

Transformation Indaba 2023



Action-Based Relational Transformation



Stellenbosch

UNIVERSITY
IYUNIVESITHI
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forward together
sonke siya phambili
saam vorentoe





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Session 1

Welcoming remarks

Prof Nico Koopman



In his welcoming speech at the Transformation Indaba, Prof Nico Koopman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel (DVC: SITP), set the tone for the day to focus on "Action-based relational transformation". In his reflection on the theme, he emphasised Stellenbosch University's commitment to being not just desirous of transformation but committed to action.

Prof Koopman highlighted that the University's vision for transformation is clearly articulated in its strategic document, transformation plan and institutional policies. He stressed the importance of turning this vision into reality through concrete actions. He urged the audience to move beyond mere thoughts and words and to translate their desire for transformation into tangible actions.

Drawing from linguistic references, he explained that words themselves imply action, as seen in words that represent a rational and logical approach to action, such as 'dabar' in Hebrew or 'logos' in Greek. He encouraged the institution to transform the theoretical strides taken and its definitions of transformation into practical outcomes.

The chosen theme of "Action-based relational transformation" was not coincidental. Prof Koopman stressed the importance of unity on this journey, and emphasised that strength can be found amid vulnerability when the community works together. He highlighted

the University's slogan, "forward together, sonke siya phambili, saam vorentoe", as a call to collaborative action.

Referring to Prof Sibusiso Moyo's vision, Prof Koopman reminded the audience that excellence in transformation, just like in learning, research and innovation, is a goal worth striving for. However, he emphasised the importance of pursuing excellence with joy and without inducing performance anxiety.

Prof Koopman hoped that the discussions during the event would contribute to an institution that embodies the vision of South Africans by fostering dignity, healing, justice, freedom and equality, and therefore ultimately having a positive impact on society, the continent and the world.

Overview of the day

Dr Zethu Mkhize



Dr Zethu Mkhize, Director of the Transformation Office, began the Transformation Indaba by presenting an insightful overview of the day. Her presentation set the stage for the event by offering a comprehensive understanding of the day's agenda and objectives, and the importance of the discussions that would follow. Dr Mkhize's articulate and informative introduction provided participants with a clear sense of direction and purpose, and ensured that the day's proceedings unfolded with focus and intent.



Keynote address

Prof Grace Khunou



In her keynote address, Prof Grace Khunou, Director of Transformation and Leadership at UNISA and chairperson of the Transformation Managers Forum, commenced by expressing her gratitude for the warm welcome received from the Stellenbosch community. She mentioned her love for the town and its beautiful environment and recognised the privilege of being part of such a unique setting.

Prof Khunou delved into the theme of the event, "Action-based relational transformation", and acknowledged that this topic initially appeared daunting but ultimately proved promising as she contemplated the concepts of action, relationality and transformation. Her address aimed to explore how these three concepts interconnect, particularly within the context of Stellenbosch and the broader South African higher education sector.

Prof Khunou emphasised the need to reflect on how historical legacies influence the present and the futures they anticipate. She posed several critical questions to probe the opportunities for learning, change and transformation within the University.

- What opportunities does Stellenbosch University (SU) offer to create something that all of us can learn from?
- Does such an opportunity even exist given the history of SU in terms of racial relational dynamics?
- Is there something that South Africa and the higher education sector can learn from SU in terms of transformation, considering the history that SU has?
- Are we having the Transformation Indaba to 'tick boxes', or is there hope?

She challenged the audience to consider whether the institution could serve as a source of inspiration and hope, despite its historical complexities.

Prof Khunou acknowledged the ever-changing global socioeconomic and political landscape, and lamented the simultaneous regression on issues such as racism, sexism, intolerance and inequality. She observed that these issues were manifesting within the higher education system, and are leading to challenges faced by students, such as food insecurity and a diminishing social justice role.

