

THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, DR BLADE NZIMANDE
ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF THE SIBUSISO BENGU DEVELOPMENT
GRANT AT ZIMBALI LODGE

22 July 2022

Our Distinguished guest of honour, Professor Sibusiso Bengu;
KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Education Honourable Kwazi Mshengu;
Director-General of the Department of Higher Education and Training, Dr Nkosithathi Sishi;
Deputy Director-General of the Department of Science and Innovation, Mr Imraan Patel;
KwaZulu-Natal Education Head of Department Mr Nkosinathi Ngcobo;
Members of the National Steering Committee;
Chairs of Council and Vice-Chancellors present;
Chief Executive Officers of our partner entities and the steering committee members (USAF,
NIHSS & CHE);
Senior Managers at the Department of Higher Education and Training;
Members of the media;
Ladies and gentlemen

Good afternoon

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude to Professor Sibusiso Bengu and his family for joining us on this special occasion.

Again, my gratitude goes to Professor Bengu for accepting and honouring our government's request to rename what was previously known as the Historically Disadvantaged Institutions Development Grant (HDI-DG) to be the Sibusiso Bengu Development Programme (SB-DP) in his honour.

The new name signifies Prof Bengu's legacy and his illustrious contributions towards the Post School Education and Training (PSET) in South Africa, especially his role as the first Minister of Education in a democratic South Africa in 1994.

It is Prof Bengu's proposals that in 2005 served as the genesis of our transformation journey in the higher education system.

Unlike the fragmented, inefficient and inequitable higher education 'system' of the apartheid era, our country now boasts a single, national, and co-ordinated Post School Education and Training sector (PSET) that is open to all.

Enrolments have increased significantly and through the establishment and expansion of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), poor students now have much expanded opportunities to access and participate in the post school education and training sector.

University research outputs have increased significantly and several of our universities are internationally recognised as citadels of excellence.

The principles that underpinned our funding framework for universities foregrounds transformation as a central pillar of its framework, and is amongst the many contributions by Prof Bengu to ensure that we truly transform our historically disadvantaged universities into universities of choice.

Ngcolosi, ngaphandle kokubonisa igalelo lakho elikhulu, umlando wezemfundo eNingizimu Afrika kungabe awuphelelanga.

Today, on behalf of our government and the people of South Africa, I want to thank you so much and say that we are indeed honoured that you are indeed accepting our request to name this programme after you. No one else would have better deserved this honour than yourself.

I remember very well when I visited you at home to see you and asked you to accept the naming of this programme, you gladly accepted but expressed your wish that this programme must not fail. We are indeed giving you all the assurance that indeed we will do all in our power to mak it a success.

Thank you very much Ngcolosi!

Background

Ladies and gentlemen

Perhaps it is important for me to give a brief historical background in our journey in the transformation of our Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDI's).

Our Historically Disadvantaged Institutions are universities which were established as non-white universities following the recommendations of the Eiselen Commission in 1959, through the Extension of the University Education Act of 1959 which specifically prohibited racially integrated higher education. But look at the crockery of apartheid, they name the act as extension of university education when they were enforcing racially segregated and unequal university education!

In 2013, our democratic government established a Ministerial Committee to review the funding of universities across the country with an aim to redress these past injustices.

The Report of the Ministerial Committee for the Review of the Funding of Universities, chaired by none other than his Excellency, the Honourable President, Cyril Ramaphosa, before he joined government in 2014. We have identified eight (8) contact universities as Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs) from 2015/16 onwards, namely:

- University of Fort Hare;
- University Limpopo;
- University of Venda;
- Walter Sisulu University;
- The University of the Western Cape;
- University of Zululand;
- Mangosuthu University of Technology; and
- Sefako Makgatho Health Science University

The Committee, advocated for the establishment of the Historically Disadvantaged Institutions Development Grant.

The purpose of the review amongst others was to determine whether the funding framework in existence exacerbates the financial challenges of the historically disadvantaged universities.

The Funding Review Committee established that the needs of individual universities far exceeded the resources that are available, and in many respects, it was the predominately Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs) which historically received lesser resources than their counterparts, and were mostly located in the least developed geographical parts of our country.

It is the Funding Review Committee's recommendation that a special dispensation for these universities must be considered as they will pose grave constraints to their academic enterprise and mandate.

