



Progress Report 2021

'walking the talk' - one step at a time

Wolwedans
FOUNDATION



Message from the Chairman

The AridEden Project – Wolwedans Vision 2030

Effecting solutions for more resilient tourism/conservation economies

After what has been yet another challenging and uncertain year for everyone, I wanted to share with you some inspiring news about Wolwedans' progress during 2021 and our vision for the future. It is a vision that we believe *everybody* can happily embrace – one that sees the possibility of *being* and doing better for our planet, future generations, and each other.

July 2020 marked our Jubilee year at Wolwedans – 25 years since we pitched our first tents atop the dunes of the Namib Desert. We were optimistic about the future and had a strategy to launch into the next 25 years, better than ever before. Then COVID struck and everything came to a grinding halt. Wolwedans was certainly not spared this unprecedented disruption; it did however provide the luxury of time to reflect, rethink, reboot and open a new chapter. As the saying goes, every crisis bears opportunity – you just need to make use of it.

What emerged in the past two years – more profound and pressing than ever before – is that although the complexity and challenges of our times can often feel overwhelming, we, as humanity must stop talking and start walking. Each and every one of us needs to step up and effect a paradigm shift – away from the depleting yet dominant economic models of the past, towards a more positive, balanced dynamic that respects the interconnectedness between business, natural resources, and people. Wolwedans has accepted its role in this and has developed a practical framework – *The AridEden Project – Wolwedans Vision 2030* – to bring the concept of sustainability to life, showcasing that “business for good” can indeed work. It even inspired our new vision statement: “*Our purpose is the pursuit of Happiness and Wolwedans exists to inspire a new way.*”

To achieve this Vision, we will continue to be guided by the Longrun “Cs”: previously these were Conservation, Community, Culture, and Commerce, and we have added “Consciousness” to ensure that we maintain a mindful awareness of balancing people, planet, and profit.

For each of the 5Cs we have defined activity areas, i.e. projects and programmes, resulting in a 5 x 5 matrix or “**Matrix | 25**”, as we call it. Underpinning all of this is the necessary pursuit of happiness for people (including

guests, team and community), the environment, and the financial bottom line of the Wolwedans Collection, the commercial arm of Wolwedans.

We have committed to sharing our journey, including challenges experienced along the way, lessons we learn, and successes enjoyed by our team's efforts. It is our hope that this will inspire others to act and advance our collective progress towards systems that thrive. In so doing, *The AridEden Project* could even become a blueprint and lighthouse project in Namibia and perhaps even globally!

Wolwedans has a proven track record of delivering high impact developmental and conservation results and we are committed to offering this experience as a platform on which sustainability solutions can be tested, refined and implemented more broadly. Together we can, should, and will get the Wolwedans Foundation and all the good it represents back on track.

As humanity, we are running out of time; action is required now and Wolwedans is poised to do its part while hopefully inspiring others to do the same. The mission cannot be shouldered alone and to make it happen, we need support. We are tremendously grateful for having secured some committed strategic partners, ‘putting shoulder to the wheel’ to make *The AridEden Project – Wolwedans Vision 2030* a reality.

Thanks to these partners (see our thank you's right at the end), we started walking again. One step at a time. As Edward Abbey, said, “Sentiment without action is the ruin of the soul.” What are we waiting for?

We hope you feel inspired reading the first AridEden Project annual progress report and who knows, maybe you consider ‘to put shoulder to the wheel’, thereby becoming a partner and an enabler of change.

The time is now. It's worth a shot.

Stephan Brückner
Chairman Wolwedans Foundation
Windhoek, Namibia



the time is now



The AridEden Project's leading brand image signals a new beginning. Like the Phoenix rising from the ashes, Wolwedans is ready to launch itself into 'the second curve' – a new, holistic and more sustainable trajectory.

At Wolwedans, we have taken pause to rethink how tourism works, who it works for, and how its success is defined. The resulting strategy will be brought to life through *The AridEden Project – Wolwedans Vision 2030* and its practical framework for building more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive tourism/ conservation economies. This framework – referred to as Matrix |25 – embeds Wolwedans' 5Cs sustainability commitment (Commerce | Conservation | Community | Culture | Consciousness) with five spheres of engagement for each 'C', all underpinned by a business philosophy of balancing people, planet, and profit.

People are necessarily at the heart of this strategy – their well-being, development, and empowerment are essential for their own success and for the advancement of Namibia as a whole. We foster this through our vocational training programmes, our desert-based economy projects, and by imparting a 'consciously' lived values system with our entire team.

Ultimately, the potential impact of *The AridEden Project* vests with inspiring others to follow suit, not only in Namibia but globally – from decision-makers, leaders, captains of industry/ commerce and politicians to educators and youth. We intend to create 'consciousness' about local responses to global issues by sharing our journey and showcasing sustainability solutions. In addition to driving change and inspiring a new way, *The AridEden Project* is, simply put, about the pursuit of happiness: happy people– guests, team and stakeholders alike – a happy and healthy environment and, importantly, a happy bottom line.

