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Namibia Investment Promotion
& Development Board

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NIPDB and FirstRand Namibia Host CEOs' Roundtable to Address Namibia's Global Competitiveness Decline and Accelerate Economic Reform

The Namibia Investment Promotion and Development Board (NIPDB), in strategic partnership with FirstRand Namibia, recently convened close to 40 top executive business leaders for a CEOs' Roundtable on Namibia's Competitiveness. The Roundtable was also attended by I-Ben Nashandi, the Executive Director of the National Planning Commission, which tracks Namibia's competitiveness in line with NDP6, as well as Shali Shindume, the Economic Advisor to the President and Dagmar Honsbein, Chairperson of the Economic Recovery Task Force.

The executive engagement was organised in response to Namibia's performance decline in the [2026 IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook](#) (WCY). The IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook is a globally recognised annual report that evaluates and ranks countries based on their ability to create and maintain an environment conducive to enterprise competitiveness and long-term economic growth. The 2026 edition, the 38th consecutive edition of the WCY, covers 70 economies and 341 criteria. It marks Namibia's second consecutive appearance in the report, ranked alongside predominantly high and middle-income countries, including five African peers: Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa.

In the 2026 IMD WCY, Namibia ranked 69th out of 70 benchmarked economies (in 2025, Namibia ranked 68th out of 69 economies), with the country's score dropping from 37.48 in 2025 to 28.48 in 2026. The report highlighted systemic performance declines in the country's ranking across all four main factors: Business Efficiency, Government Efficiency, Infrastructure, and Economic Performance, each of which are based on 5 sub-factors, for a total of 20 sub-factors. In terms of performance based on score, only the Economic Performance factor saw an improvement in its score (from 21.74 in 2025 to 22.30 in 2026), driven by improvements in rank and score on the sub-factors of *International Trade* and *International Investment*.

The government's participation in the survey and the incorporation of IMD indicators in the Sixth National Development Plan (NDP6) is forward-thinking, and demonstrates both leadership and a genuine commitment to understanding the barriers that constrain growth, with the aim of addressing and removing them. At the same time, the report reveals the scale of the work that



C/O Garten Street
& Dr. A. B. May Street



info@nipdb.com
www.nipdb.com



Private Bag 13340,
Windhoek, Namibia



+264 (0) 83 333 8600

Board Members: VJ Mungunda (Chairperson) • K Ndilula (Deputy Chairperson)
EV Hilger • D Honsbein • MK Shipanga • J Muetudhana (Acting Chief Executive Officer) (Ex Officio)
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Namibia Investment Promotion
& Development Board

still lies ahead. While the findings highlight areas of progress, they also underscore the reforms and interventions required to improve the operating environment and unlock the country's full potential.

The Roundtable served as a high-level public-private dialogue platform designed to present detailed findings and policy implications of the 2026 IMD World Competitiveness Report to private sector leadership; to identify critical bottlenecks and pinpoint key institutional, regulatory, and operational constraints hindering business efficiency and to co-create practical, private-sector-led solutions to be communicated through a formal Roundtable Advisory Note to government stakeholders.

Key Insights & Leadership Perspectives

Delivering the opening address, NIPDB Acting Chief Executive Officer, Julia Muetudhana, stressed that competitiveness directly shapes the investment climate and economic wellbeing: "Competitiveness is about Namibia's ability to create an environment in which businesses can invest, grow, innovate and compete successfully both locally and internationally. The decline in our competitiveness score is a serious signal that there are structural issues within our economic and business environment that require attention."

She emphasised that addressing these challenges requires collective commitment: "Competitiveness is a shared responsibility. We must move from measurement to action. We must identify the constraints that matter most, prioritise them, and work together to address them."

Conrad Dempsey, CEO of FirstRand Namibia, highlighted that global interest in Namibia must be matched by institutional capacity to execute. "How easy is it to create value in Namibia compared with somewhere else? Every significant investment decision begins there. Before businesses ask how much they can earn, they ask how difficult it will be to succeed."

"Growth tells us an economy is getting bigger. Competitiveness tells us whether it is getting stronger. Competitiveness isn't something that happens to Namibia. It is something we build" noted Dempsey.

'Breaking the Bottlenecks'

During an interactive session titled "Breaking the Bottlenecks", executive attendees commended leadership from the National Planning Commission and NIPDB for sustaining high-level public-private dialogue, and expressed confidence that dedicated leadership will drive meaningful economic progress over time. They noted an encouraging shift in national consensus recognizing that private investment is essential for generating economic growth, creating employment, and reducing poverty. They further emphasized that they continue investing in Namibia because they see the country's long-term economic potential as enormous, supported by strong fundamental infrastructure.



