

## **NWU VC Inauguration 26 August 2022**

### **Consolidation of our successes and positioning ourselves to discover new frontiers**

NWU Chancellor, Dr Anna Mokgokong

Chairperson of NWU Council, Mr Bert Sorgdrager, and all current and former members of Council

Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training, Science and Innovation, Mr Buti Manamela

Premier of the North-West Province, Mr Bushy Maape

Members of the Executive Committee (MECs) of the North-West Provincial government

Ambassadors, high commissioners, and embassy representatives

Executive mayors and other officials and representatives from all spheres of government

Deputy Director General for University Education in the Department of Higher Education and Training, Dr Marcia Socikwa

Senate members

Members of the Institutional Forum

Members of the NWU Convocation ExCo

NWU SRC President, Ms Thuso Molefi and all student leaders

Vice-chancellors and representatives of other universities

CEO of Universities South Africa (Usaf)

NWU Donors

CEOs and representatives from business

Former colleagues and friends

NWU staff, colleagues, partners, and friends of the NWU

Good evening, sanibonani, molweni, goei'naand, ndimadekwana, dumelang, Salaam Alaykum and thank you for gracing this occasion..

Madam Chancellor, please allow me to acknowledge and thank my family; my dear wife, Ngeniswa and children for their unconditional support and love, and my parents (My late father, Mr Magama Tyobeka, and my mother, Mma Khumalo, Elizabeth Tyobeka, who is here with us) for their love and determination in making sure that I stay on the straight and narrow and achieve my dreams. There is an African proverb that says, it takes a village to raise a child. Indeed, I must, without doubt, acknowledge the good people of my village, Welverdiend (Nonceba), some of whom are here, and others are joining us virtually this evening.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is an honour for me to address you this evening. It is certainly a privilege that I address you as the third principal and vice-chancellor of the North-West University. I thank all the university structures for the confidence and the challenge they have placed upon me. Please allow me to pay tribute to my predecessors who have laid a solid foundation for the success of this university. Dr Theuns Eloff and Prof Dan Kgwadi, thank you for the excellent job in steering this institution to where it is today. Not forgetting the former chairpersons of Council, especially Advocate Kruger, from whom I have learnt so much.

Your sound leadership ensured that we get through periods of uncertainty and turbulence especially in the early years of the merger of the two universities. Of course, I know where this university comes from because I am also a proud alumnus of this great institution. When I was a student leader at the then University of the North-West, I was focused on my studies and just wanted to achieve the dreams that I had when I was a young boy growing up in my village near Rustenburg in North-West province. I didn't know that one day, I will be standing here and addressing you as the principal and vice-chancellor of the NWU. But here we are. I must confess that my relationship and involvement with the university post my studies grew stronger after I received an Alumni Excellence Award in 2013.

Since then, I have been intimately involved with the university at Council level; trying to make meaningful contributions to my alma mater – as all of us are expected to do.

Madam Chancellor, when I was part of Council – both as ordinary member and as chairperson – we made a series of decisions that I think are fundamental to the stability, success, and sustainability of our university. This includes our 2015-2025 strategy which we must begin to review. Through the implementation of this strategy, we have successfully integrated the university structures, and made significant progress towards equity of resources provision across our three campuses. We continued to achieve good results in terms of our teaching and learning, as well as research and innovation areas. All these ensured that we continue to be regarded as one of the top universities in South Africa, and internationally.

We will be celebrating our 20-year anniversary in the next two years. I am certain that both my predecessors will agree that, although we have recorded some significant successes since 2004, we have encountered some problems along the way. It has not been an easy ride. As Kwame Nkrumah, the founding president of Ghana once said, “those who would judge us merely by the heights we have achieved would do well to remember the depths from which we started.” We are where we are today because of our stakeholders and partners. Therefore, allow me to thank all of you, our stakeholders including staff, students, donors, alumni and partners/collaborators for your dedication, professionalism, diligence, and innovative ideas and resilience, especially during the past two years.

