

From Shipyards to Growth: Namdock's Potential to Transform Namibia's Logistics and Economy

The spirit of Willie Esterhuyse¹ Lives On!

Introduction

Maritime trade is a cornerstone of global economic development, linking markets, industries, and nations. In Namibia, a country with a vast coastline over 1,500 km long and two operational ports², efficient maritime trade is essential for driving growth, creating jobs, and diversifying the economy, in alignment with the National Development Plan (NDP).

The port plays a central role in Namibia's logistics strategy, essential to achieving the objectives of NDP4. Namport, as the primary gateway for imports and exports, ensures the smooth movement of goods and resources. Sea exports consistently hold higher value than other transport modes, with Walvis Bay Port leading in trade value during January and February 2025. This statistic is not unique to Namibia as 90% of Africa's total trade passes through seaports.

Namdock, with its specialized services like dry docking³, ship repair, and maintenance, guarantees the operational efficiency and longevity of vessels. These services not only sustain Namibia's maritime infrastructure but also position the country as a potential hub for regional and international trade. The expansion of both the port and dry docks will enable Namibia to accommodate larger vessels, enhancing the capacity to handle more significant maritime traffic. This expansion also provides an opportunity to boost maritime tourism, aligning with NDP4's focus on diversifying the economy through sectors such as tourism and logistics.

A historical example of maritime-led growth can be seen in Dubai, where the development of its maritime infrastructure was key to its economic diversification. This model provides insights for Namibia as it looks to enhance its own maritime sector and position itself as a regional logistics hub.

Strategic Lessons from Abroad

While Namibia's development priorities must be grounded in its own context, insights from other countries can offer valuable guidance. Dubai is one such example. Facing economic reliance on oil and the decline of traditional industries, Dubai strategically invested in maritime infrastructure to diversify its economy, ultimately establishing a global logistics hub with well-integrated port and ship repair facilities. Similarly, Singapore's success as a maritime powerhouse can be attributed to its focus on advanced ship repair services, like those at Sembawang Shipyard, and maintaining a competitive edge through innovation and skilled labour. The Port of Rotterdam also offers valuable lessons; it transformed into the largest port in Europe by continuously innovating and expanding its infrastructure, accommodating global trade flows, and serving as a critical link to Europe.

Bangladesh, with its growing maritime sector, offers another example. The Port of Chittagong has been central to Bangladesh's trade and industrial expansion, with significant investments in port

¹ The late Willie Esterhuyse, a respected commercial executive who passed in April 2025, leaves behind a legacy anchored in every milestone achieved and every future still possible.

² Walvis Bay & Lüderitz

³ **Dry docking:** This is a process where ships are taken out of the water to inspect, repair, and maintain their hulls, propellers, and other underwater components.

infrastructure, container terminals, and efficient handling capacity, which has allowed the country to integrate more effectively into global shipping networks.

Namibia can draw from these examples by enhancing its own maritime infrastructure to support economic transformation. The Port of Walvis Bay, Namibia's largest commercial port, plays a crucial role in regional trade. With recent upgrades, including new container terminals and cranes, Walvis Bay has significantly increased its container handling capacity, now able to manage up to 750,000 TEUs⁴ annually.

Namdock, based in Walvis Bay, is a crucial component of the country's maritime infrastructure. Its dry docking, ship repair, and fabrication capabilities directly contribute to the efficiency of Walvis Bay as a logistics hub, supporting both regional trade and the local maritime industry. By expanding and aligning these services with national development goals, Namibia can further enhance its logistics network, reduce dependency on foreign ports, and increase industrial activity.

Looking ahead, the potential development of Lüderitz as a key player in the green hydrogen⁵ industry could offer new opportunities for Namdock. If Lüderitz's port infrastructure grows alongside the green hydrogen sector, Namdock could leverage its established relationship with Namport to expand its operations there. This collaboration would allow Namdock to tap into the emerging market for renewable energy exports, while also contributing to the development of Lüderitz's maritime capabilities.

