

WELCOMING REMARKS BY DR. GERT GÜNZEL

On behalf of the Polytechnic of Namibia, Dr Gert Günzel, Vice-Rector Administration and Finance, welcomed the participants to the fourth Development Dialogue Forum Series Workshop on “Towards a Food Secure Nation – within the context of National Development Plan 4 (NDP4)”, that was held at the Polytechnic’s Hotel School on 22 August 2012. The Vice Rector explained that the Development Dialogue Forum (DDF) was joint initiative of the Polytechnic of Namibia and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and was meant to provide a platform for dialogue on topical sustainable development issues.

Dr Günzel explained that food security was such a pertinent issue that no individual, community, region, country or continent could afford to ignore. He described that at the household level, the rising cost of the food basket was a matter of grave concern. However, at the national level, the increasing cost of staple food, erratic production levels, the difficult task of securing imports and the excessive cost of these imports were the most daunting challenges faced by the Namibian Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry.

According to the Vice-Rector, agriculture remained a major economic sector in Namibia, both in terms of contribution to GDP and with regard to providing sustenance to the population. Dr Günzel illustrated the statement by citing that in 2011, agriculture contributed 7.4% to GDP, while between 35% and 40% of the population depended on this specific economic sector. He commended the Namibian Government for the substantive efforts that had been made to ensure that the sector was sufficiently supported, and he singled out the rise in production levels of maize and other crops thanks to the Green Scheme. At the same time, the Vice-Rector cautioned that natural disasters such as floods in the northern and northern eastern parts of Namibia had greatly affected the production of Mahangu and the increase in humidity had brought disease to livestock.

Dr Günzel cautioned that the effects of climate change were real and were beginning to be felt across the globe. He alluded to effect that the devastating drought in the United States of America, the world’s largest producer of corn, had on food importing countries, including Namibia. He reported that the maize and wheat futures market in South Africa, the continent's biggest producer, were at record heights, raising the stakes for those governments that need to subsidise the cost of basic food.

The Vice-Rector was particularly concerned with the impact of rising food prices and the effect of the shortage of staple food on the vulnerable members of the Namibian society. He was conscious of the fact that everybody and each institution had a role to play to ensure that families, communities and the nation at large enhanced the capacity to increase overall food security. In this regard, Dr Günzel made it clear that the Polytechnic of Namibia was playing its part through capacity building in the areas of agriculture and the sustainable management of natural and water resources. By bringing the Development Dialogue Forum to Namibia, he believed that the sharing of ideas would ultimately provide meaningful input to the national planning and implementation processes.