

Aunt Laura Mpahlwa FOUNDATION

INAUGURAL Memorial Lecture

Imvuselelo – The rebirth of active citizenry and giving back to our communities to strengthen democracy.

Programme Director Prof Somadoda Fikeni

Our host, the Vice Chancellor & Principal of WSU, Prof Rushiella Songca together with her staff and Deans of Faculty

His Majesty King Buyelekaya Dalindyebo (Ah Zwelibanzi)*

His Majesty King Ahlangene Sigcau (Ah Vulikhaya)*

Former Deputy President of the Republic, Mrs. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and former NDPP, Mr Bulelani Ngcuka*;

Cabinet Ministers in our midst, namely Deputy Minister of Correctional Services, Mr Patekile Holomisa, TBC*;

South African Ambassador to Rwanda, His Excellency High Commissioner Mandisi Mpahlwa

Premier of the Eastern Cape, Mr. Oscar Mabuyane together with the MECs and their HODs*

Deputy Speaker of the Eastern Cape Legislature, Mr. Mlibo Qoboshiyane

Executive Mayor of King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality Cllr Nyaniso Nelani together with his executive council*

Executive Mayor of OR Tambo District Municipality Cllr Mesuli Ngqondwana together with his executive council*

President of the United Democratic Movement, General Bantu Holomisa

Chairperson of the Council of WSU, Adv Tembeka Ngcukaitobi SC

Members of the judiciary, namely Justice Madlanga, Judge Zilwa, Judge Jolwana and Judge Dambuza, and members of civil society

Adv Dumisa Ntsebeza SC

Fellow board members of the Foundation

Members of the Mpahlwa and Msimang families

Senior citizens and stalwarts of the Mthatha community present tonight

The business community particularly our sponsors - South African Breweries, Old Mutual, RM Bophelo Foundation, Eastern Cape Department of Environment Affairs & Tourism

* not confirmed

I also acknowledge my husband Gaur and Wendy Luhabe, one of the four founders of WIPHOLD and an accomplished businesswoman.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude for the honour extended to me by the Aunt Laura Foundation and Walter Sisulu University, to deliver the first memorial lecture dedicated to Aunt Laura. I also want to congratulate the Foundation for the wisdom to decide to partner with the WSU. In the forty-seven years of its existence, WSU has delivered the best of intellectual brains possible to our country, two of which are:-

- Nonkululeko Filtane – Your chancellor is the first black woman to qualify as a chartered accountant;
- Tembeka Ngcukaitobi – one of the finest legal brains in the country who proudly represented South Africa in the ICJ court case.

In four days' time on the 31st March 2024, it will be Aunt Laura's 95th birthday, having been born in 1929. South Africa then was unimaginably different to what it is today. We could never imagine the levels of oppression under which millions of people lived. It was also the year in which the National Party under James Barry Munnik Hertzog won an outright majority in the House of Assembly.

In the run up to this moment in history, various pieces of legislation had been passed that systematically excluded Black people from the political and economic life of the country. With this political development however, the scene was set for the escalation of such actions.

The period was equally characterised by Black people increasingly rejecting this systematic exclusion through amongst others, the formation of the South African Communist Party; the ANC's adoption of the Bill of Rights at its national conference, Nkosi Sikelel' i-Afrika as its anthem and flag with the black, green and gold representing the people, the mineral and land wealth of the country; and a range of protests throughout the country.

1929 was also the year in which the world went into the Great Depression, and South Africa did not escape its economic effects.

It was into this economic, political and social construct that Aunt Laura was born.

In the face of such need, deprivation and exclusion, the spirit of activism and service was inculcated in her from her earliest days.

We met Aunt Laura and experienced her quite early in our teens in the late 70s as the students at St Johns College. For us then she was just a young mother in her 40s who decided to play this parenting role to us. For her it turns out we were yet another project of hers, grooming us for bigger things and being the future that she saw for this country.