Madam Chancellor, since I assumed my role as principal and vice-chancellor on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, I have been meeting colleagues in senior management to understand the issues with which their portfolios are focused on in the short to medium term. I have also met some members of staff and student leaders just to get a sense of the pulse of this university. I must say that, firstly, the reception and enthusiasm among colleagues and students have been heart-warming, and

secondly, I am encouraged by the calibre of staff and students that we have at the North-West University.

Ladies and gentlemen, the North-West University will, as outlined in our teaching and learning strategy, continue to strive to produce graduates who are:

- Responsible and engaged members of society
- Knowledgeable and highly educated professionals
- Critical thinkers who are innovative and adaptable
- Principled servant leaders; and
- Skilled collaborators and team players

Madam Chancellor, I am aware of the difficulties that the youth including our graduates encounter upon their graduation and exiting the university system. The high unemployment rate among the youth continues to be a burden regardless of their level of education or qualifications. Consequently, there are those who are beginning to question the need for education and, in particular, university education. However, we know that in many countries – including our country – the situation is worse for those without university education (as highlighted in the Statistics SA Quarterly Labour Force Survey Q1 2022).

Therefore, we must continue to promote the importance of education among our youth. Quality education that aims to address the needs of society and contribute to the development and growth of our country, our continent and the world is vital. I agree with the statement by the former president of Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, that “the education provided must encourage the development in each citizen of three things; an inquiring mind; an ability to learn from what others do, and reject or adapt it to his own needs; and a basic confidence in his own position as a free and equal member of society, who values others and is valued by them for what he does and not for what he obtains.”

Madam Chancellor, we know that Africa has the youngest population in the world, and 70% of sub-Saharan Africa’s population is under the age of 30. There is clearly a need for us to invest more in empowering this young population with the necessary skills and education that can assist in the development and growth of our continent. Moreover, we have a responsibility to play our part towards the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. We must encourage our youth and emphasise President Mandela’s statement that “education is the great engine of personal development. That, it is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine; that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation.” It is possible.

**Graduate employability and entrepreneurship development** will receive my special attention during my tenure as principal and vice-chancellor. We will strengthen our relationships and partnerships with industry role-players nationally and internationally to maximise employment, partnerships, and business opportunities for our students/graduates. We have subjects and programmes such as clinical medicine, public health, and hospitality and tourism management, that are internationally ranked in the top 101 to 150 category, which confirms that we produce excellent graduates for the global market; thus, we will explore and pursue opportunities beyond the borders of our country. Our students and graduates also need to broaden their focus for

employment and business opportunities beyond South Africa as the domestic market is limited and constrained. We will ensure that our Global Engagement Office enhances its efforts to avail more international job opportunities for our graduates. The skills and international experience that these graduates would acquire can be useful to our country's economy when they return to work for companies in various sectors of the economy or establish their own enterprises that would create more employment opportunities.

Madam Chancellor, I am confident that the North-West University is poised to achieve even more and continue to play a key role towards finding solutions for societal problems. Therefore, we shall strengthen our resolve to be an internationally recognised university in Africa, distinguished for engaged scholarship, academic excellence, and an ethic of care. This is the reason that we are consolidating our successes and positioning ourselves to explore new frontiers and opportunities – nationally and internationally.

We will strengthen our teaching-learning, research and innovation, and community engagement programmes. I pledge to ensure that the North-West University has **greater social impact**, especially within communities where we are based. I know we are already involved within these communities, but we will upscale our involvement and investment, and design impactful programmes that would have long-term and sustainable impact. Working in collaboration with **local government/municipalities**, we can make significant contributions towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and this will benefit communities in many ways, and further highlight our relevance and social impact.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Auditor General's report repeatedly points to a dysfunctional local government system which is characterised by lack of skills and maladministration. This requires all of us to be involved in whatever ways we can to change this trend. We have prioritised partnerships with municipalities in the North-West Province to assist them in skills development and ensuring that they have the capacity and proper administrative systems and management information to implement programmes and achieve their mandate. We will, upon discussions and agreement with the municipalities – including those in the Vaal area – design tailor-made programmes which hopefully will be implemented without delay. I am making this commitment – aware that we have some of our executive mayors among us this evening. If we do not implement what I am committing to this evening, you know where to point fingers; not at the NWU. We want the Auditor General to report some improved performance and accountability measures for municipalities in North-West Province and the Vaal. I am confident that working together with the relevant provinces and the municipalities, we can make significant progress in the next three years.

