



**SPEECH**

**BY**

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**AT**

**THE 15<sup>th</sup> GRADUATION CEREMONY OF THE  
POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA**

**09:00**

**17<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2010**

**WINDHOEK**

***RE-THINKING COMPETITIVENESS FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT***

The Presiding Officer Mr. **Oloff Munjanu**, *Chairperson of the Polytechnic Council*  
His Excellency **Hifikepunye Pohamba**, *President of the Republic of Namibia*  
Honourable **Tom Alweendo**, *Director General of the National Planning Commission*  
Honourable **Ministers** and **Members** of Parliament  
Honourable **Judges, Governors** and **Representatives** at the Regional and Local levels  
Your Excellencies Members of the **Diplomatic Corps**  
Esteemed **Members of Council** of the Polytechnic of Namibia  
Distinguished **Faculty and Staff** Members  
Distinguished **Visiting** Professors and Scholars  
Distinguished **Invited Guests**  
Members of the **Media**  
Honoured **Graduates and Students**  
**Ladies and Gentlemen**  
All **Protocol** Observed

First and foremost, allow me to **congratulate** His Excellency President Hifikepunye Pohamba, his new team of Cabinet Ministers and Members of the National Assembly for the new mandate given by the people of Namibia during the November 2009 Presidential and National Assembly elections. We celebrate the fact that the elections were once again peaceful and stability is maintained, and therefore **all of us** are winners.

Your Excellency, it is our deep honour and pleasure to welcome you once again to our graduation ceremony and to express our sincere wish that the next five years under your able and inclusive leadership will **continue to rest** on the hallmarks of peace, stability, economic growth and social progress.

We also cordially welcome – *in absentia* - our **new Minister**, Honourable Dr. Abraham Iyambo and his Deputy to this very important sector, and likewise the **new Director General** of the National Planning Commission, Honourable Tom Alweendo, former Governor of the Bank of Namibia. You have been a champion of innovation and competitiveness and we look forward to your expressions of wisdom this morning.

Then surely, I would like to tenderly **welcome each and everyone** present here today to our 15<sup>th</sup> celebration of vision, commitment, hard work, achievement and excellence.

I wish to assure you all that the **Polytechnic community** remains fully committed to **support** our Government's agenda for socio-economic development, through efficiency, effectiveness, productivity and relevance, as expressed by our commitment to four important themes:

- *leadership,*
- *technology,*
- *entrepreneurship, and*
- *innovation.*

Under this year's theme *Rethinking Competitiveness for Socio-Economic Development*, we intend to revitalise thinking and action *en route* to *Vision 2030*.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year we are producing numerous **knowledge workers** in different fields of study, who are **well-equipped** and ready to take Namibia and the world by storm.

I **congratulate** our government, my colleagues, the stakeholders, the students, parents and friends **for continuously raising the bar of excellence** at the Polytechnic, and in that process enhancing our contribution to national development through knowledge management.

Effective knowledge management at societal, organizational and individual levels is much needed to pave the way for the creation of knowledge systems in a learning society. The presence of such systems in turn paves the way for the emergence of a knowledge-driven economy or, simply put, a knowledge economy (**K-economy**). This is an economy in which the generation and exploitation of **knowledge** are the **predominant ingredients** in wealth creation. It is an economy sustained by knowledge workers - those defined as thinkers, knowledgeable, skilled **'symbolic analysts,'** that is, workers who manage knowledge, symbols, machines and systems.

They include system analysts, programmers, engineers, managers, marketing experts, web-shapers, architects, bank workers, fashion designers, researchers, teachers and policy analysts. These persons are valued for their ability to improve quality, reduce costs, and decrease production cycle time. Knowledge- or technology-based economies are thus characterized by widespread tertiary education (with **about 30% of the university-aged population**), extensive public financing of scientific studies (at 1% or more of GNP), extensive public-sector-led research and development, a sophisticated information-based society (with high Internet use, large circulation of daily newspapers, nearly universal use of mobile telephony and universal access to computers in schools).<sup>1</sup> In **knowledge economies** such as the U.S., **more than 60%** of the workers are classified as knowledge workers.



Consequently, in the new economy we aim to build, **knowledge is king**, and by extension, **universities** are transforming to become vital in **innovation**, which in turn is the **new currency of commerce**. One of the challenges the youth face is to make decisions about careers, and as the job marketplace is changing rapidly, it helps to do some research about your future options, how to enhance your careers to remain in high demand, because competition may very well drive you out of work. Therefore, graduates, the day is for you not only to **celebrate** but also to pause and **rethink** your direction, and to recommit anew to personal and professional development. I want to assure you that the **Polytechnic** is a visionary university, a depository of intellectual capital well positioned to address your and your children's needs now and well into the future, that is, addressing current and emerging careers.

