



VICE-CHANCELLOR'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS

DUT-TUD: Transform, Upscale, Develop

Thandwa Mthembu
Vice-Chancellor & Principal

18 March 2017

Chancellor; Chairperson of Council and Council; Deputy Minister, MECs, Mayors, Directors-General, HoDs and all officers of government at all levels; Members of the Diplomatic Corps; Ex-Premier, Dr Frank Mdlalose; Reverend Clergy present; Fellow Vice-Chancellors, DVCs, professors and fellow academics; Leaders of University Structures and Members of the University Community at large; Representatives from other organs of society, business/industry and the NGO sub-sector; Family and Friends; Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am very honoured and excited that you are all here to bear witness to my inauguration.

I thank DUT's Council for appointing me under very trying circumstances. I also thank the University stakeholders for having welcomed that decision by Council and for making my first 6 months here hospitable.

I will make more acknowledgements and a vote of thanks later.

Mr Chancellor, this being the start of, hopefully, a great evening after a long and exerting day for some of us, it will serve no purpose for me to: regurgitate the many communiqués I have written; rehash the 13-page strategy document I presented to Council on 18 November 2016 and that I revised about a week ago; present our Extended Annual Performance Plan with all the objectives and targets in there; and much more we have exchanged internally.

My daughters advised me on how long my address should be, what its style should be and what the content should be. I had a stern warning not to make this address *“a regurgitation of content exhausted by my [your] predecessors and academic counterparts”*.

I will, therefore, not give the main course of the address but, just a starter of it. I will do this by attempting to elevate my address to a level above that of listing the national challenges that affect education in general and university education in particular. I will not list DUT's many illustrious achievements we will build upon. I will not list the many challenges we face at DUT and how they will be tackled. I will just hover over all of these.

Mr Chancellor, Distinguished Guests, my inauguration comes hot on the heels of lectures across the country by a great intellectual, Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Through his book entitled: *Decolonising the Mind*, amongst others, he is one of the pioneers of the decolonization movement.

It would be very remiss of me not to make a few comments on this topical matter.

At school, you learn and regurgitate what already exists. At university, you focus on discovery: of new ideas, new knowledge, new innovations; building upon what exists in pursuance of what is yet to exist and be known. So, universities are not really places of learning. In a university context, decolonisation could, in my view, only be about building upon what exists from anywhere in the world to create something new and relevant to us as South Africans or Africans.

The past is past. The present is about to pass. We need not regurgitate or relive them. Now, we need to focus on laying the foundation today for our collective future. Decolonisation should, therefore, be futuristic and not a hankering after the past.

Responses of yesteryear to apartheid's sordid past, no matter how seductive, just belong in a past. We often hear the shrill voices of our young people. We hope, in the near future, those voices will chant new chants and sing new songs of the 21st century. We observe, with appreciation, the energetic bodies of our students. We hope, in the near future, those bodies will walk a new walk and dance a new dance of the 21st century.

If our so well educated students are to be the ripened fruit that society can enjoy, they must be careful that the dirt, the stench and the squalor of the past does not turn this ripened fruit into wormed fruit that is impossible for society to eat. Yes, our youth needs to be the shade under which our society must rest peacefully and not anxiously. No, our youth should not be like the birds that nest and roost on the branches of trees and poop on our society as it rests under the shade.

Mr Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen, my inauguration also takes place as the National Education Crisis Forum, starts a #FeesMustFall convention in Gauteng today.

It would also be remiss of me if I failed to comment on this matter.

We have seen rage and violence being valorized and being unleashed on our broader society and no less on our lecture rooms, halls, laboratories and libraries. The difficulties that students have with paying fees are not the cause of their rage. The #FeesMustFall movement is not the cause of problems universities have. These are all symptoms of stunted economic growth in South Africa. In turn, this sad state of affairs leads to poverty and unemployment that affect a substantial portion of our society; not only university students.

It's time our students find a new legacy. That legacy should not just be a shadow of past legacies of struggle, past chants, past songs, past dances. It should be a bright new light that shines on all of South Africa. It should be about the ripened fruit for all of us to enjoy and not the wormed fruit. That legacy should not be akin to birds pooping on South Africa whilst it expects a comfortable shade under the tree.

It's time, without apportioning blame and without being degenerative and retrogressive, our youth focus hawk-like on how to extricate this socio-economy from the doldrums it is in. It's not about who sunk our socio-economy that will make us prosper; but, who lifted it up from the doldrums. That would be a better legacy.

So, I hope, although our students may be enraged, they will also remain engaged with change and remain enthralled in the task of advancing our dear nation.

Having hovered over the two topical national challenges in university education that I could not avoid, let me now hover over DUT itself as briefly as I can.

The title of this speech is: **DUT-TUD: Transform, Upscale and Develop**. As noted earlier, I have written extensively on what we shall *transform*, what we shall *upscale* and what we shall *develop* anew.

Transforming our university fundamentally is one of our challenges. But, amongst the choices we will make as we transform our university, transformation shall not lead, wittingly

or unwittingly, to deformation. We deform our society, we deform our university, when the choices we make about transformation leave us all imperiled, disfigured and misshaped.

Having spent many years as a country focusing on quantitative transformation, sometimes called equity, it is time we change gear to focus on qualitative transformation. Our development as a people and as a country depends on that type of transformation. Counting matric pass rates is not qualitative transformation. Counting the number of BEE deals and their quanta is not qualitative transformation. Counting the number of African staff employed at DUT is not qualitative transformation. But, ensuring that BEE deals build the economy or our academics producing high quality research and innovations than ever produced at DUT, is.

