

Kimberlite Schools – Jan-Barend Scheepers

A few things are blocking Namibia's development and growth. Many relate to education. Thankfully the government spends massively on this critical need. Unfortunately, a few problems remain: Teacher training and accountability, resource allocation inefficiency, curricula relevancy, lack of external support and mentoring for students, low minimum passing level, no recognition for the dignity of vocational training and a mismatch between training focus and the labour market's needs. This is not meant to be pessimistic and ungrateful for what has been achieved in the last 27 years. Thankfully UNAM, NUST, NamCol and others have facilitated a great many individual success stories with learners eventually doing great things both inside Namibia and abroad. All protocol observed.

Now to a possible solution. Kimberlite schools with the following basic formula. A school where the maximum class size is 15 to 25 students. 25% of the class should be "fully private" (financing from parents or externally scholarships). The next 37.5% of the class can be a mixed subsidized batch, receiving scholarships due to either their academic, cultural or sporting achievements. The final 37.5% segment will be a lucky draw of students unable to enter in the previous two pools.

The first will assist with the school's financing as well as attract well to do and favourable parents to form part of the PTFA and enrich the networking and supporting structures in the immediate vicinity of the students (not to say the other parents would not be able to play this role too). The second batch will attract any diamonds in surrounding areas to better fully realize their potential in an enhanced schooling environment. The final component will be there to help break the repetitive cycle of educational privilege while also giving a strong grounding and humble reality check to those of the first section.

The school's aim should not be focussed on university graduates, but also emphasize the importance and dignity of those in a vocational direction. This is sorely needed in Namibia.

Finally, a formula for the teachers. Their basic teacher's salary is 50% of the expected government salary. However, an ambitious incentive scheme is applied based on the short-term performance, growth and long-term impact of their students. Incentivise additions of mentoring, cultural and extracurricular aspects for teachers to go the extra mile. Climbing the ladder of incentives to a salary 2 or 3 times the national average. The low basic salary will force poor performing teachers to leave. The high-performance bonus will obviously attract many dedicated educators.

Kimberlite is the geological formation where the perfect environment existed, with all the required material and pressures to produce a concentration of diamonds. Imagine Namibia got five Kimberlite schools in the next five years spread across the country? How much closer would Namibia be to sealing our deserved title as Africa's leading Diamond producer?

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