

**UNIVERSITY RESEARCH  
IN NAMIBIA:**

**A Thinkpiece**

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**UNIVERSITY RESEARCH IN NAMIBIA**

1. Applied research should be a central priority, focus and product of the University of Namibia as soon as it is founded.
2. The word applied is deliberate but is not intended narrowly:
  - a. if basic research necessary to do the applied research is not being carried out elsewhere and can be in Namibia it is de facto part of applied research;
  - b. how applied is applied, varies with whether appropriate semi-applied research is available and what is needed is local technical, ecological, user friendliness and economic viability testing/modification (e.g. SADCC project improved millet/sorghum seed and perhaps Botswana intermediate technology for village/household sorghum and millet processing) or whether the whole research beyond general principles and knowledge needs to be done in Namibia (e.g. land questions; devising and testing a model on Karstveldt underground water/aquifer recharge rate, variability with drought, consequential safe offtake levels and implications for 'rationing' - and by what means among present and proposed users);
  - c. there is an intermediate level of applied research (e.g. on causes of physical, "entitlement" and nutritional food insecurity and its interaction with employment and real wage levels, agricultural output and non-crop/herd rural income source development) which may well initially be "academic" in the sense of not specifically commissioned but creating the knowledge and experience

infrastructure on which "commissioned" work and policy inputs more generally can be built.

3. Priority to applied research will not just happen on its own or in response to general adjurations or pleas. The record of SSA universities in this respect is either poor or uneven (Dar es Salaam, Morogoro, i.e. Sokoine, and Zimbabwe are partial - but uneven - exceptions):
  - a. with limited resources and an emphasis on teaching, under-staffed departments concentrate on getting courses taught leaving little time for research;
  - b. applied research is harder to do than pseudo theoretical consisting of taking a general model or outlook and splashing a few country facts on it;
  - c. many academics in SSA view their business as criticising governments or enterprises not providing inputs into/influence on their policy and practice (a significant problem at ZIDS in Zimbabwe as is "b");
  - d. SSA governments (and enterprises) have not been very energetic in seeking applied research/consultancy from their own universities because they have believed "imported is best", external funding has been easier to get for external personnel/institutions; and/or distrust of local faculty mirroring their view of governments/enterprises. (Tanzania and, perhaps less clearly, Zimbabwe are exceptions.);
  - e. perhaps because of "b/c" good applied researchers tend to be snapped up by governments/enterprises albeit often de facto to

administer or manage rather than to spend most of their time on applied research as such.

f. interaction among university and government/enterprise applied researchers is both limited and uneasy and both workload and lack of (or perhaps negative) policy on non-official writing by official (or enterprise) applied researchers further lessens positive interaction. (There are exceptions but usually with expatriate advisers who are actually academics and/or Central Bank research personnel, e.g., R. H. Green, Charles Harvey, Delphin Rwegasira, Philip Ndegwa).

4. Therefore, if the aim of Para 1 is accepted for the University of Namibia, pre-planning on how it might be made operational should be begun at once and implementation as soon as the University is launched.

### Structural Issues

5. In practice, to maintain a body of ongoing research and of persons committed to researching under SSA conditions is at least greatly facilitated by, and may even require Research Institutes with on a par with departments.

6. That approach does - usually - result in some research getting done because it is some faculty members' priority duty. However, it can have the unfortunate tendency of dividing faculty into administrators and teachers and by itself does not resolve the government/enterprise relationship problematic nor that of intellectual interaction among

university and enterprise/government applied researchers (including policy designers and articulators).

7. The use of Research Institutes to further research by other faculty members and to 'outside' researchers can be facilitated by:
  - a. research support funding designated for use by other faculty members;
  - b. building up research libraries open to all faculty - and to government/enterprise researchers;
  - c. regular seminar series with participation (as presenters, panelists, commentators and chairpersons as well as 'audience') from research and teaching faculty plus government and enterprise researchers;
  - d. having some teaching (in the broad sense) requirement for all researchers (e.g. one term course a year; a series of open seminars on a set of related themes) and some specialised courses (within a degree or certificate course and/or advanced degree courses based at the Institute);
  - e. providing that - say - one-third of all posts be for visiting researchers who for a period (say one term to two years) would be with the Institute on "sabbatical" from their University Department, Government Post or Enterprise Position);
  - f. encouraging joint projects of Institute staff with non-Institute Namibian researchers.
8. These measures can help alter the general atmosphere of relationships. However, that can be strengthened by more formal institutional links:

a. an Advisory Council for each research institute;

b. including:

Institute Staff

Other Academic Staff

User (Government and Enterprise) Members.

