



NALEDI HLEFANE

# Call for the development of black academics

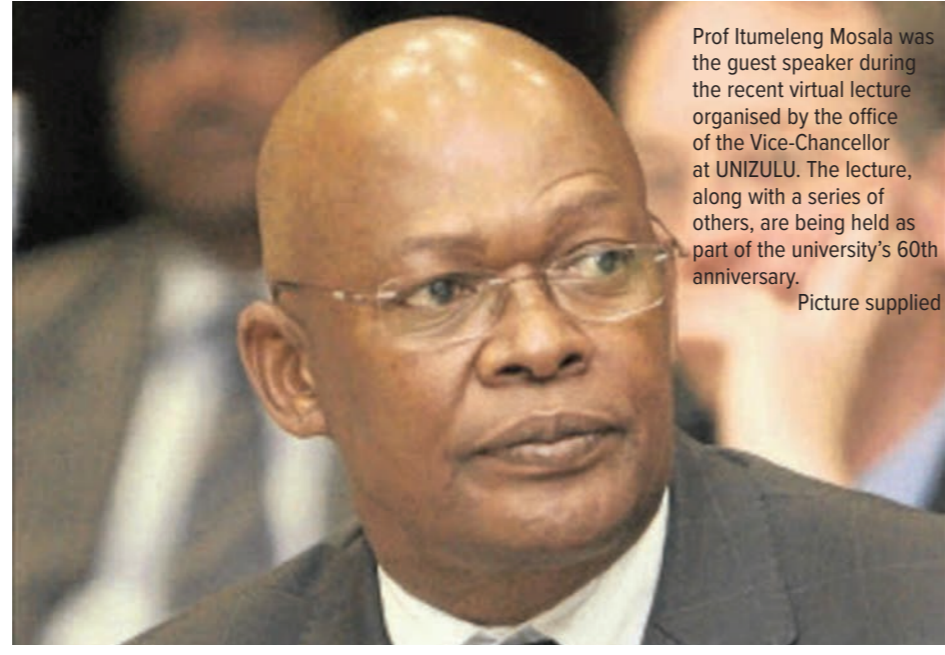
THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently held a robust virtual engagement session on the issue of the future of higher education, focusing particularly on historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs), towards the advancement of black academics.

The session took place in the form of a lecture, presented by Professor Itumeleng Mosala, a seasoned academic who is currently Research Chair at the John Langalibalele Dube Institute. His presentation was discussed by Professor Siphoswe Sipepe, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Institutional Support and Dr Makhapa Makhafole, Executive Director: Richards Bay Campus.

The topic of transformation was a build up from a conversation that took place earlier within the university and was also a form of response to the 2019 report of the ministerial task team on recruitment, retention and progression of black academics which found that black and female academics experience overt and covert racism, sexism and patriarchy.

"As a black woman, you experience triple oppression: racism by white people, sexism by men and patriarchy exercised through institutional culture. White and Indian males and females are still over represented in university instructional and research staff, while African and coloured women are underrepresented," said Prof Xoliswa Mtsose, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor, in her welcome message.

During the course of the lecture, it emerged that a way forward had to be charted, with clearly stated short-, medium- and long-term goals and models. Using an analogy of an eagle and a snake in battle, Prof Mosala urged HDIs to understand their advantage and utilise it in order to emerge victorious in the battle for the equal representation of black academics in higher education institutions. He said HDIs need to think of themselves as an eagle who



Prof Itumeleng Mosala was the guest speaker during the recent virtual lecture organised by the office of the Vice-Chancellor at UNIZULU. The lecture, along with a series of others, are being held as part of the university's 60th anniversary. Picture supplied

is fighting a snake (the colonial systems preventing transformation). When an eagle grabs hold of the snake and fights it in the air, it is bound to be triumphant as this is where the eagle is most powerful. Away from its battle ground, the snake becomes weak and vulnerable.