This strategic move would not only enhance Namibia's capacity to serve different industrial sectors in both Walvis Bay and Lüderitz, but also create a diversified and resilient economy. By leveraging its existing relationship with Namport, Namdock could position itself as a key player in both ports, supporting the national agenda for industrial growth, trade, and the development of the green hydrogen sector. Rather than simply replicating other countries' models, Namibia can adapt successful strategies to fit its unique needs, focusing on infrastructure that delivers long-term benefits, strengthens competitiveness, and creates inclusive economic opportunities.

Namibia's Development & Namdock's role

Namibia, like Dubai in its earlier development stages, remains heavily reliant on primary sector exports, particularly mining and raw materials. Both Nations share a vision of economic diversification and aspire to become trade-driven service economies. Development in Namibia is evident in GDP figures, but the growth is not inclusive improve the vast inequality experienced in the country.

The National Development Plans are multi-sectoral policy frameworks that guide national priorities, including infrastructure investment, human capital development, and economic diversification. Each of the five iterations of the NDP has outlined time-bound goals aimed at addressing structural constraints and catalysing inclusive growth. Among them, NDP4 (2012–2017) emphasized positioning Namibia as a logistics hub and improving competitiveness through targeted infrastructure and institutional reforms.

NDP4 identifies logistics as a key economic priority alongside tourism, manufacturing, and agriculture. It envisions Namibia as a regional logistics hub, capitalising on its coastal geography and transport infrastructure to attract trade and investment. Central to this ambition is the enhancement of maritime capabilities. Namdock's dry docking, ship repair, and fabrication services directly support the logistics

⁴ **TEU (Twenty-Foot Equivalent Unit):** A standard unit of measurement used in shipping to describe the capacity of container ships and terminals. A TEU is the size of a standard 20-foot shipping container.

⁵ **Green hydrogen:** Hydrogen produced by using renewable energy to split water into hydrogen and oxygen using Renewable Energy. Considered a cleaner alternative to fossil fuels.

and manufacturing pillars outlined in NDP4. By servicing vessels that operate in regional and international waters, Namdock enhances the reliability of maritime logistics, reducing vessel downtime and improving overall trade efficiency. This, in turn, strengthens Namibia's ability to position itself as a competitive logistics corridor in Southern Africa and supports broader goals of economic diversification and job creation.

Namdock's services contribute directly to Namibia's trade performance by improving the reliability and availability of vessel maintenance within the country. With facilities capable of dry docking, mechanical repairs, fabrication, coatings, and marine systems, Namdock reduces vessel downtime and reliance on foreign ports. This increases Namibia's attractiveness as a maritime corridor and enhances trade efficiency along the whole trade supply chain such as the Trans-Kalahari and Trans-Caprivi trade routes. Capitalising on maritime development could also improve transport links to landlocked neighbouring countries like Zambia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and southern DRC. By enhancing port infrastructure and services, Namibia can offer a competitive alternative to South African ports, becoming the preferred gateway for regional exports and strengthening trade relationships. Enhanced capacity and infrastructure could enable the use of Short Sea Shipping⁶ to neighbouring ports, such as Angola and the Western Cape of south Africa, offering a potentially profitable addition to regional trade.

By localising and expanding advanced ship repair and support services, Namdock retains capital in-country and strengthens Namibia's domestic industrial capacity, which aligns with the manufacturing pillar of the NDP. Moreover, this capacity empowers Namibia to assert greater autonomy in regional trade networks, which is increasingly valuable in global supply chain realignments.

Looking ahead, Namdock also supports Namibia's green industrialisation trajectory. Port-led development in Africa depends on creating industrial network around ports that can foster environmental innovation and economic resilience, the Oil and Gas sector has established the importance of the Ports and maritime trade for various projects to be achieved. The traditional oil and Gas and energy additionality found in green industries, would require maritime movement be as efficient as possible. This aligns not only with NDP4's emphasis on logistics and industrialisation but also with emerging global standards in sustainable maritime development.

