

## OMDis Agency: Empowering Oranjemund to thrive

### A Q&A with OMDis Town

Transform Agency general manager, Tony Bessinger.

### AUGETTO GRAIG

Namdeb Diamond Corporation established the OMDis Town Transform Agency, a special purpose vehicle designed to diversify the economy of Oranjemund, thereby enhancing the socioeconomic development of the town. The picturesque town of Oranjemund is a glittering oasis in the Namib sands next to the mouth of mighty Orange River. Without a diversified economy and reduced reliance on the mine, this beautiful town may face the ghostly fate of not-too-distant Kolmanskop.

Tony Bessinger, OMDis general Manager notes that the transformation of Oranjemund centres around normalizing a once privately owned, closed and isolated town and changing it into a place where the community can thrive.

Namdeb launched a town transformation programme 2014, along with the town council and the community. "A vision for a future sustainable town by 2030, irrespective of mining, was co-created amongst all affected parties, including the community," he explained. Transfer of town management from the mine to the town's council and privatising property ownership was completed in 2018.

"This will transition socio-economic services such as education and healthcare into a normalised state. This phase is in progress. Meanwhile, transforming the economy by diversifying its composition through new industries and small and medium enterprise (SME) development is also in progress and is anticipated to be completed by 2030," he said.

### How is the organisation funded and how many employees does it employ?

At this stage, OMDis is 100% seed-funded by Namdeb. We employ a core team of seven people and a further 10 people through a third party at the OMDis nursery pilot project. Secondary services such as finance, human resources and project management are managed by third parties, externally.

### How does OMDis work together with the Oranjemund town council?

The Oranjemund town council (OTC) is a legal institution that provides public services through land and service provision to the community of Oranjemund. OTC is mandated to enable conducive investor-friendly incentives for investors and local businesses. OMDis, on the other hand, is a development agency that was created to accelerate the economic diversification of Oranjemund's economy alongside diamond mining. Our overlapping efforts, with OTC in local economic development, propel us towards achieving a sustainable Oranjemund by 2030. By collaborating closely, our limited resources are used complementary to each other.

### What highlights illustrate the progress OMDis has made to date?

In tourism, we have been awarded the Orange River concession, with the feasibility study currently being finalised. Furthermore, the Jasper House Museum has been renovated providing visitors with historic experience of the town. We have also as part of tourist attraction commissioned public art murals and sculptures for Oranjemund. In this regard, an annual artist retreat to showcase the historic and environmental mysteries of the Sperrgebiet is held as part OMDis tourism drive under the Art can Transform Projects. A quarterly farmers market has been established to support the local nursery bringing the produce to the community. In addition to the tourism drive, we have facilitated hospitality training as part of capacity building. The Changemakers television series broadcasted through One Africa provided an opportunity for storytelling and success stories related to Oranjemund and the impact it had on the lives of influential persons from Oranjemund. In terms of Agriculture OMDis conducted a feasibility studies along the lower Orange River to showcase a potential of establishing an agricultural industry in Oranjemund. OMDis is also managing and running an urban agriculture project that was piloted for Rand D for the agriculture sector. Property feasibility studies have also been undertaken for the golf club, yacht club and bowling club to investigate the repurposing of old infrastructure into viable projects to alleviate the housing needs of Oranjemund as well tourist attraction.

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### How has the town changed since the creation of the OMDis?

Case studies indicate that town transformation is a process that takes up to 15 years, significant financial resources and committed stakeholders are required to see a positive impact. OMDis was created in August 2019. Since then, OMDis has played a facilitating role by connecting investors with opportunities in Oranjemund. We enable mitigating risk by conducting feasibility studies for industry development. We support existing SMEs and create a culture of entrepreneurship. We are still in the infant stage of town transformation, however, OMDis contributed positively to creating a conducive environment and connecting some property developers with OTC.

### What are the current challenges facing Oranjemund?

Challenges create opportunities for investors to solve these challenges. High demand for housing in a growing market outstrips supply by far. Lack of accommodation establishments for tourism and business travellers. Oranjemund is still primarily



OMDis General Manager Tony Bessinger. PHOTO OMDis

supported by diamond mining, while alternative economic engines are still being developed. Other challenges are: Limited retail options; infrastructure upgrade required in line with the newly developing demand; land delivery for housing and businesses.

### How is OMDis helping Oranjemund prepare for expansion?

As part of our mandate, OMDis is a purposeful intervention to accelerate economic diversification by creating two or more industries. OMDis conducted feasibility work in property development that can assist in solving the accommodation need. We are collaborating with OTC to tackle issues that can hamper economic growth, i.e. land delivery and SME development.

### What opportunities currently hold the most promising for Oranjemund?

Agriculture and tourism. Oranjemund has natural endowments that set itself apart from the rest of the region and Namibia, which makes it an attractive tourism and investment destination.

### When will the OMDis have fulfilled its function and what will happen after that?

OMDis has a plan towards 2030 by helping establish 50 new sustainable SMEs, helping establish a stable town population of at least 15 000 and seeing that at least two new industries were created. The town can support 1 000 new employment opportunities. By 2030, OMDis will have reached self-sustainability through participation in sustainable projects.

### What are OMDis' priorities for 2023 and what is expected for Oranjemund in 2024?

The completion of the fibre-to-home project in partnership with Telecom Namibia remains a priority. OMDis will also finalize the tourism feasibility study for the Orange

River concession. SME development remains a key priority as such, projects including tax compliance, training of accounting systems, mentoring, coaching and grant funding are lined up for completion by 2024. OMDis has partnered with the Oranjemund Business Box in conjunction with the MTC Swakopmund Dome to spearhead business ideas and creation of new businesses. Finally, OMDis will as part of the SME development mandate, host a Women-In-Business Conference and Expo on 18 October 2023.



General Manager Tony Bessinger with Aunie Gideon, OMDis Business Development Manager.



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