Madam Chancellor, colleagues, and friends, **food (in)security and nutrition** are a global problem. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, the most recent evidence available in 2022 suggests that the number of people unable to afford a healthy diet around the world rose by 112 million to almost 3.1 billion, reflecting the impact of rising consumer food prices during the pandemic. In addition, the ongoing war in Ukraine, and the instabilities in other parts of the world have highlighted the need for countries to promote local **agriculture/agro-processing and food security**. The agriculture sector in North-West Province contributes about 6.9% to the provincial GDP, second to the mining sector in the province. Our

Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences has nationally and internationally rated researchers who can work with other stakeholders in the province and at national level to grow the agriculture/agro-processing sector and optimise opportunities for food production, storage, and distribution. Therefore, we will pursue partnerships with the North-West provincial government and the private sector to strengthen existing initiatives and explore new opportunities. During its budget and policy vote earlier this year, the North-West provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development committed to finalise and launch the integrated provincial food security strategy during this financial year which ends in March 2023. We will discuss with the department with a view to agree on tangible programmes in which our experts can be involved.

Ladies and gentlemen, I was born and bred in a village. I have witnessed people in my village and other villages losing their valuable livestock due to outbreak of diseases and injuries. The limited number of veterinarians in our country needs attention. A few months ago, the South African Veterinary Council (SAVC) reported that our country is facing a dire shortage of veterinary professionals partly because there are limited institutions that offer full training for veterinarians.

According to the South African Veterinary Council, the number of registered veterinarians in South Africa dropped from three thousand, seven hundred and eighteen (3 718) in 2020 to three thousand, four hundred and eighty-three (3 483) in 2021. This is reportedly the reason we are relying on veterinarians from neighbouring countries. Of course, this situation is a threat to our food security and production. There is an opportunity for us to explore the growth of our animal health programmes and establish a **School of Veterinary Sciences** that can cover the North-West, Northern Cape, Free State, and parts of Gauteng provinces.

I am aware that our School of Agricultural Sciences is already doing some work with communities and other structures in the North-West Province, but we can do a lot more. We will also pursue relationships and partnerships with other relevant structures such as the **two agriculture colleges in Potchefstroom and Taung** to build capacity that can work with communities to ensure sustainable food production and safety. The available limited resources for public institutions including universities and government agencies dictate that we work in partnership and in collaboration to achieve more and change lives within communities. Of course, we will also pursue partnerships with the **chiefs – dikgosi tsa rona** – to ensure that we remain relevant and rooted in our communities and offer relevant interventions/programmes that address specific needs of rural communities.

Madam Chancellor, our plans to contribute to the agricultural sector and the economy in general will face problems if there are no sufficient **water resources**. Water resources are important to both society and the ecosystem. Communities depend on a reliable, clean supply of drinking water to sustain health. They also need water for agriculture, energy production, manufacturing, and recreation. Our country is a water scarce country, and it ranks as one of the 30 driest countries in the world. Two weeks ago, I was in Botswana where I attended a round-table discussion hosted in Botswana by our Business School. Dr Kefentse Mzwinila, the Minister of Lands and Water Affairs in that country, who also happens to be our alumnus, was part of the discussions. He emphasised the need for the governments in Southern Africa to work together on sustainable water management solutions. The need to use scientific tools for this purpose is unquestionable. Our researchers in the Centre for Water Sciences and Management advise that, to manage our

water resources efficiently and effectively, we need monitoring data to understand the system we are managing, by identifying underlying trends and using this information to model future scenarios. Therefore, we will explore opportunities to work with stakeholders in the private and public sectors to assist in the efforts for sustainable water management across the SADC.

