

# Namibia, The Republic of

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## Vital Statistics

The territory of the Republic of Namibia constitutes the Namibia North and Namibia South Conferences, which are church administrative units of the Southern Africa Union Conference within the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division of Seventh-day Adventists. Church statistics (2021) for Namibia were as follows: churches, 132; companies, 28; membership, 24,941; ordained ministers, 8; licensed ministers, 14.<sup>1</sup> The country's population is estimated at 2,586,000, which makes the member-to-non-member ratio 1:103.

Statistics for the local conferences: *Namibia North Conference*: churches, 102; membership, 17,661; ordained ministers, 5; licensed ministers, 7. *Namibia South Conference*: churches, 30; membership, 6,514; ordained minister, 3; licensed ministers, 7.<sup>2</sup>

Additional statistics (2020) for Namibia: Adventists Deaths Per Thousand, 3.56; General Population Deaths Per Thousand, 8.00; Church Membership Per Ten Thousand Population, 96; Population Per Member Ratio, 104; Percentage Net Membership Growth, 3 percent over the last year, and 42 percent in the previous 10 years.<sup>3</sup>

## Overview

The Republic of Namibia is a coastal country in Southern Africa bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the west, Angola to the north, Zambia and Zimbabwe to the northeast, Botswana to the east, and South Africa to the south. The country is divided into 13 administrative regions. Windhoek, located in the center of the country, is its capital city. Namibia has a dry, arid climate with five geographic zones. Along the coast is the world's driest desert, known as the Namib desert. A central plateau containing most of the arable land stretches across the country from north to south. Towards the south is a great escarpment containing hilly rocky shrublands where the Fish River Canyon, the largest canyon in Africa, can be found. On the Caprivi Strip one sees the bushveld, the greenest part of Namibia as it contains savannahs and forests. The fifth and final geographic zone is the Kalahari Desert in the east of the country.<sup>4</sup>

Namibia is sparsely populated with more than half of its population concentrated in the far north of the country.

<sup>5</sup> Ethnically, about "85 percent of Namibians are Black, 5 percent of European ancestry, and 10 percent are, in

South African terminology, Coloured.<sup>6</sup> Of its Black majority, 66 percent are Ovambo. At the same time, the rest are made up of smaller groups, such as the Kavango and Herero, Damara and Nama people groups, and still smaller minority groups, such as the Himba, Lozi, and San. While some have identified at least 28 languages spoken in Namibia,<sup>7</sup> most sources agree that there are 13 official languages with Afrikaans as the *lingua franca*.<sup>8</sup> Namibia has a predominantly Protestant religious affiliation, with the largest Protestant group being the Lutheran Church, and a minority practices Traditional African Religions.

Namibia's GDP is supported by agriculture, fishing, mining, exports, and, to a small scale, manufacturing.<sup>9</sup> Due to its political past, Namibia still exports most of its raw materials and imports most of its manufactured goods.<sup>10</sup> The country generally has a good system of roads connecting all major cities and a railway system operated by Trans-Namib which transverses the country. Namibia has one international airport in Windhoek and domestic airports and landing strips in 10 of its 13 regions.

The first known people to occupy the territory of Namibia were the nomadic hunter-gatherer group known as the San. A pastoralist people group known as the Nama occupied the southern regions of Namibia. Towards the northwest and central areas, farmers known as the Herero, believed to have descended from central Africa, occupied the land. In the north, more Bantu groups who migrated from further north in Africa habited along the Kunene River. They were known as the Ovambo. The Kavango people, somewhat related to the Ovambo dominated the territory to the east. These people groups were not militarily strong, which made them easy targets during the colonial territorial scramble.<sup>11</sup>

During the late 1880s, the Germans infiltrated the territory of Namibia and annexed it as South West Africa.<sup>12</sup> Earlier conflicts between the Herero and the Nama already prejudiced the natives towards outsiders who infiltrated the territory. Consequently, in 1904, soon after the German occupation, the Herero resisted the Germans to their detriment. The Germans killed off Hereros and drove the remainder into the Kalahari desert, where they perished due to starvation and thirst. It is estimated that the Herero population was reduced by more than 80 percent due to this conflict. The Nama uprising against the Germans later in 1907 also resulted in killing many while the survivors were suppressed into concentration camps where at least two-thirds died due to the poor living conditions.<sup>13</sup> When Namibia gained independence in 1990, the government condemned this conflict as genocide.<sup>14</sup>

During the German annexation, an outbreak of rinderpest among the livestock threatened South West Africa's agricultural production. A veterinary cordon fence, which acted as a quarantine boundary, was erected to limit the migration of livestock from the north of the fence to the south. This protected the livestock of the colonially governed central and southern territory from the outbreak of this disease, which killed many of the livestock of the pastoralist natives who resided beyond the fence to the north.<sup>15</sup>

The territory south of the veterinary cordon fence (VCF) became known as the 'Police Zone' while the territory north of the VCF was left to the rule of the traditional authorities.<sup>16</sup> This fence later became a political boundary

within South West Africa which detained the South West indigenous people from the industrializing southern territory's economic boom due to the mining industry and the exports of their healthy meat. The VCF also became known as the 'Redline' since it was indicated with a redline on most maps.

