

# SA leaders need a rebirth in order to move country forward

NALEDI HLEFANE

"WE have a challenge to be reborn from being collaborators in the defoliation of the lives of the poor in post-apartheid South Africa to being champions of freedom and justice."

This was the stance of Professor Malesela John Lamola during the 2021 Beyers Naudé Memorial Lecture, held recently by the University Of Zululand (UNIZULU) in partnership with Kagiso Trust at the university's Richards Bay Campus.

The partnership between UNIZULU and Kagiso Trust, which began in 2018, entailed co-hosting a series of three lectures annually in honour of the late Dr Beyers Naudé, a theologian, apartheid activist and one of the founding trustees of Kagiso Trust.

This year's event marked the end of the lecture series, which has tackled critical social topics and sparked hearty conversations in the past three years.

Prof Lamola, Associate Professor: Philosophy of Technology at the University of Johannesburg's Institute for Intelligent Systems delivered the guest speech under the topic "Being born again into the struggle for a non-racial, just and prosperous South Africa".

Prof Lamola acknowledged that the current state of the country is both alarming and embarrassing when considering the issues of "thieving politicians; looting public servants; with poverty growing alarmingly out of that; the emergence of tribalism; racism in our politics; sexism;



Professor Malesela John Lamola delivered the guest speech during the 2021 Beyers Naudé Memorial Lecture.

gender-based violence; and the invigoration of greed and self-centred callousness among those who had previously benefited from the apartheid regime".

These are matters that call for a renewal of our moral and political commitments. Instead of dwelling on these issues, however, Prof Lamola chose to focus on the renewal of self, as this is the fundamental basis of societal change.

Looking at the thought system of French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, Prof Lamola stated that we all have the freedom and ability to rebirth ourselves. Our conduct cannot be blamed on genetics nor on history, environmental or psychological influences. "The challenge is

to be critically conscious of the situation one finds oneself in and objectively make oneself within that situation," Prof Lamola said.

According to him, Dr Naudé is the perfect example of this kind of renewal. Born and raised under a political and church system that promoted the racial injustices non-white South Africans were subjected to, he soon realised the horrid impact of the apartheid regime and decided to rebel against this.

He made a conscious decision to be the kind of person he became "despite the strong political and cultural ideologies within which he was embedded as a white Afrikaner".

Professor Mogomme Masoga, Dean of UNIZULU's Faculty of Arts, was one of the respondents during the lecture and shared the guest speaker's sentiments. He stressed that Dr Naudé was a person not limited by just being, but was also inspired by doing. He modified reality and, as a result, contributed to change in the nation.

In Prof Masoga's view, greed and corruption remain a malignant cancer in our nation. "This embarrassing situation suggests that our nation is not only suffering from the poverty of food, but greatly suffering from the poverty of leadership. As we celebrate Naudé, the time has come to hold our leaders accountable. We must fight against the flaw of political service and push for the agenda of public service, for leadership is about followers and not the leader," he said.

Tessa Dooms, a Kagiso Trust board member who also responded to the lecture, believes that the nation's progress hinges on its citizens understanding the concepts of personhood and purpose. "Without truly comprehending who we are as humans and our purpose, we cannot see the value in other humans. Without personhood and purpose, we are going to continue being aimless wanderers; we will not see each other and violate each other; we will continue to enrich ourselves at the expense of others," Dooms said.

Borrowing from Frantz Fanon's words, Dooms urged this generation of South Africans to discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it, in relative opacity.

## Teaching and Learning Conference focuses on adapting to 'new normal'

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently hosted its 5th annual Teaching and Learning Conference (TLC) over the course of three days.

The event took place in a hybrid fashion with both synchronous and asynchronous presentations scheduled under the theme "Adapting to a 'new normal': What are the Teaching and Learning realities and innovations in Higher Education?"

In outlining the purpose of the conference, Professor Maria Mabusela, Director in the Teaching and Learning Centre referenced the role that Covid-19 has played in pushing academics outside of their comfort zone of face-to-face teaching.

"The Teaching and Learning Conference is all about scholarship of teaching, scholarship of engagement as well as student matters. The purpose of this conference is also to debrief with our peers, reflecting on our practice and listening to other people's presentations," she said.

In her opening address, Professor Vuyokazi Nomlomo, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning said TLC provides opportunities not only to share experiences and critically reflect on them, but also to explore alternative ways of enhancing teaching and learning through digital means.

"I am very pleased to see that a large number of UNIZULU academic staff members are participating in this conference. I would like to thank them for exploiting this opportunity to reflect on their own practices as we prepare for the implementation of our new Strategic Plan (2022 – 2027) – UNIZULU Vision 2027, which aims to foster critical and transformative pedagogies for teaching and learning as one of its key strategic goals. I am very



The issue of online learning was discussed at length during the 5th annual Teaching and Learning Conference.

happy to see such diversity in this space, which promises to explore fresh and innovative perspectives – not only to advance the teaching and learning agenda, but also to contribute to the discourse on teaching in higher education in times of uncertainty and fragility," Prof Nomlomo said.

According to her, global society (including higher education institutions) is still trying to come to terms with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and how to face the future beyond it.

The keynote speakers for the three days were Dr Brian Shawa, the Regional Education Co-ordinator for the Kuhne Foundation in Nairobi, Kenya; Prof Willie Chinyamurindi from the University of Fort Hare's Department of Business Management; and Dr Cornel Hart from the University of the Western Cape.