Due to the historic injustices, HDIs in their nature, are not financially well off as they have not generated sufficient reserves to ensure that they sustain themselves fully. Therefore, they are highly dependent on state funding and student fees for their survival.

Regardless of these challenges faced by the HDIs, historically these institutions account for the development of a significant portion of our leaders in South Africa and on the continent.

From the University of Fort Hare came President Nelson Mandela, Yusuf Lule of Uganda, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Ntsu Mokhehle of Lesotho, Sir Seretse Khama of Botswana and our honorary guest, Prof Bengu who also became Fort Hare's Vice Chancellor. From University of Limpopo emerged our very own President Cyril Ramaphosa, Frank Chikane and others and from Unizulu the former Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng, Former Minister Hlengiwe Mkhize, Mxolisi Nxasana, Sibongile Khumalo, Chief Justice Raymond Zondo and many others.

One can only imagine how many more talented professionals and leaders would have been produced from our historically disadvantaged universities had they been provided with adequate teaching and development facilities. The production of such leadership calibre went against the plans of the apartheid regime, whose aim was to suppress black talent and leadership.

Sibusiso Bengu Development Programme

Ladies and gentlemen

Our Department has noted with great concern the continuing challenges faced by our Historically Disadvantaged Institutions, especially their low spending patterns and inclination towards the generation of high level of interest from unspent funds whilst national fiscus constraints become more self-evident.

I therefore established the Sibusiso Bengu Development Programme (SB- DP) with the purpose to decisively redress the inequalities that have negatively impacted the development and sustainability of the HDIs.

This programme will ensure that it contributes to HDIs' further development as strong, socially embedded and responsive institutions in a diversified post-school education and training system.

The Sibusiso Bengu Development Programme (SB-DP) will work on high-level priority areas, proceeding from the premise that, if these priorities are decisively addressed, multiple secondary and tertiary issues would then also be addressed. In other words, this programme must act as a catalyst for further development and strengthening of our university system.

It is recognised that there are a range of other cross-cutting imperatives that our HDI's should be responding to. These include, but not limited to:

- Decolonisation in higher education;
- Indigenous knowledge systems;
- The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and digitisation;
- Blended learning;
- Entrepreneurship development; and
- Environmental sustainability;
- Strengthening and playing a critical role in our National System of Innovation, including research development

Let me highlight some of the most critical strategic priorities that the SBDP will be prioritising:

1. the SBDP will establish, strengthen and capacitate institutional management and governance structures, systems and processes, including student governance.
2. the SBDP will improve teaching infrastructure, research infrastructure, student housing, information and communications technology (ICT) and digital infrastructure, and sports infrastructure.
3. the SBDP will enhance student experience through a focus on student life and student success, and through the creation of safe environments.

4. the SBDP will enable effective staff recruitment, retention and progression, including through improving staff qualifications, creating a supportive staff environment, having attractive and reasonable work conditions, and providing effective teaching, research and professional development opportunities for staff.

5. the SBDP will ensure responsive qualifications, programmes and curricula, as well as streamlined Project Quality Management Systems (PQMs) that reflect the university's individual identity and the role it plays, or seeks to play, in a diversified higher education landscape.

6. the SBDP will identify and develop research-focus areas that characterise the identity and aspirations of each institution, and build innovation and technology transfer capacity that enables the research to impact on society, industry and the economy.

7. the SBDP will leverage local, regional, national and international collaboration and partnerships to support the development of these universities whilst at the same time contributing to the development of localities and communities, possibly through adopting an anchor-institution approach as a means of aligning with the district-development model approach as advanced by government.

Resourcing the Sibusiso Bengu Development Programme

The main resource for the SB-DP is the Sibusiso Bengu Development Grant (SB-DG), which will take the form of an annual earmarked grant.

This will replace the HDI Development Grant (HDI DG) which was approved in 2013, to enable our eight (8) designated universities to address historic challenges and build a strong developmental trajectory going forward.

Since the introduction of the HDI Development Grant (HDI DG) and the HDI-Development Programme (HDI-DP) in 2016 the Department has made a total of R1.87 billion available for investment in the HDIs, and we will be transferring over R390 million during the current financial cycle.

The overall purpose of these funds is to put in place systems and mechanisms to develop and ensure the sustainability of the institutions through healthy state of finances, safety and security, infrastructure development, third stream income development, governance and staff and student development.

