

ADDRESS BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR AT THE MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY SECOND CONGREGATION ON - FRIDAY 28 MAY 2004

I am honoured and privileged to be delivering the Vice-Chancellor's address on this historic day on the University Calendar. On this day, the 2nd Convocation of the Midlands State University, we will cap the first class of graduands of our new university. Such an occasion is a momentous one for us, as it is for any university, a time to take pride in our achievement and to share the joy of our newly graduated children and their families and friends.

In our case, however, this occasion takes on an added significance, because we are not just any new university, but a new university in the young, developing nation of Zimbabwe, which faces unprecedented challenges at the dawn of a new millennium in which the world will see the most rapid change in the history of the human race. Those of us who have laboured to make our vision of this new university a reality are aware of our responsibility to the people of Zimbabwe, whose aspirations we reflect, to see to it that the treasure, resources and human sweat invested in this vision will not have been wasted. The society we serve and the times we live in demand of us not merely that we carry out the traditional activities of universities but that we also justify them and mould them to suit rapidly changing social circumstances and requirements.

Universities worldwide at the beginning of the 21st century are required to be far more than discoverers and purveyors of knowledge. They are also challenged to apply that knowledge for the betterment of the societies that support them, to be agents of social change and positive transformation. This is especially true in Zimbabwe, which the fruits of social justice and equity were denied to the vast majority of the population on the superficial and trivial grounds of skin colour.

How can an institution such as a university be an agent of social change and positive transformation? One way is by producing knowledge relevant to the solution of society's problems and by providing the intellectual and philosophical underpinnings for national goals and aspirations. More obviously, the University has a critical role to play in national development, by educating those members of society who provide intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership and who thereby sustain the driving force underlying development. However, these days, *mazuvaano*, in light of society's rapidly changing needs, higher education must be more than the traditional package of knowledge and intellectual skills. It

must prepare students for the world of work they will enter after graduation, whether as employees, or, increasingly we hope, as employers in their own right. It must prepare them to confront and adapt to the changes they will inevitably encounter in the course of their lives.

How has Midlands State University responded to these challenges? We remind you, ladies and gentlemen, of MSU's vision, to be a unique, development oriented and pace setting university producing innovative and enterprising graduates. How has MSU put this vision into practice? In other words, how does MSU put your money where its mouth is? MSU's undergraduate degree is a unique and innovative four-year degree programme unparalleled in any other institution of higher learning in Zimbabwe. Part of the MSU degree is a component traditionally referred to as an "attachment," during which students gain practical experience working in organizations outside the University. But, these days, *mazuvaano*, it is not good enough to simply shove students into the workplace for six months or a year. At MSU, this part of the degree is referred to as "work-related learning," and it involves a close integration between the classroom and the workplace, in which students apply their classroom learning to the situations and problems they find in their reports and projects, supervised by their lecturers in on-site assessments. We note with pride that a number of MSU students have already contributed significantly to their inventions and innovations and that over 80% of today's graduands have already found full-time employment.

The classroom knowledge and skills that students take with them to work-related learning are also based on an innovative teaching methodology. These days, *mazuvaano*, it is not enough to assume that students need only to study a single subject, with a glance at one or two other related subjects, for their entire university careers. These days, when consumer products are more and more customized to meet the demands of individual consumers, students need more freedom to tailor their education to meet their own interests and abilities and the requirements of the workplace. At MSU, students are empowered to enrich their core studies by taking modules outside of their home departments and faculties, a concept referred to as flexible packaging. The flexibility of this system is enhanced by full semesterization, which enables students to embark on new modules twice a year instead of once. Students who want to adapt to the outside world must begin by adapting their education.

Our emphasis on flexibility is also reflected in our Visiting School and parallel programmes. The Visiting School including a Masters in Business Administration programme is an innovative educational product that allows people who are already engaged in full-time careers to earn higher degrees without necessarily leaving employment. The parallel programmes permit students whose qualifications have not permitted them to make the increasingly competitive cutoff points for the regular programmes to nevertheless avail themselves of university education, sometimes by attending evening classes.

