

Keynote Address at the Virtual National Indigenous Knowledge Systems Job Summit 30-31 March 2021

Delivered on behalf of Minister Blade Nzimande by Dr. Mmboneni Muofhe

Programme Director;

Vice-Chancellor of North-West University – Professor Dan Kgwadi;

Executive Management of North-West University;

Dignitaries;

Representatives from various government departments

Traditional leaders – Musanda Vho-Ramabulana

Representatives of the Private Sector and Industry

Universities represented including those from neighbouring countries such as Namibia

Distinguished guests;

IKS Ambassadors;

IKS staff members, graduates and students;

Indigenous knowledge holders and practitioners;

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to present the key-note address at such an important event as the Job Summit for Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). This is the 1st National IKS Job Summit hosted by a consortium of institutions of higher learning, which includes North-West University, University of Limpopo, University of Venda and University of KwaZulu Natal.

It is always the government's and my own concern that institutes of higher learning should not produce graduates who end up being either jobless or taking up jobs not relevant to their qualifications. A forum such as this one provides a good platform to brainstorm and find strategies and plans to address this problem.

The meaning of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) is well known to all in attendance here, as many aspects of IKS have been dealt with in the

first day of this summit. Indigenous knowledge (IK) and indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) are unique to a given culture or society (as per Ellen and Harris, 1996). However, I wish to emphasise that it not only entails knowledge and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural environments, but importantly it also encompasses the skills thereof. That is the focus of the job summit: how do we leverage the skills and technologies that we have acquired from our complex cultural interactions and apply them to our daily lives.

This job summit has brought together in a 'one stop' fashion most – if not all – relevant and related themes of IKS as drivers in the job market. These themes range from entrepreneurship; to the public and private sectors; the arts; traditional and cultural heritage; the 4th Industrial Revolution; teaching and learning; research and innovation; economic development; agriculture; and health.

Ladies and gentlemen, IKS has taught us that the world's cultural diversity can be localised, i.e. generated by particular people group in a geographical area; transmitted orally through imitation and demonstration; shared or distributed within the population group through gender, age and memories of individuals, as well as the interactions and practices that people engage in (The Herald, 2021).

IK and IKS are therefore viewed as separate and different from 'international knowledge systems', which include knowledge generated by universities, research institutions and private firms. Hence, international knowledge is created from modern scientific systems of research and development, which are all part of the global scientific and technological enterprise of human civilisation.

This knowledge is acquired through formal education and 'book learning' and enhanced by advanced study, internships, training and mentoring that essentially ensure that the extant avenues and processes for scientific knowledge creation, affirmation and dissemination are maintained and continued.

Juxtaposed, IK is mostly undocumented knowledge transmitted primarily through oral traditions and the custodians are the elders who do not necessarily have any formal education.

The North-West University is a pioneer of IKS in South Africa due to the fact that it is the first institution of higher learning to have an accredited programme, namely a Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (BIKS), which was registered in 2013 with the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) and approved by the Council for Higher Education (CHE). Subsequently, other higher education institutions also registered

BIKS degrees or are in the process of doing so and the DSI/NRF IKS Centre is currently hosted by the University of KwaZulu Natal.

The integration of African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKS) into higher education provides many opportunities for students to learn through culture in many forms, including folk stories, songs, folk drama, legends, proverbs, myths, and many more. It also allows the opportunity to learn across generations, thus transferring culture from one generation to the next. Furthermore, it provides the space for the decolonisation of education, including the curriculum, transformation, redress of the past injustices and the promotion of African indigenous languages in teaching and learning.

The DSI also has a number of programmes and strategies that are aimed at the promotion and development of IKS in South Africa. In order to achieve this, the DSI collaborates with universities, science councils and government departments that are focused on promotion of IKS. The DSI has facilitated the regulatory framework for the protection, promotion, and management of indigenous knowledge and this has led to the IKS Act which was signed by the Honourable President Cyril Ramaphosa in August 2019.

Ladies and gentleman, since the dawn of the new democratic dispensation, South Africa has faced the socio-economic problem of high and persistent unemployment, especially among the youth and graduates of various institutions of higher learning. Since the beginning of the 2000s, a number of studies have focused particularly on youth and graduate unemployment, but there has been a lack of research in the area of IKS unemployed graduates, which has left a huge gap in the job market for IKS graduates. This gap continues to be a concern for previous and current IKS students and if left unattended, can cause more harm to the programme and graduates alike.

Therefore, it is very significant to bring the entire nation to a national summit such as this, that will provide strategies and prospects for decent work, productive employment and entrepreneurial prospects for IKS graduates across the entire country.

The challenges of IKS unemployed graduates do not only result in frustration, but also lead to emotional, spiritual, and economic stress, while also contributing to the impoverishment of the African family. This phenomenon must not be viewed in isolation, but against the entire struggle of African students who are facing challenges of employment in South Africa and the rest of the African continent.