The time to embark on this bold journey has never been more opportune: it's worth a shot. This is not a short-term effort, this is the future. And we are up for the challenge. As Nelson Mandela aptly said, "It always seems impossible, until it is done."

The 'Wolwedans Way', which is driven to great extent by the work of our Foundation rests on three pillars; Business in balance, happiness and sustainability.



Business in Balance

At Wolwedans, balance applies both to work | life balance for our team, as well balance in our business financial model.

Creating a harmonious work | life balance is essential for physical, emotional, and mental health. Achieving this balance results in less stress, a lower risk of burnout, and a sense of general well-being. This not only benefits employees but employers, too. All members of the Wolwedans team are, therefore, given the opportunity to have a balance between work and their own personal lives.

On the business side, Wolwedans also seeks to maintain 'business in balance', which for us primarily addresses a financial model where profit should equal funds generated by the business for its Foundation 'to do good'. This results in a 50 | 50 balance whereby net profit after tax *equals* net income for the Foundation (derived from guest levies collected). This *excludes* conservation levies, which are collected on behalf of the nature reserve and have been part of the package from the start to provide the reserve with a steady income over the years. Conservation levies collected from Wolwedans guests, to date, exceed 27 million Namibian Dollars, contributing markedly to maintaining biodiversity and conserving the arid wildlands of NamibRand.

In 2017 – striving to make the Wolwedans Foundation financially sustainable and afford it a greater level of independence – a "Foundation Levy" was introduced in addition to the NamibRand Conservation Levy (or park fee as it was called back then). It was an amount equal to the Conservation Levy, which every guest had been happy to pay. These combined levies were charged over and above the lodging rate and listed separately on rate sheets and invoices.

In 2018 these levies were referred to as "Sustainability Levies" with one third channelled directly to the Nature Reserve, one third flowing into community projects via the Desert Academy, and the remaining third spent under Culture and general Foundation expenses. Today the levies make up from 10 - 15% of the guest bill, depending where one stays. The result of making every guest a 'donor' to the mission has been nothing short of extraordinary. Funds collected for doing good amounted to 6.23 million Namibian Dollars in 2019, doubling the commercial entity's net profit after tax.



The Pursuit of Happiness

To be truly happy, you have to be in harmony with your inner self, in harmony with your social environment and live in harmony with nature.

Happiness is a fundamental human desire and a state of mind (and heart) that every individual subconsciously strives for. Sadly, it is often ill-guided and distracted by the pursuit of accumulating material wealth. Money – no matter how much of it you managed to accumulate – does not bring happiness, and neither do the material things we endlessly consume in order to perpetuate the illusion of limitless global economic growth.

With people being at the heart of everything we do at Wolwedans, it was decided in early 2020 to make “the pursuit of happiness” an integral part of the Wolwedans journey, if not its entire purpose: happy people, happy planet, and yes, a happy bottom line.

The concept – which agreeably seems lofty – is inspired by the country of Bhutan, which introduced the *Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index* as an alternative to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measurement of progress or success. The concept accounts for the holistic well-being of ‘the citizens’ while aiming to catalyse sustainable growth across the nation. The architects of this framework recognised that to get an estimation of human well-being, other aspects besides material wealth must be factored into the equation.



Wolwedans' 5Cs of Sustainability are Consciousness | Conservation | Community | Commerce | Culture. They are deeply interconnected – one cannot have optimal impact when out of balance with another – and they frame the holistic and harmonious approach to all that we do.

CONSCIOUSNESS - In the context of day-to-day life at Wolwedans, Consciousness is “the state of being aware of and responsive to one's surroundings – as an organisation and as individuals, including guests”. What one does and why (purpose), how one lives and engages.

CONSERVATION - Conservation safeguards biodiversity and the integrity of the ecosystem services it provides, which in turn support global needs. Conservation at Wolwedans addresses biodiversity and ecosystem services as well as management of energy, water and waste, habitat expansion, and carbon impact reduction.

COMMUNITY - Ensuring and enhancing the well-being of people in general is a fundamental obligation of all. Wolwedans pays its part in this by enhancing the well-being of all with whom it has a direct and indirect relationship. Team and local community impact interventions address fair working conditions, local and regional relations, social ventures, social accountability, capacity building support for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and ‘happiness’, among others.

COMMERCE - Conducted in a more holistic and sustainable way, commerce and trade can be positive contributors to a more sustainable world. Within this dimension Wolwedans addresses issues that affect the financial sustainability of the business and its capacity to provide a source of income for people who depend on it, as well as our ability to reinvest back into initiatives in the other 5Cs.

CULTURE - Celebrating commonality within cultural diversity is what nurtures mutual understanding; this understanding coupled with respecting our uniqueness and differences is crucial to humanity's future. Wolwedans strives to strengthen inter-cultural relationships through understanding, and will honour Namibia's cultural heritage while raising awareness of and celebrating the beauty of cultural diversity.

