

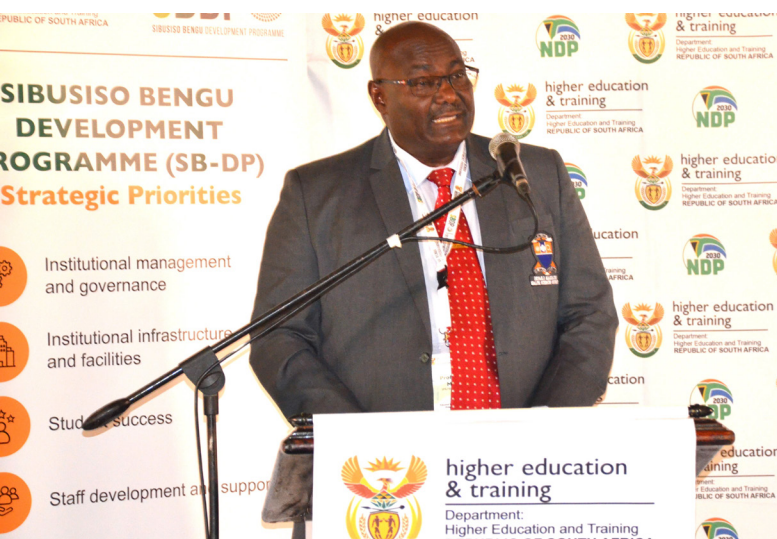
From the VC's Desk

Highlights | Thought Leadership

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VICE CHANCELLOR MBATI LAUDS MINISTER BLADE NZIMANDE DURING THE LAUNCH OF THE SIBUSISO BENGU DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME



The honourable Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande formally launched the Sibusiso Bengu Development Programme (SBDevP) in Durban on 22 July 2022. This programme was previously called the historically disadvantaged institutions (HDI) grant, but has now been expanded with a much larger budget. The launch was attended by Vice Chancellors and other Senior Managers from the eight universities designated as historically disadvantaged, the DG, DDGs and other Senior officials from the Department of Higher Education and Training. The patron of the Programme, Professor Sibusiso Bengu (first Minister of Education in the democratic South Africa) was also present with members of his family.

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SEFAKO MAKGATHO
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

The SMU Vice Chancellor Prof. Peter Mbatlali delivered an address representing HDIs while the key note address was delivered by the Minister Dr Nzimande. The SMU delegation consisted of Prof. Patrick Demana (Acting DVC Academic & Research), Mr. Theo Bhengu (Director Grants) and Dr. Senoelo Nkhase (Director Centre for University Teaching and Learning).

The SBDevP continues to be an important intervention in our HDIs without which the current transformation witnessed in these institutions would not have been seen. This development grant has assisted universities by providing funding to resolve institution specific challenges, backlog of infrastructure neglect and decay, and serving as a catalyst for effective and efficient functioning in key academic and operational administrative functions. In his career as Vice-Chancellor, Mbatlali has been in the inimitable position of being at the helm of two HDIs, and this fund has critically changed the operating landscape of these institutions, including among others:

1. Establishment of Centres for Higher Education Teaching and Learning/CUTL, with funding made available to appoint qualified academic practitioners with requisite skills and experience.
2. Reviews and development of PQMs in line with our Ministers' call for a differentiated higher education sector, with universities playing to their strengths and not attempting to be clones of existing institutions.
3. Establishment of Grants Management offices, to ensure that the SBDevP is uncompromising in the manner the projects are managed, and that we can account fully for resources given to the University.
4. Review of the Viability and Sustainability of program offerings, thereafter culling those that are not viable, and appropriately reconfiguring others as the market may demand.
5. Capacity in critical administrative and operations divisions to increase efficiency and productivity, including the development and embedding of systems to improve operational efficiencies and effectiveness at these institutions. For example with the dramatic increase in funding from Infrastructure Efficiency Grant, HDIs appointed skilled professionals with engineering, quantity surveying, project management, and other qualifications within the Built environment to provide the necessary oversight for mega projects funded through the Infrastructure Efficiency Grants. Etc,

Coming to SMU, this programme made immense impact at a very crucial time immediately following the unbundling and de-merger from the University of Limpopo. It was this programme and the associated funding that supported the University in the re-engineering of its business processes across all business and academic units.

As SMU was a new stand-alone university, there was a great need to review the governance systems, including the academic rules of the Schools and the reconfiguration of the academic governance committees. This programme funded the processes leading to the development of a new business model of the University to ensure it becomes financially sustainable in the long run. There were other strategic infrastructure projects that were made possible by the grant, including the Africa Bio-imaging Facility, Occupational Health and Safety Audits, and the Bulk Water System Contribution to the City of Tshwane.

Finally, SMU feels greatly honoured to have been chosen by DHET to be the home of programme management for the Sibusiso Bengu Development Programme and we have entered into a memorandum of agreement with DHET in this regard.

Despite the many challenges facing HDIs, the SBDevP enables these institutions to reimagine and renew ourselves, serving as a catalyst that enables their development plans to translate into quality and excellence.

Prof. Mbatlali took the opportunity to thank Minister Dr Blade Nzimande on behalf of HDIs for his steadfast belief and conviction in our higher education sector, and in particular, the requisite laser focused attention he has given to HDIs to transform into highly efficient well-resourced universities of choice.

