

# Prof Mtose encouraged by SA's women empowerment efforts

THE journey South Africa has travelled since the fateful Women's March in 1956 is telling of a nation that is devoted to creating a better future for women.

This was the sentiment of Professor Xoliswa Mtose, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), during her recent Women's Month address.

Opening her address, Prof Mtose reinforced the essence of the month of August by hailing the integral role women played in the struggle against apartheid and patriarchy.

"Women's Month is a tribute not only to the thousands of women who marched on that day in 1956, but also a tribute to the pioneers of the women's movement in this country, dating back to 1913 when women like Charlotte Maxeke led the way in encouraging women to engage in the struggle for freedom. Pioneers included Cissy, Jaynab and Amina Gool. They were among the leaders of the National Liberation League and the Non-European United Front of the 1930s," she explained.

Reflecting on some of the country's strides, she mentioned that it was



Professor Xoliswa Mtose

pleasing to witness girls learning alongside boys in the country's primary and secondary schools; more women students than males enrolled in institutions of higher learning; and

more young women passing matric and attaining more distinctions than their male counterparts in 2021.

Prof Mtose highlighted that at UNIZULU, women have been leading in graduation statistics in the past five years. The institution has also been intentional in its appointment of a woman vice-chancellor and two women deputy vice-chancellors.

"Close to half of the members of parliament, judges and magistrates are women. More than 60% of public servants are women. In South Africa today, women are champions. Recently, our national team Banyana Banyana made us proud by bringing home the Women's Africa Cup of Nations trophy. Just as the pioneers of the Women's March of 1956 were role models, the young women and girls of today have no shortage of role models," she continued.

While she hailed the accomplishments made regarding the empowerment of women, Prof Mtose also denounced the gender-based violence and femicide pandemic. Her stance on this matter is that both men and women need to collaborate in seeking a solution to this scourge.

# Academics bag once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to attend international economic sciences meeting

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

TWO University of Zululand (UNIZULU) staff members, Dr Bongumusa Makhoba and Dr Brian Mazorodze, recently joined other young economists from around the globe for an exclusive experience at the 7th Lindau Meeting on Economic Sciences in Lindau, Germany.

The pair was nominated by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), which selected bright scientists in South Africa based on their achievements in the discipline. Nominees were required to apply to participate in this prestigious event, and underwent a highly competitive and strict vetting process via a scientific review panel appointed by the Council for the Lindau Nobel Laureate Meetings. In addition to their academic and research achievements, the candidate's motivation, recommendations, dedication to science, and extracurricular activities were considered.

Dr Mazorodze is a research fellow in the Department of Economics within the Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law. His recent achievements include receiving two research excellence awards in the 2021 Vice-Chancellor's Research Awards ceremony and being recently selected for the young professional programme by the World Trade Organization.

Dr Makhoba is a lecturer in the Department of Economics. In 2019, he was awarded a scholarship by the European Social Fund to attend a PROM Programme – an international scholarship exchange of PhD students and academics in Poland at Wroclaw University of Economics.

Dr Mazorodze said one of the highlights of attending the meeting was being in the same vicinity as Professor Joseph Stiglitz. He is a former senior vice president and



Dr Bongumusa Makhoba

chief economist of the World Bank, chair of the US President's Council of Economic Advisers under former US President Clinton, a current professor at Columbia University, and a Nobel Prize winner in economics.

"Prof Stiglitz's work focuses on income inequality, macroeconomics, globalisation and economic development, all of which I find relevant and applicable to our own socio-economic context. As an early-stage economist whose policy-driven research has largely focused on globalisation and its consequences on economic development in South Africa over the past three years, my [aim was] to therefore draw, as much as possible, lessons and ideas that can help shape and build our own economy, while simultaneously aiming for collaborations between such high-profile Nobel prize winners and our own institution," Dr Mazorodze said.

Dr Makhoba was excited to meet and engage with some of the world-renowned Nobel laureates in economic sciences who have written widely on



Dr Brian Mazorodze

macroeconomics and development economics, as this is his area of research interest.

"Among the distinguished laureates [was] Christopher A Sims, an American professor who is an econometrician and macroeconomist who I have cited numerous in some of my research articles in the application of Vector Autoregression (VAR) as one of the main promoters of this methodology. Prof Sims is a professor of economics at Princeton University and a recipient of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences," explained Dr Makhoba.

Professor Lorraine Greyling, Dean of the Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law expressed her pride in the two academics on their monumental accomplishment. "To be recognised by the highest professional organisation in your field of specialisation is testament to [your] hard work, relentless search for solutions to problems, critical thinking and innovative ways to improve the subject knowledge of Economics."

# UNIZULU-UWE partnership seeks to improve reading literacy in KZN schools

NALEDI HLEFANE

A COLLABORATIVE pilot project between the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) and the University of the West of England (UWE) has culminated in a crucial study that will provide insight into shortcomings in the teaching of reading comprehension to primary school learners.

The concept of the project was first discussed in October 2019 by representatives of UNIZULU's Department of Arts and Languages Education and members of UWE who were involved in another longstanding project between the two institutions. The pilot began in 2020, funded by the British Academy Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). It was inspired by both parties' concerns about reading literacy challenges in countries in the Global South – particularly among learners between the ages of nine and 13.

Shedding light on the need for this project, Professor Pravina Pillay, who heads the UNIZULU team, shared that "reading is the single most important factor in determining academic and economic outcomes in South Africa". In her view, teaching learners how to read requires educators to possess specialised skills and employ relevant teaching methods, while also understanding how children learn to read.

"To learn to read efficiently, a precise match between a child's reading needs and the books used to practise is essential. However, learner access to appropriately matched books remains a challenge worldwide. When coupled with deficits in teacher education in many Global South countries in relation to the teaching of reading,



Professor Pravina Pillay

the task of increasing literacy remains urgent. This project has culminated in the design of a novel mobile app that can eventually be used nationally and internationally," she explained.

