

UNIZULU collaborates on national project to address SA's poor reading culture

NALEDI HLEFANE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU), as part of its Vision 2027 strategic plan, commits to creating a positive and lasting impact on society. In accordance with this, in 2023 the university took action when called upon by the National Library South Africa (NLSA) to collaborate in organising the recently held third Biennial National Reading Summit.

The three-day multi-stakeholder summit was hosted at Umfolozi Hotel Casino Convention Resort in Empangeni. It involved the City of uMhlatuze Municipality; KwaZulu-Natal departments of Basic Education and Sports, Arts and Culture; as well as Msunduzi Local Municipality, among others.

According to Nokuthula Musa, Executive Director for Core Programmes at the NLSA, the inception of the summit was necessitated by ongoing reports of a poor reading culture in South Africa, especially among young primary school level learners. Concerned, the NLSA created a platform for public and private sectors as well as civil society organisations to engage in dialogue, share improvement ideas and unify their efforts to



Picture: Xolani Ncube

tackle the poor reading culture in the country.

"There was no collaboration of reading initiatives. So we started to co-ordinate the National Reading Summit to try and strengthen the national reading ecosystem as well as our partnerships, so that we could pull together the resources needed to address the national reading crisis,"

Musa explained.

She added that it was apparent that to make meaningful changes, the problem needed to be viewed through a scientific lens. Hence, the involvement of higher learning institutions was key as they would provide guidance in terms of knowledge production and deciphering the collected data.

For this year's summit, NLSA joined

forces with UNIZULU's Information Studies Department. Dr Petros Dlamini, who heads the department, said UNIZULU was instrumental in training librarians in KZN and Gauteng to conduct studies or produce papers on the theme of reading. In addition, the department contributed with various research studies conducted by some of its postgraduate students and staff.

In Dr Dlamini's view, these research presentations led to critical discussions. His sentiment was shared by Mzomuhle Zuma, Deputy Director: Information Services in Provincial Library Services within the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture. For Zuma, the highlight of the gathering was hearing the "fresh" ideas proposed by some of the student presenters. He was particularly impressed by the idea of toy libraries, which entail introducing an element of reading while children are playing. There were presentations on using mobile libraries to deal with the barriers of reading material, as well as on digital literacy.

"I enjoyed that this summit was a diverse group with different expertise – and if you put that expertise together, it will assist in making the necessary changes," Zuma said. He reiterated the words of the NLSA board chairman, who urged delegates to implement some of the ideas discussed during the event.

One of the ways UNIZULU aims to achieve this is by publishing the most outstanding papers presented, in order to share the knowledge with other libraries, information centres and schools of library and information studies.

UNIZULU confers honorary Doctorate in Public Administration on Nomalungelo Gina

VERONICA MOHAPELOA, NALEDI HLEFANE

NOMALUNGELO Gina, South Africa's Deputy Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, recently received an honorary Doctorate in Public Administration from UNIZULU in recognition of her decades-long contribution to public service, education and inclusive innovation.

She was among more than 3000 graduates who qualified to receive their hard-earned degrees, diplomas and higher certificates from the university this year. Speaking on behalf of the UNIZULU Council as its Chairperson, Professor David Mabunda affirmed that the Deputy Minister's conferment was both valid and timely. "We really celebrate your life-long dedication to education, economic development and the empowerment of women and workers. Your service in government and beyond reflects a deep love for our people, and an unyielding determination to uplift them. You remind us that leadership is not about power; it is about purpose."

Professor Xoliswa Mtose, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor and Principal, commended Dr Gina for her great strides in both the education and governmental sectors.

The Deputy Minister expressed profound gratitude for the honour, which



Picture: James Thwala

she described as both a personal and professional milestone.

"This conferment has deeply humbled me. It marks a major moment in my life, not just as a public servant but as a woman, a daughter and a proud rural-raised child," said Dr Gina.