World War I ended the German annexation, and the Germans surrendered South West Africa to the Union of South Africa in 1915. Later, when the League of Nations was organized, they granted the Union of South Africa the mandate to govern South West Africa.<sup>17</sup> South Africa intended to incorporate South West Africa as a province. A dispute arose between the Union of South Africa and the League of Nations regarding the extent to which South Africa's governing rights in South West Africa extended.<sup>18</sup> South Africa claimed full sovereignty over South West Africa, even negotiating border shifts with Portugal along the Angolan-South West Africa Border. The League of Nations considered this a "regrettable misunderstanding"<sup>19</sup> on South Africa's part. World War II, followed by the demise of the League of Nations in 1946, temporarily halted the dispute regarding South Africa's claim to South West Africa.

The United Nations was organized in 1945 and took over the responsibilities of the League of Nations when it was dissolved. South Africa then brought its desire to incorporate South West Africa as its territory to the United Nations. The indigenous people of South West Africa were given an opportunity to express their desire. Since 30 percent of the indigenous people could not be reached during the survey, the General Assembly of the United Nations resolved that it would not accede to South Africa's request but rather place South West Africa under the international trusteeship system.<sup>20</sup> South Africa, in turn, did not accede to the resolution of the United Nations.

South Africa, by 1948 already under the rule of the National Party *Apartheid* government which enforced segregation among Whites and non-Whites, ignored the United Nation's plight to allow South West Africa to attain autonomy. South Africa distributed all the land below the VCF to South African *Boer* settlers who benefited from the *Apartheid* regime. With economic inequality, such as the 80 percent Black majority only consuming 12 percent of the GDP, while the 10 percent White minority consumed 80 percent of the GDP, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) was established to combat the economic injustice which prevailed against the indigenous people of South West Africa.<sup>21</sup>

SWAPO immediately attracted military resistance from the South African government, which tried to protect their economic benefit. SWAPO comprised mainly of the Owambo people, who were confined to the northernmost territories of South West Africa along the Angolan border. As early as 1968, the United Nations declared the South African occupation of South West Africa illegal and changed the country's name to Namibia. South Africa ignored the legal pronouncement and continued to exercise control in South West Africa. When Angola gained independence in 1975, they provided support to SWAPO in fighting South Africa. This placed severe pressure on South Africa, which, in turn, increased its military resistance.

United Nations tried to implement sanctions, but this was countered by international role players with much economic interest vested in South West Africa's trade market. When the South African military seemed to gain

the upper hand, Cuban troops entered Angola in support of the fight against South Africa's unlawful occupation.<sup>22</sup> The war had a severe economic impact on all the countries involved. In 1988, the United States of America mediated negotiations between South Africa, Angola, and Cuba. The agreement resulted in Cuba withdrawing their troops from Angola while South Africa withdrew their forces from South West Africa.

South Africa agreed to surrender elections to United Nations supervision. In 1989, SWAPO emerged victorious with 57 percent of the votes. Sam Nujoma became the first president of the Republic of Namibia. On March 21, 1990, the South African flag over Windhoek was lowered, and the Namibian flag was hoisted at the National Stadium.<sup>23</sup> Namibia finally realized independence.

## Origins of Adventist Work in the North

The Seventh-day Adventist work in Namibia developed independently in the north and the south. The origins of the Adventist work in South West Africa came from a "Macedonian call." In 1918, Chief Chikamatondo, one of two chiefs in the Caprivi Strip, sent a request through British authorities for missionaries to come to the Caprivi Strip.<sup>24</sup> Providence withheld the request from being passed on for two years, until 1920, when it was passed to W. H. Anderson. Until then, not a single Seventh-day Adventist was present along the western coast of the continent of Africa. W. H. Branson, president of the African Division, reported this startling fact as follows:

Beginning just a little north of Cape Town, you may follow up this coast clear to Nigeria, at the neck of the continent - a distance of about three thousand miles - without finding a single spot where a Seventh-day Adventist missionary has ever made a footprint, at least so far as doing mission work is concerned.<sup>25</sup>

Anderson, who was then living in Mafikeng, South Africa, set out the following week to visit the chief in the Caprivi Strip. Chief Chikamatondo was glad to receive Anderson. He and his entire village came out to hear Anderson preach. The chief desired that Adventists should make the whole country their missionary base.<sup>26</sup> Anderson soon left and promised to send two African teachers to commence teaching the children in Chief Chikamatondo's village. These two African teachers were from Rusangu Mission in North Rhodesia and were named Henry Mabona and Nathan Muyapekwa.<sup>27</sup> As soon as they arrived, Chief Chikamatonda sent 120 villagers out to gather materials for erecting buildings and within a matter of a few days, a dwelling house and a schoolhouse was set up to begin the work.<sup>28</sup> The first school was thus established at Chief Chikamatonda's village known as Ikaba.