Ladies and gentlemen, we cannot ignore the issue regarding **climate change and sustainability**. I am aware that there are climate change deniers across the globe. However, we need to contend with the reality that there are changing weather patterns that result in droughts and floods such as the ones we have seen recently in KwaZulu-Natal and some parts of North-West. There is a saying that every challenge brings an opportunity. The North-West University scientists in the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences have embraced climate change challenges and their effects on water management by developing climate change vulnerability index which is used as a screening tool to identify areas that could experience possible changes in their groundwater resources due to climate change. The drought conditions experienced a few years ago in the Western Cape inspired our researchers to develop a mobile app, sponsored by the Water Research Commission, for both citizens and groundwater professionals. The app allows logging of borehole information via smart phones, and it is used in an on-going hydro census that is envisaged to improve groundwater management and enhance sustainability.

Madam Chancellor, in addition to these scientific interventions that respond to climate change and sustainability, we plan to embark on a process to reduce our contribution to carbon emissions within our campuses. We will capacitate and intensify our campus greening initiative and deploy other climate friendly resources such as renewable energy across all our campuses. Ladies and gentlemen, in our efforts to reduce plastic waste and strive towards a climate friendly environment, it may be the last time that we serve you water in those plastic bottles. We will, of course, introduce these interventions gradually. We have no choice but to start thinking and applying ourselves differently as the renowned Kenyan environmental activist, Wangari Maathai, implored us when she said, "today, we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and, in the process, heal our own - indeed to embrace the whole of creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder. Recognizing that sustainable development, democracy and peace are indivisible is an idea whose time has come."

Ladies and gentlemen, we all agree that there is a clear nexus between water resources, food security, environment, and energy. How can we as an institution not be involved in offering solutions to the current crisis we face as far as electricity generation is concerned? The lack of reliable energy affects the economy and all facets of society. Through various initiatives by our staff and students in our Faculty of Engineering, we will be looking into research and initiatives than can provide solutions to problems faced by Eskom. As a university, we are regarded as a centre of knowledge, and society looks up to us to provide solutions. Our Faculty of Engineering will continue to provide a holistic package of energy interventions through our research initiatives in the areas of clean coal energy, hydrogen production and storage as well as advanced nuclear power systems just to mention a few.

Madam Chancellor, we will soon be in discussions with mining houses especially those in the North-West Province to test their appetite for partnerships regarding the establishment of the School of Mines and Mining Engineering. This initiative will not only look into advanced technologies in mining, but will also focus on environmental issues, mineral beneficiation, as well as mining health and safety. I believe that we have the essential building blocks for such a school, given what already exists in both our Faculty of Engineering, and the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences. We should readily, after due regulatory approvals, be able to offer programmes in metallurgical assay, mine ventilation and environmental engineering, mine geology, mine survey, mineral processing, and extractive metallurgy. What remains is mining-specific parts of the curriculum, and indeed, the appetite from the mining houses, and government. Given the issues that surround us with illegal mining, we will also position ourselves as a future hub for short learning programmes in small-scale and artisanal mining. The initial phase of this process will involve a benchmarking exercise with institutions in various countries such as the United States of America, Canada, and Australia. Our neighbours, in the SADC region, for example, the Zimbabwean School of Mines should also be a good regional benchmark for this venture. Additionally, we will soon be convening a stakeholder summit, to gauge this appetite.

Ladies and gentlemen, teaching and learning, research and innovation, and community engagement are the cornerstone of universities.

I have no doubt that our **teaching and learning** strategies and programmes place us in a good position to compete with the best universities in the world, hence we are consistently highly rated and ranked internationally. I am of the view that for us to remain relevant and competitive, we cannot ignore questions that are posed at higher education institutions, especially in South Africa and the rest of our continent. I am referring to questions about the **Africanisation or decolonisation of the curriculum, the concerns regarding quality and relevance of some of the degrees/programmes that we offer**, the questions regarding our readiness to embrace new technologies that can assist us to offer programmes to a new type of student who has specific teaching-learning needs and preferences.

