, Land of the Brave', an indication of the depth of his identification with the struggle. The adult lives of all three candidates have been more or less completely bound up with the quest for national liberation.



Hidipo Hamutenya – Fact File

Born: On 17 June 1939 at Odibo, Ohangwena region.

Education:

Tertiary: Ph.D programme at McGill University, Montreal, Canada (1971-73). MA in Political Science and Development Studies, McGill University (1970-71). Postgraduate Diploma, Syracuse University, USA, 1969. BA in Political Science and History, Lincoln University, Pennsylvania USA, 1969.

Secondary: Temple High School, Philadelphia, USA (1963-64). Augustineum College, Okahandja (1958-60).

Primary: Engela Senior Primary School and Odibo Junior Primary School (1947-55).

Career: Minister of Foreign Affairs 2002-present. Minister of Trade and Industry 1993-2002. Minister of Information and Broadcasting, 1990-93. Member of Constituent Assembly 1989-90. Swapo Secretary for Information and Publicity (1981-91). Member of Swapo negotiating team involved in drafting and overseeing implementation UN plan for independence (1978-89). Deputy Director/Head of the History and Political Science Department, UN Institute for Namibia (Unin), Lusaka (1976-81). Swapo Secretary for Education (1974-76). Swapo Representative to the Americas (1965-72). Left for exile in the early 1960s. Member of Swapo Politburo and Central Committee.

Legislative Interests: Economics and finance.

Conclusion

Swapo's Central Committee meeting on 3 April 2004 and the Politburo meeting that preceded it a week earlier indicated a significant shift within the party, as the fledgling fourth term movement was stopped in its tracks in favour of an election between three candidates.

Congress is Swapo's highest decision-making body, and it is still possible for it to change the rules of the game and even admit President Nujoma as an additional candidate or halt the process altogether. However, this is unlikely, given that traditionally the CC has been able to dictate the agenda for congresses without any major challenge. In addition, many Swapo members appear to be relishing the opportunity of a democratic choice and are proud of the fact that this Congress is widely viewed as a demonstration of the maturity of the party.

The path of competition between contenders contrasts starkly with some other Southern African countries where there has been a single designated candidate, often earmarked for the job by the incumbent several years before the transition takes place.

Delegates to the Swapo Congress face a choice between candidates who are all 'tried and tested cadres'. They all have strong struggle credentials stretching back to the early 1960s and have been Cabinet members since 1990 – meaning they all share responsibility for the Government's decision-making since independence.

In this sense they all represent continuity – in terms of Government policy and party history. All are likely to follow the inclusive policy of President Nujoma, in terms of keeping different interest and ethnic groups on board, if they win the presidential nomination.

Yet each contender also represents a potential for change to greater and lesser degrees. The considerable powers vested in Namibia's executive presidency will enable the successful candidate to lead the way in shaping the post-Nujoma landscape.



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