

# **Burning Namibian bushwood in German power stations?**

**Lessons from the campaign against the  
“Transcontinental Biomass  
Partnership Namibia-Hamburg”**

**Almuth Ernsting  
[biofuelwatch.org.uk](https://biofuelwatch.org.uk)**

**Biofuelwatch  
21/3/22**



*Tiefstack power plant, Hamburg*

**Project aimed to assess  
feasibility of energy from  
Namibian bushwood in  
Hamburg, focussing  
mostly on Tiefstack**

# Memorandum of Understanding

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Biomass partnerships with Namibia

between

Trier University of Applied Sciences,  
Environmental Campus Birkenfeld,  
Germany the Institute for Applied Material Flow Management (IfaS),

and

Ministry of Environment and Energy of Hamburg (FHH BUE)

and

Wärme Hamburg GmbH

and

Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften Hamburg

on

Set up of working groups

with regard to utilization of Namibian encroacher bush in Hamburg

*Germany | 02 June 2020*

# Origin of this proposal

## Controlling bush encroachment to support rural livelihoods

### Project description

**Title:** Bush Control and Biomass Utilisation

**Commissioned by:** German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

**Country:** Namibia

**Lead executing agency:** Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT)

**Overall term:** 2018 to 2021

German government climate mitigation finance project carried out by GIZ (German Agency for Development Cooperation). A project promoting the industrial-scale removal of woody plants, across an area of around 30 million hectares (=size of Italy).



Bundesverband Bioenergie e.V. (BBE)

10.09.2019

**Namibia's Big Biomass Opportunity –  
Namibian Delegation on the 19th  
Wood Energy Conference on 25./26. of  
September 2019 in Würzburg**



# Bush encroachment: Causes

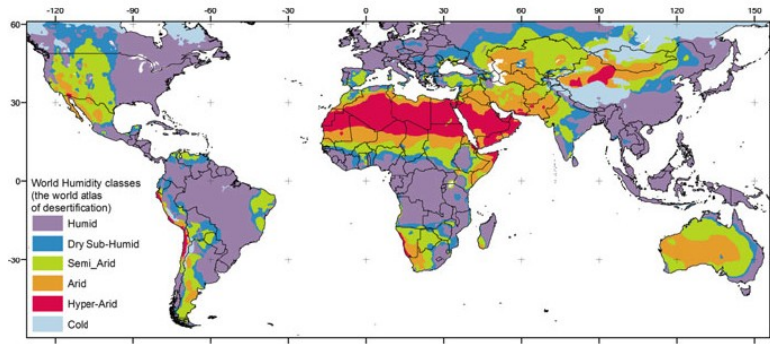


Fig. 8.1 World humidity classes (World Atlas of Desertification, United Nations Environment Programme 1997). Drylands are classified into four ranges of the Aridity Index (AI, the ratio between the mean annual precipitation and the mean annual potential evaporation): Hyperarid,  $AI < 0.05$  (7.5 % of global land area); Arid,  $0.05 < AI < 0.20$  (12.1 % land); Semi-Arid,  $0.20 < AI < 0.50$  (17.7 % land); Dry subhumid,  $0.50 < AI < 0.65$  (9.9 % land)

Woody encroachment is a global long-term trend across semi-arid regions.

## Causes:

- Higher CO<sub>2</sub> levels: Negative climate feedback (i.e. a feedback that slows down climate change because more CO<sub>2</sub> is sequestered);
- Regionally: Overgrazing and fire-suppression



Photo:  
[regimeshifts.org/](http://regimeshifts.org/)

# Industrial-scale bushwood removal and climate change



*Photo: hamburg.de*

- Trees and shrubs constitute Namibia's largest carbon sink. Removing a large share of them to generate energy in Germany would improve Germany's ghg balance (under UNFCCC accounting rules) at the expense of Namibia's ghg balance.
- Most studies show that large-scale bush removal depletes soil carbon, too, making the situation even worse.

# Bush encroachment, removal and wildlife

- Some herbivore and bird species benefit from increased woody cover
- Some species are unaffected
- Some specialist grassland species depend on retaining patches of open grassland
- Strong case for removing patches of bushwood for habitat creation.
- Large-scale bushwood removal coupled with increased livestock grazing harms biodiversity
- More intense livestock grazing following bushwood removal = high risk of desertification

# Economic impacts



*Photo: Annelie Coleman*

Bush encroachment reduces grazing space for cattle.

Namibia's land ownership is highly unequal. 70.1 % of commercial farms owned by members of the white minority which accounts for 6% of the population.

- Who in Namibia would benefit? - No concrete answers from project proponents.
- Leading German project partner (IfaS) has highlighted potential for significant economic benefits – to Germany and German companies!
- Germany would require low-cost biomass, which means keeping labour costs as low as possible;
- Undermining projects to create local value-chains for bushwood in Namibia

# Potential for large-scale job destruction



Manual and semi-mechanic bushwood removal: Common methods today

Full mechanisation



*Hamburger Energietisch*

*Photos: dasnamibia.org*



# Stopping the project

**Joint Statement  
against the import of Namibian bushwood for use in  
power and heat plants in Hamburg**

**Open Letter**

**to the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development,  
Dr Gerd Müller,  
regarding the GIZ project „Bush Control and Biomass Utilisation“  
(BCBU)**

*Photo:  
Robinwood.  
de*



# What next?

- Watch out for similar plans emerging elsewhere in Europe;
- Conflict of interest by key consultants funded by German government (Unique GmbH) not addressed – they still advise on many other projects;
- Need to examine the role of GIZ played in Namibia