

# THE DONALD HAMER CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

TEN YEAR RETROSPECTIVE REPORT | 2012-2022



# A DECADE OF IMPACT

## CULTIVATING CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP IN NAMIBIA

Over the past 10 years, the Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program played a critically important role in identifying and empowering 22 young people to take up the mantle of community-based conservation in Namibia.

In celebration of this accomplishment, we asked former interns and the organizations they supported during their internships to reflect on the impact of the leadership program on alumni's careers and on the country's conservation landscape.

Resoundingly, alumni say the leadership program provided them with the skills and real-world experiences they needed to complement their university educations. Internships magnified their appreciation of the natural world, helped them grow in confidence, and taught them to assume the accountability of leadership. The strong relationships forged during the program continue to enrich Namibia's conservation community today. Alumni credit the program with opening their eyes to their own possibilities, to new opportunities, and to careers full of meaning and purpose.

*"The Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program has produced high-performing alumni, but it does so much more, by placing young talented professionals who inject enthusiasm, positivity, and hard graft into the community-based natural resource management program, which in turn has consistently and positively lifted and inspired our teams."*

— ANGUS MIDDLETON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
NAMIBIA NATURE FOUNDATION

*"The Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program has injected new lifeblood of leadership, thus revitalizing and ensuring leadership succession, and this has enhanced organizational sustainability within the community-based natural resource management program support organizations."*

— RONNY DEMPERS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
NAMIBIA DEVELOPMENT TRUST

## CULTIVATING CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP IN NAMIBIA

Today, Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program alumni are helping shape the future of rural development and nature conservation across southern Africa. Alumni serve as community advocates, lecturers, and team leaders. They use technology to combat poaching and the illegal wildlife trade. They provide conservancies with the data they need to inform and adapt their management practices. They give voice to rural Namibians in matters of health, resource extraction, and climate impacts—regionally, nationally, and on the international stage. And they support and mentor those who follow in their footsteps, extending the reach of the program—and the impact of Donald Hamer’s conservation legacy—with each new relationship.

The alumni profiled on the following pages represent the depth and breadth of the Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program and signal its enduring impact on community-based conservation in Namibia.

*“CLP is one of the initiatives that is contributing to the foundation of CBNRM succession, and I am very proud to be a part of the future of young leaders entering into conservation work in Namibia.”*

— MAXI LOUIS, DIRECTOR  
NACSO

*“Nelson Mandela said, ‘Young people must take it upon themselves to ensure that they receive the highest education possible so that they can represent us well in future as future leaders.’ The Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program is a unique opportunity to support young Namibians in becoming such leaders. WWF-Namibia clearly sees the program’s role in expanding the empowerment of nature stewards and future leaders paving a sustainable development way for Namibia, throughout KAZA, and beyond. Thank you to The Hamer Foundation for your invaluable support.”*

— JULIANE ZEIDLER, DIRECTOR  
WWF-NAMIBIA



# PASSING THE TORCH

*"I hope my mentors know that I did not just acquire and use what they gave me, but that I seek to pass the torch to others."*

**TEO NTINDA** (2012–2014) was in the first cohort of interns and today serves as a regional program manager with the Namibia Development Trust. Without the Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program, "I couldn't have moved into my career and been able to realize my dreams," he says.

Before joining the program, Teo received his diploma in nature conservation, graduating top of his class. He says the practical nature of the internship helped him contextualize and apply the theory he learned in school.

Teo credits the internship with instilling in him a deep understanding of the community-based natural resource management program and of the value of communication and networking skills. Perhaps most important, he says he learned how to manage diverse opinions, cultures, and personalities in negotiating community dynamics and stakeholder relationships.

Throughout his career, Teo has put those skills to work engaging with government ministries, regional councils, and community-based organizations. He has brought his experiences and lessons from Namibia to bear in global conservation forums from the United States to Nepal.

Teo is especially proud of his work with Namibia Development Trust in supporting King Nehale Conservancy to negotiate and open a joint venture tourism lodge near Etosha National Park.

"The leadership program got me to where I am," he says, noting that one of the most rewarding aspects of his work has been paying forward the opportunities that were given to him.



## SHAPING DECISIONS

*“My experience in the leadership program has allowed me to contribute in local, regional, and global spaces.”*

**OMAGANO SHOOYA** (2013–2014) lives in Berlin, where she works for an international nongovernmental organization supporting conservation groups in Southern and East Africa and Madagascar. She is a long way from home, but in serving as a portfolio manager for southern Africa, she has returned to her roots in Namibian community-based natural resource management. The Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program was a key step in her journey of a thousand miles.



