



POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA

WELCOMING REMARKS

BY

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ON

THE OCCASION OF LAUNCHING OF A KNOWLEDGE AND SERVICE
PORTAL WITH LOCAL RURAL NODES:
A PILOT PROJECT IN OMAHEKE

25 FEBRUARY 2013

**POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA
WINDHOEK**

Director of Ceremonies

Members of the Council

Senior Manager: Corporate Communication at Telecom, Mr Oiva Angola

Mr Opening Murangi, Director of Ounongo Technology Centre

Faculty, staff and students

All Esteemed Invited Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

On this joyous day, let me welcome you all to this important occasion. Today we are launching the Knowledge and Service Portal with Local Rural Nodes. The project will be piloted in the Omaheke Region. I would like to extend a warm welcome to Mr Oiva Angola, Senior Manager for Corporate Communication at Telecom, Mr Operi Murangu, Director of Ounongo Technology Centre as well as other key partners in this project. Ladies and gentlemen, your presence is highly appreciated.

It is just over a month since the Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development released the Strategy for Rural Development¹ in response to continued lag in rural economies as well as levels of unemployment that are becoming unsustainable. The strategy calls for a coherent, efficient and co-ordinated approach to delivery of service, for more financial resources be directed through regional councils, for use of non-state groups such as NGO's and private sector for effective delivery of service to the communities and more importantly, for empowerment of communities so that they become employable or better still can create their own businesses.

The pilot project we are launching today is, indeed, in line with the objectives of the Strategy for Rural Development. The project aims to support six rural schools in the Omaheke region in both curricular and extra-curricular activities as well as promote ICT and build capacity of out-of-school youth and more mature members of rural communities. The proposed regional knowledge and service portal will be built on an ICT platform connecting the regional centre with local rural nodes. It will enable various accesses to modes of knowledge, knowledge co-creation and collaboration, as well as to services such as social network services which will support core and extra-curricular educational and economic activities.

The current infrastructure in the pilot schools in Omaheke is partially functional and at the same time there is lack of local skills to administer or to take full advantage of the facilities for curricular educational activities. It is in this regard that the partnerships with Telecom and Ounongo Technology Centre in this project are important. Telecom will be equipping a computer laboratory and provide solar power energy for a laboratory at one of the schools. In other schools it will provide technical solutions for internet connectivity. More importantly, it will bear costs for internet access of the schools and our operational partner, OTC.

According to Dr Jim Cavaye² rural development can easily become trapped in a single approach that focuses on delivery of services, discrete initiatives, information dissemination and provision of resources to meet the perceived needs of communities. The setting up of this project on ICT Knowledge and Service Portal meets all these requirements. He, however, cautions that unless the other part, namely engagement and partnership with the community takes place the project is bound to fail.

The engagement and partnership helps the community to act on existing motivation, build enthusiasm and confidence, challenge community attitudes and perceptions, support 'hidden' informal leaders in the community and above all, build relationships with key individuals inside and outside the community. Our partner, Ounongo Technology Centre with the support of government, academic and research institutions and international partners, will have to play a critical role in strengthening relations with the community. We have also received support from the Regional Director of Education in Omaheke for the project and this should go a long way in fostering and supporting passion, enthusiasm, motivation and attitudes that will make the communities secure tangible gains from the project.

We all need to be mindful of the fact that introducing a process of innovation to communities can be a challenge to any organisation. Unlike in private sector where the focus is largely on product development, innovation in development is somewhat different³. In development we also need to develop strategies and new, often integrated approaches that make a difference in poor people's livelihoods. Interestingly, ICT plays a catalytic role in the complex task of poverty alleviation by leveraging the effects in earning opportunities on economic activities, on education and health services, on good governance and on promoting democracy. I'm glad that whilst the focus of this project is on ICT and education, it has not lost sight of the fact that for greater effectiveness it will depend on complementarities with other poverty reduction and developmental initiatives.

The training in this project will provide communities with skills that will deploy in other poverty reduction initiatives, while at the same time integrate into the project is training in technologies that should empower communities to create their own business.

It gives me pride to state that a Polytechnic team under the leadership of Dr. Heike Winschiers-Theophilus has been exploring a number of methods for involving rural communities in innovation and design. Let me also recognise the other members of the knowledge portal team Gereon Koch Kapuire, Colin Stanley, Peter Gallert and Shilumbe Chivuno-Kuria. I'm told that students will be involved in this project – however, I would like to make an explicit point about students. Community engagement projects provide us an opportunity to work with communities in trying to find solutions to real problems they are facing. This is an ideal situation to involve students where they will have an opportunity to apply their acquired knowledge to a practical problem. I therefore want to encourage our entire faculty and staff to make as many students as possible an integral part of such projects because they provide them critical skills for good citizenship. There is no better education we can give to students than to develop them into valued and productive members of communities.

Finally, I would thank all our partners in this project, Telecom, Ounongo Technology Centre and the Regional Directorate of Education in Omaheke for having expressed their confidence in us by partnering with the Polytechnic and for committing your resources to this project. I want to assure you that we will not fail you. In fact, the pilot project is only the beginning and I hope you will walk along with us as we hope for a national rural rollout of the project to ensure that benefits from the innovative services will be enjoyed by the entire nation and actively contribute to the knowledge economy.

I thank you

References

- 1 !Hoaës, I. 2013. Namibia: Govt Reveals Strategy for Rural Development. *New Era*, 27 January.
- 2 Cavaye, J. 2001. Rural Community Development: new Challenges and Enduring Dilemmas. *J. Reg. Pol. Anal.*, Vol 31, 2, 109-124.
- 3 Kelles – Viitanen, A. 2005. The Role of ICT in Governing Rural Development. IFAD Workshop on *What are the Innovation Challenges for Rural Development* in Rome, 15-17 November.