REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

Keynote Address

Official Opening of the National Research Symposium, 2015

by

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Minister of Higher Education, Training and Innovation

Hilton Hotel, Windhoek

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Director of Ceremonies;
Prof Andre du Pisani, Chairperson of the National Commission on Research, Science and Technology;
Commissioners of National Commission on Research, Science and Technology;
Dr. Eino Mvula, CEO of the National Commission on Research, Science and Technology;
Representatives from Government Ministries and SOEs,
Representatives from the Private Sector,
Representatives from Non-Governmental Organisations,
Researchers and Scientists
Distinguished Guests,
Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen;

I am deeply honoured to be here at the official opening of the National Research Symposium 2015, a prestigious event set aside, to provide an opportunity for Namibian researchers to present their research findings.

The National Research Symposium is part of our deliberate efforts to encourage wide socio-economic use of researchers’ results by the dissemination and publication of research results. Apart from providing a platform for researchers to exchanging research results and learning from peers, the symposium is also an opportunity to engage policy makers as well as funders of research.
It is our belief that, in addition to expanding the boundaries of knowledge, research should also address the socio-economic challenges of societies and nations. For this reason, I see this symposium as an opportunity for academia and industry to connect, with a view to commercialise research outcomes.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let us therefore, make use of this opportunity, to celebrate research excellence by our scientists in various areas that are relevant to our national development.

I note with satisfaction that the National Commission on Research, Science and Technology (NCRST), together with all stakeholders, has pulled its weight towards organizing such a strategic event, a National Symposium of this magnitude.

This year, the National Research Symposium is particularly significant as Namibia embarks on the implementation of the National Programme on Research, Science, Technology and Innovation for 2014/15 to 2016/17 which was approved by the Cabinet of the Republic of Namibia, and launched during the first quarter of 2015.

As researchers, the National Programme should be a vehicle to respond to National research priorities that are identified by the 1) industry, 2) academia and 3) the public sector, which address and contribute to solving the social and economic challenges faced by communities.
The identified research priorities cut across 15 thematic areas which are:
1. health; 2. agriculture and fisheries; 3. water; 4. energy; 5. geology and mining; 6. indigenous knowledge; 7. social sciences and humanities, 8. logistics; 9. environment and tourism; as well as the areas addressing 10. enabling technologies which are 11. manufacturing technologies, 12. information and communication technology; 13. biotechnology and 14. space science.

I am pleased to note that the research papers to be presented at this symposium cover all 15 research priorities in the National Programme on Research, Science, Technology and Innovation.

As Namibia’s research and development capacity is strengthened, this will enhance knowledge flow and productive networking, which will in turn strengthen Namibia’s current ranking, from the current 109 out of 142 countries on the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)/INSEAD’s Global Innovation Index 2014.

Government’s commitment to increase R&D spending up to 0.3% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2017/18, will be based on clear evidence of enhanced R&D and Innovation; as well as a strong growth, in local high level research capacity in priority areas as determined by government from time to time. We should therefore, ensure that scarce state resources are used for the intended purpose and not spent on travel, or large inefficient organizational structures.
Ladies and Gentleman;

In order to measure our success in research and development, we have to identify and populate our National R&D and Innovation Indicators. Indicators should point to 1. growth in local research capacity, 2. increase in patents, 3. increase in peer reviewed papers, expanded innovative networks and many more.

Enhanced R&D capacity should put Namibia on a positive technology development trajectory.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is against this background that a few weeks ago, I launched the Research and Experimental Development (R&D) Census (2013/14 fiscal year) and the Innovation Census (2012/13 and 2013/14 fiscal years) which will produce data that can help in understanding the size and shape of the Namibia R&D landscape and their use in system-level planning, monitoring and evaluation

In his inaugural speech, His Excellency, Dr Hage Geingob had the following to say “As we go forward, we will seek to be transactional in maintaining and strengthening the governance architecture, but we will also be transformational as we prepare the citizens for the new economy that requires the development of new parameters in education, innovation, and enterprise.”
This signifies Government’s commitment to establishing and strengthening a national system that promotes, develops, coordinates and informs research science, technology and innovation towards a knowledge-based society. This calls for robust research and development programmes coupled with dissemination platforms starting at the grassroot levels.

The Government of the Republic of Namibia greatly values regional and international collaboration in research as a strategy for development. One such outstanding collaboration is that between Namibia and South Africa, where a number of researchers jointly work on common research problems.

Scientists, the world over, continue to be looked upon to provide knowledge as well as solutions to the challenges affecting humanity; ranging from diseases, global environmental issues such as climate change, global energy crisis, food security, etc.

Namibia has clearly identified STI as a vehicle for the attainment of our aspirations as contained in Vision 2030.

At this juncture, I would like to commend the efforts of all researchers who will present their research papers at this Symposium. The energy and time you have put in, from research design to conducting research, to publishing your results is highly recognized and commendable.
Finally, it should be noted that critical research outputs should be presented as policy briefs for us in government to make national evidence-based policies and laws.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the NCRST together with the various institutions that were involved in ensuring that this event is a success.

It is now my pleasure to declare the National Research Symposium 2015 officially opened.

I thank you.