Hence, this summit aims to fill some gaps by bringing not only government departments, but also the private or business sector, institutions of higher learning, as well as students and other relevant stakeholders together to address the plight of unemployed IKS graduates.

The summit seeks to explore innovative approaches to support public and private initiatives to create productive employment and sustainable entrepreneurship opportunities for IKS graduates through engaging various stakeholders in the public, private sectors and various community organizations.

The summit also seeks to focus on developing a cadre of IKS graduates who have entrepreneurial skills that they can utilise to develop themselves and empower local communities socially, culturally and economically.

A database of all unemployed, underemployed IKS graduates needs to be compiled to assist government in partnership with other stakeholders to provide available and immediate intervention measures through work integrated learning, internships, job opportunities and training in entrepreneurship.

Research studies into the phenomenon of unemployed graduates reveal possible causes such as lack of experience, lack of soft skills, skills mismatches, poor quality of education of the graduates and discrimination by employers.

The issue of graduate unemployment is however not unique to South Africa and is a global phenomenon in countries like India, China and Europe.

In South Africa, the unemployment rate rose to 32.5% in the fourth quarter of 2020 from 30.8% in the previous period. It was the highest jobless rate since quarterly data became available in 2008, with more people entering the labour market and actively looking for jobs.

According to Statistics South Africa, about 13% of youth between the age of 20 and 34 are graduates. Less than 20% of people over the age of 30 are unemployed in South Africa compared to more than 45% for people younger than 30. The unemployment rate for graduates according to the 2019 QLFS is about 2.1%. The situation has now become more serious and devastating due to the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for

people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

During the UN General Assembly in September 2015, decent work and the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda, employment creation, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue became integral elements of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda calls for the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work, and will be a key area of engagement for the ILO and its constituents.

Furthermore, key aspects of decent work are widely embedded in the targets of many of the other 16 goals of the UN's new development vision.

South Africa's Indigenous Knowledge Systems Policy was approved by Cabinet in 2004, and the National Indigenous Knowledge Systems Office (NIKSO) was opened in the Department of Science and Technology in 2006. Proposing the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in the arenas of education, commerce, agriculture, the sciences, law, languages, arts, social sciences, and health, the policy document implies several challenges to the idea of knowledge at the postcolonial university, and has significant implications for research and innovation in South Africa. Since 2001, the government of South Africa, through the NRF, DST and other government departments, has been providing funds to Universities to support students who are interested in IKS. The result has been a steady growth in the IKS programmes within the different universities of South Africa, with large intakes of students to be IKS graduates.

To address the already mentioned employment challenges of such graduates, the national summit will enable all stakeholders to explore the role of IKS graduates in the working environment in order to create opportunities in South Africa. It will furthermore allow networking opportunities and the exploration of different aspects of indigenous knowledge to the current era. The national IKS work summit will also offer opportunities to the IKS graduates to be more marketable and efficient to the market of employability in both public and private sector.

The IK-Based Technology Innovations unit within the DSI has been involved in the entrepreneurship programmes for training and incubation of SME's in collaboration with other stakeholder's e.g. Innovation Hub, SABS, SEDA etc. The Incubation of SME's provides business

development support to SME's. These businesses are supported to commercialise their technologies and have access the following: Business incubation and advisory services, Subsidised working space, Market access opportunities and IP advisory services

To prevent failure in new business ventures, entrepreneurs should be competent in applying conceptual, technical and business skills in order to achieve the objectives of the NDP and Bio economy strategy as well as tackling the countries crisis of high unemployment rate. To date, the DSI supported numerous communities turned co-operatives. Subsequent to that, SME's have been supported with entrepreneur training programmes in parallel with technology transfer programmes. Technology transfer programme is important since it conveys results stemming from scientific and technological research to the market place. Furthermore, it is a complex process that involves many non-scientific and non-technological factors, and many different stakeholders.

The Department is committed to ensuring that the support of technology innovations throughout the value chain including manufacturing and commercialisation thereof. The DSI contributes to the stimulation of local economies through the establishment of local manufacturing facilities. To date, all the IK-based supported SME's are sustainably making a reasonable turnaround (profit) and creating jobs within local communities. These companies are 100% black owned comprising of youth and women with the mission to stimulate their local economy. Good or high quality research results are not enough for successful socio-economic development and improvement of live hoods. Supporting social and grassroots innovation and developing local innovation systems can accelerate the alleviation of poverty within our communities.

In closing: as government we would like to work and consult further with institutions of higher learning, private/business sector and other relevant stakeholders to find solutions to the plight of IKS unemployed graduates.

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RE A LEBOGA BAGAEETSHO
THANK YOU

NNDAA!!!
BAIE DANKIE