That can increase Institute Researcher understanding of user needs and user sense of participation and understanding what applied research is/can be and what it is not/cannot be. As a result it can help mobilise resources, get access to data and build up an ongoing dynamic of "commissions" and "offers".

9. These proposals may not be very original. But they are rarely implemented (certainly not 7 "a/c") and to the extent they are, rather haphazardly. Nor will they guarantee good results (that requires good staff, high morale and a general openness on the part of all parties - not least government). But their absence can go far toward ensuring poor results!

### Integration and Interaction

10. Research should not be fragmented and it should - especially at applied level - bring the insights of several disciplines to bear as early in the process as feasible (i.e. a seed breeder is not an expert either on socio-economic issues affecting tradeoff between sturdiness in the face of drought/low inputs and maximum yield with adequate water and inputs; still less is he an expert on implications of government regional and income distribution goals. Per contra an

economist is no expert on the process of aquifer recharging, safety margins in takes or modelling either).

11. There are economies of scale in research as to a body of persons with similar concerns large enough to create a critical mass and avoiding duplication of work as well as more evident library-administration-equipment ones.
12. But to seek to have a single Applied Research Institute for the University of Namibia is probably no more realistic than to seek to have a single teaching department. For one thing, there is a locational question: Agriculture and (one assumes) Marine Biology/Fisheries are unlikely to be (in the present author's opinion, should not be) at Windhoek beyond some basic undergraduate course work (e.g. in a 4 year degree, 1 or 2 focused on science and classroom agricultural-fisheries background might be on the main campus for reasons of economies of laboratories and personnel). For another, it is one thing to argue that applied health research benefits from involvement of health economists (realistically economist early on in Namibia) and quite another to argue that Medical and Economic research in general is so marked by overlap and interaction as to require (or even justify) combining the two.
13. This suggests that a possible roster of Research Institutes for the University of Namibia might include:
  - a. Social Sciences (including Law) using NEPRU and the institute at the Academy as a core - preferably plus able ex-UNIN researchers such as Dr. N. Mwase and W. Asumbany who want to continue their commitment to Namibia;

- b. Education and Public Administration - salvaging if possible what was one of SSA's most creative applied research programmes at UNIN. (Education as defined here would include specialised education not merely standard primary-secondary-adult);
- c. Public Health/Medicine:
- d. Agriculture, Environment and Rural Development (including livestock and forestry) building on what exists within Agriculture;
- e. Water )
- ) These might initially be linked with "d".
- f. Fisheries )
- g. Engineering and Natural Science.

(Assuming "d-e-f" are initially combined, that is 5 institutes)

14. In each case the Institute should be multi-disciplinary. Social scientists (in most cases applied sociologists and economists) should be incorporated in each from the start.

Thinking of this later on when snags develop wastes time, discredits applied research and creates animosity toward the newcomers (as has been noted extensively in respect to applied agricultural research with particular reference to seed development and to rural development. In that case educational researchers are also needed - extension is, or ought to be, a branch of adult education as should key elements in rural development). Incorporating non-social scientists in social science research has a limited track record (perhaps because economists view themselves as able to understand and use the results of all other disciplines on their own - which is far



from universally valid) though there are cases of engineers (technology) and doctors (economics of health) as well as public administration specialists (who are really social scientists of the politics/governance cluster) being fruitfully incorporated.

### Salaries

15. To keep qualified citizen researchers (and to keep them happy and committed) material as well as intellectual and visible results (publication, use of work) incentives are needed, i.e. decent pay in two senses:

- a. enough to live significantly above the poverty line;
- b. comparable to posts held by persons of similar age-education-ability-experience.

In the immediate future "b" is binding rather than "a".

16. A possible "equivalency" scale would be:

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| a. Vice Chancellor      | = Governor Central Bank or<br>Chief Justice <u>less</u> 5% |
| b. Institute Heads      | = Deputy Principal Secretary                               |
| c. Professors           | = DPS <u>less</u> 5%                                       |
| d. Associate Professors | = Directors <u>less</u> 5%                                 |
| e. Instructors          | = Deputy Directors <u>less</u> 5%                          |
| f. Assistant Lecturers  | = Grade Below DD <u>less</u> 5%.                           |

