

Opening of the ANNUAL ISIBALO SYMPOSIUM of Statistics South Africa

29 June 2015

Honourable Deputy Minister, Mr Manemela (Deputy Minister for Youth in the Office of the Presidency)
Mr Pali Lehohla (Statistician General - and member of UN Secretary General's

Independent Expert Advisory Group on Data revolution for
Sustainable Development (IEAG))

Professor Manie Geyer (Director of the Centre for Regional and Urban Innovation
and Statistical Exploration [CRUISE](#))

Professor Sabina Alkire (Director of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Institute (OPHI)

Other dignitaries

Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all I would like to warmly welcome you to Stellenbosch University, and also to the fine facilities of STIAS (the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies).

As you know, we are gathered here today to highlight the work of CRUISE, which was founded in 2009 as a collaborative effort between Statistics South Africa and the department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Stellenbosch University.

CRUISE has been providing research and training in urban and regional systems to capacitate the public sector, non-governmental organizations and international development [agencies](#) in the African continent, and has produced over 50 Masters Graduates in the past four years.

I also, and I am proud to mention, that CRUISE has always been at the forefront of exploring new ways to do research and to disseminate its knowledge to a wider public outside of the university. The latest initiatives in this history of innovation, is establishing four new higher degrees, which are:

PhD in Urban and Regional Planning

PhD in Urban and Regional Science

MPhil in Development Demography

PhD in Development Demography

All four of these programme have been submitted to the Department of Higher Education and Training for accreditation, and we will hear soon what the results of our application will be. However, given the excellent track record of CRUISE in ensuring student success, I am confident that we will not have any problems in adding these new programmes to our qualification mix as of 2016.

It is of course important to know that this innovation takes place within the framework of a strong history of collaboration between CRUISE and Statistics South Africa, going back for almost 6 years now.

From where I stand as Dean in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, it is important for me to know that this collaboration makes an important contribution to the core of the knowledge project of our Faculty, and that is to critically interpret and re-interpret what it means to be human in this country of South Africa, our country.

You may ask what counting (= Isibalo) and statistics and perhaps even mathematics has to do with arts and the humanities? My answer to this is everything, if we devote our attention to statistical information about that which makes a difference to the lives of people, to their dignity, to their security as human beings, to the development of society.

I therefore have a strong sense of excitement to see on your programme papers devoted to different dimensions of poverty, and also papers devoted to differences and disparities between people and communities and regions in our country. I can see how these papers can all contribute to a better understanding of the distribution of injustice in our society, and also how they can help us to better understand what to do to address these injustices.

As such, CRUISE and Statistics South Africa contribute to a vision that is central to the strategic intent of Stellenbosch University, and that is to unlock scientific knowledge for the benefit of all South Africans, as well as the whole of the continent. As such, Stellenbosch University sees itself as a public institution that is not only prepared and willing to take its rightful place in this project of science for society, but is also already substantively contributing to this project, in and through the work done by CRUISE, but also in and through many other channels of research and teaching and community interaction.

Indeed, in a number of international university rankings, Stellenbosch University is recognized as a global leader for its academic reputation and its impact on society through teaching and research.

Twenty years into democratic South Africa, this role of a public university goes without saying, but we also know Stellenbosch University in its current form is emerging from a chequered past in which its knowledge project was, to a large extent, not serving the whole of the South African population, but predominantly the richer, whiter section of society.

This is a very sad and unacceptable history that we have fully and publicly acknowledged in previous Vision and Mission statements of the University, and also through other channels, for instance, working hard to make Stellenbosch University accessible to all populations groups of South Africa. "In 1990, the year Nelson Mandela was released, Stellenbosch had (only) 762 black, coloured and Indian students in total. Today, we have more than 11 200, or nearly 38% of our student body." (Wim de Villiers, Inauguration Speech). And we will advance this further in the next few years. Our target is to have 50% of black, coloured and Indian students by 2019 in the University as a whole, and 60% in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

More recently, on 27 May, our newly elected Rector, Prof Wim de Villiers, together with community leaders of Stellenbosch removed the plaque from the foyer of the Statistics and Mathematics Building of Stellenbosch University in which HF Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid was still, infamously, honoured. This building was formerly known as the HF Verwoerd building.

This removal of the plaque was clearly long overdue, and should have been done in the mid 1990s already when the names of our buildings referring to apartheid leaders, including BJ Vorster, were changed after protests from staff members on campus. DF Malan was also removed last year as the name of a sports hall in which we also have our graduation ceremonies, and so a process of symbolic transformation unfolded on campus, that I fully acknowledge have been too slow.

This, however, raises the important question, what the indicators could be to measure the transformation of a university, and for that matter, the transformation of a society. Clearly, a university has not transformed if it only has changed the names of a few buildings, or have taken down a plaque or a statue here and there, or has changed the demography of its students and staff.

Equal access to a university is still a far way off from equal opportunity, and it is clearly in this area that our biggest challenge in transforming our university lies. Recently a student at a mass meeting on campus reminded us that she had to work twice as hard to achieve half the marks of her fellow students from privileged backgrounds. This was said in reference to the language of instruction on campus posing a huge

problem to some students, but there are also elements of institutional culture on campus that clearly needs our attention, as the recent spate of student activism sweeping the whole of South Africa has pointed out.

I can vouch that our staff and university leadership are focusing intensively on these challenges, working very hard to identify those aspects of student life and academia that bring about a differentiated playing field for our students and staff members alike. This also confronts us with the need to continuously assess our curriculum and our pedagogy to determine their relevance and social impact, and to make sure that we are effective in producing students that can face the challenges of the present to take us forward into the future.

Such a university, I think, will in its knowledge project itself become an agent of transformation, transforming society through its knowledge products: research, teaching, and in particular, by producing students that are life long learners, critical citizens, engaged professionals and well-rounded individuals.

I believe that CRUISE, in its collaboration with Statistics South Africa, is leading the way and substantively contributing to this transformative project. I also believe that CRUISE and other units in our University can further contribute to this transformation by helping us to formulate clear indicators of university transformation, and to help us develop processes and methodologies in order to measure these indicators as accurately as possible. In this regard equal opportunity to learning is central, and I sense that statistical exploration in this area can make a huge contribution to a more just society in South Africa.

This, however, will call for a whole Isibalo Conference for another day. For today, in your focus on the multidimensional poverty index, I wish you a good day of deliberation and exploration.

Thank you very much.