Still, these days, *mazuvaano*, it is not enough to offer path-breaking degree programmes. We must develop the students holistically, taking a hand, not just in their academic lives, but in their social and personal lives as well. MSU's Division of Student Affairs actively intervenes to solve students' problems in the areas of accommodation, food and more personal issues that require counseling, such as family crises, bereavements, emotional problems and financial problems. These interventions include provision for recreation and an aggressive and proactive approach to the problems created by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. We recognize that our students cannot realize their full potential if, outside the classroom, they struggle for basic necessities, suffer from emotional problems, or if our hostels are a breeding ground for HIV/AIDS.

Still, we come back to the issue raised earlier, that of the University as an agent of social change and positive transformation. It is fine to provide a unique and adaptable education, and a healthy learning environment, but these days, *mazuvaano*, a university must also address specific issues related to national development. Has MSU done this? Here, I would like to take as an example the national issue of gender equity in Zimbabwe.

The problems faced by women in traditional and contemporary societies are well documented. We know that, historically, many social and cultural value systems have confined women and girls to the private sphere of the household and family, keeping them economically and socially underpowered. Dr Yasmin Tambia (1998) has observed, for example, that lack of basic education keeps women from obtaining crucial information in areas such as family planning and child health care. This disparity is carried over to higher education as well. A survey by the Association of Commonwealth countries in the year 2000 reveals that women have to struggle against gender stereotyping that constraints women's capacity to build research careers. In particular, the survey notes that percentages of female

academic staff at the level of Senior Lecturer and above range from 39,6% in Jamaica to 9,2% in Cyprus, well below percentages for their male counterparts. There is no clear difference between developed and less developed countries in these statistics.

Now, Zimbabwe has had its share of these problems. For example, not very long ago, most Zimbabwean families who were faced with the choice between educating a boy or a girl chose to send the boy to school. In higher education, Zimbabwe's 36,9% percentage of female academic staff at Senior Lecturer level and above, even though based on partial data, indicates that, even now, Zimbabwe differs very little from the international norm. In response to these and other symptoms of gender inequality, the National Gender Policy of Zimbabwe seeks to redress the gender inequalities that are evident in income distribution, political participation and power relations, as well as access to control and ownership of economic and productive resources. Redressing inequalities in education remains one of the most basic requirements for implementing this policy meaningfully.

The issue of gender equity is, crucially, a development issue. It is abundantly clear by now that the perspectives and activities of women, not only of men, are indispensable to the progress of developing nations. Societies that ignore the contributions of women to development do so at their peril. We cannot afford to waste human potential of either gender.

So, how is MSU addressing the problem of gender inequity in Zimbabwe? First, MSU has in place a policy of affirmative action to admit increasing numbers of female students to various degree programmes. In October 2003, the ratio of female to male students stood at 1:2. This represents a high proportion of female students, by Zimbabwean standards, but we are aiming for still further improvement. We may note this connection that Zimbabwe, as of 2002, had the highest female gross enrolment ratios in primary and secondary schools in sub-Saharan Africa, at 96% of the numbers for males in primary schools and 89% in secondary schools (UNICEF2004), a reflection of the educational track record that is one of the proudest achievements of post-Independence Zimbabwe. MSU is striving to maintain these high standards.

MSU's other efforts in the area of gender equity span the entire range of university activities from teaching and research to community service. Achievements in the area of teaching and research include the development of modules in gender studies in the Faculty of Arts and

research on gender issues in the schools and communities carried out under the auspices of the Faculty of Education. Soon the efforts of the gender specialists among our academic staff will be enhanced by the establishment of a Gender Studies Centre, which will offer junior and higher degrees in gender studies as well as short courses and workshops to the community, with the ultimate goal of providing gender sensitivity training to every student who passes through MSU. In the area of community service, the Faculty of Natural Resource Management and Agriculture offers extension services to new farmers among whom, naturally, are many women. These efforts are a foundation for the future, on which we will base future accomplishments.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, the achievements and future goals of MSU that I have outlined here today are only the beginning but, I am confident, they amply demonstrate our commitment to MSU as a truly national institution dedicated in all of its working and at every level of its organization to the development of Zimbabwe. In short, as we graduate our first cohort of graduands, I am satisfied that we have made significant strides towards building the institution we have envisioned.

It is against this background that we ask you all to join us in congratulating these young men and women who are the product of the 21st century university education practices.

AMHLOPHE! MAKOROKOTO! CONGRATULATIONS!