Prof Mosala thereafter emphasised that the university as it stands needs to be problematised because unless the current

state of the university structure is reviewed, the plight of black academics will remain.

In his discussion Prof Sipepe said: "Prof Mosala gave us an assignment that, perhaps as a reflection, is necessary. We cannot continue to live in hope. What we need is a predictive model so that we are aware of what the future will look like. The best way of predicting the future is to invent it, not to live in hope."

He added that what landed higher education in this position is the misinterpretation of what the democratic South Africa would be. The colonial structures were not removed. "We failed to recognise that the beneficiaries of apartheid were not ready to surrender their privileges and interests and universities as instruments of subjugation. It was in universities that scholars drafted and crafted philosophical justification of African people. They were designed not to liberate blacks so how do we think that the instruments of oppression would become ones of liberation? These institutions serve a particular purpose. In our desperation to break with the past, we began to conjure realities that did not exist," Prof Sipepe noted.

Considering Prof Mosala's analogy of the battle ground, Prof Makhafole suggested that the first line of attack be the top structures. Given that the majority of universities in the country are led by black vice-chancellors, Prof Makhafole said the onus lies with them to drive transformation by tweaking policies to favour complete transformation. He further proposed ways in which institutions could be turned around, counting empowerment of the African child, offering high quality training, continuous assessment, effective information exchange and collaboration and having clear short-, medium- and long-term transformation goals accompanied by a clear monitoring and evaluation plan.

# UNIZULU hosts a virtual lecture on Covid-19 in SA

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

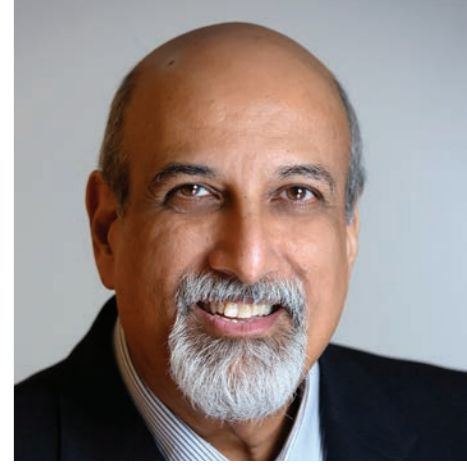
THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU), through the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, recently hosted a webinar which formed part of the institution's ongoing lecture series to celebrate its 60th anniversary.

The webinar zoomed in on Covid-19, looking at how it started, how it spreads and the impact this pandemic has had. The guest speaker for the event was Professor Salim Abdool Karim, who is a South African clinical infectious diseases epidemiologist widely recognised for scientific contributions to HIV prevention and treatment. He is the chair of the South African Ministerial Advisory Committee on Covid-19 and a member of the Africa Task Force for Coronavirus as well as the Lancet Commission on Covid-19.

UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor Professor Xoliswa Mtsose, in her introduction, said that the pandemic had revealed and sharpened the country's social contradictions. In her opinion, the shortage of supplies calls for a new economic paradigm to localise and deglobalise the economy, with local food production and nutrition development as a new foundation.

"It is the common cause that Covid-19 has been the single most disrupter and challenge in the period of a hundred years. Within a mere eight months of its breakout, it caused human devastation which was unimaginable. It has overwhelmed the health system of almost every country and forced every country into a state of economic paralysis. In the process, it has triggered world researchers. The effects have been far and wide. The pandemic has ushered the language of "lockdown", "state of disaster", "state of emergency", all terms that are associated with military interventions," Prof Mtsose said.

In his presentation, Professor Karim elaborated on how the virus started, saying that the first warning sign came in 2002, when a coronavirus from a bat, but that did not spread very far beyond Hong Kong



Professor Salim Abdool Karim. Picture supplied

and China, was discovered. In 2012, the world was given another warning sign by a virus which infected humans through camels. Then, in December 2019, came the real ordeal.