Matrix | 25

our strategic framework

Fields of the Matrix | 25 with red outline indicate activity areas where we focused on ‘walking the talk’ in 2021, made possible by donors and friends. Over time, all ‘boxes’ comprising our Matrix will be ticked and every box will represent a hive of ongoing project activity. We take it step by step, one project at a time. It’s a 10 year plan after all, and we have achieved a lot.

Matrix | 25 | The AridEden Project | Wolwedans Vision 2030

CONSCIOUSNESS	CONSERVATION	COMMUNITY	COMMERCE	CULTURE
Advocacy Creating awareness through media (digital, print & events), embedded journalist, workshops (through I3Lab)	Levy Collection & Fundraising Financial support for conservation management on NamibRand Nature Reserve & beyond	Education Support Education Assistance Fund, Waldorf & Dabeb schools support, NaDEET	Wolwedans Collection Running lodges & camps, including future development & experiences	Wolwedans Way Internal Wolwedans culture: Purpose Values Compass Lifelong Learning Happiness
Heart & Home Experience Wolwedans Village and its operations in action: transparent and hands-on	Habitat Expansion & Consolidation Facilitation of additional habitat acquisition within and on the periphery of NamibRand	SME Development Small enterprise development: entrepreneur / creativity centre, manufacturing, food production	Desert Based Economy (DBE) Drive DBE concept & inclusivity in the region, EconoMix, empowerment, SME Development	Visual Arts Art studio, artist in residence, art instruction, land art, events and
I3Lab Inspire, Innovate & Incubate Lab: Workshops & events addressing topics of global & local relevance	Resources & Waste Renewable energy, fresh water and waste water Solid Waste Management (Trash to Treasure)	Vocational Training Desert Academy NICE: Hospitality, Horticulture, Facility Maintenance	Village Stays Training hotel & guesthouse in Wolwedans Village, generating Foundation income	Performing Arts Music Choir Drumming Plays Spoken word Poetry
Retreats Mind, Body & Soul: health happiness spirituality & mindfulness family corporate	Tree Project Indigenous tree and plants: nursery, plant sales and large-scale tree planting project	RuralRevive Community Development: laundry, water, energy, horticulture, LifeSkills, clean-up	Horticulture & Animal Husbandry Nursery, sustainable fruit and vegetable as well as livestock farming, with value addition for (DBE).	Cultural Festival Celebrating culture, tradition, folklore during annual Winter Games & Winter Cup
Experiences Crafting individual and team activities that ‘feed’ Head Heart	Large Landscape Rehabilitation & beautification, GSNL (Greater Sossusvlei Namib Landscape) engagement and support.	Team Well-being Board & lodging, recreation and sports, Winter Games, Wolwedans Winter Cup	Merchandising Commercial development of locally-made uniforms, leisure wear, accessories	Heritage Built, cultural & natural heritage respected, preserved (site restoration, traditional dress-making, etc.)

Meandering through the Matrix | 25

Projects that launched *The AridEden Project* into motion in 2021 are shared on the subsequent pages. We are pleased that the Wolwedans Foundation, despite next to zero income from sustainability levies due to lack of tourist arrivals (COVID), tackled and got so much done. And importantly, managed to pull partners on board. Join us on a meander through the Matrix | 25, C by C, milestone by milestone, action by action.

Consciousness

Advocacy

Getting the message out there by telling authentic stories of our sustainability journey was a missed (and lost) opportunity in the past. Going ahead, Wolwedans will correct this, approaching advocacy activities with vigour and engaging media professionals to drive the message. After all, without effectively communicating *The AridEden Project's* progress on various channels and platforms, our primary aim of inspiring a new way to bring about a mindset and paradigm shift will not be met. *AridEden* storytelling – around the Matrix | 25 will bring sustainability to life through palatable examples and virtual platforms, making the complex 'bigger picture' easier to comprehend.



The shape elements reflected within the AridEden logo were inspired by the Hoodia plant, a resilient and endemic euphorbia that grows in Namibia's arid environments of the Namib, Hardap and Kalahari. Whilst the flower determines the logo's overall form (like a transparent pentagon), the five main 'petals' correspond with our 5Cs sustainability framework. At its 'heart, the 'happy being' figure resembles Hoodia seedlings as they grow out of fertile ground into the light, bursting with joy and energy. Like the initiatives of our vision, a pod filled with many seeds sows hope for germination that brings new life. So fitting!

Objective: Create an AridEden Project brand (name/logo/ look and feel)

Impact: Clear design/colour/communication guidelines

Progress made in 2021

- ✔ AridEden branding (logo, colours etc.) in place and implemented
- ✔ Revamp of Wolwedans brand (all divisions) in place and partially implemented
- ✔ AridEden website (www.arideden.org) developed and live, driving 5C narrative
- ✔ Social media channels (Insta|FB|Youtube) established and actively managed

Heart & Home Village Tour

"Heart & Home" refers to Wolwedans Village – the heart of our day-to-day operations and home to the people making it all happen. Our Heart & Home welcomes guests on arrival, is home to much of the infrastructure that supports our commitment to sustainability and 5Cs initiatives of *The AridEden Project*, and is the headquarters for brainstorming future initiatives and honing service excellence. What's more – it is all operated under an 'open door' policy, inviting visitors to see and learn what makes the wheels of the Wolwedans camps and Foundation turn.



