



AGRICULTURE RESEARCH COUNCIL, SOUTH AFRICA

At

GRADUATION CEREMONY UNIVERSITY OF MPUMALANGA

14 May 2016

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY CEO: DR. SHADRACK RALEKENO MOEPHULI

Minister of Higher Education: Hon. Blade Nzimande

Chancellor of the University, Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa

MEC for Education: Hon. Ms. Regina Mhaule

Chair of the University Council: Dr. David Mabunda

Vice Chancellor: Professor Thoko Mayekiso

University Deans and Heads of Departments,

Distinguished Professors and Lecturers,

Deputy Director General for Dept of PME: Dr. Tsakani Ngomane

Your Excellencies

Distinguished Guest,

Ladies and Gentlemen

**Greetings to you all on behalf of the ARC and South Africa! Sanibonani,
Dumelang! Absheni, Nda, Aheni!**

CONGRATULATIONS!

I think it's appropriate that I must congratulate all of you for this wonderful day along with the celebrations of today.

We often forget to recognize that each of us is born a genius. Yes, you're born a genius!

So, let's start by thanking the parents, guardians and everyone who made it possible for today's graduates to reach this important milestone. We thank the parents because:

- a) They gave you life, nurtured you and provided the necessary guidance for you to become the human being you are;
- b) We thank them because they sacrificed a lot for you to succeed, often with little expectation in return – other than for you to be successful in life and contribute meaningfully to society. The same applies to your guardians or sponsors.
- c) One of the most important contribution from your parents, brothers, sisters, friends and sponsors is that they have been a part of your life to ensure that you obtain good education. That is why you're graduating today.
- d) The question remains: Did you really become the best you could be in life? Are you demonstrating the genius in you?

Sadly, we know that many people fail to recognize that important attribute of being and demonstrating the genius in themselves. They degrade and die in the midst of mediocrity.

I would like to quote one author: Ralph Charell who wrote: *"Nobody succeeds beyond his or her wildest expectations unless he or she begins with some wild expectations"*

Clearly, this tells you that you must be clear in your mind about what you are capable of doing and strive to go beyond that. I believe that many of us in this room learn that we can achieve beyond our expectations – often through the support and guidance of our teachers, brothers, sisters, friends and colleagues.

Another quote by Ayn Rand: “*The sight of an achievement is the greatest gift a human being could offer others*”

For this I think we all need to give a great applause for the hard work of everyone that has made you succeed. For today, I think you must say a special thank you to all your lecturers and Professors here at the University of Mpumalanga. And I know that some of you did your practicals at the Agricultural Research Council across the road. Thank you for giving us a chance to contribute to your development.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we live in interesting times in this beautiful country of ours. South Africa, like many other countries, is going through many changes that often affect our lives in different ways. Some of these changes present to us challenges or difficulties that require among us to seek solutions for our own survival in many ways. Whether it's to put food on the table for our family, to get a job, to keep our jobs and even to just be alive.

With all these challenges, one thing is common, change is the new normal – so, we must embrace change as the best way we can explore ourselves, contribute to society and create the best that we all aspire to be. This calls for leadership.

In life, especially for those who run businesses, it's common knowledge that the only way to remain successful is through good leadership – everyone among us is a leader.

We all need to demonstrate our leadership – A leader doesn't always need a title!

In everything we do we must demonstrate **excellence**. Some of you will be entering the working world for the first time – just remember, every job is an important job – including the cleaner, the gardener, the waiter at a restaurant, the teacher, the mentor etc.

Excellence can be achieved if you have a **positive attitude** in life on everything you do, even as it presents challenges that require your leadership. The education and training you have received is only part of the effort at getting you prepared for demonstrating excellence and assuming your leadership.

Leadership is about how brilliantly you work and how masterfully you behave. You must lift up every single one of the people you work with and get to serve.

Many people go to work with a mind – set that when they get a bigger title with more responsibility they will perform at mastery and go the extra mile in everything they do. Well, unfortunately, that's not what the world expects of you. Your parents are the only ones who give you something before they ask you to work for it – they gave you food and guidance as you were born. Our democracy didn't come freely, we had to work for it to fight the evils of apartheid. So, our parents, brothers and sisters sacrificed and worked hard to succeed in achieving our democracy. Much of this is not about money – When our struggle icon, U Tata Mandela and his comrades worked hard by sacrifices and communicating to the world and all of us the importance of our democratic right – rewards or money was not what they were looking for – it became a consequence much later in life.

Democracy came with a constitution that enshrined in every one of us a bill of rights. The rights we enjoy are not absolute, but require that we exercise them with responsibility.

So, when you disagree with me, you have no reason to burn down and destroy public facilities. When you destroy these facilities that are for you and your family, are you telling us that you want to deny your brothers, sisters, children and friends the opportunity for education, health and better services? Who will re – build these facilities after you destroy them? Who will pay for the reconstruction?

As you leave the university and assume your leadership role in life it will be important to realize that:

- a) Leadership demands that you seek solutions – which means you must be creative and innovative;
- b) You must be dedicated and devoted to your responsibility of doing the best you can;

It's only when we perform at our best that the inner leader in us will enable our communities and families to thrive in what we do – then you get the rewards.

Let's now reflect a little on the challenges we all face in this world.

As I speak to you today, I'm reminded of what one Professor at a business school was doing to teach his students. He came to class with a large bucket.

He began to put large rocks of different shapes in the bucket until the student saw that he could no longer put any more rocks into the bucket -- he asked the students: "can you tell me if the bucket is full – they looked at him and wondered why he asked such an obvious or simple question – he insisted on an answer – they all replied – Yes it's full.

