

Discourse Café with Prof. Rachel Jafta on Social Innovation

BUSINESS SOLUTIONS FOR SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The well-proven Discourse Café series organised by the Frederik van Zyl Slabbert (FVZS) Institute and supported by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) provided a platform for Prof Rachel Jafta, social entrepreneur and Associate Professor at the Economics Department at the University of Stellenbosch, to engage with young people and give them advice on how to solve social problems by using business skills.

South Africa to date still struggles with poverty, injustice, and inequality. These problems, however, are man-made and therefore can be solved.

Prof Rachel Jafta welcomed the opportunity to speak about social entrepreneurship in front of students, which was jointly hosted by the FVZS Institute for Student Leadership Development and KAS. Prof Jafta emphasised the importance of social entrepreneurship, since innovative solutions from the business world can help to successfully tackle societal challenges. Coming from a humble background herself, Prof Jafta is determined to prepare less privileged high school students for university, which is why she co-founded the mentorship programme "Rachel's Angels Trust." Despite the educational deficits in South Africa, Prof Jafta was eager to highlight the numerous achievements of the past – the mentorship programmes for first year students all over the country being one of them. Having just returned from a research tour with stops in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Bogotá (Columbia), New York (US), Ukraine, Slovenia and Italy, Prof Jafta maintained that her colleague from Columbia was impressed with the

mentality of South Africans who were bent on solving their own problems everywhere he went. The example of India, where an app with special bus booking options for women was placed on the market, shows that business innovations can mitigate the social problem of gang-rape attacks and be a profitable source of income at the same time.

The speaker also gave valuable advice for students who were interested in getting involved with social entrepreneurship. Three guidelines, she said, matter most. First, aspiring social entrepreneurs should ask themselves what they care about. Sometimes projects fail because of missing commitment rather than missing skills. Also, a good grip of what has already been done in the field is indispensable. Second, one should find out one's strengths that can help make a project work. When a member of the audience objected that lacking resources might be problematic, Prof Jafta countered that everyone is a resource in themselves. Third, likeminded people, who care about the success of the project as much as oneself, must be identified and brought on board. Only a well-functioning team consisting of *finders*, *minders*, and *grinders*, the speaker claimed, can make progress happen.

About Nelson Mandela...

When being asked whether Nelson Mandela was a social entrepreneur, Prof Jafta affirmed, arguing that Mandela not only cared about people and their problems, but also was a strategic thinker. She encouraged the audience not to be intimidated by obstacles and people who oppose one's projects on

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the basis that they have been doing things differently for a long time. Her advice was to listen to the problems of those people and win them over, because every link in the chain was needed.

About her biggest achievement and mentorship programmes...

Rather surprisingly, Prof Jafta admitted that her biggest achievement so far was getting her driver's license. While she was not too serious about this, she said that she was proud of having trained high schools to select individual students with the potential of academic excellence. When one student criticised the lack of empathy in society, Prof Jafta agreed and referred to her mentorship programme that aims to teach young students empathy as well as other soft skills.

About inequality...

Inequality, a major issue in South Africa, cannot be tackled by affirmative action alone, according to Prof Jafta. Thus, the Employment Equity Act of 1998 was important, but it is no panacea. Proper education and health care were crucial pillars as well. The speaker encouraged young black women, which merely make up about three per cent of the management teams at corporate companies, to have faith in themselves, be confident, and have pride in their education.



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Impressum

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Conclusion

This Discourse Café has shown that it is of major importance to come up with creative solutions to problems of all kind. Events like this may alter the public narrative about societal issues, and therefore potentially have a significant impact. KAS looks forward to hosting more Discourse Cafés. As Nelson Mandela put it: "As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality exist in our world, none of us can truly rest."