Omagano credits the program with helping her develop soft skills—including relationship building and public speaking—that complemented her research and writing abilities. Moreover, she says, “the leadership program solidified my interest in conservation with a focus on people.”

A seminal experience was joining mentor Maxi Louis, director of the Namibian Association of Community-Based Natural Resource Management Support Organizations (NACSO), in a meeting with high-level representatives of Namibian organizations and WWF. Seeing Africans in decision-making positions helped Omagano realize there was a path for her, too, to become a conservation leader.

In her current role, Omagano has helped further the organizational development of NACSO, Save the Rhino Trust, and Namibia Nature Foundation. She has also helped shape climate adaptation plans in West African nations by supporting their participation in international negotiations.

Omagano hopes the leadership program will continue to provide invaluable opportunities for young people to bring their understanding of local situations to bear in international contexts—“where the big decisions are made.”

## FORGING PARTNERSHIPS

*“Working right next to my mentor was a great blessing and opportunity to understand conservation at all levels.”*

**WILLEM PONAHAZO** (2013–2015) works for Namibia’s Ministry of Environment, Forestry, and Tourism as Chief Warden for the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA). He says the catalyst for his career was the Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program, which set him on the fast track to leadership roles.



Willem laughs recalling that he went directly from being an intern to managing a national park staff of 16. He attributes his success in that job and those that followed to the foundational lessons he learned as an intern. Willem says being mentored by the executive director of the Namibia Development Trust allowed him to experience the multiple levels of engagement—from communities to ministries—that make community-based natural resource management possible. “I gained interpersonal skills and learned how to handle staff and engage with communities and stakeholders,” he says.

Today, Willem makes significant contributions to conservation in Namibia and beyond. Much of his field time is spent engaging with communities, traditional authorities, nongovernmental organizations, and other stakeholders to secure buy-in and partnerships across international borders. Among the most important points of impact, he says, is the establishment and management of key wildlife corridors.

Willem is grateful for the opportunities the Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program provided him as a young man from a communal conservancy and hopes the program can continue to develop young conservation leaders.

## SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

*“My work is not just about conservation but about impacting people’s lives.”*

**HILMA ANGULA** (2014–2015) traces her interest in conservation to the third grade, when she was awarded a trip to Etosha National Park for winning a spelling bee. The experience kindled a desire for a career that would allow her to see the country and make important contributions. The Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program helped turn that dream into reality.

Hilma says the program had a significant impact on her career—developing her confidence, fueling her ambitions and drive, and providing opportunities to take on new challenges. In working with mentors, as well as people on the ground, “I learned how critical networks and relationships are,” she says. “They make community-based natural resource management work.”

In 2018, Hilma was accepted into a master’s program in conservation leadership at Cambridge University, and she credits her admission and success there to the internship and her subsequent work in community-based natural resource management.

Today, Hilma is the project coordinator for the NACSO Institutional Development Working Group, collaborating with the NACSO Secretariat, NACSO partners, conservancies, and community forests on governance issues.

She is proud of the fact that she has been able to help and empower communities to better manage and benefit from their natural resources. Notably, she has had the opportunity to work extensively with women, using a gender-focused lens on conservation to create a better approach for supporting some of the most vulnerable individuals in communities.





# AMPLIFYING RURAL VOICES

*“The Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program molded me and prepared me to apply the skills I gained in all areas.”*

Raised by her grandparents in the Kavango Region, **ANNASTASIA SINALUMBU** (2016–2018) developed an early passion for rural development. During her internship, she attended the CITES conference in Johannesburg as a member of the Namibian delegation, where she felt keenly the responsibility and honor of representing African voices—especially rural ones—on the global stage. Participating “allowed me to support the voice of a lot of grassroots-level Namibians,” she says. “As a young Namibian woman, this was very important to me.”

As an intern, Annastasia supported the NACSO Secretariat and later continued with the organization, working with regional conservancy associations and Southern African Development Community countries to elevate community voices throughout the broader region.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Annastasia took a position as a grants manager for the Conservation Relief, Recovery, and Resilience Facility—Namibia’s national program for conservancies impacted by the pandemic—helping to ensure that community staff in conservancies kept their jobs and game guards continued their critical work despite the collapse of the tourism industry. This led to a new focus on community health: Annastasia is currently employed as a senior program officer in the Ministry of Health and Social Services and completing her master’s in development studies, examining the threats expanding townlands in the Kavango region pose to communal areas (e.g., encroaching on wildlife corridors).

