

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
UNISA, SAWID, UN WOMEN: WOMEN'S MONTH CELEBRATORY
DIALOGUE
THEME: *Supporting Women Entrepreneurs for Sustainable*
Economic Development
FUNCTION HALL, KGORONG BUILDING, MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS
7 AUGUST 2019

Programme Director: Ms Phelisa Nkomo, Development Economist,
Feminist and Social Justice Activist

- Ms Thembi Siweya, Deputy Minister in the Presidency and her guests
- Mrs Thoko Mpumlwana, Chairperson of the South African Women In Dialogue (SAWID) Trust and other members of SAWID and YSAWID
- Ms Anne Githuku Shongwe, Country representative of UN Women South Africa Multi-Country Office and other members of UN Women

- Our keynote speaker, Ms Nolitha Fakude, Incoming Chair of Anglo American SA Management Board
- Dr Sheila Kumalo, Chairperson of the Unisa Women's Forum and other members of the Unisa Women's Forum
- Prof Nokuthula Mazibuko, Head of the Institute for Gender Studies
- Your Excellencies: Ambassadors and High Commissioners representing various Countries present and other members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Members of the Unisa Management present
- Prof N Mathabe, former Pro Vice Chancellor of Unisa and her guest
- Dr B Bam, Chairperson of Thabo Mbeki Foundation
- Representatives from other Institutions of Higher Learning present
- Representatives from various Government Departments
- Members of the Business Community
- Members of the Ecclesiastical Communities present
- Members of Unisa National Students Representative Council
- Representatives from various media
- Representatives of the various Unisa Forums and Labour Organisations
- Other Unisa staff members present

- Distinguished members of the audience
- Ladies and Gentlemen

A very warm welcome to this important dialogue. I particularly applaud the theme: *Supporting Women Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Economic Development*, because it goes to the very heart of the massive dilemma we are facing as a country and a continent when it comes to accelerating entrepreneurship for sustainable economic development, and linked to that, the urgent need for job creation on the one hand, and broadening the rightful access and participation of women entrepreneurs in the economy, on the other.

I must say I have always found it particularly interesting that women are generally cast as the *nurturers* in societies around the world – in fact this is a role which many women claim for themselves. But sometimes that generalisation happens at the expense of the huge reservoir of entrepreneurial talent and sheer ability, that resides in the 50% of our continent which comprises women. The fact is, women can do *both* to great effect and I would suggest that there has never been a more urgent and present need for African women to mobilise, organise and put in place mechanisms and structures to unleash their entrepreneurial potential and in so doing, change the fortunes of our continent and her people for the better.

Aspects such as poverty eradication, early childhood development, the reduction of violence against women and civil coordination are in truth, not the responsibility of women alone. They are the responsibility of all of us. And while some might argue that women have a more natural aptitude to deal with these so-called “soft” or people focussed issues, one has a rather uncomfortable sense that this is a ‘cop-out’ as they say, because in fact, these are issues that are so massively complex and challenging that few have the gumption to confront them head on and in a manner calculated to ensure progress and development.

And when one is confronted with the argument that so many women are living in dire poverty that it is almost impossible for them to lift themselves out of it, I would like to say that precisely the same argument could be applied in the case of men! The difference is that even in such dire poverty, it is mostly the women – and not the men – who demonstrate the fortitude, ingenuity, capability and sheer hard work, to raise families – often extended families – virtually single handedly, conjuring miracles out of virtually nothing. And if you really think about it, that is entrepreneurship. Women already have competence, perseverance and endurance – they have ingenuity and spirit of innovation. Imagine how much more could be achieved if we

were to level the playing fields and for example, offer access to women to empower themselves economically? Would now need opportunity.

The truth is that current economic models at macro, micro and meso levels are supported by structures that are not designed for upliftment and empowerment of people who are working from the 'ground up'. What is required in Africa and in other developing and emerging economies are programmes of self-empowerment that will ensure self-reliance and security: financial security, food security and security of tenure. I'm sure I have no need to remind us that these securities are completely aligned to the SDG's and that in addressing them we will be contributing to the attainment of the SDGs.

SDG Goal 4 speaks of the importance of *inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all* in the process of upliftment and sustainability. As an educator, and Vice Chancellor of this largest university on the continent, we are deeply committed to the education of our people – young and old. If we are to break the back of the blight called poverty, hunger and inequality, we must begin with education. It is education that will conscientise, inform and stir in our people the hunger to know more, to grow more; to be self-reliant; and most importantly to flourish. And

while we have made some progress we can and must, do so much more.

I am pleased to note that the African-centric model that Unisa has adopted offers more realistic and viable form of scholarship - including research and community engagement - which involves multiple disciplines in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders, all working together for the good of our communities. For the first time, I believe we are articulating genuinely African conceptualisations of projects and models which work for our circumstances and cultures. I find this very exciting. This rising consciousness can be noted across South Africa, our regions and in fact, most of the Continent. Africans clearly feel a growing need to be in charge of their own destinies and they are demonstrating that in action. And so, I am positive but having said that, we will only achieve our goals where women are encouraged to play their roles as equal partners in our development.

I can offer you an example of what we can do without even having to think too much. In South Africa we have noted the incredible way in which the concept of a Stokvel is being expanded across an array of economic areas and beyond. Stokvels are now digital, banks are offering Stokvel accounts and there are even Stokvel apps. Stokvels are quintessentially African, an ancient practice and largely women

driven - and it is women who have ensured their enduring popularity. Stokvels work and they have flourished because of women.

Indian women have also taken up the call to action and the government of India now offers a range of micro loans schemes to boost women entrepreneurship. The amounts loaned are small, repayment periods are generous, and in some cases, may be increased as the women's record of repayment is honoured and strengthened. There are also loan schemes specifically designed for women in agriculture.¹ I recall seeing a programme on TV about this system and a comment made stuck with me because the person who was lending the money said that even in the most humble and rural communities, and even where the loaned amounts were humble and the women poverty stricken, women paid their loans conscientiously and without fail - because they saw this as an opportunity to lift them and their communities out of the dire poverty in which they existed and they felt proud and excited to be entrepreneurs.

Over a decade ago the Buddhist activist and scholar Joanna Macy, along with others such as David Korten, Riane Eisler and Thomas Berry, coined the term "The Great Turning", which refers to the global shift from an industrial growth society to a life-sustaining civilization.

¹ <https://yourstory.com/smbstory/women-entrepreneurs-msme-loans-schemes>

This, one assumes emanated from the realisation that we are not living in harmony with our planet, but rather, that we are destroying it and ourselves in the process. The time for the “great turning” is now. I would like to suggest that Africans have always understood that most intimate of relationships between humankind and the planet which we inhabit, and the need to ensure that we all live together as part of a great ecosystem and so in a very real sense, this is a path that might seem more natural to us, than it would to others.

This dialogue then, seeks to address ways in which women can be supported in their development as Entrepreneurs for sustainable economic development. In this spirit, UNISA, through the UNISA Women’s Forum and UNISA’s Institute for Gender Studies agreed to collaborate with the South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID) platform and UN Women to host this celebratory dialogue. The purpose of the dialogue is not only noble – it is imperative and quite simply, the right thing to do.

And so distinguished guests ladies and gentlemen, you will understand my delight and support when I extend a very warm welcome to each one of you, to our university and to this dialogue. Given the very dynamic list of speakers, presenters and discussants I have no doubt whatsoever, that the dialogue will lend impetus to and generate a

transformation that will make solid inroads into the entrepreneur development agenda. I wish you well.

I thank you.