The conference was intellectually engaging and thought-provoking. It featured numerous presentations, panels and workshops led by UNIZULU academics. In attendance were scholars from local higher education institutions, with some coming from as far as eSwatini, Zimbabwe and Nigeria.

## UNIZULU researchers solve six-decade mystery of the evolution of electron transfer proteins

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

A UNIVERSITY of Zululand (UNIZULU) researcher – in collaboration with international researchers from the United States of America (USA) and Europe (Germany and Poland) and his two Master's students – has solved a six-decade mystery of the evolution of electron transfer proteins, using ferredoxins as an example.

Professor Khajamohiddin Syed, an associate professor in UNIZULU's Department of Biochemistry and Microbiology, conceived and designed the study. He worked alongside Prof David Nelson from University of Tennessee, USA; Dr Wanping Chen from University of Göttingen, Germany; and Dr Dominik Gront from University of Warsaw, Poland. UNIZULU Master's students, Tiara Padayachee and Nomfundo Nzuza equally contributed to the study as first authors.

Electron transfer proteins such as iron-sulphur cluster proteins are believed to have evolved early during chemical evolution. These ancient proteins are considered living fossils. They are ubiquitously present in all living organisms due to their involvement in fundamental metabolic processes such as photosynthesis, nitrogen fixation, and assimilation of hydrogen, nitrogen and sulphur.

Since their initial identification in 1962, a large number of iron-sulphur cluster proteins have been identified in living organisms. However, how these proteins passed (known as lateral/horizontal gene transfer) from prokaryotic organisms such as archaea and bacteria to eukaryotic organisms such as animals, including humans and plants, has not been solved.

UNIZULU researchers came up with a subtype classification and nomenclature system of these iron-sulphur cluster proteins, based on the amino acid patterns (named as cysteine spacing signature) of iron-sulphur binding motif. This classification and nomenclature system enabled the researchers to identify the electron transfer



Professor Khajamohiddin Syed



Nomfundo Nzuza



Tiara Padayachee

proteins that are passed from prokaryotes to eukaryotes, including humans.

The nomenclature system is as follows: ferredoxins start with their Fe-S cluster type, followed by their subtype (ST) and then the numeral indicating its ST number in that type. Proteins grouped into a ST have the same characteristic spacing between the cysteine amino acids of the Fe-S cluster binding motif.

"This study shows the advancement of scientific research in South Africa - espe-

cially bioinformatics research, where African researchers are solving the unsolved scientific mysteries and setting the new rules," said Prof Syed.

The project has received great reviews which, among other comments, describe it as an effective tool to understand the diversity and evolution of ferredoxins as well as to identify the presence of ferredoxin subtypes across the domains of life.

Prof Syed acknowledged the support of his collaborators. He also credited the

National Research Foundation and UNIZULU for funding his research.

This work has been published in the prestigious journal Current Issues in Molecular Biology. Prof Syed is the corresponding author of the article.

The UNIZULU researchers and their international collaborators are currently working on developing an automated computer program for the classification and nomenclature of iron-sulphur cluster proteins.

## Department of Recreation and Tourism meets iSimangaliso Wetland Park

PROFESSOR ANTONIA NZAMA

THE Department of Recreation and Tourism (DRT) at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently went on an educational excursion to iSimangaliso Wetland Park in St Lucia, KwaZulu-Natal, during which a group of selected second-year, third-year and postgraduate students was exposed to the dynamics of the tourism sector and how local communities benefit from tourism.

The students and staff were led by the head of DRT, Professor Ikechukwu Ezeuduji, along with Professor Antonia Nzama, who manages the Erasmus+ SUCSESS Project, a university-industry project currently being implemented by the DRT.

The purpose of the excursion was three-pronged: linking theory with practice, strengthening the partnership between UNIZULU and iSimangaliso Wetland Park, and linking the excursion with the aims of the Erasmus+ SUCSESS Project.

Professor Nzama explained that one of the aims of the Erasmus+ project is to strengthen the co-operation between higher education institutions and enterprises, so as to support the employability of graduates and enhance inclusive regional and community development. "The unemployment of graduates in South

Africa is currently very high; therefore it is important for universities to form partnerships and collaborations with industry partners. As part of the Erasmus+ project, the Department of Recreation and Tourism has identified iSimangaliso Wetland Park as its industry partner. This partnership will create opportunities for work integrated learning opportunities as well as possible employment opportunities," Prof Nzama said.

During the visit, the students were enlightened on sustainable tourism and natural resource management - topics that are closely linked to content they are taught in the syllabus. They were also informed about the involvement of local communities in park operations and environmental awareness, among other issues.

The presentations were followed by a tour to the St Lucia Estuary. According to Prof Nzama, the aim of the tour was to demonstrate how a coastal estuarine management plan is implemented in reality, taking into account ecological, economic and socio-cultural aspects. Students were thereafter taken to Cape Vidal beach where issues of the iSimangaliso Marine Protected Area were discussed.

The DRT is currently working on finalising a memorandum of understanding with iSimangaliso.



Department of Recreation and Tourism staff and students recently embarked on an informative journey to iSimangaliso Wetland Park in St Lucia, KwaZulu-Natal.

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