She says the internship primed her for success in the health sector, giving her “the ability to see the big picture.” Annastasia credits the program with helping her contribute to Namibia in many ways, not least by supporting rural voices.





# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

*"I remember specific conversations with mentors during my time in the leadership program that continue to impact me."*

**MEKONDJO HITILA** (2016–2018) is the manager of the Ben Hur Rural Development Center in the Omaheke Region, part of the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development. In this role and other positions he has held since his internship, Mekondjo draws heavily on skills and relationships he developed in the Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program.

As an intern, field trips deepened his love for the natural environment and provided opportunities for shared experiences. Mekondjo was placed with the Namibia Development Trust and worked closely with the NACSO Institutional Development Working Group, focusing on conservancy governance. He worked with farmers' cooperatives, the Namibia Rural Women's Assembly, and community forests, while gaining an understanding of community-based natural resource management through his support of the NACSO Steering Committee.

The enduring relationships he developed with people across the community-based natural resource management program—from organization leaders to field staff to conservancy members—unlocked new insights that continue to serve him in his career. Working with communities and

people from diverse backgrounds, he learned to better understand their needs and how to help them develop the capacity to solve their problems. Today, he continues to further community-based natural resource management objectives and contribute to uplifting communities in rural Namibia.



# ADVANCING ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

*“The conservation leadership program changed my ideas about conservation—it became about the benefit to wildlife and people.”*

**HERMAN AINDONGO** (2017–2019) is the adaptive management officer at the NACSO Natural Resources Working Group, where he is responsible for collating and verifying data from annual game counts and audits and providing meaningful feedback to conservancies to inform their management activities.

He says it is challenging and rewarding work. But were it not for the leadership program, Herman would not be involved in community-based natural resource management at all. Herman expected to follow in the footsteps of his aunt, a ranger in Etosha National Park, who exposed him to the idea of conservation as a career early in life. It was his experience as an intern that changed his career path.

Placed with the Natural Resources Working Group, Herman participated in game counts, audits, and trainings in conservancies throughout Namibia, spending significant time in the field and developing a deep connection to the work. At the same time, he pursued and completed his bachelor's with honors in nature conservation and went on to earn his master's in natural resources management, focused on the perception of and attitudes toward human-wildlife conflict outside conservancy areas.

Herman highlights the practical and experiential learning opportunities he had in the Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program as critical for his career. He says he would not be where he is today without that chance to have a seat at the table and witness community conservation firsthand.



## HONING NEW SKILLS

*“The Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program helped me improve my people skills, which are so important in conservation.”*

When **MATTHEW WALTERS** (2017–2019) joined the conservation leadership program, he was a self-described introvert. Through the program, he learned to network and engage with stakeholders including local communities, government agencies, and nongovernmental organizations—developing relationships that aid his current work as a project officer with WWF-Namibia.



During his internship, Matthew completed a master's degree in natural resource management, analyzing trophy size of roan, sable, buffalo, and kudu. Working with Namibian hunters and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, he cleaned and sorted an astounding 100,000 data points collected over five years. At the same time, Matthew gained both field experience and data management skills in supporting conservancies to conduct game counts and tender and renew hunting contracts.

Today, Matthew puts his experience and skills to work for the Combatting Wildlife Crime Project. The project recently installed a closed-circuit television system at Waterberg National Park—improving monitoring, animal welfare, and security, and making management responses possible in real time. He also helps implement the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's Sustainable Wildlife Management Programme. Here too, he says, technology is making project monitoring easier and increasing benefits to conservancies.

In all his work, Matthew says he draws on the in-depth understanding of the dynamics of community-based natural resource management that he first developed as an intern.



# LEARNING FROM COMMUNITIES

*“In community-based natural resource management, we are not only supporting communities but learning from them.”*

**MIGHTY UGWANGA** (2019–2021) expected to work in the tourism sector after completing her bachelor's degree with honors in tourism management at the University of Namibia, but the Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program opened her eyes to new possibilities.

As an intern, Mighty was placed with NACSO partner Tourism Supporting Conservation (TOSCO Trust), where she drew on her education and developed practical skills in administration, finance, and project management. She later honed her networking and advocacy skills at the NACSO Secretariat, where she supported director Maxi Louis in working with NACSO partners, working groups, and projects. Equally important, says Mighty, the internship provided field experiences—like walking 25 km through the bush to count game animals—that were entirely new to her and made a huge impression.