The Wolwedans Village is an intriguing maze of operational buildings, accommodation units, classrooms and gardens. Walking through this 'maze' with a guide who explains the workings of the Wolwedans Village and sustainability at play is an informative two hour guest activity ending with brunch or lunch in the vegetable gardens.

Objective: Design tour and implement Heart&Home as a signature guest activity

Impact: Creating awareness with guests and team about sustainability, business in balance and happiness, the three pillars Wolwedans and The AridEden Project rest on.

Progress made in 2021:

- ✔ Three routes (short|medium|long) for Heart & Home established as a guest activity
- ✔ Introductory presentation in place (and refined as we go)

Conservation/Resources

Water

Wolwedans is blessed with a stable supply of underground water and is the last extraction point before it drains into the Atlantic Ocean. And although plentiful, accessing this most precious of all natural resources is technically challenging and complex. Not only is this vital resource flowing at more than 130 metres below the desert surface, but it must also be distributed to the various camp locations, which are up to 5 kms away and at an elevation gain of an additional 140 metres.

Water bottling plant

In 2019, a normal year pre-COVID Wolwedans consumed some 65,000 500ml plastic water bottles. If there was one aspect in need of change it was to stop this madness, so doing the switch from plastic to re-usable glass bottles was one of the most obvious projects to tackle, also in terms of reducing our solid waste, recyclable or not. Installing a water bottling facility to enable us to bottle safe drinking water in a hygienic environment was key to making this happen. The project is set up as being 'owned' by the Foundation, with water being sold to the Wolwedans Camps at market value and hence secure an annual income of some 200k.



A special bottling room was built close to the pump house in 2021 to house the bottling plant in a hygienic environment.

Objective: Serve drinking water to guests in glass bottles (vs Plastic) when tourism resumes. Create a sustainable income stream for the Wolwedans Foundation.

Impact: Saving some 65,000+ PET plastic bottles p.a. (when occupancy back at 2019 level)

Progress made in 2021

- ✓ Water bottling plant built, equipment procured and partially installed. Commissioning planned for April 2022, when tourist arrivals will hopefully return to sustainable numbers.

Energy

Wolwedans embraced renewable energy from the word go, with some NAD11.2 million being invested in solar energy projects since 2011. Whilst all our camps run 100% on solar power, Wolwedans Village was still running a generator for some three hours a day to pump water to the various operational areas, requiring some 15 kW of power when all pumps were running. It was another obvious project to tackle – a solar plant up-grade to do away with fossil fuel burning generators. It just didn't belong into "the Wolwedans Way".



The new solar farm (17kW) positioned on the main stores and feeding into the Wolwedans grid when the sun shines

Objective: Install additional solar capacity (17kW) for water pumping with grid feed

Impact: Generator running time reduced from three hours per day to zero = zero CO₂

Progress made in 2021

- ▼ 17 kW solar up-grade installed to pump water, including the first grid-feed system making the Wolwedans Village run on 100% renewable energy

Interesting side note:

Renewable power generation is a pursuit under *The AridEden Project* while simultaneously establishing an income stream for the Wolwedans Foundation. An idea is that the ownership of current solar infrastructure at Wolwedans, would be transferred/sold to the Foundation (at depreciated book value), enabling it to sell clean, renewable power to the commercial entity of Wolwedans and others also beyond Wolwedans when it comes to future installations, hence securing a sustainable income that would be used to do good. The sale of the existing infrastructure (at camps and the village) would also provide a much-needed cash injection into the post COVID recovery phase of the commercial entity.

Solid Waste

The waste management area at Wolwedans Village was built 20 years ago and had become inadequate for our needs. Space constraints made proper waste sorting and effective management impossible. Also, the facility was situated in the heart of the Village; when it was built, this location was on the (then smaller) Village periphery. Even when kept neat and tidy, waste is a messy (and at times smelly) affair and its location therefore needed to be shifted. Access for the waste removal truck that takes waste to Windhoek for safe disposal and recycling had become difficult as well, with too many beautiful, large shade trees in the way.

A new facility called “The Gallery” was built during 2021. It has ample storage cages enclosed with fine mesh so the wind cannot carry any trash away and pollute the desert and waste cannot be easily accessed by the wildlife with whom we share this unique desert habitat. It is a state of art facility and features prominently with every Heart & Home Tour. The old facility will not go to waste (pun intended); it will be converted into a mushroom house/ farm as part of our horticulture activities. And while logistical and capacity needs have been addressed, Wolwedans acknowledges that the first priority is to minimise the volume of waste created and, thereafter, to reuse it as a resource to meet other needs. We will drive this under a “Trash2Treasure” initiative, which will accompany the inauguration of The Gallery in early 2022.