Next he pulled a bag with small pebbles and began to pour it into the same bag with the large rocks. The pebbles went into the spaces between the rocks until he could not put any more of the pebbles. He asked them once more, is the bucket full – they replied with bewilderment – yes of course it's full now.

He pulled another bag full of sand and poured the sand into the same bucket. The sand went into the empty spaces between the rocks and pebbles until he could not pour any more sand. He asked once more – is the bucket full – the students now said it's really full there's no space.

He took a large water bottle and poured it into the same bucket. The water went into all the airspaces between the rocks, pebbles and sand until it was overflowing. Then he asked the students is the bucket full? They now were quiet.

He remarked – Now the bucket is full.

What is the moral of the story?

- a) Things are not always as they seem – there's always another way to look at the same thing;
- b) you must enquire if there's not more that can be done;
- c) You must always look for opportunities in something;
- d) Innovation and creativity will always give you better solutions; and,
- e) You must always challenge yourself to be willing to learn.

As you embark in your new careers, you will find many examples that demand of you the leadership and innovation to succeed. Are you prepared to face the challenges in your career?

Well, let's think a little about our challenges in agriculture:

Transforming African Agriculture through Science

In the last 50 years the global population has increased from 1 billion to the current estimate of 7.0 billion. During this 50 year period agricultural production and supply of food commodities has outpaced population growth and market demand. These increases in agricultural production and productivity have largely been due to public investments in agricultural research and development that yielded crop improvements and new technologies with consequences of revolutions in farming systems and methods. Such successes of agriculture, commonly known as the Green Revolution, have enabled the world to stave off doomsday predictions that have been attributed to Thomas Malthus.

The impact of the Green Revolution has been particularly evident in Asian countries along with consequences of economic growth and further population growth. However, the impact of the Green Revolution had selective and reduced impact among communities on the African continent; with devastating consequences from adverse impacts of climate change such as droughts, floods, pests and diseases that continue to manifest in the form of poverty and food insecurity among large populations. Needless, some countries, such as South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia have harnessed the impacts of innovations arising from investments in agricultural research, albeit with differential success.

Although in the last 5 to 10 years an increasing number of African countries have been investing in agricultural research and development as well as on technology transfer initiatives, South Africa appears unique for its consistent and long term approach. The result has been the rise of commercial enterprises for agricultural systems in many African countries, most scrambling for market access with improved products. Sustained economic performance of many African countries have inspired many about the realization of a continent free from hunger and malnutrition.

Recent studies and predictions by the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) suggest that the global food system will experience an unprecedented confluence of pressures over the next 20 to 40 years. On the demand side, global population size will increase, including Africa, from nearly seven billion

today to 9 billion by 2030, and probably to over 9, 5 billion by 2050. Overall around the world a greater number of people are likely to be wealthier, creating demand for a more varied, high – quality diet that will also require additional resources to produce. Africa, a continent with a growing population will need to particularly ensure higher economic growth to ensure sustainable food security for all.

Further analyses suggest that in the future decades (the next 20 to 40 years) agriculture will experience increased pressure to fulfil the needs of increased population and demand. On the production side, competition for natural resources, particularly land, water and energy will intensify, while effects of climate change will become increasingly apparent. The need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to a changing climate will become imperative. Conservation and sustainable use of natural resources will become critical to the success of agriculture to meet population demands. Over this period globalisation will continue, exposing the food system to novel economic and political pressures. Innovation and increased focus on science and technology for a knowledge based economic system will become vital to the success of agriculture to meet future demands.

Any one of these drivers of change would present significant challenges to food security, particularly in many African countries, South Africa included; and together they constitute a major threat that requires a strategic reappraisal of how to ensure household food security. These drivers of change could present the following five key challenges for the future:

- a) Balancing future demand and supply sustainably – to ensure that food supplies are affordable;
- b) Ensuring that there's adequate stability in food supplies – and protecting the most vulnerable from the volatility that may occur (including agro – logistics, prices etc);
- c) Achieving household access to food and ending hunger (zero hunger). This recognises that producing enough food in the country (and world) so that everyone can potentially be fed is not the same thing as ensuring food security for all;

- d) Managing the contribution of the food system to the mitigation of climate change; and,
- e) Maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services while feeding the population.

As we enter our new careers in life, with all the training in agriculture that you've now received, it's important you clearly understand yourself and your leadership qualities.

We South Africans, have high expectations for you to work with the communities, the farmers, the businesses and others in seeking solutions for agriculture. We hope that by graduating with these qualifications you will use what you have learned to impart solutions for agriculture's success.

We all know that South Africa is trying to implement land reform to try to ensure that our people and communities are able to produce enough food to meet our needs. Your training provides you with unique opportunities to seek and present solutions that will assist farmers to increase agricultural production.

We know there's high unemployment in South Africa – so, some of you may be asking what am going to do graduating without a job. Actually, you're in a better situation than other people – you have been trained to do a number of things:

- a) You know how to grow certain crops;
- b) You know how to advise other people what to do on their farms;
- c) You know how to market/sell your products.

So, don't wait for anyone to give you a job, start thinking how best you could look for opportunities to create a job for yourself. You've been empowered never to go hungry – so don't let your families go hungry.

Remember, excuses don't solve problems, but give one the reason to remain poor, hungry and a failure in life.

We wish you well in your careers.

Congratulations.

You've now got a trade union membership that says you've certain skills for employers to consider you.

I would therefore like to leave you with this African Union vision statement:

“By 2030 Africa is food secure, a global scientific player, and the world’s breadbasket”.

I believe that it’s through educating people such as yourselves that Africa and South Africans will end hunger and make us the bread basket of the world.

May you all be successful in your chosen careers.

I thank you all.