Born in the rural community of Ndwedwe, Dr Gina reflected on her journey from modest beginnings to serving in high public office; crediting the University of Zululand for laying the foundation of her career. She received her first teaching degree from the institution before embarking on a career that spanned nearly 20 years in education, followed by her tenure as a Member of Parliament, and now serving

her second term as a Deputy Minister.

In her remarks, she paid tribute to past honorary recipients such as Dr Pali Lehohla, Criselda Kanada, Lindelani Mkhize, Dr Irvin Khoza and the late King Goodwill Zwelithini – emphasising the significance of being counted among such respected figures.

She also used the platform to call for greater inclusion of rural and township communities in science, technology and innovation policy and programme implementation.

Dr Gina also highlighted the importance of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and the rise of artificial intelligence. She urged the graduating class to embrace technology and adapt their skills to meet the evolving demands of the modern economy.

Thanking her family for their enduring support, Dr Gina reaffirmed her commitment to using public office as a platform to effect meaningful change, particularly for the marginalised and underserved.

"Until we make a lasting impact on the lives of ordinary South Africans, especially in rural and township communities, we cannot say we've overcome the legacy of economic and social exclusion," she said.

NALEDI HLEFANE

UNIZULU honoured legal giant Advocate Frederick Mzawuvuke Muzi Sikhakhane with a Doctor of Laws *Honoris Causa* earlier this month.

This degree was conferred in acknowledgement of the senior counsel's immense contribution to the legal field and the role he plays in fighting for the rights of the marginalised.

Ahead of the conferment, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Xoliswa Mtose said Advocate Sikhakhane had been an obvious choice when the UNIZULU Council deliberated on candidates who were deserving of honorary doctorates this year.

She stated unequivocally that the law graduates who were present during the ceremony would gain a wealth of knowledge from Sikhakhane's address, especially in terms of his analysis and views on justice in the country.

Augmenting Prof Mtose's statement, Professor David Mabunda, Chair of the UNIZULU Council, said he felt honoured to have presided over a ceremony in which an honorary degree was awarded to such a deserving candidate who continues to shape the nation in an unprecedented manner.

Addressing Dr Sikhakhane, he said: "We salute you for your unwavering pursuit of justice, fearless advocacy for constitutionalism and human rights which have left an indelible mark on the legal profession and society at large. You are a symbol of integrity and a voice for the voiceless. Through this honorary degree, we honour not just your achievements but the values you stand for."

"These values were laid bare in your recently published book, *Odyssey of Liberation: A Memoir of a Rebel Advocate*, where you call upon all sections of society to rise against the injustices that have been vested upon us. You lament how in the last 30 years post-1994, we have traded the

future of our children for 30 pieces of silver and we seem to be okay with all shenanigans and wrongdoings under the guise of democracy."

In his address, Dr Sikhakhane first expressed his gratitude to the university for the "generous conferment". He then implored his fellow graduates to be a generation that will leave behind the chains of slavery, inferiority, spiritual vacuousness, cowardice and fear of confronting the boulders thrown along the path of African people to true liberation.

"I want us to be the generation that left behind the chains that tied our parents. We are the generation that will start the new journey, create enemies, storms. We are the generation that will start climbing mountains. That commitment always generates resistance; creates enemies for you," he said.

To newly qualified lawyers, Dr Sikhakhane underscored the essence of choosing to uphold justice over the lure of money and comfort. He reminded them that it is the disliked, forgotten and hated that need advocacy the most.

"I therefore challenge you as students today and challenge this university that it must be the centre of the pedagogy of liberation – unashamedly," he added.



Picture: James Thwala

PROUD MOMENT



UNIZULU celebrates the first group of graduates in the Bachelor of Engineering in Electrical Engineering and the Bachelor of Engineering in Mechanical Engineering programmes. To mark this special achievement and academic milestone, the 19 graduates were photographed with UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Xoliswa Mtose (centre), Executive Management members as well as Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering staff.

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