

Eighth Annual Africa Day Commemoration



In the picture: David Mashabela (host) and guests Prof Bonang Mohale, UFS Chancellor, and Dr Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor, former Minister of International Relations and Cooperation.

The Internationalisation @ Home portfolio under the Office for International Affairs hosted the eighth Annual Africa Day commemoration on 22 May 2025 in the Albert Wessels Auditorium on the UFS Bloemfontein Campus. This year's celebration focused on Africa's Future in Higher Education and Global Impact. The event was in a podcast format, with esteemed guests and notable leaders in higher education, namely Prof Bonang Mohale, the UFS Chancellor, and Dr Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor, former Minister of International Relations and Cooperation. The discussion was led by the Radio 2000 presenter and King David Studio podcast host on YouTube, David Mashabela. The discussion touched on the contribution of institutions of higher learning to Africa's development, driving policy change for the enhancement of higher education systems across the continent. The event aimed to reach a wider audience and accommodate the UFS community, including staff and students; consequently, it was held from 19:00 to 20:30, with a total of 150 audience members attending in person.

Prof Anthea Rhoda welcomed the guests on behalf of the UFS Vice-Chancellor, Prof Kloppe. In her welcoming speech, she said that this Africa Day commemoration opened up a thought-provoking discussion on the future of higher education on the continent. She added that the University of the Free State “strives to position itself as the key contributor to shaping Africa’s education and global trajectory”. She concluded by saying that “this podcast exemplifies the kind of platform we need, where diverse ideas can flow freely”. Delving into the UFS Vision 130 – which speaks of global impact – Prof Mohale responded to how the UFS balances its big ambitions and counteracts fundamental day-to-day challenges. He touched on the wealth of Africa and where our stories are shelved, as well as the importance of Africa being a custodian and a narrator of its own stories, noting that higher education should be a library of these stories and guide how African stories are told. He also touched on South African leadership and current democracy, stating that our leaders have forgotten the premise for the fight against apartheid and the souls who died fighting for freedom; hence, 31 years into democracy, we still have fundamental issues, yet with big ambitions.

Dr Naledi Pandor responded to a question about how universities can influence what happens in the world. She stated that South African universities play a significant role in the context of freedom of expression, democracy, and free academic activities; however, even with the skills and qualities to influence the world, South African universities do not know how to harness these skills to contribute to communities and develop South Africa. Dr Pandor suggested that for South African universities to make a global impact, a collective approach must be adopted by both government and private sector entities so that the work done by academics can come to fruition. She said that the private sector should bridge the gap and lend a hand in higher education initiatives that end up being dissolved because of the lack of funding, referring to the closure of the KwaZulu-Natal Research Institute for Tuberculosis and HIV, which was making a significant impact on developing cures for HIV.

Considering our problems, we still have things to appreciate

The discussion also highlighted the long-standing issue of oppression and how South Africans perceive it today. Dr Pandor stated that we have been dwelling on our problems for too long instead of finding solutions, and we have no hope that we can drive change. Our primary issue is being defined as inadequate, because we have a considerable number of positive attributes in South Africa. Therefore, we should not

allow our problems to define us as incompetent and dispute the notion that South Africa has not produced anything for 30 years, because if we perpetuate this, others will continue to have the upper hand over us. We should celebrate that 12 million children go to school every day in South Africa, and for 30 years now we have more than 1 million students in higher education.

Dr Pandor said that universities should conscientise young people to drive this change by offering courses that will give them skills instead of theories, because if we continue to produce many graduates in the Humanities and disregard artisans and other scarce skills, South Africa will remain a developing country. In the quest to solve our problems in higher education and South Africa as a whole, Prof Mohale believes that we need an inclusive mindset and do away with the saying 'I can' and adopt a more inclusive and collaborative approach of 'We can'. This approach will help us build institutions of higher learning that resemble us and is for us as the black community.

Decolonising education: are we learning the right things?

Generation X was fighting against Bantu education. Comparatively, the Millennials and Generation Z are fighting for a relevant education, David Mashabela said. Dr Pandor believes that young people are fighting for decolonisation because they are 'not learning the right things.' She supported her argument that South African universities produce academic graduates, not artisans and technicians. Some would understand decolonisation of education through the lens of changing the Eurocentric curriculum, but Dr Pandor explained it in the context of the current issue of unemployment. Indeed, decolonising should not only be about changing Western perspectives, but also about what universities are producing regarding the job market and the country's development.

Referring to his book, *Lift as you Rise*, Prof Mohale suggested that we can curb our economic challenges by investing in low-profile occupations. In doing that, we would be setting a new narrative and building leaders who are servants rather than those who serve themselves. The discussion concluded with the pressing issue of funding in higher education; both speakers agreed that we need multiple funding models,

emphasising collaboration between the government and the private sector, because funding from the government alone is not adequate.