It is my understanding that decolonisation or Africanisation of the curriculum simply means the recognition and inclusion of knowledge or disciplines that are centred on or characterised by African philosophical thinking, social practices, and norms. It does not necessarily mean doing away with knowledge or histories that originate from Western countries or former colonisers. In any case, as Julius Nyerere once said, “one does not judge one's state of health by comparing it to that of a sick person”.

To this end, we will invest more funding towards the development of Setswana, Sesotho and IsiZulu, to the level of maturity as languages of instruction. Our institution remains a preferred and niche destination for Afrikaans speaking students, who seek quality education in their mother tongue, probably, the last remaining such destination. Whilst others view this as a threat and an aberration to our transformation efforts, we view this as an opportunity, to demonstrate that transformation does not equal extinction of indigenous South African languages, of which Afrikaans is one. Instead, our transformation and decolonization efforts must use the Afrikaans language as a benchmark, to prop up other languages as mentioned. This is possible, as long as

we do not use any of these languages, Afrikaans included, as barriers to access and inclusion. The language policy that we adopted a few years ago during my tenure as Chairperson of Council, sets out clearly how our functional multilingualism should enable access and inclusion, instead of impeding it. That augurs well for both the transformation of the university, and the decolonization of the curriculum, in the medium to long term.

In my one-on-one meeting with the Dean of Humanities, Prof Dumi, it came to my attention that we face challenges in succession planning for academics in our Department of Setswana, to the extent we now have to resort to retired Setswana Professors to supervise our post-graduate students in that Department. I am sure all of you would agree that this is not good news. It means that if nothing is done, the pipe-line for Setswana teachers will be adversely affected, which would in turn have ripple effects to other areas of the Batswana culture and traditions. We will, in collaboration with the Provincial Department of Education, prioritize the funding of students to study Setswana, up to post-graduate level, to mitigate this risk. We face the same, if not worse, situation with Sesotho language offering, and we plan to address the problem working in partnership with relevant stakeholders.

There are opportunities for us to broaden our classroom approaches. For example, we should consider partnerships with kings, queens, and chiefs (dikgosi) and traditional courts (makgotla) in the teaching of customary law in our Faculty of Law. We should pursue any opportunities that can enhance our education programmes, while strengthening our cooperation with local communities. Madam Chancellor, last month I attended an International Indigenous Astronomy Conference that was hosted by our Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Sun City, Rustenburg. The speakers shared insights that are important for the institutionalisation and advancement of the discipline. We will support our Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Systems to grow and work with relevant stakeholders in various areas. Our forefathers could read the clouds and make weather predictions. This practice is still used by the San people in Northern Cape and Botswana, and in fact, in some of the communities in Limpopo. This kind of indigenous knowledge systems can be harnessed and utilised together with modern technologies to assist rural communities in farming and other areas. We must pursue these in tribute to leaders and indigenous knowledge activists such as Dawid Kruiper, who was posthumously honoured with the Order of the Baobab in Silver in 2014.

Our strategic intent is very clear that we want to transform and position the North-West University as a unitary institution of superior academic excellence, with a commitment to social justice. To this end, our teaching and learning strategy commits to **curriculum transformation and renewal**. Therefore, we will increasingly incorporate relevant programmes that address the decolonisation or Africanisation question and promote diversity and inclusiveness. We will also review some of the **existing programmes that are perceived to lack value in terms of preparing students for the employment and business markets**. Madam Chancellor, this talks to our Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) which in any way needs to be continuously assessed to ensure that we offer relevant programmes that meet national development needs as per our mandate.

Ladies and gentlemen, the lockdowns due to COVID-19 had a huge impact on teaching and learning for lecturers, students, and their parents/guardians. The lecturers and students had to



learn and get used to new ways of teaching and learning, and assessments. I am told that there are students who still prefer the online classrooms and assessments. I do not know about the lecturers; some of them, especially the younger generation academics, may be in the same group with students. Madam Chancellor, this is understandable as our students are increasingly dependent on technologies to access information and conduct most of their transactions online.

