

**REMARKS BY TOM ALWEENDO
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I would like to applaud the Minister of Education and his team for the platform they have created to talk about how to improve the quality of our education. It was not long ago when the issue of the quality of our education was talked about in hushed voices. I am convinced that problems are resolved only when those responsible for finding a solution to a particular problem admit that they have a problem. However we must also note that the willingness to admit one's shortcomings while is a necessary condition to finding a solution, it is not a sufficient condition to a solution. We still need to have the determination to find a solution to the problem. We still need to be prepared to do what it takes to resolve the problem. I am therefore hopeful that the conference will assist us in finding a solution to the problem of quality in our education system.

I have been asked to give an overview of the human resource development needs and projections. So far a lot has been said about the importance of education. We now know that education is the catalyst to us achieving V2030; that without the right kind of education the economy will not grow and we will remain a developing economy; we also heard that it is a waste of scarce financial resources if our education system builds skills that are not needed by the economy.

Education is certainly an important catalyst to economic growth. There are economics models that have come to recognize the fact that economic growth is not only driven by outside factors and that education policies have an important role to play in determining the long-run growth rate of the economy. It is recognized that education affects economic growth by leading to the creation of new knowledge and innovation.

Not only is education important for economic growth, it is also possibly the most basic necessity after those that are vital to life itself, such as food, clothing and shelter. It is education that lifts people out of the state of never-ending poverty in which they are constantly struggling to fulfil basic needs. For example, the huge gaps in opportunities that we witness daily in our society, is hugely as a result of an ineffective education system.

We also need to bear in mind that the world has changed so much over the last two decades, where international borders barely exist. Nations now have to compete in the world market where competition is so fierce and only the fittest will survive. But your fitness is largely determined by the quality of your education. We can therefore survive economically only if we equip ourselves with skills that will enable us to compete effectively with all the other nations. This obviously requires that we change the way we look at education. I believe for too long we have perceived education to be a social service that we provide to our people. The truth is that it is education that distinguishes winners from losers among nations.

Currently we are spending N\$8.3 billion in the education sector and this is no small change by any definition. It is therefore necessary for us to have a comprehensive human resource development plan that assesses the demand of human resources and the extent to which our education sector is able to meet that demand. We have started with the exercise as part of our planning function and we have targeted December this year as the deadline by which the exercise would have been finalised. The final output will be an occupational supply and demand model that will enable human resource planners to project the demand and supply for at least 200 occupations across all the sectors of the economy over the next 15 years.

What is however clear already is the fact that there is a mismatch between the demand for skilled personnel in the economy and the supply of the needed skills. The challenge will be whether our education sector will be up to the job to satisfy that demand.

I, however, need to add a caveat with regard to a national human resource development plan – and that is that while not having a national human resource development plan is like a pilot flying an aircraft that is not equipped with navigation instruments, such a plan cannot be cast in stone. By definition economic structure will always be a dynamic phenomenon. For example, the skills the economy needed fifteen years ago might not be the skills that will be required by the economy fifteen years from now. Do we therefore create the skills for today's economy or tomorrow's economy? How do we know how tomorrow's economy is going to look like or should look like? The best we can do in the circumstance is to ensure that our education is of high quality and is sufficiently flexible to be able to change course when needed.

We should also recognise that a human resource development plan, while necessary, cannot serve as a silver bullet to the problems we are seeking to address in our education system. There are more fundamental and binding constraints that if not removed, our efforts to improve the quality of our education will be but a dream. Allow me to mention three of the binding constraints that I consider to be too important and need to be addressed with all the urgency we can muster.

First, we need to ensure that teaching is once more regarded as a worthy and meaningful profession to pursue. Today teaching is regarded as the profession of the last resort. There is research that suggests that the young people who enrol to become teachers are those who have passed grade 12 with the lowest points. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that we have not been able to produce the high level skills that our economy demands.

The only way to change this is to make teaching an attractive profession and we can achieve this by doing two things. First, let us agree to increase the entry requirements for all those who want to pursue a career in teaching. This will surely address the perception that the teaching profession is for those who have nowhere else to go. Second, we need to start to reward our good teachers and educators

according to their performance. This will in all probability demonstrate that if you are an effective teacher, teaching can also be a financially rewarding career.

The second binding constraint is that of discipline in schools. We have heard that discipline is the elephant in the kraal. Without discipline we cannot hope to succeed at resolving the issue of the quality of our education. The current disciplinary procedure is so cumbersome such that school principals are rendered powerless. We can start to address this problem by amending the Public Service Act to give school principals full authority over the running of the schools and hold them accountable for the learning outcomes.

The third binding constraint is the issue of accountability. On Monday the Prime Minister said that we have good policies, being in education or other areas, but we more often than not fail to implement our policies. He thus argued that our problem is not in policy articulation but in policy implementation.

I agree with the Prime Minister that policy implementation is one of our serious shortcomings. The irony, however, is that we are not prepared to hold each other accountable for non-performance; and as long as we are not willing to penalise non-performance; as long as we are amenable to reward poor performance, the quality in our education and other sectors will continue to be elusive. We can change this by ensuring that people are appointed only based on their ability to perform the required task and that they are held fully accountable for non-performance.

Let me conclude by once again congratulating the Minister of Education for having provided the necessary leadership in addressing the quality of our education system. As individuals attending this conference, let us also be aware of the great potential that is within all of us to change where change is needed; let us believe that it can be done. The time is, however, now for all of us to seize the moment to act where we are required to do so. Let us not allow our destiny to be determined for us by events happening around us; but rather let us be the architects of our own destiny and the quality of education has a lot to do with that determination. We owe this to ourselves and certainly we owe it to the future generation.