I have no doubt that our HDIs will ensure that they use this grant and programme as a propeller to greater heights in honour of their illustrious alumni, and that they will finally assume their rightful positions in our differentiated PSET system.

The aim is not to develop our HDIs to mimick the historically advantaged institutions, but must develop their own unique areas of specialisation and strengths that would contribute to the overall growth and development of a diversified university system.

It must also be borne in mind that most of our HDIs cater for students who come from the rural areas, and therefore catering for students who come from the poorest of families.

It is also important that all stakeholders must realise that while adequate levels of government funding are central to driving the vision of the post school education and training, public accountability for the use of such funds remains a key priority.

I am also considering the establishment of Communities of Practice (CoPs) to support the universities to implement their projects.

In addition, the teams in collaboration with DHET will advise on the feasibility, viability, sustainability, budgets and potential impact of proposed projects and activities.

As a Department, we will be strengthening our Monitoring and Evaluation capability in order for us to assess the progress in transforming these institutions. This capacity will be based within our University Education Branch.

Another important development to note is that through our Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI), we have embarked on a strategy to assist the HDIs in increasing their research capacity through bilateral and multilateral engagements.

The strategy will enable the HDIs to increase their global footprint within the research environment and compete with the best universities in the world.

I must indicate that as government we have committed ourselves to strengthen and develop the PSET sector by investing in infrastructure to provide quality teaching, learning and research and innovation spaces.

Over the past ten year, we have strengthened our investment in infrastructure projects across our 26 universities by investing a total of R21.2 billion, of which 7.6 billion was earmarked for HDI amount to 37.4%.

We are prioritising equipment and teaching resources, including a conducive student living and learning environment.

Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (SSAUF)

My Department of Higher Education and Training, through the Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (SSAUF), will continue to support our universities particularly in staff development and their corps of better qualified academics.

The SSAUF takes as its starting point the urgent imperative to recruit, support and retain black academic staff to address their very serious under-representation at all levels in the sector.

The SSAUF intends to make possible a rapid increase in the number of people likely to enter the academic profession and is designed also to have a significant systemic effect through its emphasis on multi-faceted, phased development.

Through a Ministerial Task Team we have also undertaken a comprehensive study of the factors that inhibit the recruitment, retention and promotion of black and women South African academics in our university sector.

This study and its recommendations, which will officially be publicly releasing in the coming weeks, will go a long way in also contributing to strengthening and transforming the academic enterprise in our HDIs, though this study is targeting black and women academics in all of our universities.

Support for the District Development Model

One other important factor to be taken into account is that all our institutions are critical resources in supporting government's District Development Model (DDM).

Cabinet adopted the District Development Model, which is intended to advance service delivery in order to reach the people in each of our 44 districts and 8 metros.

All government policy, planning and initiatives are required to be spatially referenced to the local context. This includes the role that public education institutions and all universities must play in resolving a number of challenges afflicting society.

In this case all of our institutions must have a local footing and a national and global outlook.

This means that our institutions should participate at district level to ensure economic sustainability of our towns, cities and rural villages, whilst at the same time remaining nationally and globally relevant.

Through the development of our institutions we stand in a good position to build new cities and towns and expand the economy of our current cities and towns through the provision of infrastructure and new knowledge through research and innovation.

There is no reason why all the places where our HDIs are located should not be developing into viable towns and cities, as has happened in our country and internationally.

This will also mean that our SBDP must actively and dynamically link up with developmental programmes in the districts where these universities are located and be part of pulling together all resources - public and private - in each of these districts.

This is a task that all our institutions must embrace without any fail.

Conclusion

Programme Director

In conclusion, I wish all our designated institutions success and from our side as a department, we look forward to continuing working with you in making sure that we have sustainable universities and campuses with strong individual identities, responsive to the local context and respected in the global PSET sphere.

I thank you all for your contribution in ensuring that the purpose of the grant is realised.

To the Bengu Family, the sector is indebted to the contribution of Prof Bengu, as he is an inspiration to many of us. Thank you once again for allowing the PSET sector to honour the legacy of your father.

Prof Bengu, your tenacity and leadership remains and indelible component of history and conscience.

I thank you DG, and your team for making this day a success.

Thank you