

Webinar shines spotlight on BEE issues

NALEDI HLEFANE

THE phenomenon of black economic empowerment, while developed with the best intentions, still requires revisiting and amendment in order for it to fulfil its purpose.

This was the sentiment expressed during the recent University of Zululand (UNIZULU) African Thought Forum Series webinar.

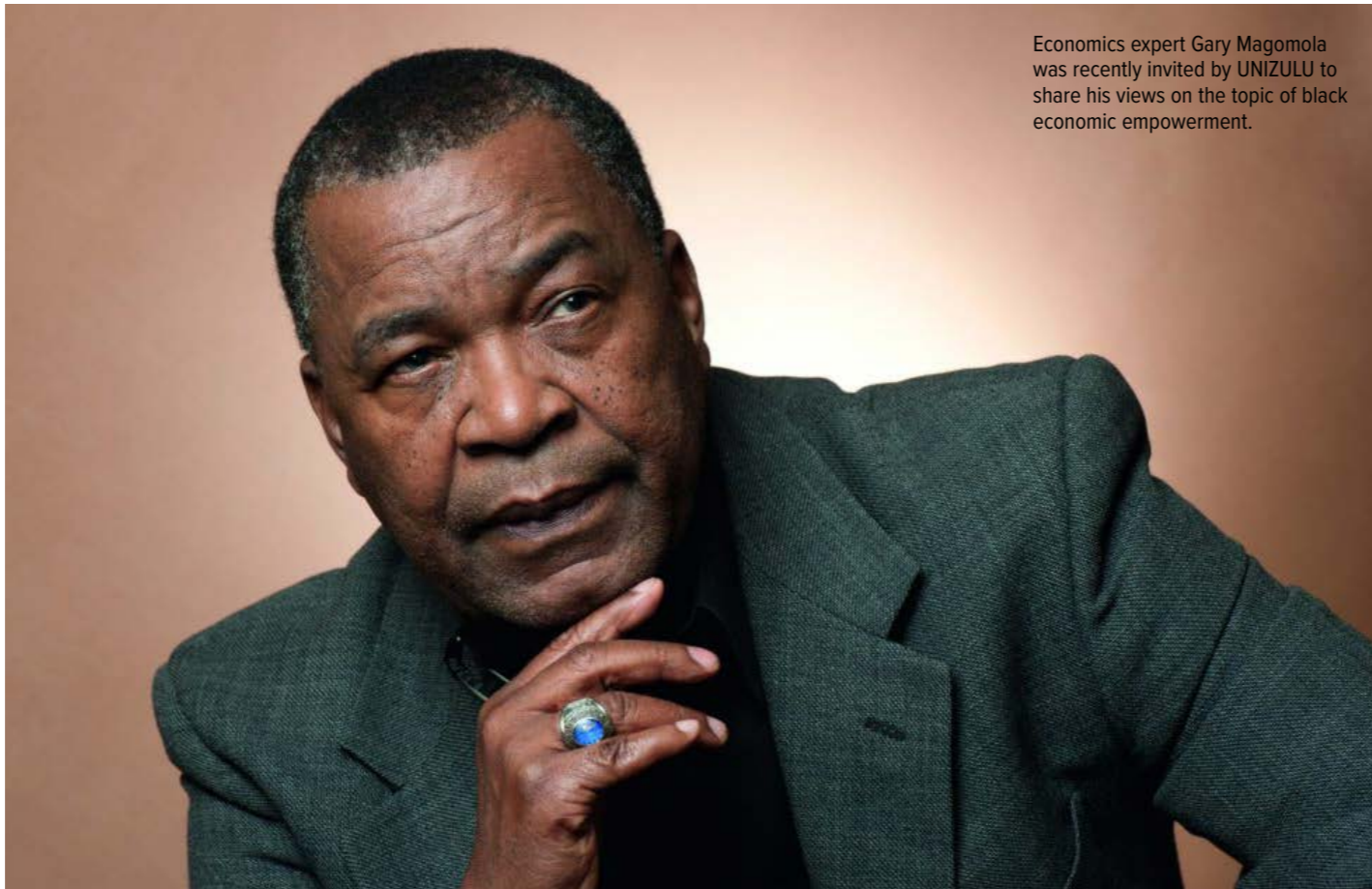
The event was organised as part of the Vice-Chancellor's Webinar Series. Providing context, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mtose explained that "the series was conceived as an important tool to transform the university into a public deliberation". Scientists, philosophers and distinguished members of society will thus be invited to share their wisdom and help the university community engage in imaginary scenarios in search for answers to society's questions.

