



## **Overview on the Establishment of the NCRST (Work in Progress)**

By

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Presented at the National Consultative Workshop on the Development of the  
National Research, Science, Technology and Innovation Programme (NRSTIP)

Safari Hotel, Windhoek, Monday March 24, 2014

Director of Ceremonies, Hon. Minister of Education, Dr, David Namwandi, distinguished participants, Dr. Eino Mvula, CEO of the National Commission on Research, Science and Technology, staff of the NCRST, all protocol observed.

It gives me considerable pleasure to offer this brief overview on the establishment of the NCRST. I do so from the perspective that I think answers the big questions in life: knowledge, consciousness, fate, God, truth, goodness and justice. This National Consultative Workshop on the NRSTIP is for all those who believe that there are big questions out there, and want to appreciate and learn how the basic techniques of thinking and research shape our existence. These are not the hidden preserve of scientists. Scientists, though, have a more specific role in all of this; they settle some questions – *empirical questions* – by means of agreed procedures, involving looking and seeing, making measurements, or applying rules that have been tested against experience and found to work.

Other questions seem to require more reflection. More self-reflection - more reflection on concepts and procedures and beliefs that we normally just *use* – *in such cases we are examining the scaffolding of our thought, and doing conceptual thinking*.

The most famous philosophical character of the classical Western world, the Socrates of Plato's dialogues, prided himself on being the only one who knew how little he knew (reflection, again).

Success will be a matter not of how much you know at the end, but of what we can do with our knowledge; understanding and taking seriously the implications of ideas.

Researching institutions is a most rewarding undertaking. This can be done from a variety of perspectives, such as: historical sociology, new-institutionalism and social constructivism, just to mention three popular approaches to the study of institutions. While not explicitly invoking any one of these, this brief overview on the genesis and evolution of the NCRST, draws on insights from all of these perspectives. Against this brief introduction, how did the NCRST come about?

## **Genesis**

While the NCRST was formally established in May 2012, as will be shown shortly, the historicity of the NCRST goes back significantly longer and had its roots in the former Directorate of Research, Science and Technology (DRST) located within the Ministry of Education (1996). The recommendations of the 1997 National Conference on Science and Technology held by the then Ministry of Higher Education and Employment Creation, and the conversation held during the formulation of the National Development Plan 3 (NDP3) [2007/8-2011/12]. Collectively all these initiatives coalesced around a common theme: the capital importance of a truly National agency and its strategic role in realizing Vision 2030, the long-term development frame of the country.

The NCRST was established by Section 4 of the *Research, Science and Technology Act*, No. 23 of 2004, and entrusted with extensive functions and powers, provided for in Section 5 of the said Act. Chief among these, 'to monitor and supervise the promotion, co-ordination, development and continuation of research, science and technology in all sectors in Namibia; to prepare and review a national research, science and technology programme consistent with Section 18 of the Act; to co-ordinate and facilitate the development of research, science and technology at national, regional and local level; provide direction and policy guidance to the research, science and technology innovation systems in the country; to promote broad participation in research, science and technology through a raft of activities inclusive, but not limited to: seminars, conferences, workshops, regional and international networking in the domains of research, science, innovation and technology; fund research, and advise the Minister of Education, the President, Parliament and any other relevant body on the functions and activities of the Commission and on any other matter relating to research, science and technology.

The constitutive Act of the NCRST, also provides for dedicated committees of the Commission (Section 13 of the Act), a three-year National Research, Science and Technology Programme (NRSTP) (Section 18 of the Act), Research Councils (the Biosafety Council, and the Council on Indigenous Knowledge Systems), also Section 18 of the Act, and the establishment of a National Research, Science and Technology Fund (Sections 23-24 of the Act).

## **Governance**

In the period September to December 2013, Terms of Reference for each of the above Committees were drafted and subsequently adopted by the Commission. This process was preceded by induction training to all Commissioners, with special emphasis on the legal and governance frameworks of the NCRST, inclusive of the provisions of the King III Code. In mid-October 2013, the Commission approved the *Charter of the National Commission on Research, Science and Technology (NCRST)*. At the same time, the NCRST approved, following extensive discussion, the *Delegation of Authority to Committees of the Commission, Chairperson and CEO*.

