



**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

**Statement**

by

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At the National Consultative Workshop on the Development of the  
National Research, Science, Technology and Innovation Programme

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Safari Court Hotel

Director of Ceremonies,  
Hon Dr. David Namwandi, Minister of Education,  
Prof Andre du Pisani, Chairperson of the 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,  
Fellow Researchers and Innovators  
Distinguished Guests,  
Members of the Media,  
Ladies and Gentlemen;

I would like to thank the Minister of Education for inviting me to be part of this important workshop. I am happy to participate at this workshop and to share with you my views on the importance of research, science, technology and innovation for national development. I am equally happy that the workshop is about developing a National Research, Science, Technology and Innovation Programme that is supportive of our national development agenda.

Our fourth National Development Plan (NDP4) recognizes that education and skills is one of the necessary enablers for any meaningful socio-economic development. Specifically, NDP4 requires us to invest at least 0.3% of our GDP in R&D per annum. Here I am deliberately using the term investment instead of expenditure because that is what it is – an

investment in our future development. This will translate to an annual investment of N\$350m. This workshop is therefore significant as it deals with Research and Development.

### **Importance of R&D**

Research and Development plays a vital role in every field of human activity. For example, as consumers of goods and services, we often use items that have made our lives easy. We use things like computers, smart phones and other gadgets. As businesses or institutions - private and public - we can hardly function without the use of modern technologies. Yet we take all these for granted. We hardly take the time to think of the amount of work behind their existence. We don't realize that these products and technologies we are so fond of using are as a result of applied Research and Development and innovative thinking. Without Research, Development and Innovation our vision for an industrialized society will remain a dream. Without innovation we will remain consumers of knowledge and products that have been developed by others instead of being producers ourselves of knowledge and innovators of products.

The importance of Research and Development is fully acknowledged in the NDP 4. During the formulation of NDP4, effort was made to obtain information on the Research, Development and Innovation landscape in Namibia in terms of input and output data. This was necessary to understand where we are as a country, in order for us to formulate appropriate targets and initiatives, thus bringing research, development and innovation into the mainstream of our planning system.

Unfortunately it was difficult for us to find quality data in this respect and there are various reasons for this.

One reason is the absence of a reliable information system on science, technology and innovation. We lack the necessary R&D policy instruments, indicators and inventory of research facilities. It is even nearly impossible to have information about the existing Research and Development projects, whether by the public, private or non-profit sectors. What is at stake here is that without an adequate information system it will be very difficult to formulate, implement or monitor Research, Science, Technology and Innovation policies.

The development of an evidence-based policy requires adequate indicators. Indicators allow for the appropriate monitoring of activities and programmes; determination of specific areas of investment; and setting up of targets. Without the necessary data our development planning will be based on unfounded information and cannot be expected to yield the necessary results.

Another factor is that R&D activities in Namibia are highly fragmented and scattered over several institutions. And this is without proper coordination, streamlining or targeting. The linkages between key actors in the innovation system, such as the research community, public research institutions, universities, industries and users are minimal. What we need is the establishment of a fully functional National Innovation System, in which all stakeholders are working closely together in knowledge creation and application.

It is also important that our innovation system is closely coordinated with our national statistics system. In this respect I am informed that the National Commission on Research, Science and Technology and the Namibia Statistics Agency are in the process of developing a Memorandum of Understanding between them. I fully support this initiative and urge the two institutions to expedite the signing of the MOU and its subsequent implementation.

As you start with the discussions on the development of our national R&D Program, I want to share with you some lessons learnt from our experience during the formulation of the NDP4.

One important lesson we have learned is the need to set priorities. When faced with many challenges, the natural tendency is to try to address all of them at the same time. Let us, however, remember that we have limited resources, both financial and human. We must therefore make informed choices and priorities to focus on issues that when done correctly, will have a bigger impact on our development. It is also important to remember that three years is a very short time and that only so much can be done in that time.

I need to warn you that in your prioritization exercise you will meet strong resistance. All the stakeholders would argue that their R&D agenda should be a priority. They will all maintain that their R&D agenda is critical for development. However, our R&D program will serve us better when adopt the principle of “first things first”. We will

reach our R&D objectives quicker only when we prioritize. What we do not want is to end up with a long wish list that cannot be implemented with the available resources. It is, therefore, important that the national Research and Development priorities are established with the aim to stimulate and support technological innovations which have applications in several socio-economic sectors.

The lesson reason is that things work better when there is coordination and collaboration among and between all the role players. For example, it has been said that we have good policies in place except that we do not implement them. We found that at Government level the non-implementation of our policies is caused, among others, by non-collaboration among the various stakeholders.

The role of various R&D stakeholders in our national development cannot therefore be overemphasized. We need to establish a framework that would facilitate the linkages among all actors in the R&D delivery process. This framework shall provide for mutually beneficial partnerships in the development of the national science and technology system in ways that provide an acceptable trade-off between public, private and civil society organizations. Such partnerships would support the advancements of research and product development, industrial production and commercialisation. To avoid the unnecessary wastage in purchasing equipment that might already exist within the country and which may be underutilized, sharing of infrastructure across institutions or sectors through provision of centralised multi-purpose research infrastructure, must be encouraged.

I am pleased to learn that the National Commission on Research, Science and Technology is spearheading the development of specific Central National Facilities at the National Research, Science, Technology and Innovation Valley. This is to ensure optimal utilization of scarce resources and allow stakeholders access to state of the art facilities. This is one of the initiatives which we feel should be implemented under this Programme. It is imperative that one hand knows what the other hand is doing in order to avoid duplications, but also to find synergies to maximise impact.

The third lesson we have learned in the process of developing NDP4 was the importance of monitoring and evaluation. As a Government we have recognized that we need to strengthen our capacity to monitor and evaluate our development plans. It will be indeed be difficult to know if we are meeting our R&D goals without a well-understood system of monitoring and evaluating. I am therefore hoping that you will build in a Monitoring and Evaluation component within the National R&D Program. The function of M&E ought to be the responsibility of the NRCST, with the support from other stakeholders such as the NSA as the custodian of official statistics.

I urge all those who are part of the National System of Innovation to take your responsibilities seriously. To do so will require that we make the necessary human and financial resources available. We also need to avail time, especially when we have other competing responsibilities. I am convinced that spending our resources on Research and

Development aimed at solving our socio-economic challenges, is a worthwhile investment that needs to be pursued.

Let me conclude by once again reminding you that this is an important workshop. What you are busy with is the process of building a confident Namibia that will claim its rightful place as a nation that is not only a consumer of knowledge and technology products, but a nation that is able to contribute to the body of knowledge - a nation of innovators. The National Planning Commission is committed to be part of this process and will work with all stakeholders to ensure the establishment of a fully functional system of innovation, whose contribution and impact to socio-economic development will be measured.

I thank you.