Although we will, through the implementation of our **Digital Business Strategy**, pursue the use of educational technologies for classroom and other student support activities, we will mainly remain a contact university while we invest and strengthen our distance learning portfolio. Our student value proposition is centred around academic excellence and a vibrant student life, and this is not about to change. We will continue to introduce world class facilities for our students, and host academic and sport teams and experts from all over world. The vibrancy of our campuses contributes to the economies of our cities – we may need to conduct a study to compare and quantify this economic contribution to ensure that our stakeholders, including municipalities, can appreciate the importance of sustained delivery of services and infrastructure development and maintenance.

Of course, we will be pragmatic in the way we embrace programme-specific needs and allow flexibility for our academics to balance teaching and research. Our Digital Business Strategy implementation must result in a more strengthened and expanded distance learning portfolio to cater for the student market that prefers this mode of teaching and learning.

As a university, we are expected to produce new knowledge and solutions to respond to socio-economic challenges and opportunities in society. We are already involved in world-class **research** initiatives that produce life altering solutions in South Africa and other parts of the world. Our world-class centres include;

- Centre of Excellence for Nutrition (CEN)
- Centre of Excellence for Pharmaceutical Sciences (Pharmacem™)
- Hypertension in Africa Research Team (HART)
- DST HySA Infrastructure Centre of Competence: co-hosted by NWU and CSIR, is focused on developing cost-competitive solutions for generating hydrogen using renewable energy and other chemical carriers as well as for hydrogen storage and distribution.
- **Centre of Excellence for Space Research**: recognised internationally for its basic and applied research. It strives to remain a destination of choice for students and researchers in the field of Astronomy / Astrophysics and Space Science
- **Material Science Innovation and Modelling (MASiM)**: creates an enabling environment for the realisation of strategic objectives of the South African government by supporting the long-term development of: Advanced Materials; Nano-Science and Nano-Technology; Renewable Energy Research; Systems Modelling; and General Innovation related to Physical, Mathematical and Computational Sciences
- **Centre for Business Mathematics and Informatics**: founded 1998 as a joint initiative between NWU and Absa - to establish a centre of excellence in risk management, and to conduct professional training and research in financial risk. SAS and FirstRand have joined the partnership; and

- **Centre for Applied Radiation Science and Technology (CARST):** research and capacity building for the Nuclear Industry in South Africa, namely South African Nuclear Energy Corporation (NECSA), National Nuclear Regulator (NNR), iThemba Labs, ESKOM, Department of Science and Innovation (DSI), Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE)

to mention but a few.

Ladies and gentlemen, some of the research and innovation initiatives that the university embarks upon result in spin-off companies that are jointly owned by the university and other partners/collaborators. It is important that we grow these spin-off companies and ensure that they generate sufficient funds to sustain themselves. That requires a review of the current business model(s) to ensure mutually beneficial partnerships with the private sector. We need people with business leadership and acumen to manage these companies. We will establish **an NWU Enterprises company**, that will manage all our enterprises and seek more business opportunities locally and internationally. Madam Chancellor, I strongly believe that we must play a key role in the **local economic development initiatives** of our country. Therefore, we will increase our investment and capacity in initiatives such as the BHive Enterprise Development Centre. We will, together with our partners in the private and public sectors, involve retired experts in business management to establish more business incubators especially in the three cities where we are located. The promotion of an entrepreneurial culture among our students is crucial in broadening their opportunities in the business market. Therefore, this will receive special attention during my tenure.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is no doubt that for us to achieve these priorities, we must capacitate and strengthen our **internationalisation programme**. We will soon embark on a review process for all our Memoranda of Understanding with universities and institutions abroad to determine value for each one of them. I will lead the exploration of new international partners to promote opportunities for collaborations in various areas including research, post graduate student recruitment, exchange programmes, and funding. There are public and private universities on our continent that I believe we should target for collaborations and partnerships, and these will be prioritised in our internationalisation plans.

