

ADDRESSES

Inaugural Address, Eastern Cape Technikon. Butterworth, 22 May 2002

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Introduction

Vice-Chancellor, Prof Mjoli, invited guests and dignitaries, members of management and staff, students, the Technikon assembly and members of the university and surrounding communities. I feel particularly honoured by the invitation to serve as Chancellor of Eastern Cape Technikon. When I first got the invitation, I was not sure how to respond to it. Initially I thought it was a hoax. On re-reading the invitation, I decided to accept this honour mainly because I believe that higher education in general, and institutions like yours in particular, have got a very special role to play in the broader transformation of our higher education landscape. In particular I am of the opinion that not enough attention is being paid to the importance and centrality of technikon education in human resources development and the growth and development of our economy.

Much as university education is very important and highly needed, it has been overemphasised at the expense of the role of technikons and the unique contribution they can make in transforming the landscape of higher education and human resources development that had arisen under apartheid. As a result of this overemphasis technikons have tended to develop an inferiority complex about their possible roles, mainly, and wrongly, regarding themselves as junior cousins of the universities. I would at least hope that my participation as part of the family of Eastern Cape Technikon is also guided by a commitment to an agenda of properly locating technikons in their rightful place.

My speech today is therefore going to raise some of the issues that perhaps need to be taken into account in defining and redefining the role of this institution within the context of the processes for the transformation of higher education currently underway in our country. To this end I will touch on the issues relating to the overall systemic and specific institutional transformation of higher education and its institutions, particularly on the question of the relationship between systemic and institutional transformation. I will try in so doing to locate the place and significance of an institution like this technikon.

The second main theme of my address will be on the very central and key challenge of placing the question of the production of black intellectuals and managers, within the overall context of transforming the relations of knowledge production. I will essentially argue that the role of this technikon should also be located within this very urgent imperative and national priority. The third theme will be on the relationship between institutions of higher education and their immediate environs and some of the specific issues that these institutions in general, and this technikon in particular, might want to consider, taking up. In essence this would be locating the role of this institution in the overall struggles for poverty eradication in our country, particularly in this region of our country.

Lastly, and flowing out of the above, the question of curriculum transformation as an essential component of repositioning higher education institutions in general, and technikons in particular.

Globalisation and the challenge of development and underdevelopment

I cannot pretend that my inauguration is not taking place in the midst of almost unprecedented debates about the transformation of higher education in South Africa. It is fundamentally a debate about how to depart radically from and overcome the Verwoerdian higher education system without at the same time restricting the parameters set by the very same system. It is a period that requires innovative and bold thinking by the whole country, government, higher education institutions, students, the labour movement and our communities. It is also a period characterised by uncertainty. Therefore our task and challenge is that of not succumbing or seeking to run away from the uncertainties, but to confront these with a view to make bold steps, without sacrificing our overall goals.

There is no doubt that our higher education system requires fundamental transformation and restructuring. It is a system whose continuation as it is can only frustrate our goals of creating a democratic and prosperous South Africa. Even more seriously, to postpone this transformation might actually lead to the destruction of the very institutions we have.

The current debate about the transformation of our higher education system is also taking place at a time when capitalist globalisation is the overwhelming reality and its ideology threatening to dominate the whole intellectual and transformation discourse. This is an important reality that we have to properly understand and be clear about. Though this capitalist globalisation is a reality that we have to confront, its assumptions and prescriptions are not the only nor the most desirable route through which we can develop our societies and meet the needs of the overwhelming majority of ordinary people of the world today. Current globalisation is essentially an imposition of a single idea – that of a market economy as an equivalent to freedom and prosperity and a panacea for all problems.

The current globalisation period is one characterised by immense inequalities between developed and developing countries, as well as sharp inequalities within nations themselves. At the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s we were promised 'freedom' and 'prosperity', yet we end the 1990s with even more countries poorer than was the situation at the beginning of the last decade. The prescriptions of liberalisation and privatisation have not brought about the better life that ideologues of current globalisation had promised us. The people of the world are even poorer, with now more than half of the world's population, for instance, without clean drinking water. The disparities in wealth are also increasing. For instance it was estimated that in 1996 Europe alone spent more than \$10bn on ice cream alone, and this was more than the total debt of a country like Ethiopia. In the same year the US alone was estimated to have spent more than \$18bn on cosmetics, an amount enough to wipe out the world illiteracy at that time by ensuring that every world's child is able to undergo primary school education.