This particular event was hosted by the Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law (FCAL). Gary Magomola, Chairman of Thamaga Holdings and Director and Chairman of the Audit Committee of Global Asset Management, was invited to decipher the subject matter. The respondents were Professor Irshad Kaseeram and Prof Dev Tewari, both from FCAL.

Magomola approached the topic from a historic point of view, looking at the economic history of South Africa and the impact of the concept of black economic empowerment during and post-apartheid. He described these two periods as phase one and phase two, respectively.

He discussed the three pillars of the apartheid government that affected the rise of the core of black economic empowerment. These were the Influx Control Act, designed to limit the access black people had to what was known at the time as "white areas"; the Group Areas Act, which designated residential areas according to racial classification; and the Job Reservations Act, which prevented black people from training for and occupying certain positions.

He noted that amid these restrictions, there were many successful and inspiring black entrepreneurs who played a major role in the economy at the time. These were people such as the late Richard Maponya. These business owners then



Economics expert Gary Magomola was recently invited by UNIZULU to share his views on the topic of black economic empowerment.

organised themselves into local chambers, which later formed the National African Chamber of Commerce (Nafcoc). The body became a catalyst for the emergence of organised black business, and later transformed into a business activist and advocacy group. The organisation soon had a national footprint.

"In the late 1970s, Nafcoc created the first black-owned supermarket of scale. Later, the organisation created a sizeable construction company that was instrumental in civil and construction activities. The foresight of Nafcoc led to the creation of the first black-owned bank in South Africa, African Bank. It took almost 10 years to raise one million rand – just one million rand – to allow for the registration of the bank," Magomola said.

In his view, the second phase of BEE is fraught with problems such as misalignment of skills. There are many cases

where BEE participants benefited from opportunities in areas outside of their competence, which hindered the process of transformation.

He concluded by saying that BEE was now "an insignificant tool" to promote the participation of black business in the country's economic activities in meaningful ways. He was also adamant that the biggest downfall of BEE is tenderpreneurship. "The rise of this form of business operator has thrown a cloud of negativity into the process of transforming the procurement landscape," he said.

Responding to the talk, Prof Tewari was convinced that the BEE period of the apartheid era was indeed more effective. He highlighted that simply giving economic incentives is not good enough. The plausible solution, according to him, is having literacy around economics for

previously disadvantaged population groups. There also needs to be a BEE strategy to move the "have-nots to the haves".

The second respondent, Prof Kaseeram said after considering Magomola's thoughts on the first and second phases of BEE, he aspires to see a third phase where the country's economy will be driven mainly by the private sector. "We have 48% of the economy controlled by the private sector and 42% by the government. We all know the government is not in the business of profit maximisation, so that is going to create major problems for the economy," he noted.

He also mentioned that he would love to see the third phase characterised by a union of small, medium and large enterprises, as well as of previously disadvantaged businesses with previously advantaged businesses.

Exciting infrastructure projects underway

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently held an event for the on-boarding of construction partners who will participate in a massive infrastructure project.

The event was held at the Richards Bay Campus. It brought together various role players and stakeholders. The partners have committed to the implementation of various segments of the infrastructure project and will embark on a process of developing concrete plans that will take the university through the first phase of implementation.

This is undoubtedly going to be one of the largest infrastructure projects ever undertaken by UNIZULU.

In his address, Executive Director of Infrastructure, Thabani Mncwango – the driving force behind the project – expressed great excitement at the prospect of the initiative's outcome.

"Today's event brings together all the parties. It is a great achievement for us as a university. We don't take this lightly. Nothing of this sort has been achieved in a very long time. It is gratifying to see the progress."

"We are excited about the prospect of working with you in a partnership to deliver on the promise of our vision and goals that are enshrined in our development framework, which is a guide document that speaks about where we are, where we have been and where we would like to be in years to come," he said.

He added that in about 30 days, a soil turning event would take place to mark the official beginning of the implementation phase.

UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor, Professor



Thabani Mncwango, Executive Director of Infrastructure and the driving force behind the massive infrastructure project underway at UNIZULU.

Xoliswa Mtose thanked all the service providers for being a part of a programme that "marks a new chapter that will contribute towards the university's progression".

"I thank you wholeheartedly for being part of this programme. I ask you to approach your role as that of a nation builder, not merely a service provider. I beseege you to approach your assigned tasks with your eyes set not only on current users, but also on those of the future generations who will benefit from this great institution and the labour of your love that we will all be proud of," she said.

Speaking on behalf of the funders, Kay Mbayise said they were keen to ensure that the money given to the university is going to be well spent.

"The drawings for a range of major infrastructure projects – including the engineering building, dignified student accommodation, a new gate house and a state-of-the-art student centre – are ready to be handed over to the contractors to start. There is also an electrical update to be done to accommodate all of the new buildings planned for the future, as with water, roads and the like."