Prof Khunou addressed the central theme of "relationality" by emphasising the concepts of connectedness and relationality. She discussed the impact of relational disconnect, particularly in the context of historical racial dynamics, and how it influences the way we relate to one another. She elaborated on three key aspects that contribute to relational distance and disconnect (i.e. epistemological relational disconnection, a disconnect with the community engagement and social justice function of universities, and the communicative complex). She underscored the importance of addressing these issues through curricular transformation, the diversification of staff and a focus on scholarship that transcends Western-derived theories.

Prof Khunou highlighted the importance of dialogue within and between different racial groups, and advocated for challenging assumptions and fostering vulnerability in conversations to bridge the gap in understanding and to build connections.

In her conclusion, she encouraged the audience to recognise the significance of being meditative and reflective, and stressed the importance of stillness and silent introspection. She emphasised the need to consider the values that underpin the pursuit of transformation and the importance of investing in the quiet moments to facilitate meaningful change. She further urged the audience to reflect on their commitment to action-based relational transformation, by posing questions about the willingness to engage in uncomfortable conversations, to see one another as human beings first, and to transform themselves. She called for a profound transformation that involves a rebirth of perspective and the embracing of true relationality.



Poem

Buhle Bam



In 1955, the call to the Congress of the People resonated with the voices of those yearning for freedom in a divided land. The poem, recited by Buhle Bam, a Stellenbosch University student and participant in the "Writing for Change" programme, highlights the disparities and injustices faced by the people of South Africa, irrespective of their race, ethnicity, or occupation. It is a call for unity, justice and, above all, freedom.

In the spirit of the historic Congress of the People, Buhle Bam's reading was adapted to address the context of Stellenbosch University's transformation. This captivating performance artfully linked the historical quest for freedom to the ongoing journey towards a more inclusive, equitable and harmonious future for all members of the University community. Buhle Bam's eloquent delivery had a profound impact on the audience, and set the tone for delving into the pressing matters of transformation, diversity and unity in the modern academic landscape.

Let us speak together at the Transformation Indaba

WE CALL ALL Students of Stellenbosch University

WE CALL ALL Staff of Stellenbosch University

Let us speak of action-based relational transformation

Let us speak about the values of the institution

Let us speak about the culture of the institution

Let us embrace how the institution acknowledges the skills, talents and humanity of all students and staff

Let us embrace the vision of the institution

Forward together

Saam vorentoe

Sonke siya phambili



Session 2

Plenary 1



Changing institutional culture vs. changing institutional climate

Prof Deresh Ramjugernath



Following a refreshing tea break, the second session commenced with a plenary address by Prof Deresh Ramjugernath, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching. His presentation set the stage for an exploration of institutional culture and institutional climate, highlighting their profound relevance in the context of Stellenbosch University's commitment to transformation.

Prof Ramjugernath began his presentation by distinguishing between the two fundamental concepts (institutional culture and institutional climate) and emphasising that these terms are often confused and conflated within organisations. By drawing upon his

background as a process engineer, he masterfully simplified these complex concepts for the audience.

Institutional culture was described as the enduring set of underlying values, beliefs and assumptions that shape the behaviour and decision-making processes of an organisation. It constitutes the shared understanding of what is important within the institution and encompasses the core principles that guide conduct, and their alignment with the organisation's purpose, mission and vision.

Institutional climate, on the other hand, was likened to a snapshot or a photo of an institution at a particular point in time. It represents the current perceptions, attitudes and feelings held by the members of the organisation. Unlike culture, climate is dynamic and can change rapidly, influenced primarily by the leadership and their decisions.

Prof Ramjugernath raised a pertinent challenge for Stellenbosch University. He questioned whether the current institutional culture aligns with the institution's vision and objectives. He emphasised that it is the responsibility of every member of the institution to contribute to creating a climate conducive to transformation.

