

Nujoma dismisses criticism of Unam's skill development programme

■ Albertina Nakale

WINDHOEK – Founding president Sam Nujoma has spoken out against those who criticise the long-term vision of the University of Namibia (Unam) to address the critical human resource development needs of Namibia.

“I am aware that there are more academic and research programmes being introduced, which are also aimed at addressing key human resource deficiencies in some of the very important sectors of our economy, though I hear that there are also some resistances and opposition from some quarters,” he reacted on Monday during the farewell dinner for outgoing Unam Vice-Chancellor Professor Lazarus Hangula.

Unam council appointed Associate Professor Kenneth Matengu as the university's new Vice-Chancellor replacing Hangula who served the institution for 25 years in various academic roles.

Matengu, who resumes office today, is set to serve for a period of six years. Nujoma who worked with Hangula when he was Unam chancellor said sometimes these resistances come about due to ignorance or perceived high costs of such programmes.

Nujoma is of the opinion that establishing quality professional programmes is costly. “If we do not take bold decisions to implement them now, even in a phased approach, the country will never be able to do so in the future as costs will be even higher, and Namibia will continue to be a net importer of specialised and unique skills forever,” he encouraged.

He advised Unam leadership to educate the public and relevant government ministries so that everyone share the long-term vision of the university about critical human resource development needs of Namibia. He said Hangula is a person who liked to consult and seek advice and views on the university's strategic programmes and projects, not only to seek support for them but also guidance on how to raise the requisite resources to implement the conceived programmes.

Thus, he says many of the university academic programmes were initiated

following consultations with his office and together they strategised on how to go about implementing the projects and how to raise the necessary required resources for them. Nujoma said together, they had several fundraising gala dinners and lunches to raise funds for many of the university's projects such as the Faculty of Engineering and Information and Technology (IT), and the School of Medicine, the Sam Nujoma Marine and Coastal Resources Research Centre at Henties Bay, and many others including recently for the proposed School of Marine Engineering, and the Centre for Mining and Metallurgical Research and Training.

Under the leadership of Hangula, Nujoma said Unam initiated several community development support projects to enhance socio-economic development and growth of the people in almost all the regions. One such practical example he cited is the rice project at Kalimbeza in the Zambezi Region which has now been commercialised, as well as the rice community projects in the northern regions through technical support from the Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Ogongo Campus.

“No one could imagine that the north could one day grow rice in their own fields. But today we see more than 100 families in Omusati and Oshana regions growing rice and the number of rice growers is increasing every year. I am informed that rice farming has also been introduced in Kavango West Region, notably at Shiguru,” he noted.

Nujoma said Hangula never gave up even when he was to operate under difficult circumstances due to negative forces and unwarranted opposition from within or outside the institution, often sacrificing his time and resources to achieve the university's initiatives.

“It would pain me dearly to see our national university going down because of being undermined for whatever reason that may be, after all the achievements and successes to date. We should never allow that to happen, and this is my plea to our chancellor and Vice President of the Republic of Namibia His Excellency Dr Nangolo Mbumba,” he pleaded.