## Pioneers of Adventism in the North

The first White missionaries sent to the Caprivi Strip, who followed teachers Mabona and Muyapekwa, were Gilbert L. Willmore and his assistant, Neville Bulgin. Willmore was called to the Caprivi Strip from Congo. His journey to the Caprivi strip was treacherous, having to go by bicycle over hilly terrains and crossing gullies over

trees cut down to fall over the ravines to cross with their belongings on their head and bicycles balanced on their shoulders.<sup>29</sup>

Upon arriving at the Caprivi Strip in 1922, Willmore first determined to find more suitable land to establish their mission. The best place they could see, Kalimbeza, offered level ground near a water source with big trees to provide shade for Sabbath meetings. This site was, however, not free from danger. It was located on a path used by lions, and they also encountered snakes, hippopotamuses, crocodiles, elephants, buffalo, leopards, and hyenas. The Caprivi Strip was so isolated from civilization that during the visit of the African Division president, W. H. Branson, and his associate, W. E. Straw, they discovered that the missionaries and the natives had lost track of time and kept Friday as the Sabbath day.<sup>30</sup>

The first converts were baptized in 1922 following Willmore's arrival at Caprivi Strip. This was due to the preparatory work done by Mabona and Muyapekwa, who preceded Willmore to the region. Among the first fruits was Gladstone Akabeswa Imasiku. He was from Barotseland (now the Western Province of Zambia) and came to Caprivi Strip seeking a teaching job when he learned that Seventh-day Adventists established a mission post there. He translated 150 hymns from the Christ In Song Hymnal into Silozi.<sup>31</sup> In 1976, pastors and laypeople translated an additional 232 hymns. Imasiku's arrival was God-sent, as he proved to be one of the best teachers and a much needed-translator for the missionaries.

Willmore's first tenure in the Caprivi Strip was short-lived as he was called to Rusangu Mission at the end of 1922. He was then replaced by Elder and Mrs Samuel M. Konigmacher. Konigmacher continued the good work started by Willmore. However, it became necessary during his stint to relocate the mission station. In 1925, the Kalimbeza Mission experienced flooding that destroyed the fruit trees and endangered the home where the Konigmachers lived.<sup>32</sup> The mission was therefore relocated to Katima Mulilo and accordingly renamed Katima Mulilo Mission.

During the latter part of 1927, N. C. Wilson and E. C. Boger traveled to a camp meeting held at the Katima Mulilo mission station. Over 700 people attended this camp meeting. On Sabbath, Gladstone Imasiku was ordained to gospel ministry as the first native in this region (although he was originally from Zambia), and in the afternoon, 70 new converts were baptized, which increased the membership to beyond the 100 mark.<sup>33</sup>

Gilbert L. Willmore returned to the Caprivi Strip early in 1928 to relieve Samuel M. Konigmacher who had labored there since 1922 when he left. This time, Willmore established more schools and arranged for the first two natives from Caprivi to be trained as teachers. These were Davison Mubonenwa and Ammon Matonga.<sup>34</sup>

## The Spread and Development of the Work in the North

Twenty years after the Seventh-day Adventist Church was first established in 1922 at the Katima Mulilo Mission, its membership was still at 200.<sup>35</sup> Then the Zambesi Union Mission decided to close the Katima Mulilo Mission

Station in August 1943. After the mission station was closed, pastoral workers were withdrawn for employment elsewhere. The small company of remaining believers were cared for and nurtured by faithful laymen and teachers who remained behind despite the odds. Among these were Dickson Mutabelezi, Philemon Nfwambi, Davison Mubonenwa, David Mukutulo, and Nelson Kutulela.<sup>36</sup> Their dedication and commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist Church was rewarded by God with a big turnover of interested persons. The following testimony was given regarding their faithful labors:

Our former teachers, for some time unpaid, cared for our membership as best they could. We were happy to find in this land of sand and water, nine companies with 229 members and nearly 600 attending Sabbath-school. We held three camp-meetings with them at Linyati, Sikanyabuka and Luhofu. The paramount chief attended all the meetings at the first place and is most friendly to our work.<sup>37</sup>

More dedicated workers joined these faithful workers, including Dismon Muntenezi, Preston Mukubonda, Jeremiah Mabuku, and Joel Mwilima. These workers carried on the work for several years, with little to no resources or buildings for worship. They were known as evangelists since only ordained ministers were called "pastor." Annually, an ordained minister would come from the Bechuanaland Mission to officiate baptisms and disciplinary meetings. Pastor Joel Mwilima became the first native Namibian to be ordained to gospel ministry at the camp meeting held in Linyati in September of 1961.<sup>38</sup>

In December of that year, the Zambesi Union Year-end Executive Committee meetings also elected Pastor Mwilima to serve on the Bechuanaland Mission Field Executive Committee. For the first time in history, the natives had one of their own who could present their interests to the higher organizations.<sup>39</sup> Pastor Lee Mubonenwa became the second native Namibian to be ordained to the gospel ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church on October 11, 1969, at the Ngweze Church.<sup>40</sup>

With the Caprivi Strip becoming such a stronghold in South West Africa, church leaders turned their attention to the Kavango Region. They entered Rundu, the capital of this region, first with literature sales and then followed up with evangelistic crusades. From there they turned their attention to Tsumkwe, the territory of the San people. We now turn our attention to the southern region of Namibia.

## Origins of Adventist Work in the South

The Seventh-day Adventist work in Namibia's central and southern territories of Namibia dates back to 1922. In February of that year, the recently formed African Division executive committee held meetings at its headquarters in Claremont, South Africa. The union presidents reported on the growth of the work in the division territory.<sup>41</sup> At that time, the African Division had one union conference, the South African Union Conference, and two union missions, the Southern and Zambesi Union Missions.

