

Taking education and training to higher levels

By Aretha Phiri

Professor Tebello Nyokong of the Chemistry Department has won yet another prestigious award. She was voted "the most influential women in business and government" in the category of education and training, in an event sponsored by CEO Magazine.

Surprisingly, Prof Nyokong had initially declined the nomination.

"I was surprised to be nominated to be honest. I actually declined the nomination as it was for women in 'business and government'. But I realised that it just means that the recognition is coming from other sectors and at higher levels. I am deeply honoured; it is actually a very prestigious award in appreciation of my work," she says.

Despite her busy schedule Prof Nyokong is committed to the education and training of her postgraduate students.

"I engage in my own hands-on training. I insist on on-the-ground training for my PhD students. I am passionate about training on a higher level, and for me it's about quality education," explains Prof Nyokong.

Noting the category for which she was awarded, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Dr Peter Clayton acknowledged Nyokong's contribution to higher education by saying, "How incredibly appropriate this title is – the most influential woman in education and training – it could only have been improved if



Professor Tebello Nyokong with Chemistry postgraduate students. Pic: Aretha Phiri.

they'd snuck the word research into the title."

Prof Nyokong's dedication to research is evidenced in her facilitation of research workshops targeted at the writing of academic papers. One such initiative was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. And she continues to personally mentor students in her Department.

She is, as her award infers, especially passionate about the development of women in the Higher Education sector.

"My job is to support younger women who are academics. We, as women, struggle so hard to get to where we are that we forget others."

She acknowledges that women typically have a larger burden with regard to progressing to higher education.

"We must appreciate what women have to go through – the social pressures and guilt that weigh women down," she added.

But Prof Nyokong also argues that "We

women must make a choice. I made the choice of never stopping. It was not an easy choice – I had to overcome many challenges. Women must not get favours but must be deserving of their rewards. At the same time, however, doors need to be opened for them in order to achieve this. Personally, I think we are doing very well in South Africa. The laws have changed and women are resilient. They will excel and we need to be positive about that."

Indeed, Prof Nyokong's advances in the sciences – she has conducted pioneering research into photodynamic therapy as an alternative to chemotherapy in the treatment of cancer – have played a vital part in facilitating the advancement of women. She is adamant that the "rules" that govern higher education need to be reviewed.

"Funding for women should not be based on age. Women are often forced to abandon their studies because of familial responsibilities. We need to acknowledge this and to ensure that such rules must change."

Prof Nyokong is an advocate of equal opportunity. She recognizes that men are now facing similar inhibitions commonly associated with the demands of culture and economic pressure.

"I have seen some of my male students discontinue their studies because of responsibilities to their families, for example. We have to encourage communities that educate men and women. This is important."

"Democracy has never automatically liberated women"

By Annetjie van Wynegaard

A petite woman, with a giant red handbag, round silver earrings and a dark shawl around her shoulders entered Eden Grove Red. The audience consisted of a wide variety of women, as well as men, buzzing with excitement when the former and first speaker of a democratically elected parliament in South Africa, Dr Frene Ginwala entered through the doors. She kicked off the Women's Week events with her keynote address. The talk was entitled "Fifteen years of freedom: how free are South Africa's women?"

She began her address with a brief history of the still-water struggle of women in South Africa. Black women under apartheid were not allowed to leave the homelands; they were limited to the domestic sphere. Dr Ginwala told an anecdote of a suckling baby named Joe, who was ill, and was taken into town illegally by his mother, whereupon they were found during a police raid. The case made history as Joe was brought into court and charged alongside his mother.



Former speaker of Parliament, Dr Frene Ginwala. Pic: Zamuxolo Matiwana.

She spoke about the role of women today, fifteen years after the first democratic elections in South Africa. Dr Ginwala said after 1994 all South Africans did not become equally free, that "democracy has never automatically liberated women". She added that the removal of the apartheid laws left a legacy of unequal access to resources and skills. When one drives around in any city one can see the disparity in houses, schools and clinics. The residue of apartheid still affects women today.

She further said that the elite women who have achieved freedom must celebrate, but not become complacent. "Women must not forget

where they come from, and those who have opened the doors for themselves, must make sure to open the doors wider for others," added Dr Ginwala.

She also spoke about the recent sexist statements made by some trade unionists and members of the ANC Youth League that speak of the patriarchy institutionalized in South Africa, and saw this as a failure of some political leaders to understand the long standing policies of the ANC.

About her own selection as speaker of Parliament she said the men at the time were scared of three things: a terrorist, a woman, and someone in a Sari. Dr Ginwala ended her keynote address under roaring applause with "sometimes there is a genetic defect in male eyes that don't see capable women".

Matter of fact

In our last issue we stated that Professor Malvern van Wyk-Smith was an Associate Professor in the English Department at Rhodes. As a matter of fact, he was a full professor at Rhodes from 1978 to 2002. We apologise for the error. Rhodes is committed to bringing you factual information and we try our best to eradicate such mistakes.