



**Speech**

**by**

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*Rector: Polytechnic of Namibia*

**At**

**MTC Bursary Awards Ceremony**

**on**

**Wednesday, 06 April 2010**

**at 11h00**

**Fuerstenhof Protea Hotel**

Master of Ceremonies

Hon. Dr. Abraham Iyambo, *Minister of Education*

Mr. Tim Ekandjo, MTC Chief Human Capital Manager

MTC Management

Polytechnic and UNAM staff members

Bursary Recipients

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very delighted to make a few remarks at today's bursary handover ceremony; it is a happy moment and we should celebrate. I shall return later to the concept of celebration but for now, let me thank MTC for their dedicated efforts and support for Namibia's development in general, and to higher education in particular.

I also wish to bestow congratulations on our new Minister of Education, Hon. Dr. Iyambo, for his appointment to this eminent Ministry in national development. Sir, I thank you also for gracing this important occasion as one of your first public events on your new calendar. We at the Polytechnic welcome you wholeheartedly to the education union, we wish you a successful tenure and pledge our commitment to the success of the education sector and national development.

This year at the Polytechnic we make our clarion call for excellence in education with our theme: *Re-thinking Competitiveness for Socio-economic Development*. According to the web definition,

international competitiveness can be defined as “...*the ability of a nation to design, produce, and market goods and services that are better or cheaper than those of other countries.*” But that’s only half the story: my definition is: *the ability of a nation to create and sustain better quality systems, processes, goods and services that drive economic growth, thereby enhancing its inhabitants’ standard of living.*

It is, therefore, disheartening to note that our international competitiveness in the education sector leaves a lot to be desired. According to the ***World Economic Forum’s 2009–2010 Global Competitiveness Index*** conducted on 133 countries, Namibia is ranked at 103 on secondary education; 112 on higher education; 113 on innovation capacity; and 128 on availability of scientists and engineers. This is an urgent call to the government and all stakeholders to awaken to the stark reality facing us and to push the position education anew: it is not all about the financial investment we make in education, but how we manage performance – i.e. efficiency and effectiveness.

Master of Ceremonies, education is the foundation of individual capacity, of national systems and of competitiveness. Education is the most important factor in economic development, for it is the acquisition and utility of knowledge that drive nations. In all cases of rapid economic growth observed in the late twentieth century, such as in Finland, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, education was and is the driver of competitiveness, and that coupled with

technological capabilities became the benchmarks of modern competitiveness. Modern industry is driven by technology, and technological capability is a learning process. Further development is driven by innovation capability – the ability to create new products, and the manufacturing infrastructure to produce these products. These three stages can be regarded as understanding the “know how”, “know why” and “create new” of the particular product category. These are challenges that the Polytechnic – as *Namibia’s university of science and technology* - fully understands and our sterling record is an example of how we can address national challenges.

As a developing nation, our challenge is to transform Namibia’s economy through the different stages as defined by Jeffrey Sachs’s book *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*: from subsistence to commercial economy, to emerging market and to technology-based economy. Namibia is currently rated as an emerging economy, i.e. an economy characterized by the nearly complete coverage of basic infrastructure (roads, power, telecoms, ports), basic education, health services, and so on. But we must move on to the high-tech economy characterized by widespread tertiary education (perhaps 30% or more of the university-aged population), extensive public financing of scientific studies (1% or more of GNP), extensive public-sector-led research and development, a sophisticated information-based society (high Internet use, large circulation of daily newspapers, nearly universal use of mobile telephony and universal access to computers in schools). Annual income per capita has reached U\$ 15 000. In the end, this

means that we must harness our human capital through education and thereby producing knowledge workers. Therefore investment in the development of human capital is a very critical investment indeed.

Master of Ceremonies,

While we emphasize that education is paramount in development, we all know that most students are not in a position to pay for their tertiary education because of their challenged family backgrounds. I am, therefore, pleased to note that MTC – as Namibia's leader in telecommunications and ICT services remains committed to the investment in higher education. MTC's bursary scheme – introduced in 2004 - has already benefitted some 39 students, and in 2008 eleven students were awarded full bursaries in various fields of significance to Namibia's development agenda. Today, we are honoring 12 students of the Polytechnic with bursaries in Information Technology (4), Electronic Engineering (3), Power Engineering (3), and Marketing (2).

I should hasten to add here that a total of N\$500,000 was budgeted for scholarships by MTC in 2009 and 70% of the graduating students have successfully been integrated and offered employment by the company. This is an important contribution to the development of higher education in Namibia and thus MTC deserves a big applause!

MTC and the Polytechnic have a long standing relationship which includes sponsoring of major events, donations and scholarships. For example in 2008, MTC committed N\$ 1.8 million in sponsorship for the MTC Chair (Professorship) in the School of Information Technology (Namibia's first *endowed chair*) and N\$ 6 million to promote laptop ownership and connectivity amongst students.

MTC thus played a very prominent role in the Polytechnic achieving a landmark N\$ 50 million in grants, donations and other forms of support from industry and international partners in 2008, for various projects. This support is indeed a clear indication of industry's confidence in the Polytechnic as a development partner. I want to assure MTC that the Polytechnic appreciates your continued support and will likewise continue to do its best to ensure appropriate returns on your investment in our students.

As we all know, Namibia's education still presents a host of challenges. In order to succeed in today's competitive environment, students must be equipped with advanced employable skills way beyond literacy. This will lead to enhanced opportunities to earn money in new and emerging opportunities, locally as well as globally.

In conclusion, I would therefore like to thank MTC and urge the bursary recipients to make the best use of this golden opportunity to run the race of academic excellence. I thank you and wish you all the success! - **End.**