



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

**PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
AUDIT AND ENTERPRISE RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OF
COUNCIL (AERMCoC) WORKSHOP**

The African University Shaping Futures in the Service of Humanity – a journey of transformation and discovery

Reflections by our Vice Chancellor, Rre Makhanya, on the thoughts that inspired this Vision, the institutional journey to date – including challenges and milestone – in the pursuit of this noble Vision, etc. He will hopefully also point us to a fountain from which we could draw more vigour as we seek to socialise this Vision and rally all our institutional stakeholders around it.

16 FEBRUARY 2018

Chairperson of AERMCoC, Mme Dolly Mokgatle, Chairperson of the Unisa Council, Mr Sakhi Simelane (in absentia), members of Unisa

Council, executive management and Unisa stakeholders, colleagues who are with us today- a very good morning to you all.

I have been asked to share some reflections and observations with you and as part of that I would like to begin by providing a very brief context that offers some insight into our journey as an institution, to our current status as a university that is unshakeably committed to its vision and mission, and its crucial role in the transformation of South African higher education and our country as well as our continent.

We all know, and some of us can even remember quite clearly, that by the time South Africa became a new democracy in 1994, higher education in South Africa was deeply divided and fragmented; split along demographic, language and cultural lines isolated and, to some extent, alienated from prevailing national and international higher educational trends. This was the situation inherited by our new government and by HEIs in South Africa, and which would have to be addressed within a framework of similar disarray and redress needs, nation-wide. *And it's important that we don't lose sight of that fact, because we have really only just begun to appreciate, through first-hand experience, the influence that our socio-economic and political*

context exert on us, and how much of that is actually beyond our control.

A flurry of higher education legislations and policy initiatives were launched post 1994, as a deliberate part of that HE Landscape restructuring process, but for us one of the most influential was the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE), which was released in 2001, and which announced, among others, the intention to reduce the number of public higher education institutions from 36 to 23 (Now 26) by means of a number of mergers and incorporations (and the virtual elimination of the then teacher training colleges – a legacy which haunts us today, and which is in the process of being resurrected.)

Included in this number were six new “comprehensive” institutions, a new institutional type created through the mergers of universities and technikons. (The programme mix of the newly formed comprehensive universities reflected their respective academic and vocational heritages.) The largest of these mergers entailed the merging of the former University of South Africa (Unisa), the largest distance education university in South Africa since 1946, with Technikon Southern Africa (TSA), similarly, the largest distance education technikon in South Africa, and the simultaneous incorporation of the

Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC). Because of its strong national and international brand, it was decided to retain the name the *University of South Africa* for the newly merged institution, and accordingly, the 'new' Unisa emerged as the only dedicated distance comprehensive education institution in South Africa, its increased size making it the largest on the continent and one of the world's mega universities.

It is important to note that the key focus of the NPHE at that stage was on *efficiency* and *effectiveness* in the sector, which The Ministry sought to *steer* through the three pillars of *Planning, Quality and Funding*. Currently the emphasis has shifted to *responsibility, accountability* and one can now add a fourth pillar, that of *Governance and Sustainability* to the original three.

Unisa's merging processes commenced in earnest from 2003 (a lot of preparatory work was done before that, including institutional restructuring and one of the key milestones in this process was the release of the Unisa 2015 Strategic Plan: *an agenda for transformation*, which commenced implementation in 2006. This 10-year strategic plan was the culmination of wide research and very broad consultation and engagement with both staff and a variety of

stakeholders, and which aimed to be reviewed on a 3 – 5 year basis. It is important to mention the vision and its rationale remain relevant today, and still resonate in all that we do. The vision has been accretively tweaked and adjusted in line with our transformation as an institution.

At that time, the vision was simply stated: *Towards the African university in the service of humanity*. You will immediately note the consonance with our present vision.

'Towards' indicated that the vision set the University on a developmental journey, and this signifies dynamism, inquisitiveness, a sense of adventure, and boldness. It also pointed to a clarity of purpose and destiny. Moreover, the vision statement was emphatically not about taking over or colonizing Africa, but rather about being part of Africa. The statement was also founded on the premise that South Africa is not part, but 100% African. As such, Unisa sought to be completely African in that sense. The emphatic *'the'* in the vision statement referred to the excellence that the University would continually strive for. The boldness of the statement therefore intended to reflect our aspirations as a university in this regard. *'Service of humanity'* underscored the traditional ideals of a university

to promote universality, to produce and disseminate knowledge, promote culture, and serve causes which advance society and humanity. Elaborated from the perspective of an African University, it meant that the University was one located and rooted in the African context, developing knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for the development of the African continent. Critical scholarship from an African perspective became an authentic part of the global knowledge enterprise. Our intention was that African knowledge and knowledge systems should be developed in their own right and that they should mitigate the dominance of western canons. Through such scholarship, we intended to contribute to a multiplicity of voices, alternative canons, and diversity in thought.

