



***EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN NAMIBIA***

**ADDRESS BY HON. PROF. PETER H. KATJAVIVI,  
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OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

**FOUNDING VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA (UNAM) 1992 – 2003**

**At the  
Forum of the Commonwealth Council on Education**

**Commonwealth Parliamentary Association,  
Westminster Hall, Palace of Westminster,  
London, United Kingdom**

**26<sup>th</sup> May 2016**

**Members of Parliament Present;**

**Professor Richard Mawditt, UNESCO Chair in Higher Education Management;**

**Members of the Diplomatic Core here present;**

**Distinguished Invited Guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish to thank the organisers of this event for the kind invitation they extended to me, to speak to you today. There are many people who played an important role that helped to ensure that I was able to make this trip. One of these friends is Professor Richard Mawditt.

Let me take this opportunity to pay a special tribute to the various colleagues from United Kingdom, the rest of Europe (particularly Germany and Finland), United States of America and Africa, who joined me in my capacity as a newly appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University of Namibia (UNAM) in the 1990s, working together to build the foundation and shape the agenda of this young university. From the UK, most of these colleagues came from London, Oxford, Sheffield, Manchester and Bath. Last but not least I would like to acknowledge specifically, the role played by Mr. Peter Williams, a longstanding friend of Namibia.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Education reform is top of the agenda of almost every country in the world. As higher education becomes less of a pinnacle at the top of the education system and more of a prerequisite for human development, the role of senior secondary education in supporting its students' transition to higher education becomes ever more important.

In many countries, much of the senior secondary school curriculum remains focused on getting students through their courses, covering the course materials, giving tests, as well as expecting right or wrong answers. However, countries prosper when students are adequately prepared for a higher education, both in expectations and in abilities. Given the increasing public expenditures for higher education, there is good reason to be concerned about the readiness of secondary school students for higher learning. Misalignment between secondary education and higher education systems can be a key factor contributing to a nation's misplacement of educational resources.

I fully concur with Bindu N. Lohani, Vice-President (Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development) of the Asian Development Bank, when he said, in 2012:

*“Quality education is essential for creating a sustainable human resource base upon which to build a country's development.”*

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Let us specifically look at education in Namibia.

Namibia is among many countries around the world that need to strengthen student preparation in secondary schools in basic science subjects, mathematics and English. In our case the need comes from a deficit inherited at the time of independence. Addressing this deficit is an ongoing challenge, 26 years later. Secondary schools are still faced with the challenge of recognizing and responding to the growing diversity of learning abilities, in order to expand the student base that will enter higher education.

Before Namibia's independence, the country's education system was designed to reinforce the Apartheid system rather than provide the necessary human resource base to promote equitable social and economic development. It was fragmented along racial and ethnic lines, in what was termed the Bantu Education system, which was also being enforced in black communities in South Africa, with vast disparities in both the allocation of resources and the quality of education offered. This had had a great impact on the quality of education in the country.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

After independence, the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) set about to create one unified structure for education administration, from the previous eleven fragmented, ethnically based departments.

English replaced Afrikaans as the nation's official language and was chosen as the medium of instruction in schools and other educational institutions. A new, learner-centered curriculum for Grades 1 to 12 was developed and introduced, which was completed in 1998. It received recognition beyond Namibia's borders and included an adapted Cambridge IGCSE programme for senior secondary level. Curriculum development, educational research, and professional development of school teachers is centrally organised by the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) in Okahandja.

Teachers were retrained during school vacations and special training sessions. Nevertheless, there was great pressure on teachers and schools to transform in a short period of time, without the staff development in advance that would normally be required for such an undertaking.

The Constitution directs the government to provide free primary education and this was introduced across the country, and encouraged higher enrolment of learners. Parents were no longer charged for tuition, or books, However, families must pay fees for uniforms, stationery, and hostel accommodation for boarders. Moreover, school boards were allowed to charge parents fixed amounts for their School Funds, which were used to supplement government allocations and cover some maintenance, improvements, and special projects. These were perceived as school fees, and were an obstacle for the poorest families, so they were abolished at primary level in 2013 and at secondary level this year, 2016.

Compulsory education in Namibia starts at the primary education level at an age of six. Primary education consists of seven years from Grade 1 to Grade 7, to prepare children for secondary education. Secondary education stretches over a period of five years from Grade 8 to Grade 12. Children achieve a Junior Secondary School Certificate after successful completion of Grade 10.