Madam Chancellor, for us to sustain the great work that is done by the university in various areas including in our research centres and focus areas, we need to attract and retain expert researchers and staff. This is the reason we have already embarked upon a **staff optimisation** process. A few years ago, Council raised concerns regarding the number of staff, especially academics, that the university was losing to other organisations including other universities and government departments. We continue to lose very skilled staff, and this affects our performance and competitiveness. The staff optimisation project will involve a benchmarking exercise with other universities and answer some of the questions with which we have been grappling. For example, why do we lose staff to other universities and government? Is our remuneration model on par with those of our competitors? Are our resources deployed strategically i.e., are there areas that we can reskill and upskill staff? We anticipate this project to be completed by the end of 2022.

Ladies and gentlemen, we all witnessed the students' protests a few years ago regarding university fees, decolonisation, identity, and inclusiveness. In terms of addressing the high fees question, the government's intervention via the **National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS)** has assisted many students to access high education. However, NSFAS also poses the highest risk to universities. Regrettably, most students who receive NSFAS funds and are expected to repay their debt do not do so. Therefore, the sustainability of the scheme is in doubt considering that the government has many other issues that require funding from a very constrained fiscus. What will happen if the NSFAS budget can no longer cater for students who are already with the university system? Imagine universities that have more than 80% of their students relying on NSFAS. There is no doubt that we need to diversify our sources of income to manage this risk.

Another challenge that we face is the insufficient funding for post-graduate studies. Earlier this month, we were in discussions with our Board of Donors regarding financial support for students. It became clear during those discussions that some companies have taken a back seat in terms of supporting students financially because there seems to be a view that government's response to demands for free education through broadening NSFAS support are adequate. The fact of the matter is that we have what is now colloquially called the Missing Middle – students whose parents' income fall just outside the qualification amount for NSFAS support. In addition, there are post-graduate students who do not get NSFAS support and many of the sources which used to fund them have gradually decreased.

We will, in partnership with our partners, explore the establishment of a special fund that can assist in funding for the post-graduate studies and the missing middle. We need to build a knowledge economy that can move this country closer to meeting the proposals and targets contained in the National Development Plan. I strongly believe that for any country to develop and grow its economy and create sustained business and employment opportunities, there needs to be a deliberate investment and support for **Research and Development programmes** which are driven by experts and post-graduate students. We cannot afford to ignore our post-graduate students if we are serious about creating a knowledge economy. Countries such as South Korea, Singapore, and Japan invested heavily in Research and Development and that moved them from middle-income to high-income status.

Furthermore, in our difficult and constrained job market where a high number of graduates are unemployed, deciding to pursue postgraduate studies which are fully funded, seems to be the best option than having our young people queuing for SASSA grants, with a bachelor's degree in their CV. This month of August, Women's month, I had an opportunity to read what some of our women staff had to say about being proud employees of the NWU. I was particularly intrigued by an extract from Dr Precious Mncayi, a senior lecturer in Economics at our Vanderbijlpark Campus. She wrote, and I quote "My passion for research was inspired by my own journey. I was inspired when I was an unemployed graduate back in 2014. I did not understand how or why that was the case, so I decided to enrol for my master's degree. I made it my mission to do impactful research that will help in shedding light on the association between education and employment, especially among young people. I realised that I could turn my challenge at the time into research as I understood that I was not the only one frustrated by poor job prospects even though I have been told all my life how important education is for better employment prospects."

Dr Mncayi, having decided to choose between staying at home with a degree, or embarking on postgraduate studies, went on to complete both her Masters and PhD degrees, and is now a Senior Lecturer. There may be many Dr Mncayi's out there, and all that is needed is to give them hope and opportunities to upskill themselves through fully funded postgraduate studies

Working with our Board of Donors and other partners, we will continue to persuade companies to collaborate more with our research centres and repurpose some of their funds to support post-graduate students especially in areas of mutual interest.

Madam Chancellor, just to emphasise the point, the North-West University has just more than 50% of students on NSFAS. There is a need for us to diversify our income streams to ensure that we can support our students in need. We will intensify our efforts to generate and raise funds for this purpose. President of the SRC, Thuso Molefi, I commit to work with students in this regard. However, I need students to understand and appreciate that donors and indeed potential employers and business partners donate funds and employ people who have demonstrated responsibility and accountability.