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& Development Board

Conversely, the platform also highlighted critical operational hurdles that frustrate the ease of doing business and constrain the country's economic potential. Amongst others, CEOs highlighted the cumbersome and manual immigration processes for business visas and entry at ports of entry continue to create severe friction for foreign investors and business leaders. They further lamented implementation lag and bureaucratic inertia, noting that despite ongoing dialogue and institutional setups such as the One-Stop Service Centre, implementation lags significantly behind policy adoption.

Attendees further highlighted Namibia's excessive regulatory hurdles, noting that government approval is required even for basic operational activities, including water extraction permits, land clearance and satellite internet usage, amongst others. The Roundtable also noted that the lack of system interoperability remains a constraint, with siloed government databases leading to duplicated manual processes and administrative delays. Ensuring the necessary skill and capacity in the process of public service delivery was also noted, with capacity constraints in the issuance of Environmental Clearance Certificates emerging as a case in point.

Roundtable participants strongly underscored that these compounding operational hurdles directly deteriorate Namibia's ease of doing business, noting that unnecessary regulatory bottlenecks raise the cost of doing business, slow down capital deployment, and discourage both local expansion and foreign direct investment. Crucially, leaders emphasised that investment promotion is not an end in itself; when the ease of doing business is compromised, the ultimate impact is felt in delayed economic growth, lost commercial opportunities, and a failure to drive job creation and poverty alleviation for citizens.

Proposed Solutions & Strategic Recommendations

To address these bottlenecks and elevate Namibia's global standing, attendees - positively and with a view to enhance Namibia's competitiveness - proposed concrete solutions, with the core message being that addressing overregulation and hastening public service delivery and implementation remain core. Notable recommendations included:

- **Focus on Immediate Implementation:** Shift focus from drafting new policies to enforcing existing directives and streamlining public service delivery.
- **Enforce System Interoperability:** Operationalise the Office of the Prime Minister's Interoperability Framework to integrate government databases seamlessly.
- **Establish Clear Reform Leadership:** Designate dedicated champions with clear timelines and accountability across line Ministries, Offices, and Agencies (OMAs).
- **Strengthen Public-Private Dialogue (PPD):** Sustain active dialogue platforms like the Namibia Public-Private Forum (NamPPF) and NIPDB Productivity Task Forces to align economic governance with private sector needs, while focusing on implementation.

Executive Director of the National Planning Commission, **I-Ben Nashandi** reaffirmed government commitment under Vision 2030 and NDP6, framing the IMD Report as an urgent catalyst. He stated that "the current competitiveness rating is a call to action. We commit to NDP6 implementation to ensure we derive outcomes. Chasing the implementation of the plans is an



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& Development Board

imperative that will get us to improve competitiveness. Automation of services must be matched with internal capacities to drive digital transformation. Reforms need to be uniformly dispersed across all sectors, with timelines and champions to drive them", said Nashandi.

The Way Forward: Advisory Note for Cabinet

As a key output of this executive engagement, NIPDB and FirstRand Namibia will consolidate the insights and consensus recommendations into a comprehensive Advisory Note for Cabinet.

This Advisory Note, through NPC, will be formally presented to the Cabinet Committee on Trade and Economic Development (CCTED), the National Economic Recovery Task Force and relevant policy-makers to ensure that the voice of the private sector directly informs national economic policy. By outlining clear priority areas and proposing targeted structural and institutional reforms, the document aims to accelerate the execution of NDP6, enhance the ease of doing business, and restore Namibia's global competitiveness.

Note on Competitiveness:

For Namibia to achieve inclusive and sustained economic growth, improving its competitiveness as an investment destination must be a national priority. Competitiveness encompasses a range of structural and institutional factors that influence the country's ability to attract, retain, and grow investment across sectors. These include efficient public institutions, sound infrastructure, policy certainty, skills availability, and the ease of doing business. In light of its mandate to promote and facilitate investments in and into Namibia, and to develop Namibian enterprises, NIPDB tracks Namibia's competitiveness on various indices, with the aim of enhancing Namibia's competitiveness through policy advocacy, investment facilitation and addressing investment constraints is vital to the work of NIPDB.

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Enquiries: Catherine Shipushu
Acting Executive: Competitiveness and Branding
Namibia Investment Promotion and Development Board
Telephone: +264 811 433051
Email: catherine.shipushu@nipdb.com

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