After successful completion of Grade 12, learners achieve a Namibia Senior Secondary Education Certificate. This can either be the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) or the Higher International General Certificate of Secondary Education (HIGCSE). IGCSE exam papers are set and marked in Namibia, but moderated by Cambridge whereas, HIGCSE question papers are set, marked and moderated by the University of Cambridge. Learners in Grade 12 are graded in the different subjects they have taken and those who wish to pursue further studies need to obtain a good grade to meet the requirements of tertiary institutions both locally and abroad.

The changes implemented have brought about an enrolment rate of 95 percent of school-age children attending school and the number of teachers has increased by almost 30 percent since 1990. Over 4000 new classrooms have been built. As a result of these improvements, repetition rates reduced in all grades. Significant progress has also been made in the use of English, although challenges remain in improving standards of written English.

I am pleased to inform you that educational change in Namibia has also greatly improved gender parity in student enrolment. The 2013 Millennium Development Goals Interim Progress Report No.4, published by the National Planning Commission, gave the ratios of male to female learners across the education spectrum in 2011-2012 as follows:

Primary education 97 girls: 100 boys

Secondary education 113 girls:100 boys

UNAM, NUST and IUM An average of 131 females : 100 males

Vocational Training Centres An average of 58 females : 100 males

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Namibia now allocates more than 18% of its national budget to education. This represents 6 to 7 percent of Namibia's total GDP, thus making us one of the three countries with the highest percentage of GDP directed toward education in the world. As has been the tradition, the largest share of the N\$67.08 billion national total expenditure budget for 2015/2016, went to the education sector, with an allocation of N\$11.32 billion (18% of the budget).

Today, as a result of this investment, we have a total of 1,723 schools, of which 1,604 are government schools and 119 private schools. As of August 2013, 26 additional schools were under construction. Most of There is, however, still a shortage of schools, particularly in rural areas, a need for more classrooms in existing schools, and for more and improved hostel accommodation for boarders. The vast size of our country makes provision of schools for all communities a technical and financial challenge.

While many teachers are seen as generally adequately prepared for the task, there are still a lot who require further training. Some schools consistently perform below expectation, and there is a high failure and dropout rate.

It is against this background that the Government of Republic of Namibia has undertaken ongoing reform initiatives, with the view to further strengthen and transform the system of education in the country.

Improving education quality calls for contextualised initiatives within the domains of national policy making, alongside school level practice, and communities that are responsive to conditions within each of these domains. The Government has developed such initiatives within the policy framework of the Education Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP). This is a fifteen-year strategic plan designed to improve quality and efficiency in the education sector, from pre-primary to tertiary levels. This year we are embarking on its third phase, from 2016 to 2020.

ETSIP was developed in response to weaknesses identified by the Namibian Government, and through a World Bank study in 2005, which highlighted the poor quality of education, untrained teachers, and unsatisfactory performance of learners.

It aims to align the education system with Namibia's Vision 2030, the Government's long-term plan to transform Namibia into an industrialised society. Vision 2030 addresses inequality, focuses on developing human and institutional capacities, and the efficient use of natural resources, as well as good governance and cooperation between government, individuals, and communities. Education is central to Vision 2030 in order to ensure that Namibian society will be made up of literate, skilled, articulate, innovative, informed and proactive people.

Furthermore, the Namibian government has now embarked on an extensive programme of developing early childhood education centres. This is aimed at preparing children for formal education as well as enhancing their care and meeting their nutritional needs.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Namibia has two public tertiary institutions of general education, the University of Namibia (UNAM) established in 1992, and the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), which was transformed from the Polytechnic of Namibia at the beginning of this year, 2016.

At both institutions, the basic requirement for entrance to undergraduate degree programmes is a Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate (NSSC), also referred to as Grade 12 Certificate, with a pass in five subjects and a total score of 25 points or more in not more than three examination sittings. Good performance in the English language examination is a requirement.

Namibia also has one private university, the International University of Management (IUM).

There are a number of specialised further education institutions set up by government, the private sector, and NGOs. These include the College of Arts (COTA) in Windhoek; The University Centre for Studies in Namibia (TUCSIN) in Windhoek, Oshakati, Rundu and Rehoboth; the Namibia Maritime Fisheries Institute (NAMFI) in Walvis Bay; the Namibian Institute of Mining and Technology (NIMT) in Arandis; and the Katutura Youth Enterprise Centre (KAYEC) in Windhoek, Ondangwa and Rundu.

The Namibian Training Authority (NTA) controls seven vocational centers. They offer a range of courses for school leavers, including: plumbing, welding, electrical general, automotive electrical, bricklaying, cabinet making, technical drawing, dressmaking, hospitality, office management and automotive mechanics. Vocational students in Namibia are given governments grants to assist them in attending Vocational Training Centres.