The theme of this lecture is **Imvuselelo – The rebirth of active citizenry and giving back to our communities to strengthen democracy.**

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK IS SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Mindful that I will be delivering this lecture to a combination of people in Academics, scholars, businesspeople, politicians, students and all types of leaders, I had to find the theoretical framework in which to place Aunt Laura which can become a takeaway for further intellectual digesting.

The theory that I found applicable to Aunt Laura is:-

“The Social Entrepreneurship Theory”

According to Bill Drayton, Founder and CEO of Ashoka, Social Entrepreneurs inspire images of audacious change; the kind that sweeps away the old approaches to solve intractable social problems such as disease, hunger, and poverty. Social entrepreneurship involves a wave of creative destruction that remakes society. This seems to describe Aunt Laura.

Two of the world’s most famous Social Entrepreneurs are:

Muhammad Yunus

He is a 84 years old, Bangladeshi social entrepreneur who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for founding the Grameen Bank and he pioneered the concept of microcredit and micro finance

Bill Drayton

Bill Drayton is the founder of Ashoka based in the US. Ashoka identifies, connects and support the world leading social entrepreneurs, learns from the patterns in their innovations and mobilizes a global community that embraces these new frameworks to build an “An everyone a Changemaker “. He is responsible for the rise of the phrase “Social Entrepreneur“.

- 1) What is our understanding of Aunt Laura in this context ?
- 2) How do we emulate her in these times?
- 3) Our Youth...how do we direct their energies to be an Aunt Laura?

1. What is our understanding of Aunt Laura?

She was a nurse by profession who qualified at the Pretoria HF Vervoed Hospital in the early 1950s. Born in 1929 to Elda Msimang, she was brought up by her grandparents John and Linah Mpanza in Doornfontein, Johannesburg. When the Group Areas Act was enacted into law, her grandparents were forcibly removed from the city centre into a three-room house in Orlando township in Soweto. Equipped with her nursing qualification, she moved to Mthatha in the early 1950s. This became the base from which she launched all her activities which seemed to be her attempt to deal with the underlying dynamics of the Apartheid system. Typical of her Social Entrepreneur character, instead of treating the society distress mainly due to the cruel Apartheid policy implementation, she held hope for eliminating the distress altogether.

I have grouped all her life activities into 4 categories :

Education

Sibabalwe training centre – for disabled

Eluxolweni school and Siyakhana – a shelter for street kids and to attend school

Umtata International School

Ezra Sigwela J S S.....In Ngangelizwe, a squatter settlement called Etipini.

Aunt Laura contributed meaningfully to the social needs of her community in Mthatha. She was instrumental in raising funds for the establishment of Sibabalwe Training Centre for the Disabled People in Northcrest, a project borne out of Sir Henry Elliot Hospital in Mthatha, where she had worked as a young nurse in 1953.

She further championed the establishment of two institutions for children who were homeless – the Eluxolweni School and the Siyakhana Programme. Both these institutions provided shelter to children who did not have a place to go and where they would be assisted with attending school, meals and other basic needs.

She further sourced land and funding for the establishment of various schools at which she would play a key role as member of the school governing body. When the only existing (previously white) English medium school in Umtata refused access to a lot of children, a committee was formed by the parents including Aunt Laura which led to the establishment of Umtata International School, which became the first Black privately owned English medium school in Mthatha and proudly attended by her own grandchildren.

She also established the Ezra Sigwela Junior Secondary School in Ngangelizwe, which was built for the children of an informal settlement called eTipini.

Social Entrepreneurs appear to make quite deliberate decisions to solve social problems, rather than simply stumbling into their work by accident. They are often quite sober about their decisions to attack a social problem and they usually understand the consequences of challenging the status quo. They are driven by a persistent, almost unshakable optimism. They persevere in large part because they truly believe that they will succeed in spite of messages to the contrary. This optimism is essential to their 24/7 commitment.