Prof Ramjugernath highlighted the crucial role of leadership in transformation. Leadership sets the tone for the climate within an institution, which, in turn, influences the organisation's culture. He expressed the need for leaders to lead by example and embody the values they expect from others. He stated that the leadership's commitment to transformation would determine whether the institution as a whole accepts the necessity for change.

In order to foster a positive institutional culture, Prof Ramjugernath highlighted several key requirements:

- Clear articulation of the institution's core values, vision and mission, regularly communicated and integrated into decision-making processes
- Leadership must demonstrate and embody these values
- Involvement of all members in the transformation journey to create a sense of ownership and inclusivity
- Training and development opportunities to align individuals with the organisation's values
- Recognising and rewarding desired behaviours while addressing undesired ones
- Promotion of open and transparent communication channels for employees to voice concerns without fear of reprisal
- Establishing clear expectations for roles, responsibilities and performance
- Promoting a growth mindset that encourages continuous learning and improvement
- Fostering an inclusive environment, regardless of background or perspectives
- Encouraging collaboration and teamwork while breaking down silos within the organisation

Prof Ramjugernath acknowledged the uncomfortable nature of the transformation journey but stressed the importance of celebrating positive changes and milestones. He encouraged introspection and the removal of biases and discrimination deeply ingrained in individuals.

In the shadow of racial sciences

Dr Handri Walters



Dr Handri Walters, a lecturer in social anthropology at Stellenbosch University, delivered a thought-provoking presentation titled "In the Shadow of Racial Sciences" during the plenary session. In a nuanced and candid exploration, Dr Walters engaged with the historical context of Stellenbosch University, offering a reflective and provocative perspective.

Dr Walters commenced her talk by delving into the historical roots of Stellenbosch University. She highlighted its transformation from the old Victoria College to Stellenbosch University in 1918, which

marked a pivotal moment in South African higher education. She pointed out how the establishment of Stellenbosch University was closely intertwined with the Afrikaner nationalist movement, with the primary goal of advancing international science and disseminating Afrikaans civilisation.

Throughout her examination of this history, Dr Walters emphasised how the University was designed to serve a utilitarian function, primarily the advancement of the interests of the Afrikaner volk. The institution's early professors and departments reflected this mindset, with its strong focus on racial classification and differentiation in various academic disciplines, including anthropology, ethnology, psychology, sociology and economics.

Dr Walters further shared her personal reflections on being a white Afrikaans-speaking woman and a lecturer at Stellenbosch University. She noted how this identity often led people to assume that she held specific political or ideological beliefs. She recounted instances where individuals would engage her in conversations on conservative views, assuming they shared a common stance based on their shared background.

In conclusion, Dr Walters offered a thought-provoking observation. She pointed out that the historical context of the University, marked by its association with the Afrikaner nationalist movement, had created a sense of 'us' that excluded 'others' and 'strangers'. This exclusionary dynamic still lingered in the public perception of Stellenbosch University. Drawing a parallel to a moment in American politics, she suggested that the notion of the University being a preserved space for a particular group, even under threat, carried connotations of exclusion. The 'ons' ('we') that adorned the JH Marais statue on campus symbolised this sense of exclusion.

Intimate difference

Prof Nuraan Davids



Prof Nuraan Davids addressed the theme of "Intimate Difference" in her plenary presentation, which emphasised the complexity of transformation, particularly within the context of post-apartheid South Africa.

Prof Davids raised critical concerns about how transformation has been framed and perceived, highlighting that it does not have a universal meaning. She noted that oppression is experienced differently

by different individuals, particularly at the intersection of various identities, such as race and gender. She lamented that South Africa, in its journey toward democracy, has retained racial categories that were once used to enforce apartheid but are now being employed under the banner of transformation.

She also delved into the notion that the post-apartheid era has brought about a new and challenging set of dilemmas, as individuals and society grapple with the complexities of identity in a democratic setting. While during apartheid, the rules of segregation were clear, the democratic era has brought about a new level of uncertainty and confusion. She highlighted that oppression is deeply intimate and personal, affecting people's lives at a micro-level. It creates forced migrations and erodes one's sense of self-worth. She discussed the importance of challenging stereotypes and myths and the harm they cause, particularly in education and socialisation.