Mighty says the Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program was instrumental in developing her interpersonal skills. By engaging with people from different cultures and walks of life, she overcame her shyness and grew in confidence. She says the program offered her crucial opportunities to grow both personally and professionally.

Today, Mighty is the field coordinator for a WWF-Namibia project working to elevate community voices in decisions about managing extractive industries in the Kavango regions. The project seeks to help marginalized peoples, including youth and the San communities in the Kavango East Region, to understand and advocate for their rights. She says that one of the most exciting aspects of the project is establishing clubs that empower girls and teach environmental management.



# ADVOCATING FOR CONSERVANCIES

*"The Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program helped me to focus my interest, passion, and ability."*

When **MILTON MUSHINDI** (2019–2021) was a boy herding his family's livestock in the Kunene Region, he knew he would someday study animal science. In 2018, he completed his bachelor's with honors in the subject, focusing on the nutrition and health of livestock.

In complement to his studies, the Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program provided a crucial opportunity to enhance his interpersonal and communications abilities and develop core leadership skills such as time management, organization, and prioritization.

Placed with NACSO's Natural Resources Working Group, Milton learned about adaptive management and participated in game counts, audits, and trainings. Since completing his internship, he has stayed on professionally as an assistant to the working group, supporting wildlife use and adaptive management activities and utilization reporting. Milton also assists with joint venture hunting contracts, including the review and tendering processes needed for these contracts to benefit conservancies. Eventually, he hopes to undertake a master's degree and is interested in studying human wildlife conflict in the Zambezi Region.

Still early in his career, Milton already sees the impact of his work: The training and technical support he provides to conservancies throughout Namibia results in direct benefits to individuals and communities. As he builds relationships within the conservancies, he is better able to advocate for their needs.

Milton is immensely grateful for the opportunities he was given as an intern. "I thank the conservation leadership program for changing my life," he says.



# HELPING COMMUNITIES ADAPT

*“The leadership program prepared me to take on more responsibility and trust as I moved into a professional position.”*

WWF-Namibia project officer **SIGRID NYAMBE** (2020–2021) says the Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program launched her career: “I would have otherwise not had this chance.”

Through WWF’s Climate Crowd project, Sigrid works with communities to collect and analyze data on how climate change is impacting biodiversity, natural resource management, and

livelihoods in Namibia. The project—part of a global effort to assess climate impacts in more than 30 countries—provides feedback to communities and supports them to develop, fund, and implement on-the-ground adaptation solutions.

Sigrid’s interest in conservation and land-use planning began during her youth in the Zambezi Region and she went on to complete her studies, with honors, in regional and rural development and land administration. She says her experience in the conservation leadership program helped fill gaps in her knowledge and provided new learning experiences. Moreover, she developed an understanding of the importance of constant learning and keeping up with current issues and challenges.

Sigrid believes that she is already helping to make a difference in the Zambezi Region by providing opportunities for communities to share and reflect on climate data. The Climate Crowd project aims to open up opportunities and funding for communities facing not only climate impacts but also ongoing development challenges, including water and food security.





# INSPIRING CHANGE

*“As a former intern and now a lecturer, I inspire students to understand that they can achieve a lot, even at a young age.”*

ALBERTINA FILLIPUS (2021–2022) first decided to pursue a career in natural resource management because it seemed the best way to do what she enjoys most: being outdoors and traveling. She credits the Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program with helping her focus her ambitions.



Albertina completed a master's degree in 2021, drawing on considerable field work in Namibia and Angola to map and predict the distribution of woody endemic species. During the leadership program, her knowledge of vegetation led to the Hans Seidel Foundation inviting her to address the National Council on the role of forests in combatting climate change. As an intern, she put her GIS skills to work for NACSO's Natural Resources Working Group and spent significant time in the field—including meeting with all 16 conservancies in the Zambezi Region to understand communities' needs related to livelihoods and assess human-wildlife conflict mitigation efforts.

Albertina recently accepted a position at the International University of Management, in the recently established Centre of Environmental Studies. There, she lectures undergraduate and post-graduate diploma students on ecosystem services, environmental science, and natural resource economics.

She continues to provide part-time support to the Natural Resources Working Group and says she is thrilled to witness its impact. The group is now translating the findings from her assessment in the Zambezi Region into practice.

