Poly delegation initiates ties with Bandung State Polytechnic in Indonesia

Dr. Andrew Niikondo, Vice-Rector Academic Affairs and Research, and Prof. Errol Tyobeka, Advisor to the Rector, recently returned to Windhoek after visiting the State Polytechnic of Bandung in Indonesia with the aim of establishing links between the two institutions.

Their visit follows an invitation from the Bandung State Polytechnic, facilitated by the Indonesian Embassy in Windhoek, to travel to Indonesia to meet with senior management members of the institution.

During the first meeting, the Namibian delegation was warmly welcomed by the Assistant Director for Academic Affairs, Dr. Haryadi, and all the heads of academic divisions at the institution. The discussions commenced with a brief presentation by Dr. Haryadi on the general academic and administrative activities of POLBAN, as the Bandung Polytechnic is popularly known. The institution was established in 1982 under the wings of the highly rated Institute of Technology Bandung (ITB), but became independent of ITB in 1997. Currently, the institution has a student enrolment of about 4 000, with 498 academic staff (60% of which have Master's and Doctoral degrees). The institution's academic operations consist of 10 departments, mostly in the engineering field. It also has a number of training centres, such as the Software Training Centre and the Pneumatics Hydraulics Training Centre, to name a few.

Dr. Niikondo, in turn, presented a detailed profile of the Polytechnic of Namibia.

The presentations clearly showed that both of these young institutions had followed different developmental trajectories. The POLBAN was a focused engineering-based institution which had experienced a conservative growth in student enrolment while offering only pre-graduate programmes. The Polytechnic of Namibia, on the other hand, had grown rapidly in terms of student enrolment, and offered a wide spectrum of programmes at both pre- and post-graduate levels. The mission of POLBAN is to conduct applied research and promote the results to develop science and technology. This is in common with the mission of the Polytechnic which is also geared to promote competitiveness by providing multiple opportunities for excellent education, applied research, innovation and service.

The discussions revolved around the possible areas of cooperation as well as identifying other areas of mutual interest, before operationalising these decisions. Both delegations had decided from the start to express their intention to cooperate by signing a memorandum of understanding.

Dr. Niikondo and Indonesian delegates

Discussions centred on the analysis of programmes that each institution offered.

It was clear that the main thrust of cooperation will involve the Polytechnic's Schools of Engineering, Business and Management, Information Technology and the Department of Tourism in the School of Natural Resources and Tourism, as well as the Department of Language Communication in the School of Communication, Criminal Justice and Legal Studies. The POLBAN was interested in possible research collaboration, curriculum development, especially since it would soon be introducing post-graduate programmes. The Polytechnic of Namibia expressed its needs, especially in relation to teaching staff in Engineering, and this was positively received by the POLBAN.

Although the two parties were able to identify areas of common interests, they were, however, not able to provide details of the kinds of activities that were to make up the programmes to be implemented through this cooperation. This required further discussions between experts of the two institutions so that they could develop joint programmes of action. It was therefore suggested that there should be a reciprocal visit to the Polytechnic of Namibia by the POLBAN to enable this expert discussions to begin.

"At the end of the tour the two sides discussed the way forward. The POLBAN offered us to look at their template of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which the parties possibly could sign as an indication of the intent to cooperate. Once the MOU has been signed, and as we develop different joint programmes for implementation, we would then sign letters of agreements which would be attached as annexure to the MOU," Dr. Niikondo explained.

It was also agreed that a Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation between the Governments of Indonesia and Namibia signed on 11 May 2009, as well as the Framework Agreement on Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Cooperation between the two Governments in Jakarta, Indonesia which provided for strong cooperation in areas of, amongst others, tourism, mineral and energy, information and technology, education, health and technical cooperation, should be used as an anchor for the agreement with the POLBAN. The two parties have specifically agreed to work in partnership in areas of staff and student exchange programmes, with particular attention to Engineering, Tourism Management and Teaching and Learning programmes.

The agreement will be signed before the end of the year when a POLBAN delegation visits the Polytechnic.