

COMMUNITY AWARDS EVENING 2017

SITHI NANGAMSO

Luzuko Jacobs

Programme Director

Ms Diana Hornby: Rhodes Director for Community Engagement

Ms Unathu Mabukane

Mr Ashley Zikhali

Our magnificent Rhodents and volunteers

Community partners

Good evening, dumelang, molweni....

It is a significant honour to be part of an occasion to celebrate the contribution which our deserving award winners tonight have made to improve the quality of life of the people of Makana through community engagement.

I consider myself privileged to be in the company of such people and to pay tribute to all the young women, men and good-hearted people who have made their self-empowerment through the transformation of the community the theatre of their operation.

All of you as our committed volunteers, whether or not you receive an award tonight, are recognised and cherished for what you have contributed. Your commitment to community engagement serves as a reminder to all of us of our common mission: to honour our diversity, to grow together and to fight for human dignity and social justice.

It is only fitting that we take time to pay tribute, in this manner, to all of you as champions of this great cause, for embracing the deep social compact between our University and the people of Makana and for dedicating time and effort for the benefit of both yourselves and our community.

I am eternally proud of you. Your alma mater is eternally proud of you. The people of Makana are proud of you. And so should your parents and all loved ones. You should be proud of yourselves.

We are meeting here tonight because you understood very well that Universities do not exist in a vacuum. As our Vice-Chancellor, Dr Sizwe Mabizela, consistently reminds us, Universities exist within a particular social, economic, cultural, political and historical context and are an integral part of the community in which they exist.

This wonderful ceremony tonight represents the best that Rhodes University, and indeed any other University, can offer to the community. You are all deserving champions of a noble and good cause. For this, we deeply thank you.

Borrowing from a famous quote by the 26th US President, Theodore Roosevelt, I would like to say that this 201 years old city of Makana, will not be a good place for any of us to live in and study unless we make it a good place for all of us to live in.

The Rhodes University Community Engagement programme, ably led by Di Hornby, represents a beautiful story of a commitment to make Makana a good place for all of us to live in, not just for a few. The numbers here tonight testify to this fact. To see so many young leaders who have bought into and fully embraced this commitment is heart-warming and bodes well for the future of our University and that of Makana.

No other University in our country can boast of almost ten percent of its entire student population being actively engaged in community work. Very few Universities around the world are as integrated into the local community as Rhodes is. This is one University which is not cordoned-off from the community it serves. This is much more than merely symbolic.

In a community such as ours in Makana, with so much entrenched socio-economic, cultural and political challenges, nothing is as important as deliberately building a strong sense of community and shared goals between all stakeholders. You are at the heart of this project.

Last month our University hosted a delegation from Makana Municipality led by the Mayor, Councillor Nomhle Gaga. The purpose of the visit was to present to the University the Municipality Development Plan in appreciation of the intricate interdependence between our University and the city and to jointly explore areas for even deeper collaboration.

The Mayor was very candid in her presentation on the serious financial, governance and management challenges faced by the Municipality. She was also full of hope.

The task to transform the Municipality and the city is far from complete. We need to know that we – all of us here – are the MUNICIPALITY. We do not have the luxury to externalise about the problems

of Makana. The challenge to mobilise all faculties, Rhodes staff and every student to be community builders has never been greater.

I believe that the deep and, in some instances, worsening challenges of unemployment, poverty, inequality and evident substance abuse in Makana will be confronted and with the participation by our faculty, staff and students. You give me the belief that this can be done.

Community engagement presupposes personally responsible citizens, participatory citizens, and justice-oriented citizens. It requires social change agents working with and in communities, seeking at all times to form progressive partnerships to address the problems and challenges facing humanity.

Community engagement requires servant leaders and people with excellent spirit. It requires an appreciation of accountability and a willingness to take responsibility to ensure development to benefit posterity and as an investment in the future – in our shared destiny.

We thank you for representing our University with honour and dignity and for making all of us proud to be Rhodians, to be proud citizens of the city of Makana.

Each and every day you went about your work in communities you touched lives, you changed them. You inspired hope and you left joy in your wake. You left your comfort zones and chose to be a force for good. You saw a challenge and decided to make a difference.

You reminded people of the power of faith and the promise of education and the pivotal role played by Rhodes University in this community of Makana.

You were not involved in charity work. Through your interactions community-identified needs were addressed, you deepened the community's and your own civic and academic learning, you enhanced the community's well-being, and enriched the scholarship of our institution.

Through your endeavours you have forged respectful, reciprocal, mutually-beneficial and knowledge-driven partnerships with our local community. You took knowledge beyond the confines of the academy into the community and you learned a lot in return.

In the process you have developed a much greater sense of societal challenges. You gained new and deeper insights into the pressing and complex challenges facing our local communities, and a more nuanced view of the wider patterns in which we, as a university, are located.

I urge you to continue to reflect, critically, on the conditions and cultures which create the need for various types of community engagement.

I challenge you to reflect on, among others:

- Why are some of our schools so dysfunctional, so under-resourced and so badly managed?
- Why is the learner population of Amasango School continuing to grow in our city?
- Why does our beautiful city resemble a huge dump site? Why is waste management in our city so disastrous?
- Why do alcohol outlets, charismatic churches, loan shops and funeral parlours seem to be the only thriving industries in our communities?
- Why is it that every other house on the western side of town has electrified fencing?
- Why are our roads breaking up everywhere in the town?
- What happens in the community after each of the annual reports of the auditor general about the financial management of public resources?

If, as Andrés Fortino of Paradigm Research International says, the purpose of scholarship is the creation of prepared minds, then we should look your way for some of the answers to these challenges. If scholarship is a force for good, for social justice and human dignity, then we should safely rely on this cohort of volunteers working with the community to find ways to ameliorate some of the institutional and community challenges we face today.

When all else fails. When leadership fails us. When auditors fail us. When teachers fail us. When fathers fail us. When the police fail us. It is time for communities take up the cudgels, realise and exercise your power and place your fate in your own hands.

Congratulations to all of you and especially to those who, this evening, will receive awards. Well-done.

Enkosi, ke a leboga,