Fashion and Beauty

Aunt Laura's Fashion Boutique - 1975-1990

Miss Transkei Beauty Pageant

Miss Universe International Beauty Pageant

Kolisa Modelling School – Beauty Queens

Aunt Laura ran the flagship family business in Mthatha with her husband Maxwell which was named Aunt Laura's fashion boutique. It is however the establishment of Miss Transkei beauty pageant, whose winners were afforded the opportunity of a lifetime to participate in the Miss Universe International beauty pageant; an eye opener to experience other countries and cultures. Clearly for the acceptance of Miss Transkei into the International Miss Universe, Aunt Laura had to travel the world to make a case

for the Miss Transkei representation. These activities were a way to encourage and celebrate black beauty and dignity of the young women – Beauty with a Purpose.

Social Entrepreneurs are bold and audacious, and their ideas are big with grand impacts.

Health

Healthcare Centres – Co-opted in and in partnership with Unitra

Medical Research Council – appointed as a member

Retired Healthcare Personnel Organisation (RHECPO) – “Retired but not Tired”.

Her choice of nursing as a profession further enabled her to serve her community. Being a nurse in South Africa during the height of apartheid was as much a contribution to the country as being a freedom fighter. Black people were excluded from the formal healthcare system which offered only the most basic of services. Mother and infant mortality as well as a range of other preventable health care issues were rife in the community. Nurses were pillars of the society in the face of so much need!

Had she not already had the spirit of service and activism in her, during her training at the then Pretoria Provincial Hospital, she met Mam Adelaide Tambo and as they say, the rest is history. She was to spend the rest of her life devoted to working for the liberation of people from conditions of poverty and inequality.

Yet community organisation was in her blood and in the mid-2000s, she and other retired nurses formed the Retired Health Care Personnel Organisation (RHECPO) under the theme, “Retired but not tired”, which ran health awareness and gardening projects in communities around Mthatha.

Using her nursing qualification, Aunt Laura decided to make these strong interventions in the health sector especially working with the University. Appointed as a member of the Medical Research Council coming from this part of the country, was a breakthrough given the extreme poverty related diseases that are found here. Being part of that

research, innovation, development, and technology transfer to improve the health of the people of South Africa.

Social Entrepreneurs are desperate for impact on the communities they serve.

Politics

Mthatha Committee for Rehabilitation of Newly Released Political Prisoners

Vukani Women's Organisation – ANC Underground Structure

ANC Veterans League

Member of the Provincial and Integrity Committee

Councillor in Ward 9 King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality

Member of the Mayoral Committee heading Housing and Infrastructure

Aunt Laura was not spared the effects of the wrath and power of the apartheid regime. She suffered under its oppressive laws and her home was also raided many times.

Yet she continued to work for the liberation from the deeply oppressive regime, helped people escape into exile, and used her family's boutique as a cell for political meetings.

Her children were equally not spared by the regime, and one of her sons had to flee into exile and another even served time on Robben Island.

Yet Aunt Laura was of a generation where service was part of their DNA. At the same time, she embodied the spirit of President Nelson Mandela's words when he famously said, "It is an ideal for which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

Such was the conviction of the cohort of South Africans of which Aunt Laura was part.

They kept going for the greater good even at personal cost to themselves and their families.

There was no sacrifice too big or small for the South Africa of their dreams and hopes, the South Africa they wished their children, grandchildren and ALL generations to come could enjoy!

Social Entrepreneurs keep going for the greater good even at personal cost to themselves and their families.

Family Values and Generations of Scholars

Aunt Laura imagined us as being a possibility of creating generations and generations of scholars despite our apartheid environment which main objective was to deprive us of education.

She might have been inspired by the Soga family legacy or, closer to home, the Xaba family legacy.