"This virus has not simply impacted health, it has changed our world. It has impacted the global economy and it has triggered one of the deepest global recessions in decades and because of a lot of uncertainties, it is not possible to rebuild the economy because you don't know when the second wave is going to hit and when we are going to be expected to shut everything down again," Prof Karim noted.

He followed with some words of encouragement though, emphasising that collective action is what we need. He went on to state that we are fortunate in South Africa because ubuntu is in our DNA. "I am because you are". If we can translate that to Covid-19, "I am safe because you are safe". This can be our defensive solicitation," Prof Karim said.

He concluded by saying that the worst being over is no reason to celebrate because the virus threat remains with us. Even though our numbers are decreasing, we are still in the midst of a pandemic.

# Post Covid-19 plan urgently needed, say academics

NALEDI HLEFANE

IN celebration of the University of Zululand's (UNIZULU) 60th anniversary, the office of the institution's vice-chancellor, Prof Xoliswa Mtsose, has decided to host a series of virtual public lectures which tackle various societal issues.

Among these lectures was that of mechanical engineering expert and Director of Grand Polytechnic Institute Professor Bambihlelo Majuqwana, whose focus was on Covid-19 pandemic preparedness as a service delivery imperative.

UNIZULU, according to Prof Mtsose, has always "taken leadership in responding to social, economic and scientific challenges faced by its society, in particular, and humanity in general". Prof Majuqwana's lecture is built on this tradition.

Looking at the devastating impact of Covid-19 thus far, Prof Mtsose said that the virus was a test of true leadership. "It's about charting the course and vision that goes beyond our immediate occupation. We are called upon to reimagine and reinvent the world. We have to contend with the necessary steps to mitigate the impact of Covid-19. This includes ensuring that we have put in the measures consistent with national regulations," she said.

Over and above health precautions, Prof Mtsose emphasised that academic engagement was required. She added, though, that she was pleased to note that there is growing multidisciplinary scholarship that is looking at this pandemic, as understanding how pandemics change history should enable us to reimagine a post-corona future. "I am pleased that (UNIZULU) is among the institutions that have risen to the challenge of providing a platform for scholastic and intellectual deliberations in what is considered to be the greatest threat to our social, economic and cultural wellbeing," she said.

Prof Majuqwana concurred with Prof Mtsose regarding the necessity of multidisciplinary research, making reference to how a mechanical engineering/medicine collaboration had brought about a solution for a water-borne virus while he was working in the United Kingdom.

In the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, his opinion was that South Africa, along

with many other countries around the globe, needed a paradigm shift.

"The paradigm within which the health system operates is faulty. Within a faulty paradigm, a pandemic preparedness system may exist, but it can only perform to the extent to which the paradigm permits. The disease does not collapse a society, rather it is because people are not ready to respond to a disease and rely on a paradigm that does not permit them to respond," he said.

One of the factors causing failure to the paradigm is the "consumption explosion" phenomenon. This relates to the use of natural resources to produce commodities such as energy. According to Prof Majuqwana, the most consumption takes place in the former colonial countries - North America and Europe - and the trade system is built on this. Prof Majuqwana recommended a departure from the current paradigm of consumption as it is destructive. "There is no pandemic preparedness that will arise there, except for the consuming classes. The mass of the people will be left to die, which is what is happening now. We recommend that we work on the 'Our health is our wealth' paradigm. We need to re-examine the paradigm of consumption to avert a situation where we feed into the consumption explosion. We should build local capacity by improving the local health system using knowledge from universities. We also need to cultivate a multidisciplinary curriculum," he said.

Dr Sheunesu Zhou, a senior academic in the Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law, who was one of the two discussants of the day, acknowledged that Prof Majuqwana's presentation challenged not only the brain, but how we envisage our preparedness to handle pandemics and deal with our economy.

He concluded that the country needs to move from being consumption-oriented to one that produces. Our duty is to produce, not only for ourselves but for the country. If we can address issues of technical knowledge, and equip our people with the skills to produce basics like food, that would help move the country forward.

