



News from the Polytechnic of Namibia

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POLYnews

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More Namibian scientists needed to manage climate change

Habitable Planet Workshop puts floods in the spotlight again

Namibia needs more scientists and environmental specialists in order to reduce and cope with the severe environmental problems associated with climate change. This need was highlighted at the Habitable Planet Workshop that was held at the Polytechnic of Namibia recently.

The ten-day workshop was organised by the Polytechnic's Integrated Land Management Institute (ILMI) in collaboration with the Applied Centre for Climate and Earth System Science of South Africa (ACCESS).

According to ILMI's Coordinator, John Kangwa, the workshop highlighted the urgent need to train more Namibian scientists and technical experts to explore ways of preventing and mitigating climate change and its associated problems, such as unusual heavy rains and floods.

Kangwa said the workshop had also explored ways in which the Earth, Africa and Namibia, in particular, could be made a better place to live,

free from preventable disasters, for all its inhabitants.

The Dean of the School of Natural Resources and Tourism at the Polytechnic, Lameck Mwewa, noted with concern that "Most youngsters are never inspired to become scientists while at school or even at universities, which is worrisome."

"In an era of rapid environmental change and many associated challenges, we need to encourage students to take a greater interest in the study of earth systems and their dynamics so that they can come up with sustainable solutions and the modalities needed to combat the effects of global warming," he said.

Mwewa indicated that Namibia still lacks an understanding of the implications of climate change and needs to educate more scientists who can research and assess issues relating to climate change.

The Habitable Planet Workshop hosted by the Polytechnic was the first



A group of aspiring scientists, researchers and environmental specialists pictured at the opening of the Habitable Planet Workshop.

to be held outside South Africa.

ACCESS is a consortium of several agencies, research councils, research programmes, universities and research groups. They have combined their efforts to deliver a range of outputs aligned to the South African Department of Science and Technology's Global Change and Grand Challenge.

According to Dr Carl Palmer of ACCESS, the organisation wishes to attract and support a new generation of scientists who will deliver outcomes of global significance and derive skills to contribute to the transition to a knowledge-based economy.

Palmer said that having the workshop at the Poly had allowed the participants to understand and

use Namibia's magnificent physical environment and landscape, as an introduction to the subject of Earth System Science.

The workshop also examined humankind's interaction with the Earth, gave students a glimpse of its many wonders and focussed on the interconnected systems which are needed to sustain life on our planet.



Polytechnic expands regional collaboration

Poly and North-West University to deepen cooperation

The Rector of the North-West University Potchefstroom Campus, Professor Herman van Schalkwyk, visited the Polytechnic last week to expand relations between the two institutions.

Professor Van Schalkwyk praised the good relationship that his institution already enjoys with the Polytechnic, saying that it had been fruitful since a Memorandum of Agreement

was signed many years ago.

At present the two institutions collaborate mainly on joint research activities in the field of Agriculture.

"We would like our collaboration to include many more areas, especially those related to Science and Engineering," said Prof Van Schalkwyk.

The Rector of the Polytechnic, Prof Tjama Tjivikua, noted that both institutions have a special focus on scientific

and entrepreneurial innovation. He said an expansion of collaboration in areas such as student and staff exchanges and joint doctorate degree programmes would benefit both institutions and needed to be strengthened.

Prof Tjivikua added that with the Polytechnic poised to introduce more post-graduate qualifications in the fields of science and technology and Industrial Engineering, North-West University is an ideal partner to help the Polytechnic achieve this objective.

Prof Van Schalkwyk welcomed the opportunity to assist the Polytechnic, in the field. "As the largest and oldest campus of North-West University and with a history stretching over 141 years, the Potchefstroom Campus has a long track record in conducting pioneering research in science and technology.

"It is important to embark on joint projects in different areas. Engaging with the Polytechnic would also benefit our own country's development," Prof Van Schalkwyk said.

Poly and UWC also tie the knot



Prof Tjama Tjivikua, Rector of the Polytechnic and Prof Brian O'Connell, Vice-Chancellor and Rector of the University of the Western Cape, pictured signing a memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at the Poly's recent Academic Welcome. The MoU provides for collaboration in capacity building, curriculum development and student and staff exchanges in the fields of Mathematics and Statistics and the National Sciences.



Prof Herman van Schalkwyk (centre), Rector of the Potchefstroom campus of the University of the North-West, pictured with the Polytechnic Rector, Prof Tjama Tjivikua to his left and Poly lecturers Dr Mogos Teweldemedhin (far left in picture) and Salomo Mbai (second from right), School of Natural Resources and Tourism Dean, Lameck Mwewa (2nd from left) and International Relations Officer, Theodora Nandjaa Mweuta (far right).

Groundbreaking Poly 'wiki' translation project capped with success

Wikipedia, one of the world's most popular and informative online encyclopaedias, is now accessible in two of Namibia's most widely spoken indigenous languages, Oshiwambo and Otjiherero, thanks to an initiative of the Polytechnic's School of Information Technology (SIT). Late last year, SIT organised a two-day translation marathon, aimed at translating the Wikipedia interface into the two vernaculars.

The School of IT arranged the translation marathon as a pre-event to the first-ever international Indigenous Knowledge Technology Conference (IKTC) to be held in Namibia. The conference was also hosted by the Polytechnic's

School of IT.

Commenting on the success of the project, Head of the Department of Computer Systems and Networking in the School of IT, Peter Gallert, said "The translation project was aimed at changing the interface of the popular encyclopaedia programme into local languages so that it can be understood and used by many more Namibians."

The interface could be translated because it is an open source, very common and user-friendly software programme that can be widely and freely distributed, Gallert explained.

Information can now be successfully uploaded to the Wikipedia incubator and

viewed there by interested users.

Gallert added that the project is also a huge step in the preservation of the indigenous knowledge, as relevant articles can now be uploaded onto Wikipedia to be viewed and used by many generations to come.

Gallert pointed out that sustained editing is needed in the incubator for a few more months for a full 'wiki' to come alive. He noted that continued and consistent updates and translations are also needed to convince the Wikimedia Foundation to create a 'wiki' for Otjiherero and Oshiwambo translations.

"Individuals are allowed to upload content of their own onto Wikipedia, provided that it

is in the respective languages in question," he said.

Wikipedia articles in Otjiherero can be viewed at:

<http://incubator.wikimedia.org/wiki/Special:PrefixIndex/Wp/hz>

while Articles in Oshiwambo can be accessed at: <http://incubator.wikimedia.org/wiki/Special:PrefixIndex/Wp/ng>.



Peter Gallert



Classes start on 8 February. Welcome all students!