



WELCOME REMARKS

BY

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RECTOR OF THE POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA

ON

**THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE ACADEMIC
YEAR OF THE POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA**

POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA

WINDHOEK

05 FEBRUARY 2014

AT 09:00

Director of Ceremonies

Minister of Education, Honourable David Namwandi

Council Member Ms Evelyn Brewer, and other Members of the Council

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Senior Management, Staff and Students of the Polytechnic

Distinguished Invited Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

Firstly, let me extend a warm welcome to all present here today, and particularly to the Minister of Education, Honourable David Namwandi who has made time to be with us this morning, and to the Members of the Council, Senior Management staff, Faculty, Staff and Students. You are all warmly welcomed to the official Opening of the Academic Year of the Polytechnic of Namibia.

On this beautiful summer morning, I'm extremely energized because dawn has broken for all of us and for the institution as a whole. **This year will surely mark the official renaming of the Polytechnic as Namibia University of Science and Technology, or UST or NU for short.** I'm sure all of you are excited about this momentous change, just as I am.

This excitement springs up against a backdrop of a number of important events in Namibia and the world.

First the global developments: just last week **Unesco released its 2013/14 report on the state of literacy and education**, which highlights some positive developments and also striking and worrying facts. The report highlights for example that **poor quality education leaves a legacy of illiteracy**: “The quality of education has a marked bearing on youth literacy. Many young people who have spent just a few years in school do not develop literacy skills – and in some cases even completing primary school is not always a guarantee for literacy.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, 40% of young people cannot read a sentence... [and] young people from poorer households are far less likely to be able to read” (p. 7).ⁱ And I may add, largely the same affected people are generally unlikely to prosper in society. **This is the lost generation.** We read the report against this conspicuous evidence and world trends requiring societies to become knowledge-based economies. The fact that you’re here is an opportunity not to be missed.

Let me now turn to Namibia: About 43-thousand of the matriculants of 2013 have very different prospects. Overall, the national picture looks good in terms of peace and security for all, government commitment especially in terms of its policies and funding, and overall literacy. Speaking poignantly to the students, who are mainly the **independence generation or born-frees**, I’d say, you live in a good country with many opportunities and possibilities where your dreams can come true. Many of previous generations had it much more difficult and uncertain as you can’t imagine.

Today, you many of you do not have everything you need – and surely not all you want, but manage to eat at least one or two good meals a day. And you are a few fortunate matriculants out of the many who never find their way into higher education or the right placing in the economy every year. This is a disturbing picture.

When we dissect the **matriculation statistics** - comprising especially the performance and and success rate, I cannot help but **lament the poor and static state of performance, prospects and the future of this country**. Last year's pass rate hardly changed from the "normal" 50 percent (or so). Only about 7-thousand matriculants qualified to enter university; that is one in seven, or 18%. So the question on everyone's mind is still, **what happens to those who don't enter university and don't have employable skills? Namibia risks losing this and the next generations.**

So our **jobs are clearly laid out for all of us individually and collectively – as professors, administrators and students**. You may have been drawn to our institution by a variety of reasons, be it the wide variety of excellent programmes we offer or the reputation that the institution enjoys locally and internationally, or simply because of the circumstances you found yourselves in. No matter the reason, we are just happy that you have become part of the Polytechnic family. Yes, you have joined a trustworthy and respectable institution, whose reputation is attested to by the fact that for five consecutive years, we have been presented the prestigious PMR Diamond Arrow Award for excellence in Higher Education.

Director of Ceremonies

2014 promises to be an exciting year for the Polytechnic community as a whole, a year of transitioning and renaming to the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). For that reason it is special to me and somehow I find myself reminiscing about 1995 the year I joined the Polytechnic of Namibia.

Everything I experienced seemed to portray a wonderful sense of beginnings, although challenging and difficult it was, while at the same time it was opening infinite possibilities for the institution and for our country. Today, we are **at the threshold of another new beginning, the transformation into the NUST.**

What does the future hold for this institution? For those of you who can see the future, we can only say that the future bodes well for this institution. In order to understand what the future demand of us, it is instructive to look back to understand where we come from. **In 1985, Technikon Namibia was established**, offering certificates and diplomas, nearly exclusively in the business fields.

The first transition took place in 1994 when the Technikon Namibia legally became Polytechnic of Namibia, which meant broadening the fields of study to include science and technology as well as offering qualifications at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. **Now, in 2014 the institution will undergo a second transition, to NUST.**

Whenever huge changes occur in an organisation, they also require attendant changes in the culture of the organisation. To show that transformation and culture change are the two sides of the same coin, **Francis Hesselbein**¹ suggests that *“Culture does not change because we desire to change it. Culture changes when the organisation is transformed...”* Therefore, there can be no true transformation without a culture change, otherwise transformation remains cosmetic.