This global reality has not left our higher education institutions unaffected. In fact today, some of the push for higher education transformation is to turn it more into a commodity principally responding to the needs of business and the large multinational corporations, at the direct expense of development of our communities. The very growth of private higher education is a direct threat to the sustainability of our own public higher education system. The ideology of capitalist globalisation also places the developmental concerns and issues of people, particularly in developing countries, as subsidiary to the interests of multinational corporations and the rich countries. The very idea of defining developing countries as 'emerging markets' shows a dangerously one-sided emphasis on processes of private economic accumulation – conceived simply as 'markets' – at the expense of the very huge social and developmental challenges facing these societies. Therefore the challenge of globalisation today is that of seeking to advance developmental agendas beneficial to our people rather than to accept it uncritically as the most fashionable thing around. Our institutions of higher education need to interrogate and debate these realities and help our students and communities to properly understand the phenomenon of globalisation.

Identifying the critical and priority issues in the debate over higher education transformation

As a country we are currently faced with the twin task of systemic and institutional transformation of higher education. It is rather unfortunate that the current debate seems to be overwhelmingly preoccupied by whether to have mergers or not – important as this may be – instead of identifying the most critical challenges that face higher education transformation. As a result the debate has tended to polarise over two extremes. The one position is that of seeking to anchor higher education transformation around what have been known as 'cen-

tres of excellence' and merging other institutions around these centres. The other extreme has been that of protecting institutional turf irrespective of the viability of institutions themselves. Both extremes are problematic. The first position does not deal with the fundamental question of what transformation is needed in these very 'centres of excellence' thus running the risk of reproducing the inequalities in education with the previously disadvantaged remaining, more or less, in the same position as under apartheid. The other position, whilst correctly pointing out at the need not to structure everything around essentially formerly white institutions, tends to defend institutional turf at the expense of focusing of what we have to deal with as priorities of transformation in higher education.

For instance one of the key challenges facing our country is that of eradication of poverty through the development of a broadly accepted growth and development strategy to tackle unemployment and job losses in our economy. The question might as well arise to what extent are the respective positions in the higher education debate informed by positioning our institutions to play a meaningful role in this regard. Concretely, as a country we are faced with the challenge of human resource development, particularly to reverse the racial and gender inequalities in the human resources profile of our country. This is a key challenge for our higher education institutions and even more so for an institution like the Eastern Cape Technikon.

There are indeed many other challenges facing our higher education institutions, but I would highlight what I regard as one of the most important ones, that of producing progressive black intellectuals and managers. One of the most enduring legacies of apartheid is that of a racially and gender based production of knowledge, thus leading to a skewed production of white and male intellectuals. This will have to change as a matter of priority. In addition, statistics point out that black managers still make just over 15 percent of the managerial strata in South African society.

This reality is a reflection of the fact that South African society is still faced with the task of addressing three interrelated contradictions, in an integrated manner: the racial, gender and class contradictions. Racial inequalities, gender inequalities and the bias of powerful institutions towards those who own wealth, to the exclusion of those who do not, still remain huge challenges in our country. This is worsened by the dominance of the neo-liberal discourse that the market is a solution to all problems of our society. Yet, the logic of the market tend to reproduce and reinforce the very same racial and gender inequalities inherited from apartheid. Ours is not a task of accepting the market in order to correct racial and gender distortions, since the market – the very origins of these disparities – will tend to exacerbate them. Let us debate these issues, frankly and honestly, as part of addressing the apartheid legacy that we inherited. Institutions like yours have an important role to play, because you are located right at the centre of the realities of the legacy of apartheid.

We would also like the prioritisation of the production of black public sector managers and managers able to lead the community efforts towards the eradication of poverty. One of the problems with our higher education institutions, particularly those located in rural areas, is that of training for the private sector and consequently for the urban areas. This has to change. We do need, particularly black, public sector managers committed to public service as a career and commitment and service to rural communities, rather than the public sector being used as a waiting station to get the first chance into the private sector. We need simultaneously to challenge the dominant ideology that all that is private is good and all that is public is evil. Eradication of poverty will centre on our capacity to create a public service and a state best able to respond to the needs of the ordinary working people, the poor and the marginalised.

Institutional transformation as the key to higher education transformation

Our transformation of higher education at the systemic level cannot succeed unless we also concentrate our efforts on transformation at the institutional level. An issue that I would like to highlight in this regard is that of the role of various social players (stakeholders) in institutional transformation. During the apartheid years we waged relentless struggles, with the students and workers being at the forefront of these, for the creation of what we then called broad transformation forums. These were struggles aimed at democratising decision making at institutional level as well as ensuring that the voice of the different stakeholders is seriously taken into account.

