

NYDA Solomon Mahlangu Scholarship Fund cheque-handover ceremony

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Remarks by Stellenbosch University Rector & Vice-Chancellor Prof H Russel Botman

[News report on this event: <http://www.sun.ac.za/english/Lists/news/DispForm.aspx?ID=1589>]

Thanks, Khaya. Afternoon, everyone ... and from my side, welcome here! Especially to our visitors. Ms Linda Dlova [on behalf of Mr Yershen Pillay, NYDA Chair] and the rest of the National Youth Development Agency team, thanks for joining us today.

It is an honour for us to host the National Youth Development Agency ... in Youth Month. Young people are a very important part of South Africa. According to Stats SA's most recent figures (2013), 44% of the country's population fall in the age bracket 15-39. That's a substantial portion ... and they are the ones who will have to build the country towards and beyond 2030.

Young people are also the section of the population who should be prioritised in education. They need skills and qualifications to get a job or to create employment for themselves and others.

That's where higher-education institutions come in – we empower our students for a career in their chosen field.

But higher education is not just a private good; it is also a public good. University graduates contribute to the welfare of society in a variety of ways ... generally, by being critical thinkers; and engaged citizens. And specifically, through their work as professionals ... in such crucial sectors as Agriculture and Health.

That is why we welcome the National Youth Development Agency's focus on these sectors through its grant to Stellenbosch University. For national development goals to be met, Agriculture and Health and all other sectors have to be placed on a solid footing. And one of the best ways of doing that is through higher education. We need to empower practitioners and researchers to be thought leaders for the future.

I am happy to say that Stellenbosch is doing its bit in this regard. And that is why funding young people – through the Solomon Mahlangu Scholarship Fund – to pursue tertiary studies at Stellenbosch is a solid investment in the future.

Our faculties are working hard to ensure that every student leaving the University will make a real difference – not only to their own pockets but to the rest of the community as well. This University is set on having the maximum positive impact on society.

We have to attract the best students from a diversity of backgrounds. This is where the Solomon Mahlangu Scholarship Fund comes in. It helps us open the doors of learning at Stellenbosch University to students who are in need of financial assistance.

I always say that talent is spread evenly throughout society, but not resources – unfortunately not ... that's the reality. But we don't have to accept that reality. We can change it. We can do something to ensure the “daughter of the farmworker” gets the same opportunities as the “son of the farmer”.

And if it is financial assistance that is needed, it can now be provided to more students thanks to the Solomon Mahlangu Scholarship Fund.

As we celebrate 20 years of democracy in South Africa, it is important to remember the contributions of those who had sacrificed so that future generations could have a better life. Though many of them are no longer with us, the struggle continues ... in a very real sense: The struggle to ensure that the Constitutional promise of human rights for everyone – including socio-economic rights – is realised in practice.

New opportunities have been created in our new democracy for young thought leaders to create a better future for all.

Stellenbosch University has adopted its own Vision 2030, which is linked to the country's Vision 2030 as contained in the National Development Plan. Our vision is to become more inclusive, more innovative and more future focused. This is a vision that enjoys broad support within the University. And it is also a vision that makes us part of the unfolding story of our nation as it moves into the future.

I want to thank the National Youth Development Agency and the Department of Higher Education and Training. You can rest assured the best investment when times are tough the best investment you can make is in education. And I can assure you Stellenbosch University has a first-year throughput rate of 87%, as opposed to the national average of 50%. We have an overall undergraduate success rate of 86% -- the highest in the country. And we are not just interested in academic excellence but also in societal relevance.

As we launch the Solomon Mahlangu Scholarship Fund at Stellenbosch University today, may our partnership with the National Youth Development Agency go from strength to strength.

Thank you.