



The Office Of The Principal and Vice-Chancellor

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

OPENING CEREMONY: 2019 SOCIAL POLICY IN AFRICA CONFERENCE

***Governance of Africa's Social Policy: Subverting Development and
Democracy***

Sierra Burgers Park Hotel, Tshwane, South Africa

25 November 2019

Thanks Programme Director

- Members of executive and extended management
- Prof Jimi Adesina: SARChI Chair in Social Policy
- Prof Les Labuschagne: Executive Director, Research and Innovation, University of South Africa.
- Dr Katja Hujo: United Nations Research Institutes for Social Development (UNRISD) Director (Rep)
- Our Keynote Speaker, Prof Andrew Fischer (Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University, The Hague, Netherlands)

- Members of the Presidency and the diplomatic corps
- Members of state and UNESCO affiliated institutions
- Honoured guests from sister institutions nationally, on the Continent and abroad
- Unisa staff and stakeholders
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

It is my honour and privilege to bid you all a very warm Unisa welcome to this important and timely conference.

As a sociologist by training I remain deeply rooted and invested in the communities and the individuals who, in the context of this conference, are the hapless victims of policies that are mostly well intended, but sadly out of touch with the realities of a transforming world and the needs of citizens-on-the-ground. Of course, this policy dissonance prevails globally, and to varying degrees. I can think of no better example than that which is presented by South Africa. The profound inequalities in our society speak to a policy environment that is not attuned to the needs of our citizens, nor to our cultural mores - not to mention our received structural contexts, all of which impact on us from the cradle-to-the-grave, and shape our understanding and response to our policy environment.

Put simply ladies and gentlemen, and if we were to use the African Continent as an example, democracy and the neoliberal capitalist ideology that underpins it, does not work. The prevailing African contexts speak for themselves. And I would assume that the same applies to other developing nations – in fact we have many examples of these kinds of failures playing themselves out right now all around the world. The point is well made that “the dominance of the conception and articulation of democracy as ‘universal suffrage, regular elections and basic civil rights ‘(Rudebeck), is held separate from ‘equality in actual practice’.”

We thus find ourselves in a situation of policy disconnect between our economic policies and our social policies, and if that were not enough, entrenched structural models that reinforce the disconnect and dissonance.

If I were to use this university as an analogy, I would have to say that while we are committed to being an authentically African university that aims to shape futures in the service of humanity, we are constrained from achieving the full flourishing of our commitment to social justice and equity, because we operate in a regulatory and policy environment which circumscribes what we may, or may not want to do in order to ensure social justice and equity. Not only

that, but we have also inherited structures, traditions, languages and business models, which have neoliberal underpinnings, which can be alien to African cultural capital, and which are virtually impossible to dismantle without first changing our policies. The fact is ladies and gentlemen, it has been our experience here at Unisa, where we have embarked on an aggressive programme of transformation, that it is an uphill struggle in many respects because of this legacy inheritance.

While I think we could agree that so-called “western” and “European” neoliberal democracy and capitalism do not achieve the same outcomes in many developmental contexts, and that there is an urgent need to find contextually derived models that will achieve results that will benefit all, the question that we have begun to grapple with, and which will be the theme of this conference, is how do we do this? How do we go about crafting policies that will be so comprehensively informed and integrated that they will transition the prevailing economically focused approach into another one that facilitates social justice and equality and that reflects a nuanced appreciation and accommodation of our cultural norms and practices?

To demonstrate this dissonance, I like to share the example of the fundamental difference between the Western-based philosophy of individualism as exemplified in the Phrase *Cogito, ergo sum* - "I think, therefore I am", which stands in contradiction of the philosophy of Ubuntu/Botho which asserts our humanity first and states "I am because we are," and which brings with it the cultural capital of community, sharing and the collective development of all citizens - "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity."

This is not to say that one model or philosophy is superior to another. What it means is that the same models and policies may not work for everyone and may not realise the same outcomes for everyone because they are antithetical to the very essence of who we are.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, the status quo cannot continue. We need to adopt a transformative social policy approach that creates a synergy between economic and social policies and addresses the structural bases of poverty, inequality and vulnerability. We need social policy that will enhance human flourishing through the transformation of the economy, social relations, social institution and public engagement. And when it

comes to social relations we will simply have to tackle head-on aspects such as gender inequality and entrenched patriarchy.

Our universities are charged to contribute to the production of responsible and critical citizens by virtue of education being ‘a foundation for human fulfilment, peace, sustainable development, economic growth, decent work, gender equality and responsible global citizenship’, as well as ‘*a key contributor to the reduction of inequalities and poverty*’ by creating the conditions and generating the opportunities for better, sustainable societies (UNESCO Position Paper ED 2015a: 13,3). Unisa has embarked on a transformational journey to do just that, on our own terms. You will therefore understand how proud and pleased I am that Unisa is hosting this Conference.

Possibly the best and most legitimate means of achieving this is policy that facilitates and advances human flourishing. There is clearly an urgent global need to attend to policy impediments that militate against this, and to redesign or design anew policies that will form the genesis of a new order for contextualised democracy and development. Please accept my very warm wishes for a productive and impactful conference.

I thank you.