In the Unisa 2015, we espoused the *values* in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa: *human dignity, the achievement of equality, and social justice*. We also affirmed the historic principles of academic freedom. We sought to weave these into the fabric of our institutional life and culture. Elaborated, the values and principles consisted of the following elements: *Integrity*; subscribing to truth, honesty, transparency and accountability of conduct in all that we do. Social justice and fairness; promoting equity of access and opportunity so that all may develop their full potential. *Excellence*; upholding high

standards of aspiration in all our practices, with continuous attention to improvement in quality.

This vision and mission remained largely intact in the *Unisa 2015 revisited*, which perhaps demonstrated its ongoing relevance and resonance with staff, stakeholders and students.

For the Unisa 2016 – 2030 we adopted the vision to be *the African University, shaping futures in the service of humanity*. Ubuntu/botho, in all its numerous and various articulations, defines the essence of the soul of Unisa. The ethos, institutional culture, spirit and service orientation are inspired and informed by this African philosophy that emphasises interdependence of humanity and a humane manner of rendering our services.

Unisa's current vision has maintained the essence of the previous vision statement while making important changes and emphasis. Being "*the African University shaping futures in the service of humanity*" emphasises both our intention to be a truly African university in form and content, as well as consciously appreciating the fact that our teaching and learning, research and innovation as well as community engagement ought to be facilitating a process of

shaping futures in our quest for human advancement and solving challenges facing humanity.

Our vision emphasises our deep commitment to being an Africa-focused and Africa-centred university that is globally competitive. A detailed concept document on what it means to be an African university, as well as a trend analysis that looked to the future to imagine the kinds of universities, stakeholders, students and global demands of the 2020s and 2030s, were part of the conceptual and analytical tools used in crafting the Strategic Plan 2016-2030. The strategy has simplified the mission statement, which is focused on lifelong learning and is nationally responsive and globally relevant. It also puts at the centre the student and allows for the provision and utilisation of cutting-edge ICT applications and platforms. The key features that informed the plan are:

- *The African university*
- Trend-setting *comprehensive* university
- Cutting-edge *open distance e-learning (ODeL)* institution
- *A quality student experience*
- *University of choice*
- Contextually relevant, optimised *centres of learning facilitation*
- Transformed and diverse university attuned to *national development*

- Leader in *higher education management and good governance*
- Unequivocal commitment to *high performance and innovation*

Building on its original values as espoused in the constitution

Unisa's updated and contextualised values reflect the changing environment, commitment and ethos of the university:

- Ethical and collective responsibility
- Integrity
- Innovation and excellence
- Responsive student-centredness
- Dignity in diversity

Colleagues if you are not familiar with these, you should be. They are in truth who and what we represent and as an institution our vision, mission and values underpin everything that we do.

But if we had been more prescient colleagues, we would have realised back in 2005, that we would be setting the tone for the future. While the plan was comprehensive and completely in tune with the prevailing context, perhaps because we had never done institutional planning on this scale or in the context of the new regulatory

framework, we were overly and unintentionally ambitious. The 2015 Strategic plan had 10 goals, 76 strategies and 78 targets; and each year we added to them! I recall a stage when we had 136 targets!

In hindsight, the very organic nature of a transforming institution in a transforming society teaches us that this is a very dynamic process – one that throws up new priorities, new challenges and the realisation that certain strategies have been rendered completely redundant before they were fully implemented. This is why we have such a strong emphasis on institutional agility and regular reviews.

In the past we had Institutional Operational Plans (IOPs), and now we have Annual Performance Plans (APPs). The former IOPs (now the APPs) became increasingly challenging in terms of implementation and completion as new key trends were identified each year and added to the existing planning framework in an increasingly complex regulatory environment.

For example, the *Unisa 2015: an agenda for transformation* had the following ten goals:

1. Effect a seamless transition to harmonized and coherent structures, policies, systems and practices for the merged institution.

2. Position Unisa as a leading provider of quality distance education programmes through an academic product range that expands on its comprehensive character.
3. Promote research, increased capacity and productivity aligned with national priorities for knowledge development.
4. Utilize the resources and capacities of the University in community development initiatives, and collaborative partnerships.
5. Establish service-orientated, technology-enhanced learner support to increase retention and throughput.
6. Create a nurturing environment to promote student well-being, to foster a sense of belonging to Unisa, and to mobilize alumni in the service of the University.
7. Establish quality governance, planning, administrative and management systems led by best practices.
8. Manage financial, human and infrastructural resources rationally to monitor expenditure, optimize value, manage risks and ensure financial sustainability.
9. Foster a healthy, secure and stimulating environment for staff, students and visitors, and protect the assets of the university.
10. Establish a performance-orientated approach.

By the time we got to 2015 Revisited, these had been reduced to seven reworked goals and supported by 23 strategies. However our *Achilles Heel*, if you would like to call it that, has always been in the number of *actions* which we commit to in implementing our strategies. It is worth noting that in the 2015 revisited, the goals comprised the following:

1. Revitalize the PQM, teaching and learning.
2. Increase innovative research and research capacity.
3. Grow community engagement initiatives.
4. Position Unisa as a leading ODL institution.
5. Create an enabling environment for persons with disabilities.
6. Establish Unisa as a leader in sound corporate governance and the promotion of sustainability.
7. Redesign organizational architecture in line with institutional strategy and the ODL model.