She shared anecdotes and examples of how students often form groups with those who are most like themselves, and how this unfamiliarity with the 'other' can lead to prejudice and misunderstanding. This reluctance to engage with those perceived as different perpetuates the divide.

Prof Davids acknowledged that the work of transformation is ongoing and cannot be quantified or neatly concluded by a specific date. She urged a deeper awareness of the many aspects of identity and othering beyond just race, including culture, religion, sexuality, language, class and nationality. She emphasised the need for authentic and vulnerable conversations to break down barriers and foster genuine understanding. Vulnerability, she argued, is not a weakness but a strength, as it shows a willingness to reconsider one's preconceived notions and beliefs. She stressed that this was the path to true transformation – one that is emotional, ongoing and essential for building a more inclusive and equitable society.

Plenary 2



Action-based, value-rooted relational transformation: realising the Restitution Statement together

Dr Wilhelm Verwoerd, Senior Researcher: Centre for the Study of the Afterlife of Violence and the Reparative Quest (AVReQ)

Fanelesibonge Ndebele, Event Project Manager: Centre for Social Justice

Dr Jill Ryan, Coordinator: Gender Non-Violence, Equality Unit

The second plenary session adopted a unique approach, featuring a dynamic conversation among three key speakers: Dr Wilhelm Verwoerd, Fanelesibonge Ndebele and Dr Jill Ryan. The central theme of this session revolved around the practical realisation of the Restitution Statement.

Dr Wilhelm Verwoerd, in his opening remarks, set the stage for the plenary session by providing a framing context. He explained how the session was conceived as a result of conversations between Dr Zethu Mkhize, Dr Verwoerd and their colleagues, spurred by the

visibility of cultural racism on campus in the wake of an incident the previous year. They sought to address not just the actions of individuals but also the underlying culture and traditions that allowed such incidents to occur. The main objective was to integrate the institution's values and the Restitution Statement into this discussion.

Dr Verwoerd candidly shared that it was his first encounter with the Restitution Statement. He emphasised that rather than approaching it from a distance as an academic exercise to critique its potential shortcomings, the focus was on facilitating a collective exploration of what it meant for Stellenbosch University as a whole and its diverse members, considering their different racialised positions.

Over the course of nearly a year, approximately 25 individuals, including colleagues and students, embarked on this journey together. Their efforts were rooted in a relational process with the primary emphasis on translating, implementing and realising the values contained in the statement. Their approach involved confronting practical and urgent issues directly impacting the campus community, rather than abstract discussions. In this context, the topic of

Dr Wilhelm Verwoerd



food security became a focal point. The group examined why thousands of students, often racially marginalised, faced food security challenges and explored how the institution's values, equity, social justice and the Restitution Statement could guide them in addressing these pressing concerns.

The conversation delved into broader themes of social justice and equity, emphasising the University's commitment to transformative action rooted in its core values. As Dr Verwoerd and his colleagues shared their perspectives and insights, they invited participants to engage actively in the discussion, fostering a spirit of shared commitment to the ongoing relational journey toward meaningful transformation. This session represented a distinctive and practical approach to realising the Restitution Statement and aligning it with the institution's commitment to equity, social justice and positive change.

After Dr Verwoerd had set the stage for the conversation, the focus shifted to Fanelesibonge Ndebele, who highlighted the pressing matter of hunger and its alignment with the principles of social justice. Ndebele began by emphasising the urgency of the topic and recognising that this issue demands immediate attention.

Fanelesibonge Ndebele



Ndebele, a representative from the Centre for Social Justice, provided a clear definition of social justice and highlighted how it relates to the fair and just distribution of opportunities, benefits, privileges and burdens in society, regardless of human diversity. He argued

that hunger is undeniably a social justice issue, particularly in the context of South Africa and Stellenbosch University.