Educational institutions in Namibia and their portfolio are accredited by the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA), which evaluates and accredits national institutions and degrees, as well as foreign qualifications of people who wish to demonstrate the national equivalence of their degrees earned abroad.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Namibia's education system continues to enjoy considerable attention from the Government, which has identified particular challenges, viz:

- high dropout rates;
- teenage pregnancies;
- drug abuse in schools;
- school absenteeism especially in rural areas where children are required by their families to herd cattle rather than go to school;
- lack of teaching facilities;
- challenges relating to the nutritional programme in schools and hostels;
- the need for upgrading the skills of instructors in the vocational training programme; and,
- inadequate pre-primary development.

The Namibian experience has demonstrated that there is a need to make a concerted effort, involving all stakeholders, to undertake targeted interventions in addressing these issues. For instance Universal Primary

Education (UPE) needs to ensure the quality of education provided to the pupils and not just the numbers that attend school.

With this in mind, the following key areas in Namibia's education system need targeted intervention.

#### *Adequate Teacher Qualification and Support*

Teachers working in primary schools across rural Namibia have a difficult job because of limited qualifications and support. Quite often, teachers have to teach multiple grades, textbooks are pitched far above the comprehension level of students, and classes include children with very different levels of learning achievements. The average school teacher in Namibia does not get adequate pre-service or in-service education, nor does he/she get the support to overcome these problems. Compounding this is the relatively low educational qualifications of many teachers themselves.

#### *Low Teacher Motivation and High Absenteeism*

A key factor affecting the quality of primary education in Namibia appears to be low levels of teacher motivation. Difficulties associated with accommodation present additional challenges, especially in rural areas.

#### *Poor Teaching Methodology*

School teachers in Namibia often do not explain the meaning of the text, from books and other sources, using understandable local examples that would relate to the everyday life of the learners.

### *Linguistic Diversity*

In Namibia, linguistic diversity creates unique challenges for the nation's education system. The teacher not only has to account for varying learning abilities within the classroom, but also dialect nuances and mother-tongue language differences, which affect students' comprehension of the subject matter. The students with rural schooling are at a significant disadvantage as they transition to higher education, because Namibia's universities teach exclusively in English. Part of the challenge is that many teachers are themselves not adequately equipped in English, so they cannot competently teach the students good English.

Nevertheless, there has been some improvement in this area. I can reflect on the example of a student I received while I was serving as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Namibia. This student had excelled in Physics and Chemistry and joined UNAM, but he was poor in English. Having seen his potential, I recommended him for the bridging course in English language at UNAM and the boy excelled very well. Today, he is an engineer, working for a multinational company. There were numerous examples of this kind during my service as the Vice-Chancellor of UNAM.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Since independence, there has been a debate on the role of universities in an independent Namibia, relating to the training of manpower needed for nation building.

Since its inception in 1992 as a Windhoek-based university, the University of Namibia (UNAM) has grown significantly. Starting with some 3000 students in 1992, UNAM's 2015 enrolment topped 20,000, including full-time, part-time, and distance education students. Eight faculties cover the humanities and social sciences; education; law; agriculture; science; engineering; economics; and medical sciences, which saw the first 35 medical doctors graduate this year, 2016. There is also the Namibia Business School, which is part of UNAM.

UNAM now has 12 campuses in the various regions of Namibia. Each of these regions has a variety of natural resources and UNAM's strategy has been to come up with ideas that could harness these resources to the fullest, and take its courses to people in those communities.

The expansion of the university is linked to the policy of decentralization so that the University does not function in a vacuum. It is one way of empowering society and thus reinforcing democratic principles of societal existence.

Professor Rubadiri once suggested that, the university should not be divorced from its society, but rather should be part of a continuum of knowledge that begins in the village. This has been our guiding principle at the time of the founding of the University of Namibia and has continued under the leadership of my successor, Professor Lazarus Hangula, the current Vice Chancellor.

One of the biggest challenges for UNAM in the 1990s was to enroll students from different communities across the country. The unequal educational provisions of the past had created very unequal school outputs. For example, for some years there were hardly any students at UNAM from some of the northern regions, such as Oshanaana.

Our response was to engage the communities in the north of the country in order to address this situation, and to analyse it in detail. It was made clear that the marks of students leaving school after Grade 12 were simply not good enough, particularly in the fields of Maths, Science and English. At the same time, there was a feeling in the community that young people needed further training to enable to get jobs locally even if they did not continue to do degree courses.

