

## Rhodes Excited by Keiskammahoek Partnership

### Column for *Le Ntaba ka Ndoda Community News*

Molweni.

It is a privilege to communicate with members of the Keiskammahoek through the pages of *Le Ntaba ka Ndoda Community News*.

In recent times I have visited Keiskammahoek twice. On each occasion I have been excited about the possibilities of building a between Rhodes University and communities in Keiskammahoek that is based on mutual respect and benefits.

Rhodes' involvement in Keiskammahoek goes back many decades, when the Institute of Social and Economic research did a survey of the area. Some academics have also undertaken other research on the area.

As a university, Rhodes has three purposes.

One is to produce knowledge by doing research so that we are able to understand nature and people and our problems and challenges in South Africa better. Our challenges are well-known. They include economic development and creating jobs; ending poverty; addressing landlessness; providing decent social services such as education, health care and housing; tackling HIV/AIDS and other diseases, ensuring human and social rights for all, and making sure that the people participate in making policies and decisions and really do govern.

Another purpose of a university is to provide students with an education so that they have knowledge, expertise and skills to be citizens and professionals who can develop South Africa and Africa. Universities have to strive to make place for talented students from rural poor and working class families. We have to also make sure that students from rural poor and working class families are given every opportunity to succeed at universities. In this way we have to try and ensure that everyone benefits from democracy.

The third purpose of a university is to undertake community engagement. Here, a university makes use of its knowledge and expertise and its academics and students to contribute to the development of communities.

Through community engagement we aim to not only help build respectful partnership with communities and their representative organisations to address under-development, poverty, and lack of opportunities faced by communities. We also aim to *learn from* communities in a way that increases the knowledge and understanding of academics and students about various issues.

Building a strong long-term partnership between Rhodes University and Keiskammahoek communities is an opportunity for meaningful engagement on a number of levels, in which there can be mutual learning and development.

On 3 May Rhodes leaders, academics and community engagement staff met with Keiskammahoek community leaders and representatives at Rhodes University. We were impressed by the presentations that were made by members of the Keiskammahoek community.

We are excited by the level of organisation, and the seriousness and determination that we see among those with whom we have had contact when we have visited Keiskammahoek. We take inspiration from this. Self-organisation on the part of communities and a willingness of communities to take action and to do things for themselves is very necessary in any real partnership.

Keiskammahoek community representatives have indicated what they see as important needs in Keiskammahoek. From our side, we have indicated the various ways we may possibly be able to support development in Keiskammahoek.

These include partnerships to:

- Research issues of importance to the Keiskammahoek community
- Support teachers, school leaders and students and improve schools
- Place teacher-trainees in Keiskammahoek schools
- Set up early childhood education (ECD) facilities and train ECD teachers
- Create community computer facilities
- Develop a rural fisheries initiative, and
- Raise funds for scholarships and bursaries for talented students from Keiskammahoek to attend Rhodes.

We have also said that it will be important to involve the University of Fort Hare as they have expertise in some areas where we do not.

The emerging partnership between Rhodes University and Keiskammahoek communities holds great promise. Rhodes University is committed to this partnership. In the coming months we look forward to working together with our Keiskammahoek partners to plan our next steps.