“The Gallery” was completed in December 2021 and sets a new benchmark within the African safari / lodge sector. It might well become a Namibian Centre of Excellence with regards to Solid Waste Management. Our first ‘Angel’ Christine Lühle-van Dam (ConTine Foundation) who bridge-financed, is delighted to see progress and looks forward to “The Gallery” in action.

Objective: Build a new state of the art Waste Management Facility

Impact: Once fully operational (by April 2022) solid waste leaving Wolwedans is reduced by 75%

Progress made in 2021

- ✔ Solid Waste Management Facility – The Gallery – built and completed during 2021
- ✔ Team training/awareness campaign formulated, and waste-awareness workshop format finalized, a concept that can be shared and applied in other contexts and shared broadly
- ✔ Waste transport system in place and colour-coded wheelie bins procured for effective sorting

Tree Project

The Tree Project is a large-scale, indigenous tree planting initiative as well as a tree and plant nursery based at the Wolwedans Village. Guests are given the opportunity to adopt one or more trees at the Village – whether small, medium, or even the biggest of them!

Planted and “adopted” trees are irrigated with recycled water from the Village operations and simultaneously contribute to our CO₂ sequestration and quality of life enhancements for the Wolwedans team staying at the Village. Proceeds from tree adoptions will go towards securing the grey water recycling system that is needed to ensure the tree grows to full size and realises its full conservation, carbon sequestration, and inhabitant well-being potential.



Over 200 trees have been planted at the Wolwedans Village over the course of the past ten years, gradually transforming it into an oasis that enhances the well-being of the team members and trainees who live there, while also creating habitat for small creatures that have made it their home. Trees and hedges provide shade and shelter from the hot, dry desert winds, and perhaps one day there may even be enough flowers to support bee colonies – the ultimate goal and icing on *The AridEden Project* cake.

tree & plant nursery

Once the tree planting goals for Wolwedans Village have been achieved, the Tree Project will expand to include tree and plant sales beyond Wolwedans, simultaneously greening spaces, soaking up carbon, and generating an income for the Foundation. In preparation for this, we have started a nursery and linked it with our horticulture training (which launched its pilot course with a passionate intake of learners in mid-2021).

The training ensures that Namibian youth learn about caring for seedlings and young trees, and how to nurture them to a size that is attractive to the market. These trees and plants can then be sold to businesses and individuals in the surrounding area, generating income for the Foundation while building market-related horticulture skills and business acumen for potential tree entrepreneurs of the future!



Tree planting is a celebrated affair and involves the Horticulture trainees – after preparing the ground - singing when the tree is planted by a guest/donor who adopted it for NAD 5.000. Trees gifted to AridEden ‘Angels’ are honoured with a tree ring around them. In 10 years’ time, this will make for charming resting spots, enhancing the wellbeing of people and birds.

Objective: Green up Wolwedans Village and turn into an ‘AridEden’ and importantly, raise funds

Impact: Awareness and sizeable fund-raiser for the Wolwedans Foundation

Progress made in 2021

- ✔ Tree Nursery built housing some 350 trees and a seedling nursery
- ✔ 365 trees (1.5m high) procured and settled into tree nursery (this is to kick-start the project and have reasonably sizes trees ready for adoption
- ✔ 27 trees adopted by guests by end 2021 (at NAD 5000/tree) and ceremoniously planted at the Wolwedans Village. Some trees were gifted to wedding couples, HSH Princess of Liechtenstein and other.
- ✔ 1000+ trees (*acacia galpinii*) raised from seed to scale and going to nursery and the beyond Wolwedans (i.e. Maltahöhe, schools in Hardap region).

Community

Vocational Training

Wolwedans is committed to supporting young Namibians by equipping them with the skills necessary to make a meaningful contribution to society through their work, enabling them to provide for themselves and their families.

Our focus is on hospitality training in which the Wolwedans Foundation has invested for over a decade. We run two accredited, private vocational training centres: the Desert Academy in NamibRand Nature Reserve and the Namibian Institute of Culinary Education (NICE) in Windhoek. Both provide a “living classroom” approach, exposing trainees to a real world working environment from the outset. This environment gives trainees relevant, practical work experience – something that has proven to be a major stumbling block for recruitment in the sector.

Since 2007, ± 350 young Namibians have obtained a Namibian Training Authority Level III qualification from Wolwedans’ training programmes, with consistent pass rates exceeding 90% (compared with a national average of less than 40%)! Qualifications are earned in either “Food & Beverage Service” or “Commercial Cookery”.



Going ahead, Wolwedans plans to expand these successful training offerings to include Horticulture, Facility Maintenance, Ranger, and Field Guide programmes. Facility Maintenance has already been developed with NQA approved unit standards and is a nationally accredited qualification; the same will be pursued for a Desert Academy qualification in Horticulture. A curriculum will then be developed for each that ensures a good balance of theory and practical training to give job seekers and entrepreneurs marketable skill sets and experience. Ranger and Field Guide training will form part of a subsequent expansion phase for our vocational offering, as could additional vocational fields. We have seen the impact this kind of opportunity has on young Namibians and we will continue to respond to Namibia’s economic and capacity development needs, playing our part where we can.