As **Sanford Borins et al** state in the book *Digital State at the Leading Edge*, "...**organizational knowledge** is often referred to as **intellectual capital** and consists of three primary domains:

- **human capital** – the tacit knowledge existing in the minds of employees and their capacity to solve organizational problems;
- **structural capital** – the infrastructure and knowledge embedded in technology; processes, and routines; and
- **relational capital** – the knowledge embedded in relationships established with the external environment, such as customers, partners, and suppliers”.

Consequently, the objective of a country is to harvest the full potential of an organization's *intellectual capital*.<sup>2</sup>

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Higher education** is the biggest contributor to a country's competitiveness. I believe that Namibia's challenge in enhancing its competitiveness lies in transforming higher education, that is, it lies in striking the correct balance between **relevance, equity** and **excellence**, thereby achieving **competitiveness**. If relevance, equity or excellence is compromised, then our competitiveness as a nation will also be sacrificed. Professor Skinner at Harvard carried out an investigation for more than twenty years into the sources of *competitive advantage*, and his findings were as follows:

- a. 20% is derived from the *knowledge of the industry*;
- b. 40% from *research and development*; and
- c. 40% from *people and their cultural belief systems*, which is *social capital*.

Professor Skinner called this the **20-40-40** rule.<sup>3</sup>

**Thus, our objectives are** to constantly challenge the *status quo* and change the systems in order to produce a new breed of students and graduates, knowledge workers, capable of propelling Namibia to the top of global competitiveness ranking, but without losing the wonderful things for which we are known.

Graduates,

I am therefore reminded of some wise words by the famous Florentine sculptor, Michelangelo who once said:

*"In every block of marble.....I see a statue shaped and perfect in attitude and action. I have only to hew away the rough walls....until I set him free."*

As a sculptor, Michelangelo was very particular about choosing the pieces of marble he would work on. At times, he picked blocks with **apparent imperfections**, which, in the finished work, enhanced the beauty of the piece.

At the Polytechnic, we too choose the students we admit with care, looking out for those with special qualities and promise – although initially they may look like rough pieces of marble. But our students are not inert stones waiting to be shaped. Instead, they are young bright women and men, each embarking on a future full of possibilities. Our role is simply to help them “**discover**” themselves and to unleash the **latent potential** in them.

Finally Graduates,

This is your moment and all your families, relatives, friends and society at large are looking up to you as professionals, role-models and leaders. Live up to society's expectations, and surpass them each time. And in your journey, I want you to remember five valuable **lessons**:

1. There are **trends** that are foreseeable because they have **unstoppable momentum**, like a freight train but on a grand scale. Many of these **high-momentum trends** will have profound consequences and seem either inevitable or very difficult to change, like competition and globalization. Your responsibility is to learn from the past and present and envision the future and prepare yourself and your nation suitably.<sup>4</sup> *If you don't, you lose out on competitiveness!*
2. **Long-term trends** form a skeleton of the future. Putting flesh on that skeleton can be done in different ways. We can't predict the future in detail, but we can study the alternative directions it can take and how to influence it.<sup>5</sup> *If you don't learn, you're confined to history and will lose out on competitiveness!*

3. If you shape yourself right, you are king for a day because you will never rule the world forever. **Toyota** was once the world's envy, the **master of innovation**.<sup>6</sup> Today, the *elegant solution* is in a state of shock, but not out of the competition. *You can only remain ahead if you're always competitive!*
4. Market changes happen at the **point of discontinuity**. *If you don't see the point, no one will discover your competitiveness!*
5. In **niches** there are **riches**. *If you don't see or seize unique opportunities, you will never be competitive!*

I wish you a prosperous future and thank the audience for the kind attention. Have a memorable day!

- **END.**

## REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Sachs, *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*, 2009, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> Borins Sandford et al, *Digital State at the Leading Edge*, University of Toronto Press Incorporated, Toronto, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Lovemore Mbigi, "The Challenges of Capacity Building for Governance and Economic Liberation in the Public Sector in Namibia," *Prime Focus*, November 2009.

<sup>4</sup> James Martin, *The Meaning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, A Vital Blueprint for ensuring our Future*, Transworld Publishers, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew E. May, *The Elegant Solution: Toyota's Formula for Mastering Innovation*, Simon & Schuster, London, 2007.