In 1829, a hundred years before Aunt Laura was born, Rev Tiyo Soga was born to a traditional family in rural Eastern Cape and became the first black to go to school. Following the Scottish missionaries who were his mentors, he ended up as a famous scholar at the University of Glasgow in Scotland in literature and theology. He is, amongst his many achievements, very much associated with the famous hymn “LIZALISI DINGA LAKHO“, which he composed. But the biggest legacy Tiyo Soga left behind for South Africa is very much through his two children, William Anderson Soga and Jotello Festiri Soga.

According to the late Prof Bongani Mayosi, cardiologist and Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at UCT, Tiyo Soga’s first-born son William Anderson Soga became the first black doctor in South Africa, having qualified in Glasgow in 1883, 30 years before UCT established its medical school and 60 years before Wits and UCT accepted blacks into their medical faculties in 1941.

This inspired several doctors who came after him like Dr Moroka, Dr Xuma, Dr Monty Naicker and Dr Yusuf Dadoo. Between 1918 and 1934, they all qualified overseas and mainly at the University of Edinburgh, given that Wits and UCT only accepted black medical students after 1941. They all went on to become famous and contributed immensely to our country. Dr Moroka and Dr Xuma became successive Presidents of the ANC, while Dr Naicker revived the Natal Indian Congress and Dr Yusuf Dadoo became the leader of the Transvaal Indian Congress and leader of the SACP.

They left an enormous legacy in South Africa's field of medical science and health, which has become one of the most highly regarded internationally. When in 2020 Covid showed up all over the world, it became very clear that each country was going to have to depend on and be led by its own scientists for solutions. As the Chairman of the Solidarity Fund for Covid response in South Africa, I am very proud to say that for scientific and intellectual direction in this battle zone, I relied on the Covid-19 response team under the leadership of our very own Prof Salim Karim, a product of the former black medical school at the University of Natal. South Africa has been applauded by the World Health Organisation and the rest of the world for the manner in which we handled the pandemic. Such is the strong legacy that Tiyo Soga and William Anderson Soga left behind within Medicine and Health.

It was Tiyo Soga's other son Dr Jotello Soga who became the first ever South African of any race to receive a degree in Veterinary Science. In 1886 he qualified at Edinburgh College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine as a Member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, with a gold medal distinction in botany. After coming back home to South Africa, he helped eradicate rinderpest, a highly contagious and fatal cattle disease that almost decimated South Africa's cattle stock. For the next 26 years until 1912, he was the only Veterinary Surgeon of any colour in South Africa. Befittingly, in May 2009, the University of Pretoria named the library at the Faculty of Veterinary Science after him. It is now called Dr Jotello Festiri Soga library.

And so, besides his influence in theology and literature, Rev Tiyo Soga left behind a huge legacy in these two areas, Medicine and health and Agriculture, in a way that is irreversible.

The same can be said of the Xaba family in Willowvale. Dr Orr Xaba also qualified at the University of Edinburgh in 1936. His daughter Aunt Nolwandle Xaba became the first head of the medical school of WSU. They have no less than four of his grandchildren who are doctors, the latest being his great grandchild who qualified as a doctor two years ago.

Social Entrepreneurs have an obsession with family values and generational legacies especially education.

2. How do we emulate Aunt Laura in these times?

A WIPHOLD Case Study

The theme of this lecture is **Imvuselelo – The rebirth of active citizenry and giving back to our communities to strengthen democracy.**

WIPHOLD is an interesting case study of how Aunt Laura can be replicated and more, especially given that, as this generation, we have better access to resources, financial and otherwise in terms of networks. With the same focus and determination that she used; we can do a lot more to change our country.

WIPHOLD's Centane Maize and soya bean farming project is a valuable and strong example of how rural development can be done.

