

VICE -CHANCELLOR'S ADDRESS AT THE SIXTH CONGREGATION OF THE MSU GRADUATION CEREMONY - FRIDAY 5th OCTOBER 2007

It is a most pleasant duty for me to welcome you to the sixth congregation for the conferment of degrees of Midlands State University. Indeed we always deeply value and cherish your participation as we celebrate together, the culmination of our joint efforts to contribute towards the nurturing of the human capital, which is arguably the most critical resource in the sustainable development of our country. I extend a special note of welcome to you Your Excellency and Chancellor and assure you how much we cherish your presence, especially as we are aware that you have to literally put aside everything in your tight and busy schedule in order to be with us on this our special day.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, this time around we are delighted to present to you a total of one thousand nine hundred and five (1905) future leaders, as well as life long learners who have distinguished themselves in our various programmes. Highlights of this group include its gender composition. Since 2004 when we held our first graduation ceremony, the proportion of female graduands rose from 32.3% to 32.6% in 2005 and to 35.1% in 2006. Today we are extremely delighted to report that within the class of 2003, which witnessed the first implementation of the policy to admit students on a 50/50 gender balance, the girl child accounts for a record 48% of the total graduating body. As one of the three universities that were tasked by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education to locally train lecturers, we are pleased to present here today an additional one hundred and thirty three (133) talented men and women who represent our first cohorts of the Master of Commerce, Master of Science in Human Resource Management and Master of Education graduands. The congregation will also witness the capping of first graduands from two of our departments, which have come of age namely, the Department of Music and Musicology, and that of Banking and Finance. Indeed today's graduation ceremony is not an ordinary one, as somebody from the top table will be joining the queue of graduands; and this somebody is non other than our own indefatigable Chairman of the Midlands State University Council, who wore the student cap and humbly tested his own medicine by going through the rigorous mill. We commend him for leading by example.

As we celebrate the harvest of our core business today, I wish to update our stakeholders here present, on the progress that the institution has made towards the achievement of policy goals

that I have alluded to during previous congregations of the University. In this regard, we acknowledge that the road that we are traveling is by no means a rosy one. It is bumpy, and fraught with a multiplicity of challenges, the major one being exodus of our staff to the region and beyond in search of greener pastures.

The macroeconomic challenges notwithstanding, we remain fully awake to the demands and opportunities in our general environment, and the concomitant need to relentlessly strive for relevance in our curriculum. Inspired by the government policy framework for the indigenization of the economy, which encourages entrepreneurs to participate more in the strategic sectors of agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, mining, construction and energy, the University has widened the scope of our Work-Related-Learning to include an Entrepreneurship Economic Model. We view the economic challenges, which have created shortages on the one hand, as having simultaneously created a myriad of entrepreneurial opportunities on the other.

We therefore applaud the setting up of a revolving fund in the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises to support student initiatives in entrepreneurship. To date forty-two students have applied for such funding and eleven have had their projects approved. The projects include Mushroom Production, processing of fruits into drinks, Software Development Web-Design and Furniture Production. In terms of curriculum projects, it is our submission that any sustainable socio-economic development of this country squarely rests on our urgent realization and appreciation of the fact that Zimbabwe is an agricultural economy and not an industrialized one. To this end, we therefore envisage partnerships with stakeholders in experimental projects such as small-scale irrigation and conservation schemes to keep in check the desertification that is slowly creeping in many parts of our province.

The efforts of the University to provide a curriculum that is beneficial to students and to the nation have been matched with the drive to create a conducive, living and learning environment through infra-structural development. In terms of student accommodation on campus, our existing halls of residence can only accommodate one thousand one hundred and seventy (1170), out of a total five thousand four hundred and ninety eight (5498) conventional students. Although the construction of student halls of residence is an integral part of our construction project under the Public Sector Investment Programme, economic challenges have painfully slowed down our progress in that direction. However, the cause of

student accommodation has remained a priority issue on our agenda as an institution. Some of our stakeholders, including the media, and very recently the Child Governor for the Midlands Province in the recent child parliament, have also brought this same concern to the fore.

At institutional level, we have explored ways of complimenting government efforts to address the student accommodation challenges. The Concession Agreement for the Build Operate and Transfer (B.O.T.) initiative between a Project Development Consortium and the University has already been signed and the tendering process is underway. We are hopeful that the pick will go down into the ground in January 2008 to mark the commencement of the construction of student halls of residence as well as a university commercial centre. As a university we remain gravely concerned about the overcrowded and unhealthy conditions to which our students in the neighbouring Senga Township are exposed. As an immediate measure, efforts are therefore being made to increase the university bus fleet in order to enable the efficient ferrying of non-resident students to and from all suburbs of Gweru. This move is intended to decongest Senga Township, which has attracted the majority of our non-resident students owing to transport challenges.

In a bid to create more space for the teaching and ceremonial needs of the University, we have embarked on the construction of a Multi-purpose 3 000 capacity Hall at our extension site, next to the Administration Block. The pre-fabricated and collapsible hall is intended to house several classrooms, and to also become the venue for our end of semester examinations, as well as other important functions such as our graduation ceremonies when the need arises. The project is 37% complete and is scheduled to be finished before the end of November 2007. As regards office space, the construction of the Administration Block has not progressed according to our original plans owing to the unfavourable macro-economic conditions. We remain hopeful that the project, which is now 71% complete, will be finished early next year.

Your Excellence and Chancellor, at institutional level we have continued to play our part in the furtherance of gender equity and equality, which is one of our national millenium development goals. The female student admissions statistics have steadily progressed from 39% in 2003, 37% in 2004, 42% in 2005, 48% 2006, and 47% in 2007. The cumulative effect of our policy to admit students on the basis of a 50/50 gender balance has brought the total

female student population on this campus to 45%. In the same vein, our bridging science programme, which enables more female students to pursue natural science degrees is a conscious effort by the University to prevent the girl child from being confined to particular disciplines. Aggressive efforts are being made to find female applicants for the bridging programme, from those who fail to make the normal admission into natural science degrees.

In the area of corporate governance, great strides have been made in the implementation of the Tip Offs Anonymous programme, which is designed to promote good ethical behaviour. Your Excellency, I am pleased to report that the program has been well received by the entire university community. To date, a cohort of nineteen (19) accredited trainers comprising both staff and students from all levels has been produced. This group is leading the process of entrenching the culture of good corporate citizenship within the University community.

Your Excellency, the auspicious occasion today is indeed a manifestation of a delicate synergy of informed, well-proportioned, and carefully timed interventions by various stakeholders. Accordingly, I humbly wish to abuse my privilege, by congratulating in advance, the parents, guardians, spouses and relatives of our graduands; our government, as represented by our Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education; valued friends of Midlands State University; Industry and Commerce; and, of course, our dear graduands, staff and Council of Midlands State University, who have managed against all odds to successfully transform wild dreams into realities. Congratulations, Makorokoto, Amhlophe!

I THANK YOU!

