

UCT's Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng wins inaugural Africa Education Medal

UCT vice-chancellor, Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng was named winner of the inaugural Africa Education Medal today, 5 September 2022. The award was launched this year by T4 Education and HP, in collaboration with Intel and Microsoft. Phakeng was chosen as the winner from among 10 finalists for the Africa Education Medal from across the continent including H.E Jakaya Kikwete, former President of Tanzania.



Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, UCT vice-chancellor

The Africa Education Medal was founded to recognise the work of those changemakers who are transforming African education. Unesco data show sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of education exclusion in the world. Over one-fifth of children between the ages of 6 and 11 are out of school, with girls particularly disadvantaged. However, tireless international efforts have seen Africa make great strides in boosting enrolment in the decades leading up to the pandemic. By celebrating the stories of those working every day to expand upon these vital gains, the Africa Education Medal aims to inspire others to follow in their footsteps and bring lasting change in African education.

Phakeng is among the world's leading scholars in mathematics education. Growing up in rural and township South Africa during apartheid, she became the first black female South African to achieve a PhD in Mathematics Education in 2002 and she is determined not to be the last. In the two decades since she has published more than 80 research papers and five edited volumes that continue to shape mathematics education in classrooms across Africa and far beyond. Her research focuses on language practices in multilingual mathematics classrooms and has proved influential in post-colonial Africa and post-apartheid South Africa in particular.

"It is the greatest honour to be recognised for my life's passion," Phakeng said. "Quality education is the key to Africa's future and I'm so grateful to HP, Intel and Microsoft for this award that I hope will inspire others across our continent to further the cause of African education."



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Her research and community work have won her many prestigious awards, not least the Order of the Baobab (Silver) conferred on her by the President of South Africa in April 2016. She was named the most influential woman academic in Africa by CEO magazine in 2014, and in 2020 she was included in Forbes' inaugural list of the 50 Most Powerful Women in Africa. This year she became the first African to be elected chair of the International Alliance of Research Universities, succeeding Professor Stephen J Toope, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge.

Professor Phakeng has shown exemplary leadership in her field, with her research illuminating how learners and parents are positioned in and by the power of English. Her work explores practices in mathematics learning that harness learners' spoken languages while developing their mathematical English. This innovative work has highlighted those typically disadvantaged by their multilingualism in an English-dominant society and it has embraced the power of languages in learning.

Brad Pulford, VP and Managing Director, HP Africa, congratulated the winner by saying:

“Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng’s drive and leadership in transforming education across Africa and beyond stand as a shining example to others all over the continent. Only by joining forces between NGOs, government, educators and businesses we can make bold moves towards improving the education environment. A quality education empowers not just individuals, but entire communities. It will skill the next generation to fulfil their full potential in a world being transformed by technology.”

Nominations for the Africa Education Medal opened in April 2022 for individuals working to improve pre-kindergarten, K-12, vocational and university education who are either educators, school administrators, civil society leaders, public servants, government officials, political leaders, technologists, or innovators.



Entries open for inaugural Africa Education Medal

5 May 2022



The winner of the Africa Education Medal was chosen by a Jury comprising prominent individuals based on rigorous criteria from among 10 finalists:

- H.E Jakaya Kikwete, former President of Tanzania and Chair of the Board of Directors of the Global Partnership for Education
- Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, South Africa
- Basuti Bolo, Founder and CEO of GoToSpace, in Botswana
- Cyrille Nkontchou, Founder and Chairman of Enko Education, in Ivory Coast
- Felix Malombe, Executive Director of STEAM Labs Africa, in Kenya
- John Mugo, Executive Director of Zizi Afrique Foundation, in Kenya

- Folawe Omikunle, Chief Executive Officer of Teach For Nigeria
- Jide Martin, Founder and CEO of Comic Republic, in Nigeria
- Musu Bakoto Sawo, National Coordinator of Think Young Women, in Gambia
- Noella Coursaris Musunka, Founder and CEO of the Georges Malaika Foundation, in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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