Given our increasing emphasis on training to develop Namibia's tourism economy, we may eventually convert Wolwedans Village into a Training Campus. We will also boost our fundraising drive through the Education Assistance Fund to ensure that fees to attend these quality vocational training programmes do not pose prohibitive barriers for promising, young Namibian candidates.

When Namibia was locked down in April 2020 a decision was taken to close NICE (the Namibian Institute of Culinary Education) for the time being and send all remaining trainees to Wolwedans to complete their Level III training. NICE – still mothballed - will hopefully be re-opened in September 2022.

The Wolwedans Desert Academy provides a lodge-based campus in the NamibRand Nature Reserve: a natural, healthy and safe environment for vocational and life skills training where trainees can focus on what matters most – their education. In addition to acquiring skills and nationally accredited qualifications, trainees are exposed to the concept of sustainability as well as a culture deeply-rooted in values, mutual respect and harmony.

The training academy empowers young Namibians with skills and experience related to all aspects of lodge-based operations and hospitality, including courses on food and beverage service, kitchen, housekeeping and laundry operations, maintenance, guiding, and front office administration. Trainees learn the importance of working together whilst building confidence through exposure to a variety of departments in a supervised environment. Multi-skilling like this is an important aspect in the sector; it ensures that graduates are well rounded individuals that can slot into a variety of positions in any organisation.

Vocational training in the heart of the NamibRand Nature Reserve at Wolwedans – one of Namibia's top travel experience destinations – is the perfect springboard to a career in the hospitality sector.

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For more information about the Wolwedans Desert Academy and its training programmes, visit <https://wolwedansdesertacademy.org/>.

Objective: Further develop Desert Academy Vocational Training

Impact: Securing livelihoods, offering highly relevant qualifications in hospitality and horticulture (and others), and building capacity to scale

Progress made in 2021

- ✔ 21 Desert Academy Trainees graduated in July 2021, despite COVID disruption
- ✔ New intake of 22 Hospitality trainees/apprentices enrolled at Desert Academy in October thanks to a grant by the Social Security Commission Development Fund and ongoing commitment by the Namibia Training Authority (NTA)
- ✔ Pilot in Horticulture Training commenced in September 2021 with 12 trainees
- ✔ The Wolwedans Foundation drove the process to have Facility Maintenance for the hospitality sector registered as a new national qualification with the NQA.

RuralRevive

‘RuralRevive’ – which is fast becoming one of Wolwedans’ most inspiring ventures – is a medium- to long-term development and community revitalisation project to take shape in Maltahöhe, the closest settlement – situated 180 km further East - that is marred by high unemployment, destitution, pollution and social disintegration – like so many other small villages in rural Namibia that have seen better days.



Two adjoining properties were secured by the Wolwedans Foundation in 2021 to form the ‘home’ and logistical base of the project. The properties will house the Laundry, Greenhouses and the initial Barn as well as project staff accommodation.

Approximately 20% of the Wolwedans staff and trainees hail from Maltahöhe and surrounds, creating a connection for us through our team. Situated some 180 kms to the east of NamibRand Nature Reserve, it is our closest village and, therefore, “community”. It is also along the Wolwedans weekly supply route, which is yet another reason why supporting its socio-economic development presents win-win opportunities for everyone.

‘RuralRevive’ will be tackled in partnership with the people of Maltahöhe with initial financial support generously provided by the Social Security Commission Development Fund and the Julius Bär Foundation.

The first three to five years of the initiative will seek to achieve the following:

1. Establish a laundry facility
2. Conduct Horticulture production & training
3. Launch The Barn / Trading Post as a trading hub
4. Implement the DesertRunner transport solution
5. Introduce community clean-up and solid waste management activities in the Daweb Constituency

A capacity building programme in 'business basics', referred to as "EconoMix", will be on offer as an over-arching activity. It is a tailor-made, entry-level business management course that includes the basics of financial intelligence (how to manage money and debt), costing, procurement, HR/ admin, negotiation skills, and marketing. EconoMix will serve as the backbone to entrepreneurial empowerment across all RuralRevive business development projects.

Individuals who pursue personal career aspirations will be supported with basic business skills to convert these aspirations into financially viable livelihoods, enabling people to take charge of their own destiny. As RuralRevive builds momentum and additional stakeholders see merit in coming on board, new and complementary business ventures will naturally evolve in the region, ranging from diversified services and value-add production, to manufacturing and retail. Eventually, Maltahöhe could be a thriving business hub again, creating jobs and sustaining livelihoods.

In anticipation of 'RuralRevive' things to come, the Wolwedans Foundation secured two adjacent properties in with sufficient existing infrastructure to host some of the above developments. There is even a borehole! Existing buildings are in a solid state and simply need a few touch-ups and alterations to get going.

