

Sizwe Mabizela on the Launch of the AJHECE

Honoured guests, colleagues and friends, thank you for your kind and generous invitation for us to be part of this auspicious occasion of the launch of the African Journal of Higher Education Community Engagement.

We offer our warm and heartfelt congratulations to you, Di [Hornby], Margie [Maistry], and the rest of the team for all the hard work that has brought us to this momentous day. This journal will contribute an important voice and perspective informed by our local context and shaped by our experiences in the global scholarship and debate on community engagement.

Through it, we should learn about initiatives that aim to advance the social purpose of our universities. We should learn about those initiatives that are replicable elsewhere in the continent and the world. We should learn about those initiatives that are scalable, those that have worked and those that have not worked.

Last year, Rhodes University Council approved the university's strategic plan document, Umkhombandla, as part of the repositioning and re-envisioning the future of our university, we crafted new vision and mission statements for our university. In our vision statement, we have boldly and unequivocally declared our aspiration to be foremost in the generation and advancement of locally responsive and globally engaged knowledge that seeks to create a just and sustainable society.

There are three significant components to our vision statement that are worth highlighting:

Firstly, we exist to generate and advance knowledge. We are a knowledge institution. We do this through research and through teaching and learning. So *that* for us is important - that we exist to generate and advance knowledge.

Secondly, the knowledge that we endeavour to generate and advance is intended to simultaneously respond to the challenges of our local community and contribute to our accumulated global stock of knowledge. So that's why we say it must be locally responsive and globally engaged. In this way, we can enrich the global stock of knowledge from our vantage point, even as we endeavour to address the urgent and pressing challenges of our community. There is no mortal or irreconcilable tension between being locally responsive on the one hand, and globally engaged on the other. As a public institution of higher education, we must always be responsive to our local, national and continental developmental imperatives. And at the same time, generate cutting edge knowledge that can benefit humanity more broadly.

Thirdly, the knowledge that we seek to generate and advance is that we seek to create a just and sustainable society. We exist. for the public good, we exist for the

public benefit. So for us, community engagement is not something that is additional or extraneous. It is our reason *that*. It is our very purpose of being.

For us, communities should not see themselves as passive recipients of goods and services, but they must be engaged as agents of their own emancipation. There's vast knowledge and wisdom which reside in our local communities, and we must harness it for the greater social good. We must develop partnerships, networks, and other social relations with our local communities that allow for equitable exchange of knowledge and other resources that enhance their agency in their own emancipation and enrich the intellectual project of our university.

These partnerships and social relations must be predicated on the fundamental principles of mutual trust, respect, reciprocity, and mutual benefit.

We must always work collaboratively with our surrounding communities to identify challenges and co-create solutions to these challenges, drawing on the asset-based approach to development. Not only will this approach address the challenges of our communities, but will also transform our universities and their knowledge project. To make our knowledge project significant, relevant, responsive, and impactful.

If we remain true and faithful to our purpose and mission, as we must, we will be able to advance the higher social purpose of higher education. That is to transform individual lives for the better; to create just, inclusive, and sustainable societies; and to create a more just, a more humane, a more equitable, a fairer, a more compassionate, and inclusive future for our continent and all of humanity.

May this new journal grow from strength to strength. May it serve as a platform for us to share with each other, learn from and through each other and grow together. And may it reflect the richness of the human experience and teach us how to be fully human. For it is in recognizing, defending and advancing the humanity of others that our own humanity can reach its fullness.

We are immensely indebted to the outstanding panel of advisor and editorial board members who will guide this journal to be the authentic voice of the continent on community engagement.

Once again, hearty congratulations. I thank you.

Prof. Sizwe Mabizela

Vice Chancellor of Rhodes University