A large map of Southern Africa was hanging on one wall in the committee room. W. H. Branson pointed out where new missions had been opened recently, especially in Congo. He also pointed out that Angola and Mozambique were two large, unentered fields. He asked William Harry Anderson, who had responded to Chief Chikamatondo's call two years earlier, to make a preliminary survey and spy out the land. Anderson responded, "I am like Caleb. I feel as strong today as when I first came to Africa twenty-six years ago. I am prepared to go wherever the brethren feel I can do the most good."<sup>42</sup>

Although the intention was to reach Angola, South West Africa benefitted from this missionary trip. Anderson left for Angola towards the end of April 1922.<sup>43</sup> To get to Angola, Anderson had to travel through South West Africa. Anderson headed to Windhoek, where he sought permission from the civic area administrator to travel through Ovamboland to Angola. At that time, the railway services only extended up to Tsumeb. Anderson would have to carry on his solo journey through Ovamboland on foot or by donkey cart. The administrator refused his request because he believed it was not safe to travel through that area alone.

Determined not to give up on his mission, Anderson went as far north as he could to assess the situation. God provided help right on time. Anderson learned of a Mr. Hanson who would soon be travel through Ovamboland to Angola. Anderson was then granted permission to travel with Mr Hanson, who, seemingly, was already familiar with the territory. It took at least two more weeks to traverse South West Africa and reach the Angolan border. During their resting stops, they met several welcoming hosts alerting Anderson to the prospects of setting up missionary work in South West Africa. After six months of traveling through South West Africa and in Angola, Anderson returned with the report that it was a goodly land to Cape Town, where his wife had been working in the interim.<sup>44</sup>

The need for education made the grounds fertile to enter South West Africa. The Ovambos had a custom whereby the heir to the throne would not leave the country or his people. This prevented them from obtaining education elsewhere.<sup>45</sup> Thus, several tribe members, whom Anderson met along the way, made requests similar to that of Chief Chikamatondo to send teachers to their territories. In response to Anderson's good tidings, the Zambesi Union Mission sent Elder Ovid O. Bredenkamp and his wife to begin the work in South West Africa, along with natives to accompany him as teachers and evangelists.

In May 1923, Elders T. M. French, Field Secretary for the African Division, and W. H. Anderson accompanied these workers to South West Africa to help them settle on suitable grounds for establishing a mission station. Following a brief survey of the land across Windhoek, Tsumeb, Usakos, and Grootfontein, the Bredenkamps were advised to settle in Windhoek and to learn the Ovambo language.<sup>46</sup> The challenge with the South West Africa territory was that its population was sparsely settled. Windhoek not only had the largest population but was also located in the central point of the country, where they could work to spread the Advent message.

The first approach to ministering to the populace of South West Africa in this region was to open a school that would teach the natives English and to have evangelistic efforts for the significant European presence in the area. Bredenkamp settled in Windhoek in 1923, and, by the end of June 1924, he gained nine converts.<sup>47</sup> Bredenkamp's stay in Windhoek turned out to be short-lived, and no replacement was sent when he left in 1924. For a long time after that, the work in South West Africa was left unorganized. The candlelight of truth became a smoking flax, just enough for others who later came to South West Africa to revive the flame which was lit to spread the Adventist message throughout Namibia.

## Pioneers of Adventism in the South

A re-entry wedge of Seventh-day Adventism into the southern territory of Namibia was by using colporteur ministry. The work, started by Ovid Bredenkamp in 1923 and abandoned when he left in 1924 nearly made Seventh-day Adventism in South West Africa go extinct. Fred Ficker was a colporteur and became known throughout the Southern African Division as "the Apostle to Southwest" because he canvassed the territory from 1929 until 1932.<sup>48</sup> God's blessings evidently attended his faithful work. "During one winter period, while making his deliveries in the small villages on the main railway line, he discovered that the train stopped for only ten minutes at one of the stations – far too brief a period in which to deliver eighteen books."<sup>49</sup>

He thought long and hard about how he would deal with the situation when a bright idea came to mind. At a preceding station, he called ahead to the police sergeant, where they would only stop for 10 minutes, and requested him to assemble all the names of those who were supposed to receive books to meet him at the station when the train arrived. Providently, when Fred arrived, the sergeant was waiting for him with those who were ready to purchase books, and there was just enough time to assist everyone before the train departed again.

Fred Ficker was later joined by his brother, Herman Ficker, who became one of the earliest prominent workers in South West Africa. Herman reported once that "Bible Readings" and "Home Physician" were widely distributed and that by 1932, there were just under ten Sabbath keepers who had settled in South West Africa.<sup>50</sup> Although they were widely dispersed, they kept their lamps trimmed and burning.