Objective: "Make Maltahöhe great again" by reviving the local economy

Impact: improved livelihoods, food security, carbon mitigation, waste management and stimulus

Progress made in 2021

- ✔ Two adjoining properties secured for start of project (input of Wolwedans Foundation)
- ✔ Project outline further developed and fine-tuned
- ✔ Funding secured from two institutional donors, to name The Social security Commission development Fund as well as the Julius Bär Foundation in Switzerland.
- ✔ Steering Committee put in place

Commerce

Trade and the accumulation of wealth have been central to the growth and development of civilisations over thousands of years and are likely to remain so, at least to a degree. Business transactions carried out in a manner that is not conscious and intentional sometimes have negative impacts and consequences, even though often unintended. Conducted in a more holistic way that considers sustainability, however, these transactions can make positive contributions and even rehabilitate and regenerate societies from the negative impacts of the past.

Wolwedans is conscious of how its activities impact on people and places. With an approach of doing better as we know better, we are continuously refocusing how we trade. Of practical and paramount importance to this is financial sustainability, not only of the for-profit side of our business, but also of the Wolwedans Foundation. We must set our sights on achieving financial sustainability if the respective activities of these ventures are to provide a source of income for people who depend on it, as well as ensure our ability to continue reinvesting into 5C initiatives.

Most commerce at Wolwedans takes shape under the umbrella of NamibRand Safaris, trading as "The Wolwedans Collection". Progress on the Foundation front was made with regards to conceptualizing "The Desert Based Economy", a project that will be driven by the Foundation under 'The AridEden Project' umbrella. No concrete projects were tackled in 2021 from the Foundation.

Objective: Strengthen income stream for the Foundation

Impact: Self-sufficiency and resilience

Progress made in 2021

- ✔ None

Culture

Celebrating commonality within a world of cultural diversity is what nurtures mutual understanding; coupled with respecting our uniqueness and differences, it is this mutual understanding that is crucial to humanity's future. Drawing on our uniqueness, we enrich each other and contribute to a greater common good.

Wolwedans strives to strengthen inter-cultural relationships through understanding and honours Namibia's cultural heritage while raising awareness of and celebrating the beauty of cultural diversity. We create a variety of platforms through which we can support, advance for and celebrate cultural diversity, and enrich lives by awakening people's creative spirit.



The morning circle (completed in Feb 2021) serves both as a daily assembly point for team, trainees, contractors and visitors alike, as well as a cultural event and performing arts venue. It brings people together each morning - on the periphery of Wolwedans Village, creating a wonderful sense of community and togetherness.

Objective: Create a central focal point for the Wolwedans community

Impact: Sense of community and consciousness established

Progress made in 2021

- ▼ Morning Circle built and used (daily) for daily assembly and culture events

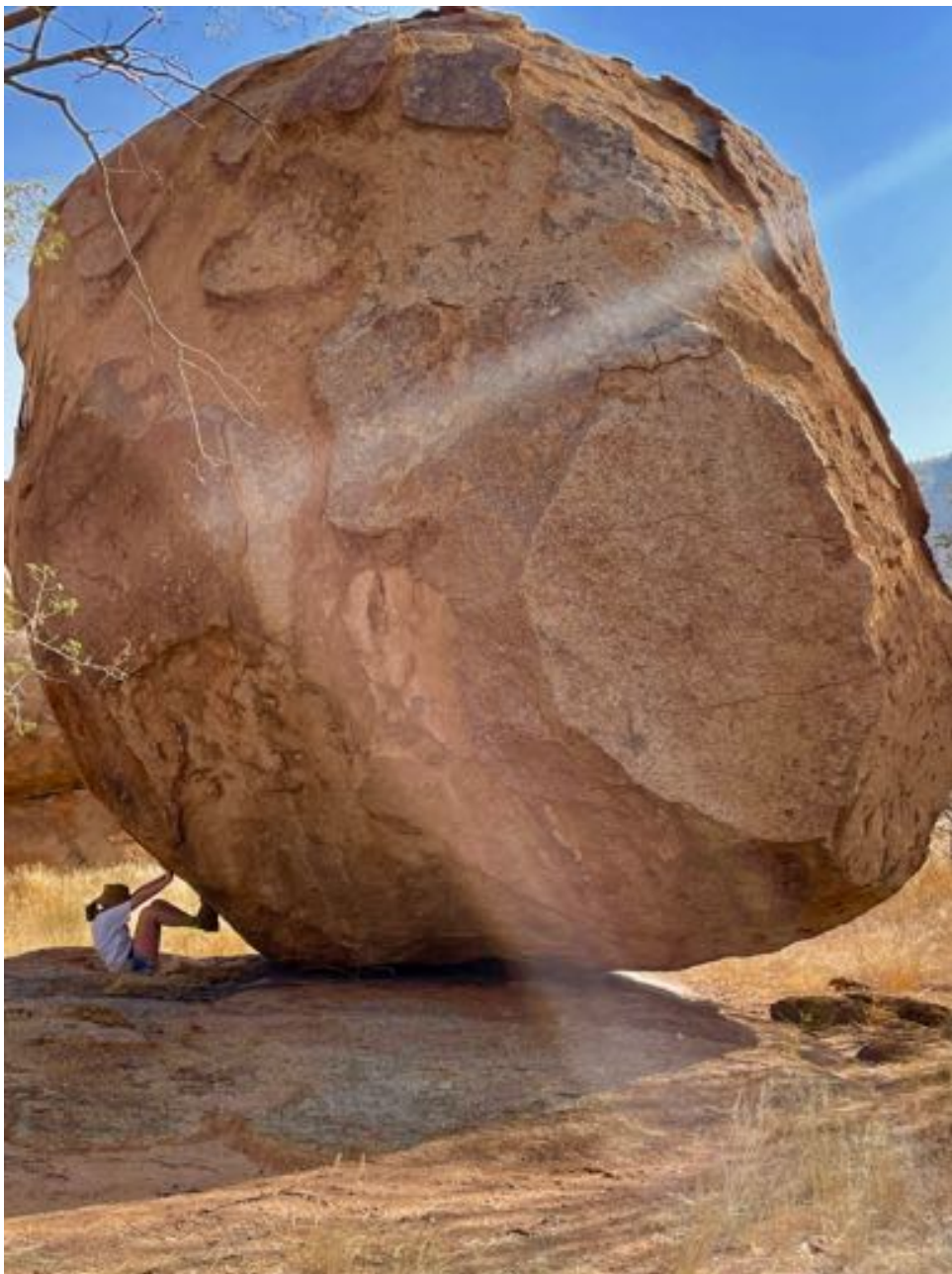
In terms of other Culture activities under the Matrix | 25 framework, comprising Visual Arts, Performing Arts and Heritage restoration not much has happened in 2021 due to a lack of funds. The same applies to the 'Cultural Festival' which will be hosted when team numbers return to pre-COVID levels.

