



WELCOMING REMARKS

BY

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RECTOR

AT THE

MEDIA ANNOUNCEMENT

OF

**THE COMMONWEALTH AWARD FOR INSTITUTIONAL
EXCELLENCE**

ON

MONDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2011

15:30

Director of Ceremonies, Dr. Andrew Niikondo

The Right Honourable Nahas Angula, Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia

Members of the Polytechnic Council

Distinguished members of the Namibia Open Learning Network Trust

Management and Staff of the Polytechnic of Namibia

Representatives of the Polytechnic SRC

Members of the media

Ladies and gentlemen:

It is indeed a pleasure to welcome you all to this public announcement of yet another milestone in the Polytechnic's remarkable story of becoming one of Africa's leading institutions of science and technology. Today, we are celebrating the Polytechnic's international prize awarded by the Commonwealth for Open Learning for excellence in open and lifelong learning also generally referred to it as distance education.

It is a particular honour to have here with us today one of the primary architects of the Namibian education system, the Rt. Hon. Nahas Angula, Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia. As its founding Minister of Education, his many achievements included not only presiding over the statutory formation of the Polytechnic of Namibia, but also overseeing its establishment and nurturing it in its formative years.

His leadership, vision, and unstinting support as the Polytechnic's line Minister played a pivotal role in its growth and development in those early years, and continue to influence our ethos and activities. It is a role that the Polytechnic community acknowledges with the same degree of appreciation and pleasure with which we warmly welcome him to our campus today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Namibia gained independence in 1990, and with a population of 2.2 million, our country is surely one of the youngest members of the Commonwealth. Its organs such as the Commonwealth of Open Learning (COL) have been our steadfast companions in educational development, and we take great pride in belonging to the celebrated community of nations.

Today, we celebrate yet another triumph and milestone in the life of the Polytechnic of Namibia. This time it is the Institutional Award, in the COL Excellence in Distance Education Awards, which we received at the Commonwealth of Open Learning's Sixth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in Kochi, India in late November last year. The COL Excellence in Distance Education Awards recognize those that have made remarkable achievements in the development and advancement of open and distance learning, also referred to as ODL, in three categories: a) Honorary Fellows of COL, b) Institutional, and c) Material. The Polytechnic is one of three winners out of 19 institutions that competed for the prize globally for the Excellence in Institutional Achievement. The award serves as further recognition of, and inspiration for, our continuous effort towards excellence.

We recognise that the award confirms the value of COLL's sterling contribution to the difference the Polytechnic of Namibia seeks to make in the lives and career prospects of the thousands of students who turn to us each year. The Polytechnic community always takes pride in exponentially reciprocating the confidence it students, Government, partners and the nation at large have shown in it. Long may the Poly continue to live up to those expectations!

We are thus deeply honored to receive the COL Award on behalf of the entire Polytechnic community and the Namibian nation at large. This award is well deserved against the backdrop of extraordinary challenges we face as an emerging university, of which resources are at the core, and it goes to show that innovation matters. Indeed, we have challenges in respect of human capacity, funding, materials, technology, and so on. But our spirit remains indomitable and so this achievement is the culmination of exceptional organizational vision, commitment, and hard work of a dedicated institution with a passion for the value that open and distance learning can add to humanity.

Ladies and gentlemen, would you please join me in a round of applause to express our appreciation to Dr. Delvaline Möwes (the Director of our COLL), the faculty, the dedicated staff at COLL and our student population whose hard work and dedication earned Namibia and the Polytechnic this latest international accolade. Simply put, the Distance in Education Award is a special prize we are very proud of and shall celebrate for many years to come.

Indeed, the Polytechnic has achieved much with the limited resources available to it, and has received many accolades internationally and nationally, including two unprecedented PMR Diamond Arrow Awards as "Best Higher/tertiary Education Institution in Namibia" (2009, 2010).