# UNIZULU student in top ten of international hackathon

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

SINAYE Sotatshe, a third-year Computer Science student from the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), has been placed in the top 10 of the international Cloud DevJam Hackathon.

Organised by Zaio in Cape Town, the coding gameshow aimed to find the best Mern stack (JavaScript/React) developer team in the world. Upon successfully qualifying to participate in the hackathon, Sotatshe was paired with Durban-based software developer Ronica Singh for the challenge.

There were more than 200 applications received from about twenty-three countries all over the world. Sixty-four teams were selected and Sotatshe's team went through. "We had to hack our way through a series of challenges during a six-week period, with each week providing more obstacles than the last. Each team was given five days to complete the solution. The solutions were then compared with one another, with the best solution winning the round. My team was able to pull through. Losing teams were eliminated from the challenge," explained an ecstatic Sotatshe.

The team with the best solution wins the round and moves along into the next week where they face their opponents. "The series went on, my team made it to the fifth week of the challenge. We were given some prizes for making it to the top 10 in the challenge. My prize includes an ASUS VivoBook, which was delivered to me," Sotatshe said.

Sotatshe admitted that he is a novice when it comes to participating in hackathons. He said he has always been eager to put his skills into practice, as JavaScript is his hobby language. Even though he was never taught this at UNIZULU, from learning Introduction to Software Engineering, he is now able to pick up any language of his choice. Sotatshe has also recently attended the MTN Business App of the Year Hackathon, where he used Flutter as a solution. It took him two days to switch from JavaScript to Flutter.

The Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, Dr Pragasen Mudali, in his congratulatory message,



Sinaye Sotatshe. Picture supplied

said: "Sinaye has shown great initiative in entering hackathons so that he can exercise the skills and knowledge that he has gained in his Computer Science classes. His achievements reflect very well on the relevance of the Computer Science curriculum and the commitment of our lecturers towards the development of our students. As his Introduction to Software Engineering lecturer, I am very proud of Sinaye's achievements thus far. He has followed in the footsteps of previous cohorts of students and is now an inspiration for our current students. I have every confidence that Sinaye will continue to fly the flag for Computer Science at UNIZULU."

# University of Zululand borehole project a resounding success

GCINA NHLEKO

GROUND-breaking projects are currently underway at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) and the latest of these is the drilling of three boreholes, for the university's use, with the capacity to supply the institution with enough water for decades to come.

The university's vice-chancellor, Professor Xoliswa Mtsose, said this will help deal with key challenges en route to creating a good teaching and learning environment for both students and staff.

She noted that the university had identified six strategic priorities for the period 2016 - 2021. These included accelerating infrastructure projects.

The borehole project has been expedited because the city of uMhlatuze has struggled to secure the university with a constant supply of water. In dealing with the deadly Covid-19 virus, it became imperative that we make sure that water is always available on campus so that the UNIZULU community can be able to wash their hands constantly and help us fight the spread of the virus.

While the boreholes will not replace the water from the city, they will at least make sure that water security is guaranteed at all times for our university.

"Investment in post-secondary infrastructure is an investment in South Africa's next generation of students and researchers. Improving the spaces where students live and providing to the basic necessities such as water place will fuel prosperity for years to come," said Executive Director: Infrastructure, Thabani Mncwango

Director of New Built, Shati Phakoane, said the project will make sure that the university has an uninterrupted supply of water. "We also hope that in the long



Picture: Sandile Gumede

term, the university might also see a financial benefit in the savings as we look forward to generating income streams from having our own source of water," he added.

There are several projects and initiatives under the university's Physical Planning and Operations office. The following are worth-mentioning:

- ◆ Infrastructure implementation, design features, new sock and refurbishments
- ◆ Covid-19 facility and infrastructure priorities
- ◆ The facilities management plan
- ◆ The organisational design processes: remodelling PPO for performance improvements and excellence
- ◆ Maintenance project
- ◆ Production of an in-house hand sanitiser
- ◆ Covid-19 business plan
- ◆ Integrated works management system

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