The Seventh-day Adventist work in South West Africa progressed very slowly. Nevertheless, the everlasting gospel was being carried forward against all odds. By 1938, the Cape Conference asked Pastor and Mrs J. van de Merwe, Miss Aileen Flemming, and Pastor R. Visser to move to Windhoek to conduct evangelistic campaigns.<sup>51</sup> Their first campaign started on February 13, 1938.<sup>52</sup> Several factors hindered the success of their work. South West Africa had continuous political uncertainty due to its annexation to South Africa. Seventh-day Adventists were also not allowed to place billboards up for public display. Previous religious offshoots caused the locals to be prejudiced against groups who held views that were uniquely different from the common beliefs. Despite



their evangelistic campaigns not being largely attended, the few converts gained from these evangelistic efforts were sufficient encouragement for them to press on. The first fruits of their labors resulted in the baptism of 13 converts on June 5, 1938, which brought the total number of believers to 24.<sup>53</sup>

## The Spread and Development of the Work in the South

The first pastor sent to live in the southern region of South West Africa was Pastor J. J. Bekker, who also became the first president when the mission field was organized in 1954. A list of 50 names was given to Pastor Bekker when he went to South West Africa. Of those 50, only two faithful members remained in Windhoek. Others moved far away from Windhoek or apostatized from the church. Pastor Bekker dedicated his first two years in South West Africa to searching for those persons who were formerly Adventists. Pastor Bekker had to travel extensive distances to meet with some of the people, and his work was attended with such success and blessings from God that only three out of the fifty names which he had received had to be removed since almost everyone with whom he met rededicated their lives to God and committed themselves once more to the Adventist Church.<sup>54</sup>

In 1957, Pastor H. P. Campher joined Pastor Bekker. Campher previously worked with the members of Mixed-Race descent.<sup>55</sup> Pastor and Mrs. Campher initially struggled to make any breakthrough among the people of Mixed-Race descent. After studying their needs, he realized they had little to no recreational facilities or activities available. Pastor Campher then organized a singing group and conducted musical concerts. Many of the locals became very interested, and so Pastor and Mrs. Campher gained their first converts through their needs-based approach.<sup>56</sup>

So successful were these musical concerts that they were soon taken beyond Windhoek, into Rehoboth. The first fruits of the Camphers resulted in building the very first church in Windhoek for the South West Africa Mission Field. The church was erected on a piece of land that was freely gifted to the church and was built by Pr. Campher and a Voice of Prophecy student.<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately, that particular church was demolished a few years later, but the church reorganized as Khomasdal SDA Church at a later time.

Pastor Bekker highlighted two major factors that hindered the growth of the church in South West Africa at the South African Union Conference Session in 1963. Severe drought across the land often caused members to become further dispersed from one another in search of grazing land for their livestock. Another dilemma that impeded their progress was often the need by converts to transfer their membership to other Conferences as they relocated. When people converted to Seventh-day Adventism, the Sabbath often became an issue for their employment. In such cases, many people relocated to South Africa in search of work which would accommodate their commitment to keep the Sabbath day holy.<sup>58</sup> Despite these crippling factors, workers in South West Africa remained determined to grow the church.

As the South West Africa Mission Field sought to expand their work into the unreached territories of their land, they met with another peculiar challenge. White missionaries were not allowed to enter the Black African areas unless they had an established membership of at least 100 in that particular area.<sup>59</sup> To meet this challenge, the South West Africa Mission Field enlisted the services of Tobias Amakalie, a native of Ovamboland, who was already a member of the church by then, to enter Ovamboland as the first full-time worker in 1966.

The work in Ovamboland was further strengthened when believers who first discovered the Seventh-day Adventist teachings in Angola settled in Ovamboland. As soon as they settled, they began holding meetings on Sabbath, which gave support to Amakalie's efforts to reach his people with the Bible truth, which he discovered while living in Windhoek.<sup>60</sup> The first church, Oshakati, was opened on the Sabbath of January 27, 1973, after several years' attempts to engage the Department of Bantu Affairs for permission to open a church in Ovamboland.<sup>61</sup>

The efforts of lay members towards the church's growth in South West Africa, even though not recorded, cannot be overlooked. As members moved and settled in unreached parts of South West Africa, they remained faithful Seventh-day Adventists who testified about their faith in those communities. Due to the efforts of laypeople, the Adventist message was carried into areas far away from Windhoek, where the work was initially concentrated. These places include, among others Walvis Bay, along the western coast of South West Africa, Swakopmund, and Karibib. The churches in many territories of South West Africa were organized as a result of lay members who personally took their faith with them wherever they went at a time when official church workers were only a few and underresourced.

In the Kunene Region, formerly known as Kaokoland, efforts to reach the indigenous people testify of God's providence and immanence in the work when faithful members and missionaries earnestly desired to share the truth. In 1995, a young missionary couple, Gideon and Pam Petersen, who served with Adventist Frontier Mission, arrived in the North Western Territory of Namibia, known as the Kunene Region, to work among the Himba people. In the small town of Opuwo they met a few Adventist residents. The Petersens asked a Himba-speaking young man named Kapitango to translate for them. "Gideon worked with Kapitango to learn the language, and together the two men began teaching Himba families the basic principles of God."<sup>62</sup>

The Himba still lived in traditional huts without essential human life-supporting services such as electricity and running water and survived on subsistence farming. Only a small minority could read and write; therefore, learning took place orally. As Gideon and Kapitango shared God's truth, none of the Himba seemed to remember what they had learned from them. After one year, only Kapitango and two other young men were baptized. The Petersens and Kapitango prayed to God for wisdom and tried every means to help the people understand the Bible stories. Then, one day, Gideon Petersen observed a lengthy festival involving dancing, chanting, storytelling, and poetry. Petersen realized that the Himba "need to hear the gospel message told using their own cultural traditions – heroic poetry, storytelling techniques, and chants."<sup>63</sup>

Then, the Petersens and Kapitango began to translate the Bible stories into the Himba language. They had to explain the Bible's main characters and events since the Himba did not have a concept of sin or angels. They created a cassette tape and gave it to one of the village leaders. He loved it and listened to it until the batteries ran out.<sup>64</sup> Soon, the missionary team discovered solar-powered MP3 players and wrote scripts of dramatized Bible stories. They solicited the help of a Protestant Himba preacher to help them record the stories and gave these MP3 players to every tribal leader in the area. The Thirteenth Sabbath offering of the third quarter of 2012 helped to fund the recording of more stories for the Himba and provided MP3 players for all of the more than 200 Himba settlements.<sup>65</sup> These MP3 players became known as Godpods. Kapitango was later invited to study theology at Rusangu University in Zambia and became the first native Seventh-day Adventist pastor from among the Himba.