The University therefore developed a community based approach, through which we established a second campus in Oshakati with a focus on access, English, and business studies. This was made possible with the support of the Namibian Government, particularly the Ministry of Local and Regional Government and Housing, the local community, and the Ford Foundation.

The British Council supported our work in Oshakati through funding our Coordinator of the access courses, Dick Chamberlain. The British Government also supported the work of UNAM more generally through funding two successive Pro Vice Chancellors who particularly focused on

our outreach to the communities. These were Terry Davies and Bob Kirby-Harris. I believe they have been duly honoured for this work.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In a bid to strengthen the ongoing education reforms in Namibia, the following aspects also need consideration:

#### *The Role of Parliament*

There is a need to strengthen the role of Parliament in the improvement of education, with a proper follow-up on the enhancement of its oversight function.

#### *The Need for Public–Private Partnerships*

The interface between public and private higher education provides opportunities for significant synergies.

#### *Responding to Stakeholders*

In the dynamic context of African development, with a particular focus on regional integration, university leaders should take a multiplicity of concerns into consideration, including the extent to which graduates receive an education that is relevant to the needs of the workplace. In this context, it is important to note that within the SADC region, we have a Vice-Chancellors' Forum, which brings university heads together to share experiences in the field of higher educational management.

### *How can technology improve the quality of school education?*

There is a need to use ICT more widely and particularly in rural and remote areas where it has not yet been used adequately due to lack of electricity.

### *Student behaviour*

There is a need for authorities to monitor and manage student behaviour so as to promote a conducive learning environment and a positive student culture. In this case, it is instructive to note that the UNAM campus in Rundu had problems with excessive student use of alcohol until the campus was made an alcohol-free zone by the current Director. Academic performance, as well as social behaviour have improved significantly as a result.

### *Focus More on Case Studies*

Benchmarking is important.

### *Link Curricula to Real-World Challenges*

Universities can jumpstart their degrees by linking their curricula to real-life challenges.

### *Create Opportunities for Students to Participate in Social Entrepreneurship Contests*

There is nothing more engaging and hands-on than letting students participate in entrepreneurship contests, which should include both the human management aspects as well as technological startups. One university or a group of institutions can get together to sponsor and manage such contests.

### *Invite Business Executives to Deliver Lectures*

Inviting entrepreneurship executives to engage in teaching provides more engaging, vibrant, and effective learning.

### *Foster Global Exchange Programs with Other Institutions*

Global exchange programs are very important because they enable students to think outside the box.

### *Encourage Student-in-Residence Programmes*

Student-in-residence programmes are comparable to internships, except that students get hands-on experience, and work a specific number of hours at the host company.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Tertiary institutions should never exist in a vacuum from the rest of the society around them. This is very important in the Namibia of today as we speak of implementing the Harambee Prosperity Plan for sustainable national development initiated this year by President Hage Geingob. This plan reinforces and complements the overall national development goals. It is built on four pillars: effective governance, economic advancement, social progression, and infrastructure development. Higher education is covered specifically under the pillar of social progression. The plan aim meant to fill development gaps, including vocational training and ICT.

A viable strategy for Namibia to ensure that its institutions of learning respond to the country's development aspirations, as highlighted in the

Harambee Prosperity Plan, is to focus on knowledge generation, transmission and transfer. This can be done in four main ways:

- 1) Institutional research agendas anchored on societal needs, radiating to all units within and between institutions, and with an emphasis on participatory action research.
- 2) Curricula anchored in society's development challenges, regularly fed by research findings and characterised by participatory hands-on/minds-on experiential learning.
- 3) Out-reach activities involving the application of research results to address development challenges, in which teachers and students learn from society in the same way as society learns from them – a system that feeds the lessons from outreach experience into formal curricula.
- 4) Engaging stakeholders, through regular and deliberate engagements, driven by conviction of the need to change the ongoing socio-economic inequalities in our country.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to indicate that, education in Namibia has improved significantly over the last two decades since independence. Schools are accessible to most children, especially now with Universal Primary Education and Free Secondary Education policies in place. Both student enrollment and attendance are at their highest level, and teachers are adequately remunerated. However, challenges in implementing and monitoring high standards in teaching and learning outcomes across regional, cultural and socioeconomic subsectors prevent Namibia from fully achieving this goal. In addition, poor support for teachers, especially in rural and remote areas, and limited use of technology in the classroom, remain barriers to improving both primary and secondary education.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

All that is left is for me to thank you for having me together with my dear wife, Jane, and my colleague, Hon. Dr Becky Ndjoze-Ojo, Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Training and Innovation.

**I thank you!**