17. Expatriates should be paid an "Expatriation Allowance". The reasons are purely pragmatic:
- a. if paid at local rates which make sense in Namibia terms, able Northerners (and some Southern country nationals) won't come or will come only for 1 or 2 years to build a base for a 'home' career;
  - b. if local salary scale is high enough to attract good expatriates from all countries it is much higher (e.g. R 100,000 to R 175,000 for a senior full professor) than Namibia can afford or should pay citizens;
  - c. if expatriates cost more there will be greater attention to Namibianising whenever feasible and appropriate. (100% would never be appropriate as it would lead to ingrowing parochialism and datedness.)
18. In practice, expatriation funding can be 'won' from most countries for their own nationals. And a fund for such payments in general (not tied to nationals) might be saleable to the Nordics.
19. A practical/equitable problem arises. The pragmatic case for expatriation allowances argues paying what is needed to get the person wanted. For example, a £30,000 a year UK Senior Professor should get R 100,000 expatriation if the basic salary is R 50,000 but a Tanzanian or an Indian should get no allowance as those countries home pay scales are well below Namibian citizen scales. On a "no worse off" principle this is equitable. But it causes problems because it looks as if it were a colour bar (all white faces would get allowances, many brown or black ones would not) - a real problem in late 1970s/early

1980s when Tanzania paid such allowances on a rough "make up to home salary basis" and Indians received a 0 allowance. But again to pay R 150,000 allowance and salary to a Professor from a poor country is expensive overkill so far as Namibia is concerned. (It is easier if home country will pay allowance as part of its technical assistance to Namibia - the University of Namibia's hands are then "clean".)

20. Evidently this problem is not limited to research or to University of Namibia. It is public sector wide.

21. A different issue is "private" consultancies by University faculty. These are open to abuse. One way forward could be:

a. prior approval needed (to ensure not so busy "on the side" as to have no time to earn salary);

b. one month a year automatically approved subject to "a";

c. up to 2 more months (subject to "a") approveable but 50% of pay to go as "internal tax" to the University to:

i. finance research in 'unpopular' (or low commissioned project) areas;

ii. seminar (including abroad) and staff development programme for younger/less experienced faculty.

(If basic salaries are plausible and this system operates from the start of University of Namibia's life it can be acceptable and will soon be seen as normal. IDS has a rather harsher system.)

d. Beyond that the faculty member could (if work seen as important) go on unpaid leave.

**Expatriates: Uses (and Abuses)**

22. Some expatriates (say 10% to 20%) are needed to avoid parochialism, keep up to date, experience thought and work elsewhere. For the avoidance of doubt expatriate means not Namibian, i.e. a Tanzanian is as much an expatriate as a Swede.
23. Initially - until Namibians are trained and experienced - more expatriates are needed. Their purposes should be:
- a. to ensure enough high quality research is done to create an ongoing, serious research institute environment in which Namibians can learn what such a body is and how it works;
  - b. to help design overall and specific research programmes/projects;
  - c. to bring to bear comparative experience/knowledge from other countries (especially those of Southern Africa);
  - d. to work with inexperienced researchers including criticising sloppy or aimless work to build in self and peer criticism;
  - e. where necessary to Direct the Institute (not ideal role - a Visiting senior Research Professor is a better one especially as a good researcher may hate and/or be bad at academic administration);
  - f. be on 1 to 4 year renewable contracts with a swing to 2 as norm as Namibian personnel gain in numbers and experience.
24. Relative to "e", there should be an Executive Secretary or Personal Assistant to Director who should do the bulk of the Administration. The British model of making best academics Heads of Department with so

much administration and so little senior support staff they cannot be academics thereafter is (and is increasingly seen in UK to be) arrant nonsense.

### **External Links**

25. Research institutes, should have working relationships (including exchange of staff which should be or soon become more than 'students' from Namibia North and 'experts' from North to Namibia. Both flows are valid and should be in both directions. For example, Finland's first PhD in Tropical Agriculture was based on an MA in Development Economics and a Ministry of Agriculture Research Post in Tanzania in the early 1970s).
26. The selection principles should be:
  - a. relevance (e.g. hunting-fishing research focused in Innuits in the Canadian Arctic is not relevant);
  - b. quality (i.e. a third rate partner is unlikely to help stretch University of Namibia so it grows fast);
  - c. regional balance (i.e. Southern Africa, Africa and Asia should be well represented not just the North. Latin America is probably a later stage given language and limited interest in Africa in LA barriers).
27. To get a complete list to canvass requires consulting Namibians and friends of Namibia in different disciplines. Not all the answers are

obvious (and not all 'obvious' answers are correct. An incomplete check-list would include:

- a. Dar es Salaam (Development Studies, Medicine, Marine Biology, Engineering, General) Sokoine (Agriculture and Forestry), Institute of Finance Management, Maji Institute (Water) in Tanzania;
- b. University of Zimbabwe (General, Veterinary);
- c. University of Botswana (problem as to research strength but in many ways Botswana is Namibia's "elder twin");
- d. University of Zambia (Mining);
- e. University of Arizona (Ecology/Deserts);
- f. University of Maryland (Agriculture/Fisheries);
- g. University of Bochum (Germany - Development Studies);
- h. IDS (Sussex) - (Development Studies);
- i. University of Ghana (African Studies, Geography);
- j. University of Ibadan (Social Science Research, Medicine);
- k. Institute of Social Studies (Hague) - (Development Studies);
- l. University of Washington (Seattle) - (Public Health/Medicine);
- m. Wageningen (Netherlands Agricultural University - there is a tropical agriculture focus from colonial past roots);
- n. University of Toronto (Applied Economics).

28. These are all worth checking out. Doubtless not all will come to anything. And there are others "out there".
29. How formally and in how large a front with what components to set up links needs to be flexible. This relates to partner practice as well as probably very different levels and quantities of cooperation.
30. What is termed "development studies" in the North need not be so styled in Namibia. After all, applied research in Namibia is, in a very real sense, all development studies research! (But the title may be useful - IDS (Dar) is a domestic title and is a functioning, functional Institute.)

### Library/Publications

31. Key to a functioning Research Institute (especially to one geographically far from most other Institutes) is a good working library including basic journal subscriptions and (perhaps more crucial) exchange arrangements for papers/work in progress with other Institutes.
32. To finance such libraries may be quite feasible - grants for books and journals are fashionable. The problem may be identifying the materials to buy/subscribe to:
- a. this is a job for specialists knowing literature so far as lists go;
  - b. the balance of books/journals for Namibia would be different from any global standard and the higher African/South African

proportion of volumes/journals may not be well known to international experts;

- c. setting up a working library system (Main - say 100,000 volumes and Institute - say 3,000 to 5,000 volumes each as well as access to Main Library?) requires another kind of expert (if the ex-UNIN Librarian will complete set up of Parliamentary Library he could do this - if not the IDS (Sussex) Library might be able to put together a team to do a "design" and perhaps locate/second someone to get it up and running).

33. The Commonwealth Secretariat seems to be one place to look for help on "a". But there are things Namibia can do:

- a. ask disciplinary and research experts in Namibia for list in their fields;
- b. get lists from other Research Institute Libraries including those in Zimbabwe and South Africa. (IDS-Sussex might be a starting point on Development Studies but University of Namibia would need advice on how to pare down given size of IDS's collection).

34. Institutes should publish own research, work in progress, commissioned research when (if) acceptable to commissioner (and if not a "spin off" analogue containing non-confidential part). This can be done by desk top publishing, e.g. this paper was done on a word processor; one step up would be a printed cover.

35. For this there are several reasons:

- a. dissemination of knowledge;
- b. evidence of productivity or otherwise of staff;



- c. something to exchange with other institutes;
- d. chance to build in peer review and checks on lazy or sloppy work (i.e. require 2 readers/commentators on any study before publishing).

### **Funding**

36. Multiple research funding would appear desirable:
- a. in general University of Namibia block grant budget from domestic government revenue;
  - b. external support (government foundation or partner institutes abroad) channelled through Budget or Direct to Institutes but mobilised for specific capital costs, projects and/or recurrent costs;
  - c. consultancies to Namibian government and enterprise users (the first requiring they do get Consultancy lines in their votes for which they can choose the consultants.
37. A strategy for mobilisation is needed and a rolling 5 year budget with first two reasonably firm. In some cases - e.g. Library, staff development - 5 year firm grants from external sources could usefully be sought.
38. Cooperating partner institutes abroad should not be chosen on basis of ability to put up funds. However, some at least can raise special funds on the basis of such arrangements and others would be happy to go jointly with University of Namibia to donors who favour South-North

Cooperation in this area, e.g. SAREC/SIDA, EEC, Netherlands probably Norad, Danida and Finnida. The World Bank theme "African Capacity Building" is a useful one to use for this (fund-raising purpose).

39. External fund raising is likely to be very important for some years. A senior university officer on academic/research side should be full time coordinating/selling. He cannot be a specialist in each use, he needs to be a plausible academician not just a project analyst, accountant or administrator.



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