

# NELSON MANDELA

## UNIVERSITY

**Transformation Indaba**  
**"Setting the Scene"**  
**Professor Sibongile Muthwa**  
**09:00 9 February 2022**  
**ZOOM platform**

MANCO members, extended MANCO members, staff, students, guests - Sanibonani, Molweni, good morning, goeie môre.

Best wishes for 2022 – and many thanks for putting in the hard work over the past two years – we are here; still standing, operating and thriving amidst a multitude of constraints and extraneous factors.

We are grateful to all our staff, students and stakeholders ... for staying the course.

Perhaps we now, in this moment, have a clearer sense of what it means to be Mandela University.

A university, to be truly a university, needs to embed itself in the social realities of the society in whose name it exists. To do so, suggests that universities configure themselves as transformative institutions capable of translating societal aspirations into the way it does its work.

In short ... we should shift from the university's historical position of social aloofness, to social embeddedness and strive to be a good, just university. How we transform and where we are transforming to is thus critical to our own institutional ambitions.

Transformation is thus not an end in itself, but a prerequisite for the university to achieve its ambitions which are entangled with the development imperatives of our country, our Continent and the globe.

It is thus a great privilege for me to be opening the very first Transformation Indaba of the Nelson Mandela University, providing a space for us to:

- a. firstly, reflect on what we have accomplished since the implementation of our first Council-approved five-year Institutional Transformation Plan (2018 – 2020), drawing on the lessons learnt - but also improving where required to do so, and
- b. secondly, on day 2, to start our conversations relating to our new and/or revised transformation goals for the next 5 years, namely 2023-2027.

In 2018, when I started my tenure as the VC of this university, I posed the following question in my inaugural address – What are Universities for? This question is central to our transformation agenda and is reflected in our University's Vision 2030 strategic plan as well as our Mission, Vision and Values. Nelson Mandela University, in service of society – continues to focus on the hard realities of our broader socio-economic, politico-cultural and environmental challenges.

We also have a greater calling ... instantiated by carrying the Mandela name. Why is this so? In a world ravaged by so many challenges that pushes greater numbers of our people to the brink of demise and ruin, our task is that of holding steadfast onto the incomparable legacy of Nelson Mandela as the fountainhead of our praxes.

Mandela, for our university, is not simply a name ... but an action. This action should radiate through our institutional identity and our programmes.

The Mandela action is a responsibility that lies with all of us, staff and students – who we are as Mandela; how do each of us, in our different spaces (whether academic, professional and support services, or students), contribute towards being a university in service of society, and also hold each other accountable when our actions or lack thereof, are contrary to the institutional mission, vision and values.

When we started with the implementation of the first ITP in 2018, the world was very different to the one we live in today in 2022. It has become less predictable, with increased uncertainty and volatility being the new normal/abnormal? Over the past two years, in particular, these challenges and uncertainties have played themselves out in various ways across all sectors, including the higher education sector, and in particular our university – we can all attest to this. The criticality of a transformative-responsive University, in service of society, became sharper, more pronounced, more urgent - as we face these unpredictable situations that we continue to navigate.

With these unpredictable times, the issues of resource stewardship and resource mobilisation persist. Working with the existing or less resources, while keeping to our values of excellence and sustainable stewardship, will require us to be creative, shifting our conceptual paradigms to ‘thinking outside the proverbial box’.

Expansion of our international partnerships / collaborations, access to international opportunities (including funding, capacity building, research projects, visiting scholars, joint qualifications, increased international enrolments at under- and postgraduate levels - to name a few) will enrich the quality of the scholarship and operations, where relevant, based on these diverse exposures. Within the University, each of us are change agents in the spaces where we work. So, if you have an idea of doing something better, for example, reducing replication in a work process, transitioning from manual paper-based to technology-enabled - share your ideas with your line manager! We are all in this together - we need to collectively contribute towards the sustainability of our university to be in service of future generations.

Despite the surrounding unpredictability, we have been provided with great opportunities to be creative and innovative, to unlearn / undo the old ways of conducting our core and support functions, and reimagine new ways of conducting our functions within these exigent/ arduous circumstances. We continue to review and have become more self-reflexive, as individuals and as a university. Through this we have and can align our praxis with the outcomes we have set ourselves in Vision 2030 and anchor our scholarly work on being an inclusive, engaged and engaging institution.

The next two days we will be listening to examples of how the University is playing a key role in engaging with our various communities. To be a transformative, responsive university, we do need to continue to co-create and co-construct by

intentionally listening and hearing what our communities need. The insights and learnings generated from these interactions will push forward the frontiers of knowledge and cultivate socially conscious graduates who make a positive impact on society as responsible global citizens and leaders.

The draft transformation report compiled by Dr Levendal, which will be discussed at this indaba, indicates that we are shifting in right directions; but that there is still much work to be done.

I hope that everyone present will actively participate and authentically share in these discussions and I look forward to working with you towards the development and implementation of our next five-year Institutional Transformation Plan.

I thank you