## Church Institutions

Adventist World Radio-Namibia (AWR-Namibia) has an office that operates five radio stations across the country, two in Namibia South Conference and three in Namibia North Conference.<sup>66</sup> The five radio stations each broadcast in different languages with programs contextualized to the local needs. AWR-Namibia has "integrated all forms of modern transmission such as FM radio broadcast, internet radio, and TV streaming, as well as GodPods to reproduce the gospel message for all target groups in Namibia."<sup>67</sup> The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Namibia also owns a television station broadcasting license with plans underway to establish Hope Channel Namibia.

The Namibia South Conference operates four elementary/primary schools: Otuzemba Adventist Private Primary School in Opuwa, Eden SDA Academy at Windhoek Central, Katutura SDA Pre-Primary School Kindergarden and the Karibib Lil Kindergarden School. The Namibia North Conference operates two primary schools namely Mavuluma and Rundu.

A clinic also operates from the Windhoek Central SDA Church. Dentistry known as Windhoek Adventist Dentistry also used to operate. However, the financial impediments brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have temporarily halted its operation.

ADRA-Namibia has been very active with feeding programs. ADRA-Namibia facilitates programs that emphasize cleanliness and hygiene, which have become especially important during the worldwide pandemic brought about by COVID-19. ADRA-Namibia responds to disasters by providing emergency relief. Other ongoing programs driven by ADRA-Namibia include providing mentorship to students, food security recovery programs that contribute to food security by encouraging backyard gardens in households, and a health-related program known as the YEP Project that is funded by ADRA-Sweden and seeks to provide support and education to those living or affected by HIV and AIDS.<sup>68</sup>

## Church Administrative Units

In the north, Adventism was mainly concentrated on the eastern part of the Caprivi Strip. Since the work started in 1922, led by Gilbert Willmore in the Caprivi Strip, it was under the direct supervision of the Zambesi Union. While still in its infancy stage, the work in the Caprivi Strip was referred to as the Upper Zambesi Mission. The first mission station opened by Willmore, when he arrived became known as the Kalimbeza Mission in 1922.

In January 1924, the South Atlantic United Mission comprised the two mission fields, the Angola and South West Mission Fields. This, however, did not last long, as accessibility between South West Africa and Angola was always tense due to past political conflicts. Consequently, South West Africa was removed from the South Atlantic United Mission in 1925 and was placed under the administrative care of the South African Union Conference. At the same time, the Caprivi Strip was placed back under the care of the Zambesi Union as it was easier to access it via the Zambezi River due to the lack of roads in those days. From then on, Northern Rhodesia Mission Field managed the Katima Mulilo Mission Station, which Samuel Konigsmacher had established.

In 1926, the Katima Mulilo Mission Station, still under the care of the Northern Rhodesia Mission Field, was renamed Upper Zambesi Mission, the name that was first envisioned for this territory because of close interactions between the Katima Mulilo Station and the neighboring mission across the Zambezi River in Northern Rhodesia.

When Gilbert Willmore returned to Katima Mulilo early in 1928, he strengthened the cause, and with its growing work in Katima Mulilo, the station once again became known as the Katima Mulilo Mission Station, but it still operated under the care of the Northern Rhodesia Mission Field and continued as such until it was closed in 1943.

The Bechuanaland Mission Field was organized in 1951. When the work was reopened in the Caprivi Strip in 1954, it was placed under the Bechuanaland Mission Field that already had a church and an ordained pastor in Maun, Pastor Walter M. Cooks, the former station director in the Caprivi. Pastor Cooks never lost his interest in the work in the Caprivi Strip.

The Caprivi Mission Station was detached from the Bechuanaland Mission Field, which became known as the Botswana Mission Field, at the end of 1972 and was attached to the Zambesi Union administered from Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, effective January 1, 1973. However, the arrangement brought about considerable difficulty in managing a remote station. It did, however, propel the church in the Caprivi Strip to strive towards independence. Through the efforts of the pastors and dedicated laypersons, this was accomplished two years later, when it was voted to organize the Caprivi Strip into a mission field at the Zambesi Union Session held at Solusi College (now University) in September 1975.<sup>69</sup>

Pastor Eric Annandale, who had joined the work in Caprivi Strip since January 1973 and served as the station director, was elected to become the first president. He and Pastor Lee L. Mubonenwa shared the role of the

departmental director. The organizing meeting of the Caprivi Strip Mission Field convened at the Ngweze SDA Church on October 22, 1976.<sup>70</sup> Pastor Annandale left the Caprivi Strip in 1977, and Pastor Lee Mubonenwa replaced him as president, thereby becoming the second president of the Caprivi Strip Mission Field and the first native Namibian to hold such position. He was joined by Pastor Edward J. Harris, who became the first executive secretary of the Caprivi Strip Mission Field.<sup>71</sup>