The year 2014 will be a year of culture change at the Polytechnic. Culture can be about values or visions or norms or symbols, or just about anything in an organisation. Given the amorphous nature of culture, it is not surprising that change of culture is viewed as an extremely daunting undertaking in an organisation.

In our context we have clearly identified all the elements that will have to change in our transition process, and these include the fields of study; programme and qualification mix; student enrolment distribution; staff qualification profile; research focus; infrastructure/facilities; and systems and practices that will drive these processes. However, an effective communication and change management strategies will need to be place and provide a platform for driving the culture change.

While cultural change is often perceived as one of the hardest undertakings in an organisation, nonetheless here at the Polytechnic we subscribe to **Denis O’Grady’s**² philosophy that *“change has a bad reputation in our society, but it isn’t all bad.....In fact, change is necessary in life – to keep us moving, to keep us growing, to keep us interested. Imagine life without change – it would be static.. boring... dull”*. That’s why we have opted for change; we need to ensure that success of the second transition of this great institution surpasses what was achieved in the first transition.

Director of Ceremonies

In the midst of the transformation of the institution we are pursuing for this year, we have adopted the theme ***“Universities as transformation agents to Economies,”*** which is so apt and timely. As we have had an internal dialogue focusing on what kind of future institution we want to build it is appropriate that the institution complements it by looking at what relations we wish to create with our society.

Would we be fulfilling our mandate if we only focused on producing high-level skills for our country? Are there other roles we can play to ensure that we are both better connected to and embedded in our communities? Is there a contribution the institution can make in a country that is faced with a number of pressing challenges such as **high levels of unemployment, increasing inequalities and growing levels of poverty in communities?**

Honourable Minister, this public university can only be or become a true transformation agent in this economy with the right support and resourcing, especially from the government. In fact, its own transformation hinges largely on the resourcing required as provided for in our budget. Fix the funding and the Namibian people will find no valid excuses why their children have to necessarily study abroad. It surely wouldn't be because we don't have quality education or prestigious universities in Namibia.

This theme will allow us to seek innovative answers to these issues. Just tomorrow afternoon the Polytechnic, together with government, business and donors, will be **launching the FABlab Namibia Technology Centre**, which will be the **first advanced technology centre in our country providing space to SMEs and individual entrepreneurs**, where they will receive expert guidance to develop their products or even produce new products.

This is the only way Namibia can expand its industrial base, create jobs and more importantly, increase its competitiveness. In the new institution, the NUST initially we will have four institutes, namely the Namibian-German Logistics Centre (NGLC), Namibian Business Innovation Centre (NBIC), Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Institute (REEEI) and Integrated Land Management Institute (ILMI) which will be outward focusing in order to be able to provide services to various sectors and communities.

However, in order to extend and maximise the impact of these institutes internally we will need to strengthen their interactions with the different faculties so that they tap into the additional pool of expertise they have and avail it to communities. I have no doubt that the NUST will make its presence felt in our communities and thereby make a meaningful contribution to the development of our nation.

Director of Ceremonies

As I conclude my message, allow me to say a few words to the new students. First, I say you have made a wise decision by choosing the Polytechnic of Namibia, or the UST or NU.

Secondly, you have just been listening to some of our plans for the future – our plans are ambitious, but we will walk the talk. You must become an active member of this academic enterprise and raise high the NU flag. It's about your future and your children's.

Thirdly, our new vision as the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) is to be “a premier university of science and technology preparing leaders for the knowledge economy”. You are indeed our leaders of tomorrow who will be obliged to drive the knowledge economy of our country and the world. Please make sure you give 100% or more to your studies so that you can fulfil the obligation you have to your country and the world. So take these lessons to heart:

1. **The future of this country and the world will be in the hands of those with skills.** So memorise this mantra: skills, skills, skills.
2. **A good opportunity rarely returns twice.** Use every opportunity as if it's the last one.
3. **Do not fail because of your lack of interest or commitment!** Compete from a vantage point.
4. You are the future leaders of this world. Learn to care for everyone. Learn to live with everyone; learn the **hard skills and also the soft skills** – both will take you far in life.
5. Change is a constant in life. Everything in the world will change. **Learn to live with change. Learn to lead in a world of change.**
6. **Don't forget that your health and well-being are as important as your dedication to success.**

With these few words I welcome you all and wish you an enjoyable and enriching learning experience at the Polytechnic/ NUST, UST/NU.

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I thank you.

References

Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/14, p. 7.

Namibian Sun, 24 April 2012.

1. Hesselbein, F. (1999). The key to cultural transformation, leader to leader. www.leadershipnow.com/changequotes/html
2. O'Grady, D (1998) in Bottom line. www.leadershipnow.com/changequotes/html