



Public Protector shares her views on social justice in South Africa

THE 10th Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) Conference sparked a hot debate on the social challenges that are facing South Africans and their possible solutions.

The conference was held between last Wednesday and Friday at Meet Mekaar Resorts in Mtubatuba under the umbrella theme *Social Justice and sustainable development in Africa today*. It was aimed at interrogating multiple social issues that South Africa faces by addressing the exploitation of its people and resources, readdressing the inequities of the past and determining the role of the State in its attempts to redress the injustices of the past, as well as discuss the potential of academic research in responding to the challenges. Among the guest speakers was Public Protector Advocate Busisiwe Mkhwebane, who shared her office's ongoing pursuits for social justice for all. According to Dr Smangele Cele, the chairperson of the organising committee of the conference, it was imperative to select panelists who would unpack the worrisome issues that affect the majority of

the population who are still living in impoverished conditions. Mkhwebane was the main speaker. The Office of the Public Protector is an independent constitutional institution tasked with investigating, reporting on and remedying improper conduct in state affairs. In her speech, she drew from her extensive experience as a law practitioner and her work as a public protector. Her main focus was addressing the people's initial document of hope, the South African Constitution.

She reminded delegates of the purpose of the Constitution, which is to correct the injustices of the past to heal the nation through that process. These included laying the foundation for a democratic and open society in which the government is based on the will of the people and that every citizen is equally protected by law, as well as to improve the quality of life of all citizens and unleash the potential of each person. According to Mkhwebane, these ideals could have been fully realised had it not been for greed of corrupt government officials that prevented the poor

majority from attaining the resources required to live quality lives. The public protector believes that, through her office, these ideals can materialise. She reported that between October 2016 and March 2019, the Office of the Public Protector received about 50 000 matters ranging from access to housing and property ownership to access to clean water to workers' rights and social security. The office has finalised more than half of the cases.

Although the public protector commended her office for its work, she mentioned that the major social injustices were still perpetuated against the poor and marginalised majority whose many cases still needed to be heard and resolved.

She said that the road ahead was long, filled with hurdles and perils, but that it needed to be travelled so that all could truly benefit from the opportunities inherited in our democracy.

For her, the manner in which cases are dealt with demonstrates the empathetic capacity to fully realise true justice.



Public Protector Busisiwe Mkhwebane during her address at the 10th Humanities and Social Sciences Conference held at Meet Mekaar Resorts in Mtubatuba recently.

Academics weigh in on threats of 4IR in HEI

THE technologies that will emerge during the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) will impact on us in negative ways if we do not actively get involved in the processes of creating them in order to align their properties and functions to our needs.

This was the sentiment during one of the panel discussions that took place at the 4th Teaching and Learning Conference (TLC) which was recently held at uMfolozi Casino and Convention Centre.

An initiative of the University of Zululand's (UNIZULU) Teaching and Learning Centre, the theme of TLC this year was the much-debated topic of the 4IR. Through this topic, the centre sought to spark conversations concerning the effects of 4IR in the teaching and learning environment. The centre hoped to find realistic solutions to the problems the higher education sector faces in aligning their curriculum to 4IR, while also discovering a suitable approach to better equipping academics, students, learners and teachers to adapt to the teaching and learning environments of 4IR.

In the panel discussion, five academics representing various institutions including UNIZULU dissected the emerging threats for higher education institutions and organisations wanting to embrace 4IR. According to Professor Nkqubela Ruxwana, Research Group Lead: Fiber Security at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, in as much as we are excited about the technologies of 4IR, we need to be wary of their threats and dangers as we embrace them.

"If we are not involved in terms of their development, if we are not curious about what it is they (the technologies) are bringing, how they are positioned, what will work for us and will not, then we have no choice of rejecting or accepting them. We have to be actively involved or are curious about them so that if there are things that seem to be stepping on our toes, we can reject them. But if we don't get involved, decisions will always be made for us and cyber security threats will prevail," Prof Ruxwana said.

Cyber security was also discussed as one of the threats of 4IR, especially considering the automation of many things in this revolution. Weighing in on this issue, Dr Neil Evans, a senior lecturer and Head of the Department of Information Studies, said the principle of not trusting anything that seems to be too good to be true will have to apply.

He added that the securing of computers and mobile devices will also need to be intensified.



Dr Neil Evans, one of the panelists during the plenary sessions of the Teaching and Learning Conference.

UNIZULU Language Policy at the forefront during COPAL Meeting

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) hosted a group of delegates from various universities during Community of Practice for the Teaching and Learning of African Languages (CoPAL) in South Africa in Empangeni earlier this month.

CoPAL is a sub-committee of Universities South Africa (USA) that aims to, among other things, "provide a structured opportunity for members of faculty to collaborate, network and exchange ideas on issues of common interest or concern, as well as recommending strategies for the sector to enhance access and success in the teaching and learning of African languages in the public universities".