When all these attempts at transformation are accompanied by shunning excellence, they become deformation; leaving all of us imperiled, disfigured and misshaped. At DUT, excellence and equity – in this order – will be married without any option of a divorce! This way, transformation will catapult into greatness all areas of our endeavour as a university worth its name.

Upscaling anything requires that you can measure it. Knowing your measure, you then peg the field (*uyayiklama indima*) to increase your territory. A colleague of mine who is obviously city-bred didn't think about *ukuklama indima* which came very easily to the mind of this rural boy. Instead, he said, let's '*throw the javelin*'. Our plans to upscale our teaching and learning programmes, our research and innovation programmes, how deeply engaged we shall be with the cities and the region we serve, and what outcomes we will achieve in the broader society, need the proverbial throwing of the javelin so as to measure how far we throw it and how farther we could throw it. To what extent shall we expand our existing research centres to conquer their markets not only in the cities, the region and nationally, but internationally, too? To what extent shall we exploit the many industries around us to the hilt in our teaching and learning programmes and in our research and innovation programmes? To what extent shall we get embedded in helping to solve the many problems of society like crime, energy and water poverty? To what extent shall we bring new technologies from anywhere in the world, even as we may not have invented them ourselves, in order to improve the quality of life of our people? We need to '*throw the javelin*', measure how far we could throw it, hone our skills at it and then upscale our efforts to make us truly great.

Developing our young people intellectually is our main business as a university. But, more, as a university of technology, developing our young people to participate productively in our socio-economy is our niche. I focus on this aspect because DUT has declared one of its DNA strands to be student centred-ness. How developed our students are; and how developed our curricula, our research and innovations we expose our students to, must, ultimately, be felt in their outcomes in the broader society.

With about 5 million young people between the ages of 18 and 24 and only about 1 million of these being in universities, university students should take the responsibility for the rest of this age group and actually the rest of our society. Who else but a university student, has the knowledge, the high levels skills and the innovations to turn our socio-economy around?

My little dream, more probable at a university of technology, is that in a few years, if out of the about 27 000 students we currently enroll, we could graduate just 0.05% (only 14 graduates) of them per year as tried and tested entrepreneurs, by design and not by default, DUT would begin to transform fundamentally the economy of our cities and our region.

Slogans about land expropriation and nationalisation are not going to necessarily turn the economy around. Innovators and entrepreneurs will. Land has no value, but potential value. Our innovations and our entrepreneurial spirit are what add some value to it. Japan, Singapore and other Asian tigers did not become as prosperous as they are now because their people had more land? Almost two decades now after Zimbabweans started to expropriate land, have they turned its potential value into real value?

To transform, upscale and develop, we shall need a refined **institutional culture** that will value not just people because they have potential value, but the right people. We shall need a caring, competent, deliberative, empowering, nurturing, productive and disciplined **leadership**. We shall need robust systems that will provide for evidence-based **management**. Ultimately, we shall need the whole university to be a well-oiled **self-bureaucracy** where even individuals take responsibility for executing their tasks and functions with minimal or no supervision.

Some of my daughters requested that I tell stories.

I am a product of a disciplinarian school principal father and a disciplinarian school teacher mother. When in his book entitled: *Good to Great*, Jim Collins says if you are disciplined you don't need bureaucracy and controls, I remember that I experienced that in my childhood. Once, my parents were away during a weekend. On return, my father called me. He asked which household tasks I had accomplished during their absence. I was perplexed because he had not asked me to perform any tasks for the weekend. With a bit of tough love on the buttocks with his cane, he told me that it was my duty to look around and find something to do or fix. He said he didn't have to tell me about things I am old enough to discover for myself. From then, I became pretty much a self-bureaucracy. I became self-controlled requiring little or no external bureaucracy at all for tasks I had before me.

If you are an academic, nobody needs to tell you that you must have the right qualifications and the right teaching, learning and research profile. Just do it. If you are a manager responsible for maintenance, you should not be asked by anyone to fix this and that. You should even fix things people are not yet aware they are broken or that you know if they are not serviced after so many months or years they will break. If you are a student, you actually don't need a test to prove that you know what you have researched and innovated.

We are still a long way towards achieving all our major objectives. But, we are certainly on the path.

On this path, and if DUT were a bus, we would need the Right People in the Right Seats playing their Right Roles in the DUT bus. Given the old age of our bus, the steep hills we are on, with our diesel tank running low, the passengers might even need to get out of the bus and push it. In that case, as Ron Clarke in his book entitled: *Move Your Bus* suggests: runners will need support; joggers will need validation; walkers who lack motivation may have to be

prodded on; riders with their dead weight might have to be cast aside, I would add. Let the driver and the conductors steer this organisation to greatness. With the completion of the executive team, I am confident we will have more conductors to help the driver and the passengers get to our destination.

I, therefore invite all of us to work together, focusing on what will make our collective future bright. I hope there will be no inertia against change and transformation, against upscaling and developing this university. I hope there will be unity in purpose. Certainly, we need no prevarication and no digression as we demonstrate through our graduates and our innovations that we could be the most accomplished university in the human and socio-economic development arena.

I am confident that sooner than later DUT will be a proud model for our local, regional and national development.

Thank you all for attending this function and for listening attentively.

.....oOo.....