He proceeded to underline the responsibility of Stellenbosch University in addressing the problem of hunger. Ndebele identified multiple dimensions of this responsibility:

- **Obligations imposed by the Restitution Statement:** Ndebele stressed the significance of the University's public commitment to the Restitution Statement. He emphasised that the institution's values and the statement itself indicate a commitment to addressing issues such as hunger among students and staff.
- **Legal obligations as an entity of the state:** As an entity of the state, Stellenbosch University is not exempt from the legal obligations outlined in the South African Constitution. These obligations encompass ensuring the right to access food. Ndebele challenged the institution to consider its legal duty in fulfilling this right.
- **Moral obligations:** Ndebele contended that, by acknowledging the role of the institution in past injustices, the Restitution Statement places a moral obligation on the University to take intentional actions against hunger. This moral responsibility stems from recognising and addressing past injustices.
- **Strategic obligations for academic excellence:** Ndebele linked the issue of hunger to the University's value of excellence by asserting that hungry students cannot achieve academic excellence. He urged the institution, represented by a diverse group of faculty members and deans, to address this matter with a sense of urgency, as it has far-reaching impacts on the University's pursuit of academic excellence.

In her contribution to the plenary conversation, Dr Jill Ryan delved into the matter of food equity and its connection to the principles of fairness and justice. While the University acknowledges food insecurity, Dr Ryan aptly pointed out that it is fundamentally a hunger issue, impacting students' ability to function, perform and engage fully in various aspects of University life.

Dr Ryan emphasised the significance of understanding food equity on a global scale, extending beyond mere access to food. Food equity encompasses not only access to healthy food but also recognises the cultural significance of food. Cultural elements tied to food, such as identity, belonging and community, play a vital role in the broader context of higher education. She highlighted that food is more than just sustenance; it holds the key to cultural connections, comfort and shared experiences. The preparation, consumption and sharing of food can foster a sense of belonging and community, influencing research, pedagogy and overall well-being. Dr Ryan emphasised that the lack of access to food goes beyond hunger; it deprives individuals of deeper connections and experiences.

Furthermore, Dr Ryan stressed the importance of recognising that food insecurity and access issues are deeply rooted in historical injustices, exclusion and inclusion. Addressing these issues requires moving away from a paternalistic, welfare-based approach and towards a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding food equity. The conversation, as Dr Ryan articulated, needs to transcend superficial solutions, and delve into the historical, cultural and diversity-related dimensions that underpin the challenges associated with food access. This approach aligns with the broader values and principles of the institution and the commitment to achieving true equity and justice in higher education.

Dr Wilhelm Verwoerd continued the conversation and acknowledged the challenges and complexities of truly embracing the Restitution Statement and its implications. He candidly expressed that for many individuals, especially those coming from a position of privilege and inclusion, delving into the statement can be emotionally challenging. It involves confronting historical injustices, pain and trauma.

He underlined that the Restitution Statement deepens the understanding of why addressing issues such as food security and hunger is imperative. By exploring the historical roots of these challenges, the statement raises essential questions about who should take responsibility and in what ways. Dr Verwoerd stressed that this responsibility is not just about personal intentions or actions but is tied to the broader membership of societal and generational groupings.

Dr Verwoerd stated that, while many individuals are quick to distance themselves from past injustices and privilege, it is vital to acknowledge the responsibility that comes with being a beneficiary of historical systemic privileges. He emphasised the importance of broadening the spectrum of those who should be engaged in addressing these issues by moving beyond the operational teams and budget controllers. It is a responsibility shared by everyone connected to the institution, not driven by charity or paternalistic care, but a deep-rooted responsibility that emerges from historical injustices.

