

Good morning

I know this entire area consisting of two of our most beautiful protected areas very well because I was the Chief Executive of the Seychelles National Parks Authority. It is therefore fitting that as Minister I am back here today to preside over the community launch of what could be a game changing project for protected areas in Seychelles. In my various roles in the environment I have pushed for stakeholder engagement in environmental management. This idea of public engagement and ownership is not just a personal belief but it is enshrined in our Constitution and in our protected areas policy. Let me explain.

The Constitution of Seychelles says in Article 8 of the Seychellois Charter of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms that “The State recognizes the right of every person to live in and enjoy a clean, healthy and ecologically balanced environment ...” Article 8 has been much quoted. But what is less known is that the Constitution, in Part II called Fundamental Duties, also says that “it shall be the duty of every citizen of Seychelles” to “protect, preserve and improve the environment”. This is an extraordinary Constitutional Duty which I would say has not been explored and taken on board enough in all our activities but needs to be as we look for more private sector and civil society engagement.

However, in the Seychelles Protected Area Policy published in January 2013, this Duty is translated into what is termed ‘Co-management’. There is an entire section on the subject in this official policy, which I was also involved in the drafting as were others present today. Co-management is defined as “A partnership in which two or more stakeholders negotiate, agree upon guarantee and implement a shared set of management functions, benefits and responsibilities for a particular protected area.”

I will not talk further about the policy as it is enshrined in the upcoming Nature Reserves and Conservancy Act, except to quote one paragraph: “It is also important to acknowledge that a partnership approach to managing protected areas will need to expand under the current global socio-economic conditions. Seychelles has had to restructure its internal budget in recent years and there are only limited resources for conservation coming exclusively from Government. Sharing the sourcing of financial resources among a variety of entities (public and

private) has become of increasing significance especially in an economy which is profoundly dependent on global tourism.” These words are incredibly prophetic as they were written 8 eight years ago. Tourism has collapsed and with it the funding mechanism for protected areas. We must urgently look for other ways to manage these areas.

I am gratified therefore that the LEAP project being implemented by Nature Seychelles has chosen these two protected areas which actually need support, outreach and local ownership. The MOU between Nature Seychelles and SNPA is a great step to establishing formal relations in terms of project management. In practical terms, I hope we will soon move to a joint management committee between the community, which includes the district administration and local leaders, and the SNPA which will mean that co management truly starts to become a reality.

Thank you