

## **Strategic Risk Leadership Conversations on Higher Education**

### **Theme: Disruption at the Base of the Pyramid – (therein) Unfolds a Paradox**

The third chapter of our Strategic Risk Leadership Conversations on HE is set to kick-off on 3 December 2019 – running through to the following day.

Sustained more by the “Why” rather than the “What” and “How”, this chapter is set to be unique in a number of ways. Firstly, the purpose, -viz. deepening the risk culture and strengthening the governance texture within organisations, is of fundamental essence. For instance, our country’s economy has shrunk during Q1 (2019) and thus tilting towards a potential recession? Relatedly, the unemployment rate reached its highest level in a quarter of a century? The trend of service delivery–premised protests by our broader communities has intensified and further multiplied – pointing towards titanic levels of importance etc.? Meanwhile, reverberations of evidence continuing to emerge from the Zondo Commission remain staggering to say the least – particularly since the network of role-players involved stretches beyond our country.

Contradictorily, therein has unfolded a paradox, in that, despite these (and other) challenges some disruptions – or disruptors – have set in. For instance:

- a. Our country held a peaceful national and provincial election, the 6<sup>th</sup> one in succession, and which was once again punctuated by consistent calm; how we pulled it off despite a record number of political parties (viz. 49) - and thus constituting a 152% increase - having contested the election?
- b. Foreign direct investment increased to R70,7bn in 2018, representing a 163% improvement – and thus a feat beyond perhaps the wildest imagination of any optimist. And this was in response to (in part) the rallying purpose – that deeply embedded sense of higher meaning – which the President and his Team leveraged on.
- c. Taking the optimist posture one imaginative stretch further, this year’s State of the Nation (SONA) painted a future picture of a smart city for our country. Sure, there are doubting Thomases – but so was the case when the (then) President J.F. Kennedy spoke of the US landing man on the moon for the first time within that decade of the 1960s. And it occurred successfully, with both Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin making history on 21 July 1969 – within the decade as promised by President Kennedy?

- d. The swing in terms of the research outputs landscape globally, which saw the US taking an emphatically commanding lead, and doing so with consistency began with a dreamy statement by Daniel Gilman's aspirational articulation of what a university should be, in Year 1872, viz.:

“Give us more and not less science. Encourage the most thorough and prolonged search for the truth which is to be found in the rocks, the sea, the air, the sun, and the stars; in light and heat, and magnetic forces, in plants and animals, and in human frame.”

Needless to reiterate, today the US continues to lead in terms of research outputs as well as, relatedly, the number of universities that feature in, for instance, the Top 100 in terms of global rankings?

- e. The titanic battle for Africa's economic supremacy that rages on between Nigeria and South Africa remains a marvel to watch. Its parallel, the China/USA one on the global stage, also serves as a lesson on how far **clarity of purpose** (i.e. the “Why”) could swing the scales, (and) effectively rewriting the rules of the game.

Similarly, despite her relatively smaller economy, Rwanda has turned the tide, seeking to remake her world – or is it country – following the saddening 1994 genocide that shook the global community. That this country continues to operate at economic growth rates of above 7% despite challenges in terms of importing the required raw material and pertinent technology – and despite a dampened global economy - once again underscores the disruption that becomes possible with clarity of purpose, the “Why”?

Finally, coming closer home, our sector (the Higher Education), continues to have its set of challenges. For instance, despite delivering some of the finest brains for various sectors of industry, and supporting efforts towards finding innovative solutions, we remain largely conservative. Our innovative posture remains stifled by strongly hierarchical structures, and our decision-making processes are still deeply engulfed in bureaucratic committee-premised hurdles. We seem to be inherently inward-looking despite the fast-paced changes in the external environment surrounding us.

## Concept Note on the SRLC-HE (2019)

It is thus against this background that the largest distance learning institution on the African continent has once again convened the Strategic Risk Leadership Conversations on Higher Education. Germane about proceedings of our 2019 Chapter, at least expectedly, is the promise that both speakers and delegates will distil definitive solutions embedded in the midst of our daily challenges. What it takes to disrupt the status quo whilst seizing emerging innovative opportunities, how to embrace the art of navigating through fluidity whilst remaining competitive, how clarity of purpose – that deeper commitment towards a higher ideal - contributes towards strategic resilience for individuals, organisations, a country and our beautiful Continent, is a key message we hope to illuminate through the SRLC-HE 2019!