The Restitution Statement, as Dr Verwoerd explained, also lengthens the way by recognising that these are not short-term issues to be tackled within a year or two. Instead, they necessitate a lifelong, ongoing commitment to deep engagement. This change in perspective, deepening the why, broadening the who, and lengthening the way, can ultimately transform how the institution approaches complex issues such as food security and other legacies of historical injustices.

In essence, the statement, through these processes, encourages a profound approach to transformation, moving beyond superficial, surface-level changes. While no recipe was offered, Dr Verwoerd's insights and the ongoing conversations with colleagues demonstrate a commitment to addressing these issues by fostering deeper understanding, shared responsibility and long-term engagement. The challenges are immense, but they are met with an unwavering dedication to genuine transformation and meaningful change.

Ndebele shared his personal journey and positioning within Stellenbosch University, highlighting his experience as the beneficiary of a recruitment bursary aimed at diversifying the institution. His admission to the University brought him face to face with various challenges, including the issue of hunger that many students silently grapple with.

Ndebele pointed out that, over the years, he has observed a trend where the burden of hunger falls on students individually, and they are left to bear the shame and stigma associated therewith. He also raised concerns about a tendency to delegate responsibility, particularly on issues such as hunger, to specific offices or fundraising efforts, thus shifting away from the concept of shared responsibility.

Moreover, Ndebele highlighted the experiences of students who face unfair treatment from faculty members when they cannot attend classes due to hunger. These stories remain hidden, and the

core issue of hunger often remains unaddressed. He questioned what shared responsibility truly looks like within the institution, considering the principles of social justice, the Restitution Statement and the institution's core values.

Dr Jill Ryan



Dr Ryan added her insights to the ongoing conversation by addressing the concept of shared responsibility. She expressed her frustration with the observation that the burden of care work, responsibility and transformation often falls on the same individuals within the institution.

Dr Ryan raised a critical question: "Why is it that the care work is always done by the same individuals?" She emphasised that when it comes to deeply transformative conversations and responsibilities, the same people, often from marginalised groups, are expected to both bear the weight of oppression and provide the solutions. This reality presents an additional layer of oppression, where individuals are expected not only to endure the hardships but also to become the very agents of change.

She highlighted the need for shared responsibility to be truly inclusive and not confined to specific offices or designated individuals. When responsibilities are narrowly delegated, it defeats the purpose of shared commitment. Dr Ryan advocated for all members of the institution, including leadership, to be actively involved in these transformative processes.

Furthermore, Dr Ryan urged for a more personalised approach to shared responsibility, emphasising that it should feel like a personal mandate for everyone to get involved. She criticised the existing dichotomy, where one group is often perceived as having to give up something to make space for another, when it should be about collective progress, not a zero-sum game.

Dr Ryan underscored the importance of having a holistic understanding of shared responsibility, and emphasised that solutions should be as intersectional as the people they affect. Transformative efforts should not be limited to staff and students alone; they must also encompass management and leadership, as the latter play a crucial role in setting the tone and providing resources for these initiatives.

Panel conclusion:

- the importance of not shying away from the stark realities faced by students and staff;
- the importance of creating platforms for open and honest conversations and how this would afford individuals the opportunity to speak up;
- the need for the recording of experiences, which would culminate in the formulation of real solutions grounded in the realities on the ground;
- the urgency of the shared responsibility of the SU community to develop solutions rather than relegating this responsibility to students who are struggling with hunger themselves;
- the need to address hunger as a matter that impacts every aspect of the institution. To become a world-class institution, it is crucial to ensure that students are not left behind, and this can only be achieved through open dialogue, action and a commitment to finding meaningful solutions;
- the need for intergenerational dialogues, especially within the Afrikaner white community and how the concept of "growing our humanity together", drawn from the Siyakhula training series, serves as a metaphor for the SU transformation journey;
- the values of the University and how they are deeply connected to the sense of humanity; hence, the need to have the values deeply embedded in every practical aspect of University life; and
- the need to recognise that the transformation journey requires a willingness to change habits and ways of being, which cannot be accomplished through short-term or project-oriented actions but necessitates a long-term, relational approach.