Qualified human capital, also known as *talent*, is the resource globally considered the most critical today for national development in the 21st century and the information age. Thus in the light of the institution's remarkable evolution and growth in such a relatively short period of time, and given the drive to address population growth and the demand for

higher education, it goes without saying that distance and e-learning have to become important drivers of in education.

The world population is growing at an alarming rate and the need for higher education *versus* the available opportunity cannot be overemphasized. Currently, Namibia's tertiary enrolment, standing at 5.9%, is at the bottom of the ladder. While that remains a fact, we can only beginning to hope for comprehensive human development and realization of our Vision 2030. There is thus a need for Namibia to embark on new strategies, initiatives and methodologies to enhance human development across all sectors of our economy, especially in higher education.

ODL is truly an opportunity for those who seek flexible, alternative routes to education and those who would otherwise not be able to further their studies and improve their lot, because education is the greatest equalizer in human development and empowerment. We believe the award will inspire others and enhance the continuous enhancement of ODL at the Polytechnic and Namibia and generally in education. Therefore, we savor the moment and congratulate the other equally deserving winners across the continents for a job well done.

Against this background, I need to reiterate our position in the Namibian market as well as globally. Propelled by the collective force of national human resources development imperatives, Namibia's declared desire for global economic competitiveness, and unprecedented local demand for higher education qualifications of an applied and technological nature, the Polytechnic of Namibia has evolved from humble beginnings into an emerging powerhouse amongst African institutions of higher education. Its growth and development has been spectacular, if not exceptional, in virtually every respect. For example, between 1996 and 2010, student

enrolment grew from about 2 500 to 11 500, while academic programmes increased from 23 to more than 100. Virtually all of the new programmes consisted of under-supplied disciplines critical to national development, including Engineering, Architecture, Health and Applied Sciences, Natural Resources, Tourism, Geo Sciences, and so on. The range of qualifications on offer expanded from only national certificates and diplomas to include Bachelor, Honours and Masters degrees; and the campus grew in size from 3 hectares to about 15 ha and the value of the infrastructure from N\$30 m to about N\$700 m.

Given the above, it is clear that new paradigms had to drive the institution's teaching, learning, research and service delivery. Teaching and learning resources were transformed from mainly "talk and chalk"-based to include modern facilities such as high-tech lecture halls, multiple computer-, engineering-, science- and simulation laboratories, on-line teaching and learning support systems, a fibre optic backbone and largely wireless computer network supporting an impressive computer:student ratio of about 1:5, including the additions of new laptops for students this year. Complementarily, a large, state-of-the-art library, the finest in Namibia - was built and now hosts a collection of books more than 20 times as large as that held in 1996, and thousands of electronic journals and periodicals not available at all back then. And yes, the Polytechnic is currently placed second amongst institutions of science and technology in the latest international Webometrics ranking of African universities at position 16.

Nevertheless, Right Honourable Prime Minister, Ladies and gentlemen, we cannot envisage any form of hiatus at a time when the rest of world is gearing up for what distance education pioneer and scholar, Sir John Daniel, enthusiastically describes as *"the latest revolution in education"*. The Polytechnic has, over the past few years, all the weapons needed for

the renewed global onslaught: **first**, a significant national footprint, thanks to our growing network of regional centres; **secondly**, state-of-the-art computer-based communication and e-learning technologies, backed by an innovative new scheme to help students acquire high-spec laptops and 3G devices at wholesale prices; this combination will put lecture notes, study guides, electronic journals and articles, and direct communication with tutors literally at students' finger tips wherever they have mobile phone connectivity. We believe that broadband will greatly enhance our capacity – institutionally and individually, but it must be affordable.

Finally, we are deeply honored to receive the COL Award and now allow me to thank and congratulate Sir John Daniel and the Commonwealth of Learning for an inspiring vision and yet another year of phenomenal milestones in advancing ODL. We wish them well and pledge our collaboration to the international community of educators and learners. Our gratitude also goes to the Right Honorable Prime Minister for gracing this occasion with his imminent presence and in joining us in the celebration.

To all, I thank you for your steadfast support, thoughtful consideration and kind attention.

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