The Road Ahead

Bringing sustainability to life through *The AridEden Project's* [Matrix | 25](#) requires the development, financing, and implementation of a range of integrated projects and programmes. An overview of the projects envisaged for the next 10 years, which are in various stages of development, may be downloaded [here](#). These include projects that are still in their infancy and are simply "seeds planted", through to those completed and documented.

With the first of these under way, we look forward to refining these as well as incorporating new ideas that will surely develop organically as we put our shoulder to the wheel to make it all happen.

Will you join us. On this mission?



*It always seems
impossible until it is
done*
(Nelson Mandela)

Thank you



From the barren desert soil and circumstance (think COVID), new life emerges, thanks to individuals, institutions and family trusts - who see merit in the journey Wolwedans has chosen – putting shoulder to the wheel of building back better.

Investing in 'doing good' has been core to Wolwedans since day one through raising revenue for conservation management of the NamibRand Nature Reserve and, over the past decade, with an increasing focus on broader development impacts. With the reality of completely depleted reserves in a post-COVID trading environment, our capacity to continue with these future-focused activities had been gravely hampered. Years might have been lost at the expense of people and the planet.

Instead of giving up, however, we reached out and joined hands with like-minded individuals and institutions – those who want to be part of the change that we all want to see. We are eternally grateful for their support and for sharing in the vision. Our promise: to remain dedicated and to continue to roll up our sleeves to do the work on the ground.

(in alphabetical order)

ConTine Foundation | Germany



The AridEden Project | Wolwedans

- ✓ AridEden webpage, launch event & ongoing media
- ✓ 80% of a 17kW solar up-grade with grid feed technology to handle all water pumping with the sun
- ✓ 80% of Water Bottling Plant at Wolwedans Village
- ✓ Bridge finance for 90% of Wolwedans Solid Waste Management Facility (“The Gallery”).
- ✓ 100% of “The Tree Project” - including 365 trees and a tree nursery for 500 plants
- ✓ Finance for Horticulture Training pilot phase with 12 trainees and accreditation process.
- ✓ Ongoing commitment pledged, way beyond 2021

NTA – Namibia Training Authority | Namibia



Wolwedans Desert Academy

- ✔ Approx. 50% of training budget for new intake of 2 Hospitality Trainees Level II, (started Oct 2021 - 2023)

Social Security Commission Development Fund | Namibia



Wolwedans Desert Academy

- ✔ 50% of training budget top-up for new intake of 16 Hospitality Trainees, eight hailing from marginalized backgrounds (2021-2023)

RuralRevive Project – Maltahöhe

- ✔ 50% (match funding) of Laundry in Maltahöhe (2022)
- ✔ 50% (match funding) of Horticulture Project with special emphasis on skills transfer in Maltahöhe
- ✔ 50% (match funding) of Solar Project as well as Wastewater Treatment Plant for laundry water in Maltahöhe

Next?

The Matrix | 25 provides ample opportunity to put shoulder to the wheel and get involved. To get a glimpse of what lies ahead, in terms of Mission/Vision 2030 have a look at:

https://www.arideden.org/fileadmin/photos/projects/project_list/TAEP-Project-Overview_09_2021.pdf