Session 3

Breakaway Sessions

In the third session, participants engaged in breakaway sessions, where they were divided into four groups to discuss specific topics. The topics for these breakaway sessions were:

- E-CARE Values
- The Stellenbosch 'DNA'
- Unconscious Bias
- Institutional Culture vs. Climate

In these sessions, attendees discussed the current state of these topics, what they should aspire to, and key takeaway messages for the institution. The sessions were designed to foster dialogue and provide feedback, to enhance the understanding of these important transformation-related issues.

Feedback from each of the reporters for each breakaway session:

Breakaway 1: E-CARE Values



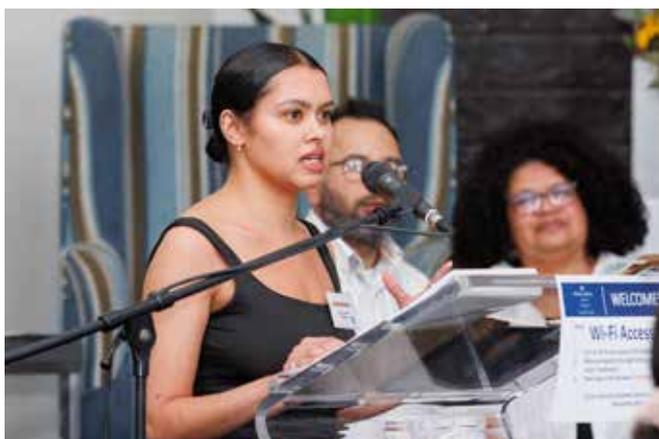
Participants in this group discussed the current state of the E-CARE values at Stellenbosch University. They raised concerns about the visibility and understanding of these values, and questioned their applicability in smaller environments within the institution. The group examined the concept of excellence and its meaning within the University context, and emphasised the need for the values to be visible in all spaces. Three key takeaways included a call for accountability, the importance of speaking out and creating safe spaces, and the need for the institutional culture to better reflect its values. They also highlighted the importance of transformation being a collective effort and not the responsibility of a specific group.

Breakaway 3: Unconscious Bias



This group delved into the topic of unconscious bias and its impact on the institution. They identified unconscious bias at various levels, such as in the classroom and curriculum design. Participants shared examples of addressing bias, both from the perspective of perpetuating bias and being on the receiving end thereof. They discussed the need for skills development in empathy, reflective listening and understanding the impact of unconscious bias. The group emphasised the importance of upskilling and focusing on the role of academic staff and students in addressing bias. They also noted the intersectionality of issues, such as classism and racism, within the context of unconscious bias.

Breakaway 2: The Stellenbosch 'DNA'



Participants in this group explored the concept of the Stellenbosch 'DNA' and its cultural implications. They discussed words such as power, isolation and fear in relation to the University's DNA. The group considered how this DNA differed from other DNAs and its impact on the institution's culture and values. They aspired to change the mindset of individuals, by focusing on leadership expectations, student involvement and the emancipation of black women. One takeaway message was the need to teach a different narrative of racial science, dismantle power dimensions, and focus on benchmarking with other institutions.

Breakaway 4: Institutional Culture vs. Climate



Participants examined the distinction between institutional culture and climate at Stellenbosch University. They noted improvements in culture after the Khampepe Report, which emphasised the importance of transforming the culture to support institutional strategies and policies. The group recognised the dominance of Eurocentrism within the culture and acknowledged the need for change. Participants discussed the differences and relationships between culture and climate, and highlighted the impact of individuals on both. They expressed the aspiration to create an inclusive and emancipatory culture by focusing on the need to dismantle the Eurocentric culture and provide access to academic resources. The group also highlighted the importance of leadership taking initiative in the transformation process.