Centani and Willowvale have got a rich history of the Xhosas, examples of which are:-

- 1) Rev Tiyo Soga is buried in Tuteurha in Centani. In 2010 we built a monument on his grave site, given his importance in our history;

- 2) King Phalo, the Xhosa King is buried in Bawa between Centani and Butterworth;
- 3) The infamous Nongqawuse happened in Centani – the great cattle killing in 1856;
- 4) One of the famous battles in South Africa is Centane Hill battle. This was made famous because it was the first time two kings were in the same battle – King Sarhili and King Sandile;
- 5) King Hintsisa is buried in Nqadu in Willowvale;
- 6) King Sarhili is buried on the Mbashe River.

All this history is not known because it is buried under this deliberate poverty by the apartheid system. WIPHOLD sought to unlock this rich history by first removing this poverty from the system.

Mnquma and Mbashe districts are the poorest districts in South Africa. At some stage Centani and Elliotdale were competing for number 1 and number 2 in terms of the poorest towns in the country. The biggest asset of the community in these areas is land. However, without title deeds, this makes their crucial asset not bankable, due to a lack of security of tenure. This in turn perpetuates the poverty. With this focus in mind, WIPHOLD decided to take on this community problem the Aunt Laura way – by changing it in a way that is not reversible.

In 2005, we set out to confront the issue head on. We were deliberate about addressing the issue through WIPHOLD's community programme. However, for it to be meaningful and sustainable, the farming project had to be more than just a corporate social initiative. We decided to partner with these communities and their traditional leaders to use their communal land without title deeds into commercial farming and in doing so we able to force the investment capital to participate and join the project.

A first step was to proceed with our investment in the land, knowing there were no title deeds and therefore, no security of tenure.

In 2013 WIPHOLD, Nedbank and Old Mutual went ahead with an initial investment of R100m (each party contributed R33 million) and began the maize and soya bean project in the Mbashe and Mquma municipalities.

With these partners having absorbed the initial risks and demonstrating what can be done, other corporate entities came on board with this project, having found a commercially viable platform to support.

Today collectively, we have 2 500 ha under production with 2 800 landowners in the project. Landowners are treated as such with proper rental and then participation in the year-end income. The project covers thirty nine villages in Mquma and Mbashe from Qolora and Taturha in Centani to Caftweni , Gwadana , Nqadu in Willowvale.

The project has 2800 bank accounts, meaning the money goes directly to the landowners and not through some committee or traditional leaders.

Farmwise is the off-taker and is helping with the marketing of the maize and soya bean products.

AFGRI has donated 15 000 tons of bunker storage and a maize dryer into the project. They also help manage it on behalf of the partners.

This is the first ever commercial storage facility for the Eastern Cape and is a significant catalyst for change in the province.

We are following the same modus operandi with livestock.

A decade later, I am happy to say that the following has been achieved:

- We have collectively proved that large scale commercial farming can be financially sustainable on communal land. The risk can be worth it.

- We have created food security and restored dignity to many of the most vulnerable in this community.
- We have reduced poverty and facilitated the development and transfer of skills.
- We have enhanced social cohesion by creating more economic opportunities for more people, an in equitable way.
- We have created the conditions for sustainable and durable change.

This communal project is a massive game changer for Mngquma and Mbashe. The dignity and self-esteem of these communities has been restored. Put simply, this community will never be the same again.

Rural development requires heavy lifting. Small and subsistence farming is not effective for this purpose. The change is substantial and irreversible.

If we can continue the progress we have started, we would have broken the cycle of generational poverty in rural South Africa forever.

3. How do we get youth to act like Aunt Laura?

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), youth are one of Africa's greatest reasons for optimism because 70% of the continent's population is under 30.

Meantime in 2016 a poll of young adults between ages 18 and 29 conducted by experts at HARVARD UNIVERSITY, just 42 % say they support the current economic system, while 51% percent say they do not.

The millennials do not trust the current Mainstream Economic System. While this was a big surprise, according to Muhammad Yunus, it is the poverty, unemployment, and inequality that this young generation is experiencing under this economic system that makes them unhappy. This was surprising coming as it did from the youth of some of the wealthiest countries.

