

Education on the African continent focus of UFS Africa Month celebrations

By Leonie Bolleurs

SEOs: Dr Marinkie Madiope, Poloko Masuelele, Department of Open and Distance Learning, Ms Zola Thamae, Free State Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation, Prof Francis Petersen, Paul Kagame, Prof Lynette Jacobs, Unit for Institutional Change and Social Justice, Prof Colin Chasi, Curriculum Design and Development Unit

Amid great fanfare, colour, and song, the South Campus of the University of the Free State (UFS) kicked off Africa Month in celebration of education on the African continent.

Delivering welcoming remarks on behalf of Dr Marinkie Madiope – the South Campus Principal – was Poloko Masuelele, Assistant Director heading the Curriculum Design and Development Unit on the South Campus. “The African continent is suffering a great deal of challenges, including the scourges of malnutrition and strained delivery of basic education. How revolutionary would it be if we could simultaneously eradicate these vices by formulating policies, mechanisms, and vehicles that would enable us to feed, heal, and teach our people? It is incumbent on us as thought leaders to take the lead in this significant enterprise.”

Bringing a government prospect, was Ms Zola Thamae, the Acting Director in the Free State Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation. She stated that there is much that could be done to address challenges in Africa if the university and government take hands. She also urged students to read and educate themselves in order to change their background.

Searching for African solutions

Prof Francis Petersen, Rector and Vice-Chancellor of the UFS, delivered the keynote address. Focusing on the theme of Africa Month, he said when it comes to educational development, there is no other continent that has faced the same trials and challenges as ours. “But in the harsh crucible of history, character, tenacity, and a sense of ubuntu were forged, translating into an exciting, fertile breeding ground for new knowledge creation, independent thought, and innovation,” he added.

He quoted Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda, who said, “Africa’s story has been written by others; we need to own our problems and solutions and write our own story,” and added that over the past few decades, on many fronts and in many spheres – also in education – this is exactly what has been happening.

“We are actively searching for African solutions to African problems. The value we can offer is substantial,” he said.

Prof Petersen expressed confidence not only in Africa’s people, but also in what they are bringing to the table. “While Africa has established itself as an attractive investment destination, it is now more sought after for its people than for its physical assets. And its people have been driving exciting and encouraging developments in education.”

“In terms of Africa’s contribution to global knowledge, the world is slowly but surely acknowledging the abundant evidence of scientific innovation contributed by African scholars – not only at present, but since the earliest times.”

He also trusts that Africans have advanced considerably in decolonialising curricula. “Across our continent, African history, achievements, and discoveries have been absorbed into

school curriculums, replacing a Eurocentric focus in education, and fulfilling the vision of Africans *owning their own story*. Most higher education institutions – the UFS included – have over the past decade or two also been engaged in a comprehensive, systematic process of decolonising our curricula – incorporating the knowledge created on our own continent in various study fields.”

Despite these encouraging milestones that education has reached in Africa, Prof Petersen is of the opinion that much remains to be done. “As custodians of higher education in Africa, and as part of the larger education sector, we have our work cut out for us,” he stated.

He believes that the unique point in time in which Africa finds itself presents an opportunity to completely reimagine the entire education landscape.

Collectively we will succeed

Also contributing some valuable input to the celebratory event, was Prof Lynette Jacobs, Associate Professor in the Department of Open and Distance Learning. She stated that one of the problems of colonial education is that it does not cultivate African self-esteem. Quoting President Julius Nyerere, she shared that “Education should not alienate students from their traditions but should rather make them appreciate themselves as Africans.”

According to her, Africans have lost the confidence to celebrate themselves in their African cultures and traditions within the formal education environment.

“Collectiveness, togetherness, dialogue, and being authentically human are what Africa brings to the world. The world has so much to learn from Africa,” she said and asked the audience, “Do you embrace who you are and are you proud to share it with the rest of the world?”

Representing the Unit for Institutional Change and Social Justice was Prof Colin Chasi. He emphasised the importance of working together to bring about positive change in Africa. “We enhance our capacity if we are working together. Collectively we will succeed; separately we will suffer a terrible fate,” he stated.

Photo Caption

Attending the Africa Month celebrations on the UFS South Campus were, from the left: Temba Hlasho, Executive Director: Student Affairs; Thandeka Mosholi, Head: Social Responsibility, Enterprise, and Community Engagement; Prof Colin Chasi; Ms Zola Thamae; Prof Francis Petersen; Simphiwe Dube, South Campus SRC President; Dr Cornelius Hagenmeier, Director: Office for International Affairs; Poloko Masuelele; Nombulelo Shange, Lecturer in Sociology; and Bulelwa Moikwatlhai (seated), Office for International Affairs.

Photo: Dries Myburg

Quote:

“Empower yourself through education and own your space.” – Simphiwe Dube

Links

Poloko Masuelele <https://www.linkedin.com/in/poloko-masuelele-2bb099211/?originalSubdomain=za>

Department of Open and Distance Learning <https://www.ufs.ac.za/southcampus/south-campus-home/South-Campus-Formal-Programmes/homepage>

Ms Zola Thamae <https://www.linkedin.com/in/zola-thamae-54a183110/?originalSubdomain=za>

Free State Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation

<https://provincialgovernment.co.za/units/view/27/free-state/sport-arts-culture-and-recreation>

Prof Francis Petersen [https://www.ufs.ac.za/adhoc-pages/rectorate/prof-\(fw\)-francis-petersen](https://www.ufs.ac.za/adhoc-pages/rectorate/prof-(fw)-francis-petersen)

Prof Lynette Jacobs <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lynette-jacobs-b0623a34/?originalSubdomain=za>

Unit for Institutional Change and Social Justice

<https://www.ufs.ac.za/institute#:~:text=The%20vision%20of%20the%20Unit,Discrimination%20on%20all%20three%20campuses.>

Prof Colin Chasi <https://www.ufs.ac.za/institute/staff/colin-chasi>

Social media

Amid great fanfare, colour, and song, the UFS South Campus kicked off Africa Month in celebration of education on the African continent.

Prof Francis Petersen, Rector and Vice-Chancellor, addressed a group of staff and students in the context of education on the African continent, and said: “We are actively searching for African solutions to African problems. The value we can offer is substantial.”

He also trusts that Africans have advanced considerably in decolonialising curricula. “Across our continent, African history, achievements, and discoveries have been absorbed into school curriculums, replacing a Eurocentric focus in education, and fulfilling the vision of Africans *owning their own story*. Most higher education institutions – the UFS included – have over the past decade or two also been engaged in a comprehensive, systematic process of decolonising our curricula – incorporating the knowledge created on our own continent in various study fields.”

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