



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
THE SIGNING CEREMONY FOR THE LAND DONATION BETWEEN RAY
NKONYENI MUNICIPALITY AND UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
UNISA MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS, PRETORIA
WEDNESDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2018

Programme Director, I am deeply honoured to be part and parcel of this important occasion in the life of our university. Today both UNISA and the Ray Nkonyeni Municipality are making history. What we are engaged in is far more than the donation and receipt of a piece of land on which we will construct physical structures. What we are building is the future of the municipality, its people, and by extension, the future of the country.

Today's signing ceremony is significant for two major reasons. First, it is a demonstration of the practical collaboration that the government can have with the higher education sector. This I say because the relationships between the government and universities are often fraught with tensions. Understandably, this emanate from the fact that universities house academics who more often than not, in the practice of their craft, express critical views about the government.

What must be understood about this relationship is that whatever is expressed is borne out of deep love for the people that both academics on the one hand and public representatives and public servants on the other have for citizens. Academics understand too well that the poor are almost solely dependent on the government for their health needs, for the education of their children, for housing, water and electricity, and even for food that is bought using social grants provided by the government. Therefore, the developmental state must be kept on its toes, so that it can provide the vital services for the poor.

The second reason why this ceremony and subsequent actions are so important is that we are laying the foundation that will enable the university to expand its physical presence in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Yours is a strategic town in the south of KwaZulu-Natal. Yet, our

students from that part of the province must travel 120 km to use the services at our Durban Campus. The envisaged campus will therefore eliminate this burden and bring services to the students' doorstep. This campus will also provide the necessary services to our students from surrounding areas such as Kokstad and many parts in the East of the Eastern Cape.

Apart from bringing the services to the students and people of Ray Nkonyeni, there are many other benefits that will accrue from the building of a campus.

There is a potential for Port Shepstone to become a 'university town'. I am saying this advisedly, conscious of two dynamics about such a potentiality. One, the fact that there is a university in town does not, in and of itself, turn such a town into a 'university town'. Two, the unique character of UNISA, as an Open Distance and electronic Learning (ODEL) institution means that it does not have a captive presence of lecturers, students and other stakeholders who form a community. Yet, we have seen an increase in the number of young full-time students who are demanding that the university should do more to cater for their needs.

There are several features that must be present for a town to be regarded as a 'university town'. These revolve mainly around a university purposely availing its research, innovations and enterprises to have a direct bearing on the nature of the social and economic characters of the given town. In many instances the university becomes the centre around which the town is dependent for its very existence and brand. We can think here about such towns as Oxford and Cambridge. In our case we can think about Makhanda and Stellenbosch. These are typical university towns.

The conversation that we must have is whether it is possible, in the long term, to have Port Shepstone having some features of a university town. It is my firm belief though, that even if, because of the one feature of UNISA that may stand in the way of assisting the development of a 'university town' – not having a captive full-time staff and student compliment – it should be possible to explore many other possibilities.

One such possibility is to explore how the institution and the municipality can collaborate to leverage on the knowledge produced by our researchers to help develop the town and the municipality broadly into a vibrant and economically, socially and politically sustainable place.

I am therefore, Madam Executive Mayor, challenging both our institutions to think beyond the MoU, and begin to think about more sustainable initiatives. For instance, the university has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Tshwane.

One feature of that MoU is engaging our Bureau of Market Research (BMR), which is a market-leader, to support short to long-term development plans by the City of Tshwane, capacity building, and knowledge sharing in general. This is a concrete possibility that we can explore.

What we must not do as a university is to adopt elitist, civilising tendencies that undermine existing knowledge systems and expertise that already reside within institutions. We must instead learn from each other; the university contributing research and developing ideas, and the Municipality bringing practical experiences and learnings into the relationship.

Programme Director, in addition to the potential collaboration between the institution and the municipality, the establishment of a campus in the town will definitely open up study opportunities for all the people (both young and old) within the boundaries of the municipality.

Thousands of young people who are currently in the margins of society will acquire the necessary skills that will prepare them for the job market.

Apart from the technical educational skills that will be acquired the university will have to contribute the non-tangible, yet extremely important social development indices. By their very nature, universities bring possibilities of thinking beyond what obtains, and begin to imagine 'what might be'. It is for this reason therefore that universities catalyse and change the culture of the communities that they find themselves in.

It is my considered view that the relationship that we are founding today will be of mutual benefit to the two institutions. More importantly, this relationship must be of benefit to the people of Ray Nkonyeni Municipality.

Madam Mayor, as a university we are geared to explore possibilities that a relationship with the municipality bring up.

Thank you!