The political unrest for independence in Southern Rhodesia brought considerable hardship for the Caprivi Strip Mission Field. For the officers of the Caprivi Strip Mission Field to attend Union meetings in Bulawayo, they needed to travel by plane to Pretoria, South Africa, and from there travel by road to Bulawayo, where they would need to be escorted by soldiers as soon as they cross the border from South Africa into Southern Rhodesia. This, along with other logistics including Southern Rhodesia's strong currency at the time and the fact that South West Africa was under the South African government, made it desirable for the leaders of the Caprivi Strip Mission Field to be joined to the Southern Union Mission administered from Johannesburg, South Africa, rather than the Zambesi Union in Bulawayo.<sup>72</sup>

The Caprivi Strip Mission Field Session voted on February 13, 1981, to request the Zambesi Union Mission to transfer the Caprivi Strip Mission Field to the Southern Union Mission, and that the action be passed on to the Trans-Africa Division.<sup>73</sup> The request soon enjoyed the attention of the Trans-Africa Division, who invited Pastor Mubonenwa to the Division Midyear Executive Committee meetings to present the case of the Caprivi Strip Mission Field. The request was considered favorably, and Pastor Paul M. Mabena, the Southern Union president, visited the Caprivi Strip in August of 1981 to assess it.<sup>74</sup> On January 1, 1982, the division committee approved the Caprivi Strip Mission Field's transfer to the Southern Union.

The South African Union Conference and the Southern Union Mission merged in 1991, forming the Southern Africa Union Conference that incorporated the Namibia and the Caprivi Strip Mission Fields. The Caprivi Strip Mission Field evangelized the regions beyond the Zipfel, the Kavango Region and to Tsumkwe, and its name no longer represented the mission field's geographic reality.<sup>75</sup> Thus, the Caprivi Strip Mission Field leaders requested the name change to North East Namibia Field at the mid-year executive committee meetings held on May 18, 1993, at the Southern Africa Union Conference headquarters in Bloemfontein, South Africa.<sup>76</sup>

In the southern part of South West Africa, the first attempt to organize the Seventh-day Adventist work came in 1923, a short-lived attempt in Angola and South West Africa. Windhoek, in South West Africa, became the South Atlantic United Mission's headquarters. The South Atlantic United Mission was discontinued in 1925. The unorganized territory of South West Africa was then turned over to the Cape Conference in 1930.<sup>77</sup> By then, there were four Sabbath keeping families known to live in South West Africa. No pastor had yet taken up residence in South West Africa, but the four Adventist families received occasional visits from the pastor from Upington, South Africa, and the Cape Conference and South African Union Conference officers.

Attaching South West Africa to South Africa was feasible because the South Africa's government also governed South West Africa. Additionally, a good railway and roads already connected the Cape with South West Africa.<sup>78</sup> While the earliest evangelistic efforts had resulted in the organizing of two churches, a White and a Mixed-Race Descent Church,<sup>79</sup> the lack of pastoral care and spiritual nurture nearly made the work in South West Africa to go extinct.<sup>80</sup> By 1954, only two White members remained in Windhoek, and the Mixed-Race Descent Church was completely defunct. Therefore, the South African Union Conference decided in 1954 to organize the work in South West Africa into the South West Africa Mission Field, with Pastor J. J. Bekker as its first president. When South West Africa gained independence in 1990 and changed its name to Namibia, the South West Africa Mission Field changed its name to Namibia Field.

At the North East Namibia Field Session in 1999, it was voted to dissolve the North East Namibia Field and merge its territory with the Namibia Field thereby constituting one Namibia Field since January 2000.<sup>81</sup> Church leaders believed that the united efforts of the two fields located in Namibia would strengthen the mission work and help reaching all the unentered parts of Namibia. By 2012, the Namibia Field was upgraded to the Namibia Conference, under the auspices of the Southern Africa Union Conference.

The extensive distances between the southernmost and northernmost territories of Namibia caused the Namibia Conference to split again in 2016 in order to create the North Namibia Conference with its headquarters in Katima Mulilo and the South Namibia Conference with its headquarters in Windhoek. In 2019, upon the recommendation of the General Conference, the names of the two conferences were changed to have the name of the country precede the wind directions. Therefore, the North Namibia and South Namibia Conferences became known as the Namibia North and Namibia South Conferences respectively. Presently, the territory of the Namibia North Conference includes the Zambezi, Kavango East, Kavango West, Ohangwena, Oshana, Omusati, and Oshikati Regions.<sup>82</sup> The Namibia South Conference territory includes the regions of Oshikoto, Kunene, Otjozondjupa, Omaheke, Khomas, Erongo, Hardap, and Karas.<sup>83</sup>

