



Background and Overview of the National Programme on Research, Science, Technology and Innovation (NPRSTI) [2014/2015 – 2017/18]

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“If we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and must make discoveries”

Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1967: 254.

Preface

Born in 1925 in Martinique, Frantz Fanon studied medicine in France and later specialized in psychiatry. Fanon did not live to see peace restored to an autonomous Algeria. After his untimely death in 1961, he became world famous for his edifying and revolutionary writings, among these *Black Skins, White Masks* (1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* [originally published in French in 1961] (1967).

At this history-making occasion when we launch the first-ever National Programme on Research, Science, Technology and Innovation (NPRSTI) in our country, the above quotation from Fanon makes eminent sense. As Africans his words have special resonance, spurring us on to act, to think, to harness knowledge, science, technology and innovation in support of national development, to see knowledge as capital, to appreciate the dialectics and discourses associated with knowledge-creation, and to value the actualizing and transformative power of Research & Development (R&D). For without such an understanding of the task that lies ahead, the NPRSTI cannot fly.

Genesis

The legal and statutory basis for the development of the NPRSTI derives from Section 18 of the *Research, Science and Technology Act (RST)* (Act No. 23 of 2004). The NPRST is located within a broader policy framing that of Vision 2030 that envisions “a prosperous and industrialised Namibia, developed by her human resources, enjoying peace, harmony and political stability”. It also intersects with the National Development Plan 4 (NDP4) – one of the constitutive policy articulations of VISION 2030 – and at the Continental level it resonates with the African Union-NEPAD’s recommendation to privilege Research and Development (R&D)- globally, it responds to the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that will mature at the end of this year.

From these brief comments it is clear that the NPRSTI forms part of a more complex, multi-level policy matrix, for it is rare to craft this type of policy and programme without taking cognizance of other cognate policies and strategic frameworks. The NPRSTI, very much like the NCRST itself, should be seen as facilitators of knowledge creation and dissemination with the purpose of transforming the political-economy and knowledge landscape of the country towards becoming globally more competitive and socially more sustainable. It is also worth stating that the NPRSTI and the Strategic Plan (2014/15 – 2016/17) of the NCRST are meant to co-exist peacefully!

NPRSTI in Summary

In an elegant summary of the NPRSTI, it would be useful to say that the document, informed by its aims, identifies research priority areas, based on a collaborative process, a policy dialogue, comprising of important interests and knowledge that could conceivable address some of the key social and economic challenges of Namibia.

While the archaeology of the process of knowledge creation that culminated into the NPRSTI has a longer history, structurally, the NPRSTI hangs together in terms of the following buttresses and foundations (if you will allow me the use of architectural language):

- A statement of the Aims of the NPRSTI
- A brief environmental scan of the National Research & Innovation System (in its constitutive parts)
- A SWOT analysis of the RSTI terrain
- A description of the NPRSTI Strategic Priority Areas (SPAs)
- A specification of various targeted research areas with potential for transforming the political-economy of the country and for spawning enabling technologies
- An identification of financing mechanisms for the NPRSTI
- An implementation, monitoring and evaluation matrix

Anatomy

In my brief introduction to the NPRSTI, I wish to emphasize, what I believe are issues of capital importance. The narrative contained in the actual Programme elaborates on each of these aspects, and I wish to urge you to read at the very least, a Summary of the NPRSTI.

- (1) Aims of the NPRSTI – are to: Enhance research coordination, with a view towards increasing efficiency in resource use; to facilitate human and institutional capacity-building in the realm of research, science, technology and innovation; to ensure sustainable financing of priority research and development projects, and to promote science as a preferred area of study, especially at higher education level.
- (2) It is worth stating that the tenor of Section 18 of the RST Act of 2004 infused the contents and anatomy of the NPRSTI. This means, among other things that the NPRSTI has to articulate the national direction for RSTI in Namibia, identify lacunae in the current RSTI landscape, and proactively propose how such shortcomings could be overcome, promote inter- and trans-disciplinary cooperation and integration through research teams and networking, and to privilege STI in research and their intercession with the actual economic, social and environmental conditions in the country.
- (3) The NPRSTI will be rolled-out in parallel with the process of collecting baseline STI indicators and capacities in the country.
- (4) The SWOT analysis of the current RSTI terrain in the country has pointed to several structural and policy weaknesses, among these low investment in R&D, the need for reviewing the legal and policy framework, a fragmented research and innovation system, the relationship between Indigenous Knowledge and RSTI, limited national infrastructure for research, a small industrial sector and weak linkages between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and industry and lack of awareness of the primacy of RSTI for sustainable development. Chapter 3 of the NPRSTI chronicles these and other lacunae, as well as existing and new opportunities for RSTI, based on existing strengths in the area.
- (5) The three-year NPRSTI and its strategic template are, as was said before, closely aligned to NDP4 and the National Human Resource Development Plan (2010-2025). This implies that the NPRSTI will have to work in tandem with other National policies and strategies. This also means that strategy implementation will have to be robust and transparent across five (5) Strategic Priorities, supported by 10 more specific objectives.
- (6) Section 2, Chapters 4 and 5 of the NPRSTI respectively, sets targets to be achieved by the end of 2017, and outline in great detail the five (5) Strategic Priorities, each resting upon specific objectives linked to more detailed interventions, are: Creating an enabling policy and regulatory environment; Building research capacities and technical skills; promoting cooperation in research and innovation activities; disseminating scientific and technological knowledge, and promoting innovation in the economic and social sectors.
- (7) Section 3, Chapter 6 of the NPRSTI identifies Research Areas addressing economic and social challenges. These fall into and cut-across the following knowledge domains and academic disciplines: Public Health, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water, Energy, Geosciences,

mining, Indigenous Knowledge, Social Sciences and Humanities, Logistics and Environment and Tourism. Chapter 7 outlines the research areas addressing enabling technologies, these are: Manufacturing Technologies, Information and Communication Technology, Biotechnology and Space Science.

- (8) A most important part of the NPRSTI is Section 4 that engages with financing, implementation and evaluation. In respect of financing, I wish to state that hitherto, investment in RSTI has been modest, as a percentage of GDP, fluctuating between 0.02% and 0.04% of GDP in the fiscal years 2010/11 and 2012/13. Clearly, such low levels of investment in RSTI do not pass muster. Hence the NPRSTI is proposing 0.2% of GDP or N\$ 256 million in the 2014/2015 fiscal year, 0.25 of GDP or N\$ 320 million in the 2015/2016 fiscal year, and 0.3% of GDP or N\$ 380 in the 2016/2017 fiscal year.
- (9) Finally, the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework is comprehensive, robust and transparent. Monitoring and Evaluation will be done with respect to both quantitative and qualitative considerations. For such purpose, the NCRST has established a Research, Science, Technology and Innovation (RSTI) Information Management System.

Conclusions

Friends of RSTI, what remains is for me to express my deepest thanks and profound gratitude to my colleagues in the NCRST, to those who contributed to the formation of the NPRSTI, to Government, through the Ministries of Education and Finance, and to every researcher, innovator and creative thinker, for making the NPRSTI a memorable success. To the media colleagues, I say, you are our partners and friends please help the NCRST to inform the public about the NPRSTI. I thank you!

- **Notes for an address on the occasion of the official launch of the NPRSTI, Hilton Hotel, Windhoek, Tuesday, 17th March 2015.**