The mobile app sought to help capacitate pre-service (final-year education students) and in-service (qualified) teachers with the required knowledge and skills to teach reading in rural and township schools. It was also designed to aid teachers to select age-appropriate (neither too challenging nor too easy) reading books for their pupils. Through a simple scan of the pages, the app could detect from the diction which age group the book would be suitable for.

Both sets of partners were involved in designing the theoretical aspects and fieldwork of the app. The technical work, however, was undertaken by a team of IT specialists that included UNIZULU computer science graduate,

Mampshika Madimetja. Township and rural schools in and around the Zululand region in KwaZulu-Natal were used as a pilot case study. The app was used by level four English students in UNIZULU's Faculty of Education and by in-service teachers employed within the pilot area.

Prof Pillay explained that in-service and pre-service teachers were required to complete questionnaires and participate in focus group interviews prior to and after using the app. This process has now been finalised, and the data analysis stage is scheduled to start soon.

In addition to meeting the set targets, Prof Pillay counted as achievements the presentation of two papers at the International Conference of the United Kingdom Literacy Association in 2021 and 2022; as well as the imminent presentation of two papers by the UNIZULU team at the upcoming UNIZULU Teaching and Learning Conference, and at the Rethinking Literacy and Pedagogic Agency in the 4IR in Johannesburg.

The project was initially scheduled to end in January 2023. However, the British Academy has granted a one-year extension so that the project can deliver on outcomes such as dissemination of information in the form of conference presentations, feedback to schools and the publishing of articles, Prof Pillay said.

## Steering Committee

The UNIZULU team consists of Prof Pillay, Dr Jethro Gina, Dr Nontobeko Khumalo, Dr Lindiwe Mthethwa and Madimetja. The UWE members are Dr Jane Carter (head of project), Dr Ben Knight, Dr Karan Vickers-Hulse, Dr Tessa Podpadek, Dr Selma Babayigit and Dr Paul Mathews.

# UNIZULU's extraordinary Professor Revaprasadu edits multiple books in less than two years

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

PROFESSOR Neerish Revaprasadu, a senior professor in the University of Zululand's (UNIZULU) Chemistry Department has, in just 18 months, edited five books as well as an online title for Elsevier, a Netherlands-based online academic publishing company.

According to Prof Revaprasadu, the five books form part of an ongoing series that is now on volume eight. It is a type of encyclopaedia for nanoscience that covers the hottest topics in the field. Each chapter gives a perspective on the latest fields in nanoscience. Current hot topics include energy generation and storage, nanomedicine, 2D materials, and carbon-based materials.

Outlining the journey he has travelled to get to where he is with the book, Prof Revaprasadu said, "I started co-editing the Specialist Periodical Reports (SPR) Nanoscience series in 2015. At the time, the series was in its infancy. Through my efforts in getting new emerging researchers to contribute to contemporary topics in nanoscience, the brand of the series grew in stature. Dr Malik Dillshad Khan also contributed to attracting young new talent. The series has now become a sought-after vehicle for young emerging researchers to contribute to. The series has a good mix of contributions from both emerging and established researchers. We are also aware of the gender balance,

with the last few editions featuring contributions from women researchers. The geographical representation was also important."

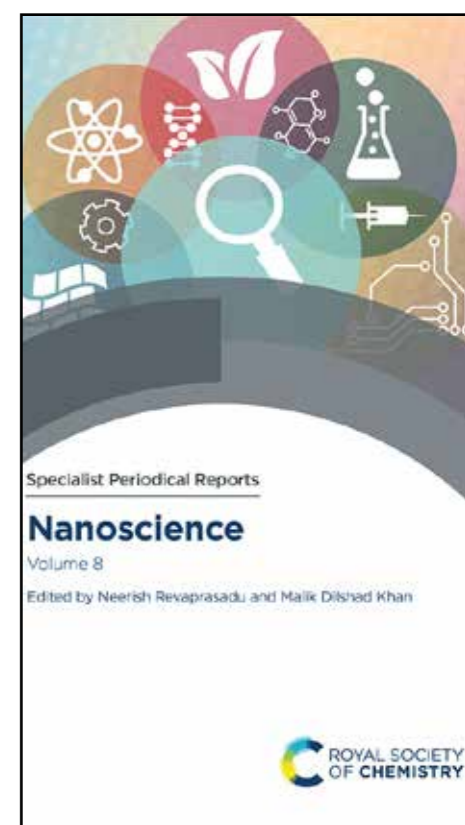
The field of nanoscience continues to grow at an impressive rate, with more than 10 000 new articles a year contributing to a literature base of more than half a million citations. Prof Revaprasadu reckons that such a vast landscape of material requires careful searching to discover the most important research. Thus, each volume in the series presents a digest of the last 12 months of literature across the field. The editors present critical and comprehensive reviews of these topics. Prof Revaprasadu believes that anyone practising in the nano-allied fields or wishing to enter the nano research world would benefit from this comprehensive resource.

He added that the editors are influential in determining the important and emerging areas in nanoscience, and are responsible for giving the series exposure and credibility. "UNIZULU will be proud to (see) their staff, which is myself and Dr Malik Khan, who are the editors, having an influence on the international stage. Indirectly, the university will gain exposure as a leader in nanoscience."

Professor Nokuthula Kunene, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation and Professor Khoboso Lehloanya, Dean of the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering congratulated Prof Revaprasadu for

the book and thanked him for "always putting UNIZULU on the map".

The book is available to purchase online on Amazon and Takealot.com. It is published by the Royal Society of Chemistry, London – a prestigious chemistry publishing house.



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