Some of the students from marginalized communities who met Deputy Prime Minister, Marko Hausiku. All photos by Asser Ntinda

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The students spoke their minds, for those who have excelled and those who have dropped out, mincing no words and calling a spade a spade. The Deputy Prime Minister who opened the discussions said he chose not to have a speech as that would inhibit the flow of discussion.

“I did not come to address you and go,” he said. “This meeting was organized for you and to interact. I want to know why some students were doing well while others were failing and dropping out.

“What do you do when you are on leave back home? Are there some problems that you encounter when you go back home? These are some of the questions that I would like all of us here to discuss and, if possible, find a solution, and move forward.”

The discussion started with some piercing shots from Elsarien Katiti, a student of media studies at UNAM. Speaking impeccable English, she set the tone for the discussion, frankly giving facts as to why some students fail and drop out altogether.

“There are many reasons,” she said. “One is being bullied, vilified and mocked for what you are. We are called all sorts of names and reminded of the past that is no longer there. Someone can just walk to you and say ‘you San people, do you still exist?’ I thought you had long been extinct!”

“Such remarks hurt, and imagine you are at school to learn! The emotional stress and trauma that we go through at schools is painful. You may not understand the depth of such emotional stress because you have not lived that life. But we who have gone through it right from the beginning feel. And it hurts.

“Only the strong ones survive to the end. The weak ones simply drop out and go back to their roots where they feel welcomed and regarded as human beings and taken care of. What is the point of being in an environment where people look at you in disdain?”

“Some students just leave schools and go to their communities where they are accepted as human beings. In most cases, the choice is really between one’s environment where one is respected and accepted as a human being or to live a life in an environment where one is constantly called names, bullied and always reminded of the past, as if we still live they way our parents lived a hundred years ago.”

She said the government had enjoined and united all Namibians under one motto – One Namibia, One Nation. That slogan, she said, should unite, not divide the nation. She said all human beings were equal, and should therefore respect one another for the sake of nation-building.

“Namibians, please respect us. We are part of you. We are equal. I am not extinct. I am here. I do not live in the bush. I live a normal life like you. Treat us as one of yours. Change your mindsets towards us. Understand and accept us. Stop grouping us as this or that people. We were taken out of the bush a long time ago. We are people like you. We deserve respect.”

Some people drop out because their parents could not afford to pay school fees, something which the Deputy Prime Minister took strong exception to. He said Cabinet had taken a firm decision that no child should be sent back home just because his or her parents could not afford to pay school fees.

“I want those children in my office,” he said. That should not be the case. Cabinet’s decision is very clear on this issue. We have a special fund allocated for the marginalized communities. Education has been identified as one key area that can take you to a level where you can fend for yourselves. Take it seriously.”

The San Development Student Support Scholarship Programme has 108 students and learners for this year, compared to 76 last year. Several students are in their second or third year at various tertiary institutions.

Government pays for stipends to students and learners on a monthly basis, amounting to N$1000, 00 for tertiary level and N$500,00 for primary and secondary school learners.

The total estimated annual allowances to be paid out to students and learners for the year 2011 is N$451 000, 00 for tertiary level and N$363 000,00 for primary and secondary levels.

San

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