# LOOKING AHEAD

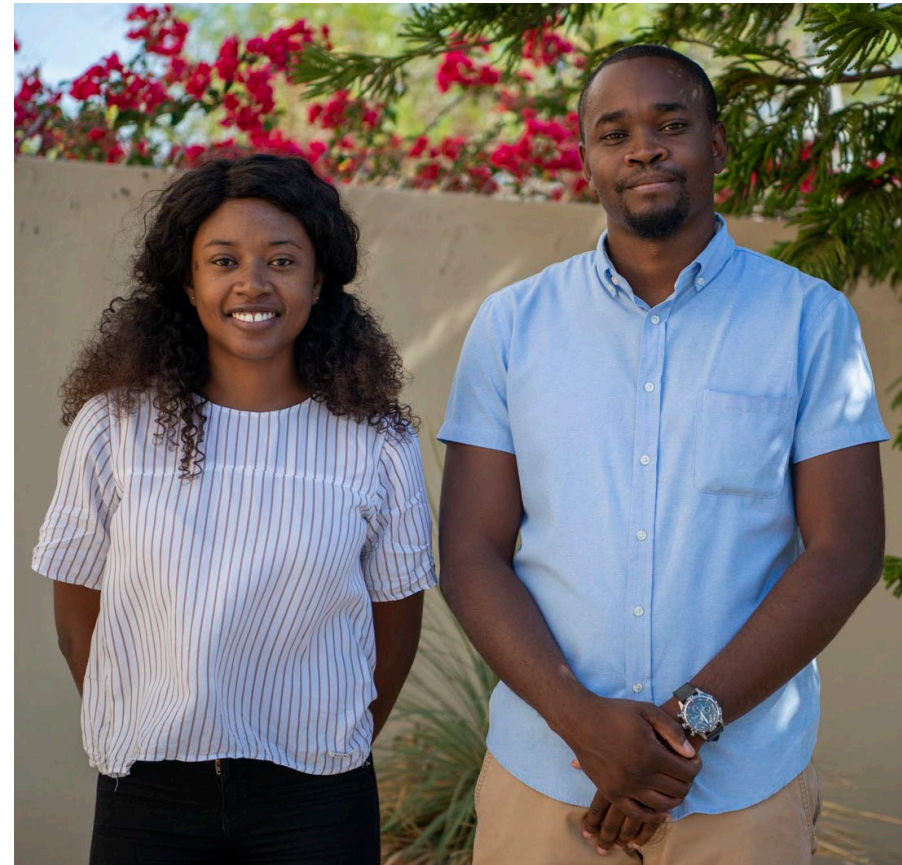
Asked about their ideas for the future of the leadership program, alumni were effusive and eager to see it expand. Their ideas echo the results of the independent assessment commissioned by WWF and demonstrate a desire to remain engaged with the program.

- They hope to see more young Namibians benefit from the leadership program, suggesting ideas such as shortening the internship to a year and focusing on bachelor's level students to make it more accessible.
- Some suggested interns would benefit from participating in more regional and international activities and in longer-term field experiences, such as practicums based in conservancies.
- Alumni say addressing knowledge gaps in subjects such as fundraising, law, and agroeconomics would benefit the community-based natural resource management program. They also note that recruiting interns from additional disciplines, such as business administration, would increase diversity and create greater reach for the program.
- Alumni would welcome more formalized opportunities to network with one another—such as a reunion—and to transfer their knowledge to new interns.

Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program  
alumni Mighty Ugwanga & Milton Mushindi.

*“The Donald Hamer Conservation Leadership Program is contributing to the foundation of community-based natural resource management program succession.”*

— MAXI LOUIS, DIRECTOR  
NAMIBIAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY-BASED NATURAL  
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS (NACSO)





## ALUMNI AND CURRENT INTERNS

*Thank you for the enduring impact you have made on the careers of these rising conservation leaders.*

- Alton Tsowaseb, 2012
- Christiaan Hamukoshi, 2012
- Teofelus Ntinda, 2012
- Omagano Shooya, 2013
- Rosalia Andreas, 2013
- Willem Ponahazo, 2013
- Hilma Angula, 2014
- Asser Many, 2014
- Annastasia Sinalumbu, 2016
- Mekondjo Hitila, 2016
- Herman Aindongo, 2017
- Matthew Walters, 2017
- Victoria Amon, 2018
- Rauha Iyambo, 2018
- Milton Mushindi, 2019
- Mighty Ugwanga, 2019
- Nestor Shefika, 2020
- Sigrid Nyambe, 2021
- Sunnypo Imalwa, 2021
- Albertina Fillipus, 2021
- Soini Shatilue, 2022
- Victoria Hailapa, 2022





THANK YOU