Student's vegetable business growing in leaps and bounds



Sboniso Madlala, a Master's agronomy student at UNIZULU, established a vegetable farming business that has created jobs for 11 individuals in less than a year.

NALEDI HLEFANE

SIBONISO Madlala, a Master's agronomy student at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), epitomises what it means to rise above the difficult circumstances of life.

Like scores of citizens around the country, the 27-year-old from Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal was hard-hit by the advent of the lockdown period in March 2020. Unemployed and penniless, he decided to put his plant science knowledge to use by starting a vegetable farming business. And thus, Bequeathal Enterprise was born. He intentionally chose the word "bequeathal", which means leaving a legacy, because it resonated with his business aspirations. The farm is based in Jozini, northern KZN, an area Madlala targeted because of its warm climate.

"I always knew that I would take the entrepreneurship route one day, but I thought I would only be able to achieve that after having been an employee for a few years. I realised that because of the lockdown period, chances of employment would decrease significantly, so I wound up starting my farming business sooner than I had planned."

"I started small with just one hectare of butternut. The first production cycle went very well, so I decided to increase

it to three hectares in the second cycle. Currently, I am occupying 10 hectares where I grow mielies, cabbages, butternut, green pepper, chillies and tomatoes," Madlala said.

In a space of 12 months, Madlala's business has expanded in ways he never expected. He now employs 11 community members, six of whom are elders and five youth. He has also successfully secured markets through local retail stores such as Shoprite, Boxer Superstores, Super Spar and the Fresh Produce Market.

Madlala attributes his swift success to the invaluable knowledge he acquired while studying towards his undergraduate degree at UNIZULU. His advanced comprehension of plants and the soil enables him to make informed decisions about the type of vegetables he grows and how to ensure these have adequate nutrients.

On his future plans, Madlala said he intends to exploit a unique area of animal farming. He is eager to get the wheels in motion, especially since he has finalised an international deal for this business venture.

The Master's student could not emphasise enough how essential entrepreneurship is in this day and age. He hopes his story will inspire unemployed graduates to also seek and grab entrepreneurship opportunities in their fields of study, because "vacancies are becoming fewer and fewer".

'Women have the power to end patriarchy' – Dr Mjoli

NALEDI HLEFANE

THE female employees of the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) were recently awakened to the pivotal role they can play in eliminating patriarchy, through simply raising their boy and girl children to understand the importance of and believe in the notion of gender parity.

This knowledge was imparted by Dr Nozibele Mjoli, the founder and Managing Director of Hlathi Development Services, at the institution's Women's Day event.

Dr Mjoli, who delivered the guest speech, highlighted that the progress in solving gender issues has been slow because the focus has been on treating the symptoms – poor representation of women in leadership positions – instead of tackling the root cause. The underlying issue in this case is patriarchy.

"Patriarchy and gender equality cannot exist at same time. If we want to achieve gender parity, we need to first destroy the pillars of patriarchy. Women have power to do that because we are the ones who give birth to babies and are the ones who raise them," Dr Mjoli elaborated.

She challenged UNIZULU women to start instilling in their children the fact that they are all born to be leaders in society, irrespective of their gender. "It's not the men who will do that because they are not the ones who nurture babies. Women, the ball is in your court; you have to change the way you raise your children and prepare them to live in an equal society," she emphasised.

In Dr Mjoli's view, women have for a long time unconsciously perpetuated the problem of gender inequality through their subordinate mind sets. This starts when children are being brought up. She said



In celebration of Women's Day, female UNIZULU employees sported pink ensembles on the day of the function. Pink is known as the colour of gratitude, the theme for this year's event.

boys are told to become strong and confident because they will become leaders in society, while girls are taught to be subordinate, helpful and nurturing. She elaborated that changing this mind set will not only result in the attainment of gender equality, but a society with great leaders too.

According to Professor Xoliswa Mtose, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor, the knowledge of how to work towards becoming successful is another area in which women's mind sets need to be shaped from a young age.

Her concern, however, is the lack of adequate education on this vital aspect of

life, especially in the country's education system. It is only once an individual arrives in the workplace that they begin to think about and position themselves for success. In her opinion, women tend to take time to "understand that the whole world is about competition" – and thus often lag behind their male counterparts in the race to success.

She urged UNIZULU women to start changing their mentality by "owning their thinking" and silencing the inner voice that leads them to believe that they are inferior.



Dr Nozibele Mjoli, founder and Managing Director of Hlathi Development Services, delivered a thought-provoking speech at UNIZULU's recent Women's Day event.

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