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## **Would a National Business Council do the trick? Klaus Schade**

The Fifth National Development Plan was launched two weeks ago on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May 2017. Contrary to general perceptions that often exist, this is not a Government Development Plan, but a National Development Plan designed through extensive consultations across the country and the various sectors of society. Not only because of the estimated investment volume of some NAD160 billion, government alone cannot implement NDP5 and ensure the ambitious outcomes will be achieved. It requires the involvement of all different groups in society, such as the public sector, state-owned enterprises, the private sector and civil society.

Recent examples of policy initiatives, such as the New Equitable Economic Empowerment Framework (NEEEF) and the Namibia Investment Promotion Act (NIPA), have clearly demonstrated the drawbacks of insufficient initial consultations between especially the public and private sectors. However, the bright side of these examples is that Government has embarked on broad consultations after the release of the draft NEEEF and the final NIPA and engaged with the broader public through numerous public consultative meetings and other fora across the country. In addition, private sector has used the opportunities and not only attended these fora, but provided profound inputs into the discussions that were developed usually after hours. This clearly shows the willingness of both parties to work together in order to achieve the best outcome for our country.

This provides a strong foundation for the establishment of better structured and more regular meetings between the public and private sectors as opposed to ad-hoc meetings on specific topics. The establishment of a National Business Council consisting of the highest decision makers and technocrats in the public and private sectors chaired by the President would provide an opportunity for regular and substantive exchanges of views on challenges and opportunities faced by the various stakeholders. Such a high-level decision-making body will ensure closer and smoother cooperation and could avoid policy pitfalls we have experienced recently. Ideally, the Council meets every six months and agrees on a plan of action, responsibilities, time lines and deliverables over the next six-month period. The role of the Council, however, should not be limited to the implementation of NDP5 programmes and strategies, but should provide a forum for discussing public policy initiatives as well as private sector challenges. Beforehand, the private sector needs to consolidate fragmented structures in some economic sectors in order to ensure strong coordination and consultations within the sector as well as an effective representation at the Council. The establishment of such a high-level public-private sector policy platform could become a game changer for achieving Namibia's development ambitions.

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