## Effects of the Political Development on the Church

From the very beginning, when William H. Anderson responded to Chief Chikamatondo's plea for missionaries to set up schools and teach his villagers about God, the Seventh-day Adventist Church caught the attention of the governing administrators of South West Africa. The High Commissioner and Magistrate for the Caprivi Zipfel, Captain H. Neale, granted permission to the Seventh-day Adventist Church to set up the first mission school at Ikaba,<sup>84</sup> which became the first school in the Caprivi Strip. Gilbert Willmore, the first mission director at Caprivi, then established another school at Kalimbeza that also served as the Seventh-day Adventist Mission headquarters in the Caprivi Strip. The school was moved to Katima Mulilo because of excessive flooding at Kalimbeza. With Katima Mulilo as the new hub, several schools continued to be established. In 1928, there were fourteen schools.<sup>85</sup> These schools, sometimes referred to as "bush schools," usually went up to Grade 4 and

served as feeders for the main school at Katima Mulilo that offered classes up to Grade 6. Students could continue their education at Lower Middle School in Rusangu, Northern Rhodesia.<sup>86</sup> Although a government school existed in the vicinity, many parents preferred the Adventist schools.<sup>87</sup>

The Adventist schools' success in the Caprivi Strip prompted the government to turn to the Adventist church for help in social work. With no hospital in the Caprivi Strip, the sick had to travel across the Zambezi River to Sesheke in Zambia to get treatment.<sup>88</sup> The Caprivi Strip's commissioner, Major L. W. F. Trollop, hoped the Adventists missionaries would open medical work in the Caprivi Strip, but the church did not have the financial resources to open a medical facility.

In time, school attendance began to decline. Pastor W. P. Owen's arrival as station director at Katima Mulilo did not help the school. He often resorted to manual labor or physical punishment as a means of discipline, causing some parents to complain to the commissioner about the school.<sup>89</sup> Another factor which contributed to the decline in attendance and interest in education was the lack of employment. The government did not encourage attendance nor did it try to develop the educational system.<sup>90</sup> The rapid decline resulted in only three schools being left operational by 1939. The control of the Caprivi Zipfel was transferred to the Union of South Africa's Department of Native Affairs in 1939, resulting in discontinuation of the annual subsidy paid to the Katima Mulilo Mission for the schools. It was believed the schools did not warrant any financial support from the government because of their declining student attendance. Despite this setback, the Adventist educational work continued under Owen's leadership for the next few years, hoping circumstances would improve in time.<sup>91</sup>

The church membership also began to decline. The Zambesi Union invited Station Director W. P. Owen for consultation. Following Owen's advice, the union closed the mission at Katima Mulilo in 1943. Owen and James Malinki, the only ordained ministers at the time, were sent to serve elsewhere. When the work in Katima Mulilo was discontinued, no schools were left in the eastern Caprivi Strip. The South African authorities wanted to reopen the educational work and opted to use the missionaries again. Commissionaer Trollop, a Catholic, invited the Roman Catholic missionaries to establish the educational and medical work in the territory. The Roman Catholics took over the abandoned premises of the Seventh-day Adventist Mission Station in Katima Mulilo, and, after a difficult start, expanded and gained the government's support through subsidies.<sup>92</sup>

The arrival of a new government officer in the Caprivi Strip brought along the prospects of reopening the Adventist work in that area.<sup>93</sup> The new district commissioner invited the Adventist church to put in an application to open churches and schools in the area and promised to present their request with interest.<sup>94</sup>

The country's liberation efforts, which began in the early 1960s, and the issuing independence in 1990 impacted the way the church was managed in Namibia. The South African government, which administered affairs in South West Africa in the 1960s, was undergoing political unrest because of its *Apartheid* regime and became suspicious of Black foreigners, especially from the north where emancipation from colonialism was either already achieved or underway. Consequently, the South African government restricted entry into the country

and all Black foreign workers were ordered to return to their homelands.<sup>95</sup> The South African government's move caused the Caprivi Strip Mission Station to become detached from the Bechuanaland Mission Field. Because Black foreigners were not easily allowed into South West Africa, a Black president would have difficulties administering the Bechuanaland Mission Field. However, the people of Botswana felt the time had come to have a native elected as their president. Therefore, a request was made to attach the Caprivi Mission Station directly to the Zambesi Union offices in Bulawayo, which was still being managed by a White president.<sup>96</sup> This action was effected on January 1, 1973. With their new administrative headquarters now being farther away, the Caprivi Mission Station was compelled to become more independent and work towards achieving a Mission Field status.<sup>97</sup>

The political unrest in Zimbabwe influenced the decision to detach the North-East Namibia Field from the Zambesi Union and unite it with the Southern Union Mission, based in Johannesburg, South Africa. The transfer was in the best interest of the North-East Namibia Field since South West Africa was still under South African control. Nevertheless, a few years after Namibia gained independence, the Namibia Field began working towards achieving a union status, which will provide more administrative independence and help expand the mission work in the country.

## Future Outlook

Although not the union status has not yet been achieved, the process has started and been moving since the Southern African Union Conference Executive Committee's approval on November 26, 2018.<sup>98</sup> In 2021, the pension and medical aid systems were migrated from South Africa-based organizations to Namibia. An Inter-Conference Council Committee works closely with the Southern Africa Union Conference and the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division to study what remains outstanding for Namibia to achieve a union status. Preliminary financial audits have been conducted by the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division to assess the Namibia Field's preparedness. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Namibia hopes to achieve union status by 2024. Developing infrastructure remains one of the most serious challenges in Namibia. There is a limited number of mission houses compared to the work force, and only a few churches have adequate buildings for worship.

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