Transformation Indaba Summation

Dr Leslie van Rooi



Dr Leslie van Rooi, Senior Director: Social Impact and Transformation, provided a summation of the Transformation Indaba. He highlighted the evolution of this annual event and its significance for Stellenbosch University. As he noted, this year's Indaba marked the seventh in the series and served as a crucial platform for reflecting on the institution's progress, challenges and aspirations.

Throughout the years, the Indaba has transitioned from being a space marked by institutional uncertainty to a place where participants actively engage in discussions about the institution they aim to become, rather than dwelling solely on their current position in relation to one another. The focus on relationality this year underscored the challenges of defining relationships within the University, particularly concerning the identities of both black and white individuals.

Prof Khunou and other speakers emphasised the complex issue of relationality, especially in terms of identities. The metaphor of

"reading and writing in both 'white' and 'black'" symbolises the difficulties we face in understanding and embracing various aspects of identity and culture.

Dr van Rooi's personal anecdote about the "Fees must fall" movement illustrated the journey of the Indaba and the institution. It highlighted the significant progress made in shifting from an environment characterised by mistrust and uncertainty to one where open engagement and dialogue about our differences are possible. This transformation has taken place despite the pain and challenges associated with confronting the institution's complex history.

Dr van Rooi acknowledged the vital role of leadership in guiding the University through these transformations. Leaders such as Jerome van Wyk, Monica du Toit, Llewellyn MacMaster, Julian Smith, Russell Botman and Prof Koopman, amongst others, have played essential roles in navigating the institution's path during difficult times.

The energy and active participation of all those present during the Indaba demonstrated that the institution is on a positive trajectory. With the commitment of all those involved, Stellenbosch University is well-positioned to continue its journey toward positive change.

Dr van Rooi expressed his gratitude to the organisers and participants for their hard work and dedication in making the Indaba a success. He emphasised that this platform is invaluable for critical reflection and the redesigning of the institution's future. In an ever-evolving world, it is imperative to revisit roles, places, mandates, pains, hopes, dreams, relatedness, vulnerabilities and agencies to adapt, grow and effect positive change. His closing remarks reflected his heartfelt appreciation and commitment to fostering a more inclusive and transformative future for Stellenbosch University.



Closing remarks and vote of thanks



Prof Ronelle Carolissen



In her closing remarks, Prof Carolissen reflected on the concept of "transformation fatigue", a term that resonates with many committed colleagues. This fatigue stems from the long, strenuous and often frustrating work that occurs in organisations such as ours, where change is driven incrementally. It is sometimes exacerbated by the feeling that some individuals get away with not participating in this vital work, yet still label it as transformation. Such thoughts and feelings can lead to internal conflict for those dedicated to change, creating a sense of betrayal of their own values, vulnerability and self-doubt, accompanied by a sense of shame. However, amidst

these challenges, there are moments of success and progress that reignite the collective energy of the SU community.

Prof Carolissen acknowledged the roller coaster of emotions, emphasising the importance of acknowledging these dips as a normal part of the transformation process. She highlighted the need to examine why and how these dips occur and implement support systems to navigate them effectively. She emphasised the recognition of our common humanity and vulnerability, not only within the context of Stellenbosch but on a global scale, and how the recognition of our vulnerabilities and the incorporation of self-care and compassion are vital. She stressed the importance of combining activism with empathy, not only for others but also for ourselves.

In conclusion, Prof Carolissen expressed her gratitude to Prof Khunou for laying the foundation for the day's deliberations and challenging the audience to transform words into actions. She extended her thanks to the panel members, who creatively called upon the staff and students at Stellenbosch University to take action, share their ideas, and ignite our collective spirit. She thanked all the participants for their contribution of ideas, energy and enthusiasm.

Prof Carolissen noted that one of the Indaba's most significant aspects is not only the exchange of ideas but also the sense of unity and support among a large group of transformation drivers within the University. The Indaba has reinforced the idea that, even when it may seem like we are working in isolation, we are part of a broader community that offers robust support and love.



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