

# Unam subsidy falls short of budgetary needs

■ Albertina Nakale

WINDHOEK – The N\$912 million subsidy allocated to the University of Namibia (Unam) this year falls short of what is required to meet the university's needs, a spokesperson said.

John Haufiku said the university needed at least N\$1.3 billion for the financial year ahead. In order to meet the educational needs of a diverse nation, Unam has 12 campuses and nine regional centres countrywide, the latter being managed by the Centre for External Studies, the distance education unit of the university.

It is against this background that Unam over the years since its expansion of the number of campuses countrywide normally

submits its budget request in a range of about N\$1.3 billion annually to meet its academic needs.

However, government allocated the Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Innovation N\$3.1 billion and about N\$9.4 billion over the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), of which N\$911.9 million is for Unam, N\$500 million for the Namibia University of Science and Technology (Nust) and N\$1.1 billion for the Namibia Student Financial Assistance Fund (NSFAF) in the budget year and N\$3.4 billion over the MTEF.

“Unam is pleased that the Namibian government has remained committed to funding higher education despite the challenging economic conditions. This year’s

national subsidy falls short to meet Unam’s needs as per the budget submitted,” Haufiku said.

He said it is, however, important to make it clear that the term subsidy means “partial funding”.

According to him, some financial periods where the government has funded more of Unam’s needs have been at its own prerogative, largely based on the state of the economy and other contemporary and equally competing national interests.

Therefore, he said, the notion that complete funding of Unam is or should be the sole responsibility of the government is misleading.

Haufiku noted that since its establishment, Unam’s growth has squarely relied on committed government funding, adding that although this facilitated stable growth for the university, such a reliance on government

alone is neither sustainable nor a favourable situation.

He said Unam has of late become a leading research institution, adding that this indeed is part of its mandate apart from teaching and community service.

“In most leading universities, teaching is considered an expense that a university must bear while research is the driver of income and new knowledge. The world over, leading universities are minimally funded by governments and largely rely on research to generate funding for their programmes and initiatives. Unam is readjusting to follow suit,” he maintained.

Further, Haufiku said under the new vice-chancellor, Professor Kenneth Matengu, Unam has chartered a new vision that is supported by various new objectives in order to raise more funding through second- and third-stream sources.

Though they are a few, he explained that one that is most relevant to this subject is financial sustainability.

Some of the key sub-actions he mentioned involve intensified Unam focus on competing for international research grants (formation of a research grant office) as well as streamlining operations to cut unnecessary costs.

Another key sub-action is capitalising on research activity, which entails the formation of Inceptus (Pty) Ltd – a company owned by Unam, tasked with commercialising research activity.

All these efforts, Haufiku says, will ensure that Unam meets its financial obligations now and in the future.

“The time is perfect for this strategic move because unlike 20 years ago, Unam now has hundreds of professors and PhD holders who can drive a rich research agenda and secure funding,” he said.