In his opening address, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Institutional Support Professor Sipho Seepe said that if you deny people the opportunity to read and write in their language, you deny them their basic right to be themselves, which is their identity. "It will be a great gain not only for UNIZULU, but for the reclaiming of our heritage when students are able to study for any degree in an African Language. Each faculty must have a module that can be taught in an African Language adopted by that institution. Remember that language is about justice," he added.

Looking at UNIZULU's language policy, Nhlanhla Cele: Executive Director: Institutional Planning and Interim Executive Director: Infrastructure & ICT



Delegates during the Community of Practice for the Teaching and Learning of African Languages (CoPAL) in South Africa meeting.

Services, presented the context to the language policy, further outlining the future plans in ensuring that issues of languages are afforded due diligence approach.

He emphasised that it was important to note that we are in KwaZulu-Natal and the majority of the students we get come from Quintile 1 to 3, which are deprived

of resources. The Quintile system was introduced by government in response to the issue of unequal access to quality public schooling. According to this system, schools are categorised into five groups (quintiles) based on the relative wealth of their surrounding communities. Schools in the poorest communities are classified as Quintile 1 and schools serving the wealthy communities are classified as Quintile 5. Quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools are not allowed to charge fees and are often referred to as "no-fee schools", which demonstrates how dire their situation is perceived to be. Therefore, as the majority of UNIZULU students come from such backgrounds, the issue of language of instruction is a major concern as this may be a contributor to the high dropout and failure rate.

Transformation at UNIZULU is imperative and language is an integral component of the transformation agenda, Cele said. "The University of Zululand teaches using English. The university is exploring if using English, isiZulu and Sign Language as the official languages is the way to go or what the other alternatives are. The university must also establish if the use of isiZulu is for teaching purposes or to develop terminology or an option when students are struggling," he said.

In ensuring readiness, the university has developed an integrated transforma-

tion plan, reference groups for language implementation plan, it has further made budget allocation, implementation action plan and fast-tracked conversations with experts in looking for new possible learning areas seminar, as well as exploring new learning programmes. These are some of the short-term planning initiatives to ensure readiness of the language policy.

Long-term initiatives that UNIZULU will roll out include creation of a centre for African thought leadership African languages. That centre will be fully fledged with language laboratories and dedicated infrastructure in order to prioritise and ensure a fully-fledged centre of knowledge.

It is encouraging to see more disciplines partaking in the language development initiatives. This is indicative of UNIZULU's commitment to the intellectualisation of indigenous languages.

The consultation workshops are the first stage in the language policy development process. The development of the language policy is in consonance with UNIZULU's pursuit of the intellectualisation of isiZulu language so that it carries the scientific rigours of research, teaching and learning. The terminology will ultimately be made accessible through open source technologies, and thus will be available for researchers, students and government departments.

UNIZULU celebrates teaching and learning excellence

The University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently hosted its Vice-Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching and Learning Awards at the uMfolozi Casino and Convention Centre.

The awards aim to promote, acknowledge and encourage continued excellence in teaching and learning. To achieve this, special recognition is given to academics acclaimed for their teaching practice and who have demonstrated outstanding teaching outcomes and have made a broad and deep contribution to enhancing the quality of learning and teaching at the university.

In his opening remarks, Professor Mahlomaholo Mahlomaholo, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learn-

ing, highlighted that the quality of portfolios that were received was high and that it was not an easy task to choose the winners. "This is the core of what the institution is about. I was very impressed looking at the processes that were embarked upon to ensure that the people that are going to be awarded the prizes are of very high quality. We can be very proud colleagues that we are doing quality work," he said.

The front-runners were Prof Khoboso Lehloenyha, from the Department of Agriculture, who was recognised for being a distinguished academic; Dr Neil Evans, from the Department of Information Studies, whose recognition was for being

a developed academic; and Dr Mabutho Sibanda, from the Department of Agriculture, who was named an emerging academic. The recipients each received a generous amount, a third of which will be for personal use while the remainder is intended for the enhancement of their teaching, research, innovation and community engagement activities.

Candidates were either self-nominated or nominated by peers or students. They each submitted teaching portfolios that articulated their teaching philosophies based on the teaching and learning practices guided by particular teaching theories, assessment methods and curriculum development.

UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor Professor Xoliswa Mtose, in her closing remarks, said: "The winners for this year's awards have made the entire university proud. May you continue to uphold the ethos that the university is trying so hard to nurture. The university has set itself very high standards. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you for all the hard work that you have done. These accolades are a symbol of recognition of hard work and dedication of our staff members."

She concluded by saying that it was only through the outstanding work of the nominated academics that an exceptional university can be created.



The winners of the Vice-Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching and Learning Awards. From left: Dr Mabutho Sibanda and Prof Khoboso Lehloenyha from the Department of Agriculture as well as Dr Neil Evans from the Department of Information Studies.

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