South African youth on the one hand have an added burden of our expectations that they must help us undo all the social ills that were entrenched by the Apartheid Policies. We expect them to deliver on transformation, ploughing back and help us rearrange the fortunes of this country. Because they have better opportunities and possibilities, we expect them to do better than us or the generations before us. They have better tools and equipment and platforms that they can use as instruments for change. Some are in serious positions of leadership both in private sector and public sector.

The Question then arise as to how can we get our youth to act like Aunt Laura? How do we get them to this active citizenry mode?

The benefit we had as my generation, is that we had experienced and lived our adult lives under Apartheid and after the constitutional democracy. We will do anything to make sure that period is never repeated. We also had the privilege of being mentored and lived under the leadership of these stalwarts of change ...Aunt Laura, Mam Bertha Gxowa, Mamusisulu, Omabholofo, OMamsimang, oMankadimeng, oMakotane oMakuzwayo, oSis Zanele Mbeki including Mrs Mbeki senior, oSis Brigalia Bam - we were never short of living role models.

30 years since the dawn of democracy, the history and knowledge of this evil system is starting to fade. Unless deliberately engaged on this subject, the youth might not have enough to work with or even know what we are trying to reverse.

Muhammad Yunus, in his book of "A world of three Zeros: "ZERO POVERTY, ZERO UNEMPLOYMENT ZERO NET CARBON EMISSIONS " does address the matter of how he

tried to answer the question of how to energize the youth into being Social Entrepreneurs in an Aunt Laura way. Universities in all continents are establishing Yunus Social Business Centres to teach courses, undertake researches and to act as clearing houses for social business ideas for business leaders, foundations, NGOs, social activists, government organisations and financial institutions. By now over 34 universities all over the world have Yunus centres.

It might be then to energize our youth back to Active Citizenry, we might need centres like the Yunus Centres with an angle that keeps the memory and knowledge of how the apartheid system worked in South Africa, and its impact that is going to take many generations to correct.

We must recall that when Aunt Laura and her cohort of citizens stood up to be counted, they were just ordinary people, living through the same conditions as other people. They were not extraordinarily advantaged economically or socially. But they would not stand by and do nothing in the face of such need!

This is the activism that is required in this contemporary age – a spirit of working together for win-win solutions and jointly beneficial outcomes.

That spirit is also crucial to ensuring that we build our country together – public representatives, citizens and business.

There is an African proverb that goes, “if you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far, go together.”

Building a nation is not an easy endeavour. Creating a spirit of oneness wherein different identities remaining intact is difficult, even in a country without the fractures we have had to endure.

Thirty years is a short time in the lifespan of a country. In our thirty years, some things have gone well, and others have gone badly.

But nothing is irreversible with the will to do things differently.

We must join together our individual sense of pride and patriotism, so that we can ensure we turn around the trajectory of our country. Our collective spirit to serve will be the driver and critical success factor.

As we gather here today, a few days before the 95th birthday of Aunt Laura, we have an opportunity to consider this point very deeply. And more importantly, we have an opportunity to make a different choice about how we build our country.

And let me say, we will not build our country on hashtags and social media outrage. We need to organise ourselves so that we can address the real issues through hard work, perseverance, and commitment.

Ladies and gentlemen, and to the family of Aunt Laura who are present, the legacy of Aunt Laura will cast a long shadow over our country, and the community of Mthatha in particular.

I hope that this shadow will infuse in us the spirit of active citizenship, the sense of leading to serve, and the humanity to want to build a better South Africa.

The work we have collectively done till now has helped to set us on a different path. But it has not been nearly as sufficient as required. This 30th anniversary of democracy must serve to inspire us to all do more, do differently and contribute wherever we can.

Thuma Mina is not just a nice hashtag for social media. We must be prepared to step up and contribute. There can be no other way to build our country! And it is our country and therefore it must be our responsibility!

Thank you again for this opportunity. I wish the Mphalwa family well as you commemorate the birthday of your beloved mother.