Most of those are still with us, which in my view is a concrete demonstration of the complexity of the task at hand and the yet to be resolved challenges of aligning and scheduling the interdependencies that are required by an ODeL institution the size of Unisa, for the effective implementation of its strategy.

Then colleagues, 2013 – 2015 marked a shift in emphasis for three key reasons. Having been a VC since 2011, I believed, and still believe, that one of the key lacks in our strategizing has been a limited focus on *people* and our communication with people - Unisa staff, students and stakeholders. This focus could not merely include people as part of a system or process, and focus solely on aspects such as staff development, and succession planning, as critical as these are. The focus on people in this context was more closely related to the cultural notion of valuing one another and of inclusiveness and belonging as characterised in Servant Leadership and the African philosophy of Ubuntu/Botho, articulated in our 11Cs plus one and in our Charter on Transformation. This belief contributed to the recent establishment of the Change Management Unit in my office and to our current commitment to a far broader interpretation of Transformation. Put simply colleagues, if you don't have the buy-in and onboarding of people, you will not succeed in the kind of implementation that will truly transform our university. That requires appropriate and impactful communication.

Second, we now had a new draft regulatory reporting framework (now promulgated) which introduced the notion of integrated reporting and which promoted and regulated governance, risk and compliance

in line with the King Code. So, one notes a clear shift in focus by DHET, from the emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness to an emphasis on accountability and responsibility – and governance and sustainability. AERMCoC understands very well that institutions are obligated to comply, irrespective of our personal sentiments around this.

Third, we were nearing the end of our Unisa 2015 planning cycle and deeply immersed in formulating our current strategy, and yet, the Unisa 2015 was no longer entirely aligned to the new demands of the regulatory environment, hence the interim *Unisa 2013 – 2015: towards a high performance university*.

The five approved Goals in *Unisa 2013–2015: Towards a High Performance University* were:

- 1) Improve academic performance in teaching and learning, research and innovation, and community engagement to enhance institutional impact and student success (*Focus Area: Academic*).
- 2) Establish Unisa as a leader in sound corporate governance and the promotion of sustainability (*Focus area: Governance and Sustainability*).
- 3) Promote service efficiency and effectiveness in the institution towards being a recognised student-centred Organisation (*Focus*

area: Service).

- 4) Establish a people-centred university by enhancing capabilities and capacities and advancing cultural transformation (*Focus area :People*).
- 5) Cultivate external stakeholders and stakeholder relationships. (*Focus area: Stakeholders*).

It should be noted that this planning period dealt in-depth with growing concerns around service.

At the same time, 2014 marked the beginning of the process of preparing the current strategy. During that year, the 2016–2030 strategy document had been broadly consulted and was in the final stages of discussion with Council. The dawning of the 2015 academic year thus found us at a critical juncture, straddling both the old and the new. As a university it was imperative that we conclude the business of the past 15 years emphatically so that we could move seamlessly and confidently into our new strategic era in 2016. All actions in our compacts with the Minister and Council had to be successfully finalized, ensuring that we did not enter our future with cumbersome “baggage” that diverted and diluted our attention and our capacities unnecessarily. Progress on these commitments was

thus vigorously driven and monitored very closely by management and Council, and yet still, we did not succeed as we would have liked to.

At the same time, in 2015, we also began preparing for the implementation of the first phase of our 2016–2030 strategy namely, 2016–2020. In line with the national and organizational trajectory, it will be no surprise to learn that Council approved three strategic goals for this period:

GOAL 1: Towards becoming a leading, ODeL, comprehensive university in teaching, learning, research, innovation and community engagement based on scholarship.

GOAL 2: To craft and embed an agile, innovative, sustainable and efficient operational environment.

GOAL 3: To establish innovative technology platforms for a high performing University.

But as you can see colleagues, we now pared the number of goals down. Our original ten goals in 2006, was as it was then, though now our goals comprise three. However, we now have 17 objectives and over 50 targets.

Colleagues, Unisa has a very mature and well documented strategy and planning model and history. It has clearly moved with the times. But throughout it has been susceptible to and hampered by the whimsy of individuals within the University, with some who have chosen to interpret policy creatively in ways that further agendas that have nothing to do with the university. This must stop. This is obviously a University and of course we encourage creativity and innovation, but this must be firmly within the ambit of our strategy and our vision.

And the only way that this will happen is if we work as a *team* that understands the regulatory environment in which we function, the manner in which our strategy is aligned to that environment, the unavoidable need for compliance and following due process in our implementation and that commits to offering support to one another, especially when it comes to our interdependencies – and we all have them.

In the current dynamic environment it is this discipline colleagues that will ensure clean audits and sound and transparent governance.

The AERMCoC has a hugely important role to play in our institutional governance, not only as a watchdog entity, but also as a champion and

disseminator of the message which I have just shared, and as a living example of sound and transparent governance in action, through your and our personal and collective conduct.

I thank you.