



“Iminingo”

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S COMMUNIQUÉ

Monday, 12 December 2022

End-of-the-year Message

It feels like only yesterday when we started this year at high energy levels, individually and collectively, pursuing our personal and professional goals. Somewhat unbelievably, we are approaching the end of the year. Many of us feel weary. We must be.

Like I mentioned last year in a similar message to the DUT community, this message is not really meant to give a comprehensive account on the university's performance in 2022 and prospects for the year 2023. The State of the University Address (SOUA), which contains such information, is scheduled for late February 2023.

There are many remarkable achievements we registered this year. Of course, there are many disappointments, too.

Despite some disruptions in February, the year 2022 started and proceeded relatively well. On 4 December 2021, Council approved its 'Policy Choices on Vaccination', which was meant to allow all our first and final year students to return to our campuses, but ensure everyone is protected against COVID-19. Senex and EMC had argued before Council thus:

“There are at least three (3) major challenges or risks the University is facing regarding the quality and integrity of its teaching and learning products (certificates, diplomas and degree).

- i) *Prevalent challenges of academic integrity, especially in assessments because of large-scale cheating in online assessments. Even though we have tested an online proctoring/invigilation solution, it has not been implemented and may not even be a panacea.*
- ii) *The fact that after 2 years, some of our students will be graduating with hardly any face-to-face and academic socialisation or engagements with their lecturers and fellow students is mind-boggling.*
- iii) *We have evidence from our Health and Wellness units (students and staff) and from other sources across the world about increasing mental health problems among staff and students.”*

It would be unconscionable, indeed, to have students who enrolled in 2020 when COVID-19 emerged, graduating without ever having seen a lecture or an examination hall and without having engaged in deliberation with fellow students and their lecturers. When lockdown finally ended during the first semester, Council suspended the policy early in July, thus paving the way for all our students to return physically to our campuses.

Sadly, some of us fell short of upholding our values and principles like honesty, integrity, accountability, professionalism, and excellence. We are aware of modules and programmes that just continued as if we still had lockdown and as if Council and Management had not made relevant decisions that facilitated physical academic engagements. The less I say at this stage, the better.

On the more positive and progressive side of the DUT coin, more work was done this year towards embedding our values and principles. We hope this will help us to jettison these egregiously scandalous and academically treasonous behaviours like the failures I refer to above. We finalized the DUT Living Values Framework (LV Framework), which is an integral part of *The DUT Way*. It provides much clearer definitions of our values and principles. Further, it is a cue for our individual and collective behaviour as DUT people. In keeping up with one of the strands of our DNA, that of being *'people-centred and engaged'*, I am glad that the LV Framework was developed with the active participation of all our people, staff and students. They were in the forefront of refining the definitions and statements of behaviour.

Just like ENVISION2030, the LV Framework was not developed by consultants, but some of our people. Even though the Strategic Plan Working Group (SPWG) was originally assembled to produce our strategy and its plan, something it has done spectacularly, it has pivoted its focus towards implementation. Regarding the LV Framework, over and above SPWG members, I must single out Mrs Lorna McCollough, who organised and facilitated all the workshops with our people. What this demonstrates is that we continue to deepen our *'culture of shared responsibility and accountability'*. ENVISION2030 is organically adaptive!

Between June and September, I engaged with several internal stakeholders, like the Institutional Forum, the Labour Management Consultative Forum (LMCF) and the SRC. Amongst them, there is a palpable sense of determination and zeal to make this a **D**ifferent, **U**pended and **T**ransformed university. In fact, during one of those engagements, I was asked why the pace of transformation could not be faster!

Between August and September, Institutional Planning, Evaluation and Monitoring (IPME) ran our impact-oriented *ENVISION2030 Tracker Survey* in which various stakeholders of DUT participated. Because of a cacophony of negative narratives about the situation and morale at DUT, one would think DUT staff and students are oblivious to the advances DUT has made. For example, from the tracker results, *'the extent of personal identification with our values and principles'* stands at 78% while *'the extent of belonging among staff and students'* stands at 73% and 75%, respectively. Like the university's detractors are wont to be, EMC itself was incredulous when it learned about these relatively positive results under the circumstances. These results, thus, corroborate the positive qualitative feedback from my unmediated conversations with stakeholders as reported above. They equally debunk notions of wide-scale dissatisfaction and alienation.

These are simple, yet important, indicators of the journey we have travelled from a few years back when suspicion, mistrust, innuendo, obfuscation and inertia against what Council and Management set to achieve were very rife. Indisputably, the number of achievements we registered this year are attributable to institutional purposefulness, cohesiveness, coherence and collaboration. We all deserve to pat ourselves on the back for a great job well done. These developments remind me of what I said in February 2020 during the State of the University Address:

"As I conclude, I must point out that it is People that bring life to any strategy. As we stand on the brink of implementing ENVISION2030, and as we fly to greatness, always remember that it is People – the Right people, occupying the Right seats and playing the Right roles – that are the source of everything we will be doing in the coming 10 years."

On behalf of Council and Management, I take this opportunity to wish every member of DUT family, their own families and loved ones, a peaceful, joyous and safe festive season. Even if just for a few days, we must withdraw focus from our unending challenges of work and life. May we all set some time aside to rest, recharge and replenish.

Let us look forward to an even more prosperous 2023.

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