Since the passage of the Higher Education Act, we have at least won this struggle at legislative and institutional level. But unfortunately the institutional forums we have set up seem to be not working for a number of general as well as institution-specific reasons. This is indeed very disturbing. Some of the reasons these are not working include a mode of engagement between various institutional stakeholders outside of a commonly defined vision for various institutions. As a result this engagement becomes adversarial even where it is not supposed to be or is characterised by pursuance of sectoral interests outside of the broader institutional interests. This needs to be corrected. Some of the challenges outlined above are central in trying to forge a common agenda around institutional transformation. Sometimes the whole restructuring processes have been premised on retrenchment of workers and marginalisation of students even where there should have been genuine consultation and engagement towards restructuring.

The institutional forums, important as these are, will not work unless they are grappling with real substantive issues about repositioning of institutions to address the major transformational challenges at systemic and at institutional level. One of the challenges therefore is to make these forums to work as key

platforms for turning around our institutions. This is a challenge we earnestly need to take up.

Another key component of institutional transformation – and indeed the entire transformation of our higher education system – is the relationship between institutions and their immediate social and economic environment, in particular communities. One of the sad realities of our higher education today is that a lot of what happens and taught in our institutions does not relate to the immediate reality facing our people on the ground. For me this is a very important role for technikons.

For example, given the extent of poverty in our country, and not least in this region, our people are normally involved in do-or-die struggles to maintain what we can call sustainable livelihoods. Our people have for instance formed stokvels, burial societies, networks of street vendors, etc, to try and create sustainable livelihoods. The question that arises is to what extent are our higher education institutions studying these and seeking to strengthen them? To what extent are our departments structured in such a way that they can help the very same students who are going through higher education from savings generated from *umgalelo* to understand and strengthen these? I believe that technikons have a particular role to play in studying these, and producing students better capable of strengthening these as important pillars in the struggle for sustainable livelihoods in our communities. I do not see the reason why we cannot incorporate into our curricula, as I will point out below, the study of sustainable livelihoods in poor communities. For example it is estimated that about R60m from stokvels and burial societies is banked from Soweto alone! Street vendors and spaza shops incorporate about 3,5 million people, and this is bigger than the entire retail sector in our country. We need to build knowledge and strengthen these as part of the overall struggle to eradicate poverty in our country.

The other critical question is that of the role of higher education institutions in the moral regeneration movement. This is one of the most important challenges facing our country today. We need to struggle for the creation of a caring society based on social solidarity rather than individualistic and selfish models of societal development. We need to critically re-evaluate what we teach on the basis of what values are these transmitting.

Curriculum transformation

One of the most important implications that flows out of the above is that one of the key challenges of higher education transformation is that of curriculum change in line with the developmental needs of our country and our immediate environs. In many instances we teach engineering, economics and so on from American and British textbooks that do not at all relate to these daily realities and economic innovations of our people in their struggles for sustainable livelihoods. We need curriculum transformation, using the best of knowledge available globally, but also relating to our own struggles for development, for

example, the study of co-ops, stokvels, burial societies and many other means of eradicating poverty and people's innovation for sustainable livelihoods. The question is what role can this technikon play in relation to its own curricula as well as linking up with communities around it.

For example, one of the key obstacles to rural development, as identified by the Strauss Commission appointed by former President Nelson Mandela and reported to him in September 1996, is that of access to financial services and credit for development. This Commission, amongst other things, pointed to the legal and other disadvantages faced by rural women, the very same section of our rural communities that bears the brunt of poverty and struggle to keep the fires burning at home. The question of rural financial services is one of the most important issues that needs to be factored very strongly in your own training and research programmes as part of management training in general. Perhaps this might as well become one of your niche areas.

Build on your strengths

I have no doubt that this institution has a lot of potential and strengths that it needs to exploit to reposition itself for the future. Ironically, the very disadvantage of being located deep in the countryside, is a potential source of strength precisely because you have been dealing with students coming from some of the most disadvantaged communities. This experience is something you need to reflect upon and strengthen the capacity of the institution to play an important role in training a new kind of student and future managers who best understand the challenge of development. It is also for this reason that I decided to accept this appointment.

It is to some of the issues outlined above that our engagement with higher education transformation should be based, including institutional transformation. I am happy to join the family of the Eastern Cape Technikon and look forward to jointly tackling the challenges facing this institution as we move into the future. With these words, I accept the appointment as Chancellor of the Eastern Cape Technikon.