Energy and Sustainability: Pathways to Growth

As Namibia seeks to diversify its economy and harness its rich energy resources, Namdock is poised to play a pivotal role in the emerging oil, gas, and green hydrogen sectors. Situated at the heart of Namibia's maritime infrastructure, Namdock's expertise in ship repair, maintenance, and heavy fabrication positions it as a key player in the country's green industrialisation strategy. Namdock's involvement in servicing the offshore oil and gas industry ensures that it remains central to the ongoing energy sector expansion, while also facilitating the broader shift towards sustainable energy solutions.

Namdock's capabilities are vital for both the growing oil and gas sector and the green hydrogen economy. The government's efforts to establish a green ammonia⁷ hub at Walvis Bay, a critical node in the region's green hydrogen export infrastructure, directly benefit from Namdock's technical expertise. The planned ammonia bunker hub will require robust maintenance and operational support, areas where Namdock's services are indispensable. This infrastructure will complement efforts to decarbonise regional shipping and logistics, aligning with Namibia's broader environmental and industrial goals.

⁶ **Short Sea Shipping:** The transportation of goods over short distances by sea, often used between neighbouring countries or regions.

⁷ **Green ammonia:** A derivative of green hydrogen, ammonia produced using renewable energy, which can be used as a fuel or for fertilizer, contributing to green industrialization efforts.

In addition to its role in oil and gas, Namdock is expected to be a key partner in the development of green hydrogen infrastructure. The expansion of Namibia's energy and logistics sectors, particularly with the construction of hydrogen production facilities and associated port infrastructure, will require world-class engineering services. Namdock's established presence and experience in large-scale industrial projects make it an ideal candidate for supporting the growing demand for green hydrogen-related infrastructure in Namibia.

Namport's expanding operations at Walvis Bay and Lüderitz will also play a crucial role in Namibia's ambition to become a regional logistics hub for green hydrogen. The port's involvement in the development of the Lüderitz Port Masterplan and its participation in the Southern Corridor Development Initiative are vital to the country's hydrogen export plans. Namport's continued expansion will further integrate Namibia into global hydrogen supply chains, complementing the work of Namdock and other local stakeholders.

Through collaboration with international partners, such as the Dutch-Port Rotterdam agreement, Namibia's green hydrogen vision will benefit from an integrated approach to infrastructure development. Namdock, as part of this broader framework, will contribute not only to the offshore oil and gas industry but also to the green energy transition, ensuring that Namibia is well-positioned to lead the charge in Southern Africa's sustainable development.

Conclusion

Namdock is more than just a shipyard. It is a strategic enabler of Namibia's development ambitions. By directly supporting trade efficiency, fostering industrial growth, and enhancing the country's position in regional logistics networks, Namdock plays a pivotal role in shaping Namibia's economic future. Together with Namport, which facilitates the movement of goods, Namdock strengthens the very backbone of maritime operations through vessel maintenance and engineering support. These two entities form a critical part of Namibia's logistics value chain, driving trade and industrialisation in tandem.

In light of the volatility of global trade policies and ongoing tariff-related discussions, the need for trade flexibility and diversification has never been more urgent. As Namibia seeks to reduce its dependency on primary exports, Namdock offers a crucial opportunity to anchor the shift toward value-added services and green industrialisation. By investing in infrastructure, promoting regional integration, and aligning policies that prioritise sustainability, Namdock can play a key role in reducing trade costs, building more resilient supply chains, and creating greener, more efficient port operations.

Through such advancements and needed upgrades, Namdock is poised to not only further the objectives of the National Development Plan but also elevate Namibia to a competitive, forward-thinking player in global trade. Ultimately, the development of Namibia's logistics sector, powered by Namdock, may provide the foundation for the inclusive growth the country needs, creating jobs, driving innovation, and fostering sustainable development that benefits all sectors of society.

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