## **Bilateral Agreement with South Africa**

Once some of the foundations of the NCRST were laid, the earlier state-to-state bilateral agreement between Namibia and South Africa of March 2005 provided the context for meaningful intellectual engagement with the National Research Foundation (NRF) in that country. At the Bilateral Namibia/South Africa Joint Technical Meeting held in Windhoek over two-days in October 2013.

This important and productive meeting solidified previously agreed thematic areas of cooperation in research, science, technology and innovation between the two countries and took stock of a number of SADC-wide multilateral frameworks and projects. The latter, multilateral frameworks and science-related matters, concerned among others: SADC Policy Training in Science and Technology, SADC Climate Change, SADC Women in Science, developments relating to the SADC STI Strategy and the Science, Technology and Innovation Desk, the SADC IKS Workshop and the IASA young Scientist Summer School Programme.

## **IST Africa 2000**

On 15-16 November 2013, the NCRST, in cooperation with IIMC Ireland (IST-Africa Project Coordinator), organized a successful consultative meeting as part of the IST-Africa Initiative Supported by the European Commission under FP7. At this meeting, the construct of 'Living Labs' and how these have evolved in other African States as well as in Western Europe, was introduced and interrogated within the framing of the 'Innovation Life Cycle'. Special emphasis was placed on the relevance and utility

of such 'Living Labs' for a range of stakeholders, both public and private. The meeting was followed by the following steps:

1. Putting together the Organizational Profiles of key institutions (making use of a standardized template).
2. Identifying suitable European universities as partners under IST Africa.
3. Putting out a call for research proposals of excellence and with a social bent to IST-Africa for possible funding.

### **Councils under the aegis of the NCRST**

The Research, Science and Technology Act (RST), Act No. 23 of 2004, provides in Section 19 for the establishment of Councils in the research, science and technology sector, after consultation with the Minister of Education, to perform specific functions assigned to them by the NCRST.

The Commission has agreed in principle to establish three such Councils. These are: the Biosafety Council, the Council on Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and the Space Science Council.

Nominations for the Biosafety and the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Councils have been advertised and received by the Commission. At its last meeting the Commission recommended the names of persons to serve on the Biosafety Council to the Minister of Education for his decision. These Councils will be established in line with the requirements of the RST Act (2004).

### **NCRST Strategic Plan (2014-2019) & Website**

Under the slogan of '*Fostering Excellence through Knowledge and Innovation*' the Strategic Plan of the NCRST was finalized in March 2014 and approved by the Commission at a Special Meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

The Strategic Plan resonates powerfully with Vision 2030 – the long-term development frame of the country – and speaks to other relevant national

development documents, such as NDP4. The Plan pivots around three (3) strategic themes over the next five years. These are:

- Further public understanding of and interest in RSTI in Namibia.
- Deepen stakeholder cooperation and strategic alignment around RSTI, and
- Align and integrate a supporting regulatory environment for RSTI in Namibia.

The NCRST website is currently being developed and will be formally launched on the 16<sup>th</sup> April 2014, and this will give the NCRST a virtual presence and enhance our communication with researchers and other important institutions.

### **National Consultative Workshop on the Development of the National Research, Science, Technology and Innovation Programme (NRSTIP) – 24-25<sup>th</sup> March 2014**

Ladies and Gentlemen, the reason we are all gathered here today is because of the Research, Science and Technology Act of Namibia Act No. 23 Of 2004, provided for the National RSTI Programme (Section 18). The genesis of the NRSTIP lies in the 1999 *National Policy on Research, Science and Technology* and its legal anchor is the RST Act No. 23 of 2004.

In its evolution and more recent iteration, the NRSTIP, responds to a number of National policy framings, notably: Vision 2030 and NDP4, as well as various international policy documents, chief among these: the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), relevant parts of the African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development (AU-NEPAD), and the Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Protocol of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The overriding purpose of these consultations is to engage critically and creatively with the Draft NRSTIP, so as to provide strategic focus to the work of the NCRST and national direction in the domains of RSTI.

### **Conclusions**

My overview has outlined the historicity, genesis and development of the NCRST, sketched its institutional architecture, outlined its governance and policy frameworks, and indicated how the NCRST has funded research, both bilaterally

with South Africa, and more recently, nationally. It is against this background that I wish all participants of this workshop the best of luck with the tasks set before them. It is my hope that this outline has given you a clearer understanding of the importance of this workshop, and that it will spur you on to make it a success.

I thank you.