The practice or tradition that demands that some of our students protest and vandalise university infrastructure, is not helpful for us in attracting donors and potential employers and partners to our university. I appreciate that some of the protests happen due to very legitimate concerns such as lack of equity in the provision of resources, delays in responding to students' concerns, and the general bureaucracy that is associated with some of our services and regulatory institutions. Therefore, from the management side, I will ensure that we respond timeously to the issues raised by students via the correct structures and methods. I need students to make a commitment to play their part. The university has more than fifty-thousand students, and it cannot be that 100 disgruntled students block the entrances of the university and inconvenience the whole university community and partners.

Madam Chancellor, another reason for the disruption of our academic activities can mainly be attributed to the quality of student leadership. It is crucial that those who contest student leadership positions understand the responsibility and accountability that come with the positions. We are in the process of establishing a Student Leadership Academy to offer leadership training to students, especially those in leadership positions or aspire for such positions or roles in future. The Student Leadership Academy will not only focus on issues in the student-life environment, but it will also prepare students for a life in the boardroom. The students need to know that negotiations, teamwork, and problem-solving are the essence of leadership – not violence, disruption of classes, and destruction of property.

To this end, Madam Chancellor, as part of empowering our students, we will be hosting an International Conference Against Violent Student Protest: Towards Peaceful Resolution of Disputes on Campuses. This conference will be hosted before the end of the year at the Mahikeng Campus. Deputy Minister Manamela, I invite you and other universities to join us at this conference.

It would be very remiss of me not to talk about the crisis of gender-based violence. As the North-West University, we have adopted a zero-tolerance approach to gender-based violence and violence in general for both our student and staff environments. We will task our internal experts

to work with staff, students, and external partners to tighten our policy instruments to ensure that we deal decisively with perpetrators and offer meaningful and sustained support to survivors. Madam Chancellor, perpetrators of violence of any kind should never be comfortable among us, and we will make sure of that.

As we create a conducive environment for young women to thrive academically, we recognise the hurdles that women encounter in society. The story shared by Judge Navi Pillay when we hosted her a few weeks ago as part of our Women's Month activities makes one realise just how far we come and yet the journey ahead is still a challenge. The Legal Firms refused to employ Judge Pillay because of her gender and race, and even when she decided to start her own law firm, men (including black men) did not believe she would succeed simply because she is a woman. Most of you may know that she became one of the most successful lawyers who is the first black woman judge of the High Court of South Africa and served as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights among other assignments. We do not want young women today to go through the pain that women such as Judge Navi Pillay had to endure to succeed.

Therefore, we will continue to offer women including our students and staff the necessary support to create an environment that promotes equity and equality. After all, we need women to lead, as Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the former justice of the Supreme Court of the United States once said, "women belong in all places where decisions are made. ... It should not be that women are the exception."

Madam Chancellor, you are aware that our plans to get a Medical School for the North-West University remain on track. We desperately need the cooperation and support of the North-West Provincial government and the relevant national government departments to make progress. We already have the necessary ingredients in our Faculty of Health Sciences to start the Medical School. Deputy Minister Manamela, the public health issues in our country need more medical doctors, and the North-West University is ready to train these professions who can help the people of North-West and other neighbouring provinces, and countries.

Madam Chancellor, colleagues, friends, ladies, and gentlemen, we have embarked on a new journey. It is not going to be an easy journey. It would need all hands-on deck working towards a shared goal – the success and sustainability of the North-West University. To paraphrase, one of the great sons of Africa, Amilcar Cabral, during this journey, every one of us must have the courage of their responsibilities, exacting from others a proper respect for their work and properly respecting the work of others. Hide nothing from our stakeholders. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told, especially in this period of fake news and misinformation. We shall not mask difficulties, mistakes, failures, and we will certainly not claim easy victories.

We will be transparent and honest with you. We are mere custodians of this great institution, and we have no choice but to preserve it for future generations. I am determined to achieve the commitments that we are making this evening; and believe me when I say, I am here to lead this university to discover new frontiers and opportunities. Join us on this exciting journey.

Enkosi

Baie dankie

Ke a leboga