

Honorary Doctorate conferred by Utrecht University

Acceptance speech Dr. Hugo Tempelman

Dear Rector Magnificus, Board of the Utrecht University, esteemed colleagues, and all who are attending this ceremony, either in this beautiful church or being virtually connected to us.

Being here and receiving a honorary doctorate from this esteemed university fulfils me with pride but also makes me ask the question: who am I to receive this great academic honour?

To answer this question I will guide you along the road, which brought me from the first bricks of a small PHC Clinic in Elandsdoorn, South Africa to the Dom Church in Utrecht.

Elandsdoorn is a township in the rural areas, characterised by minimal infrastructure, high unemployment, many social illnesses and enormous child & youth development issues. In 1994, I was the first medical doctor in this area with approximately 140.000 inhabitants.

In 2003 Ndlovu Care Group has been the third clinic to initiate a free-ARV program against the political will of those days, which brought the responsibility to describe its successes and its failures. Lessons to be learned and how to improve.

It became quickly clear that all our efforts would have no impact if we did not address the major infrastructural and social issues as well. To cut a long story short, working on food security, bore holes for water, fighting malnourishment, social support in all its perspectives, after-school and computer literacy programs, vocational training for skills development and job creation: out of the small HIV clinic an integrated community development program developed. This was made possible through the donations of many in the Netherlands and other countries, for which I am deeply grateful.

But would all these activities, have brought me here today? Probably not, were it not for the fact, that from the beginning we have had the ambition to learn from everything we do.

I was fortunate enough to meet Adri Vermeer, now emeritus professor of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences who taught me the wise words "If you have not described it, you have not done it".

Together we started research based on the recognition that HIV/AIDS is not only a medical but as much a social and behavioural problem, needing an integrated approach.

This lead to contact with other disciplines at the UU developing the Ndlovu Research Centre, a collaboration between University Utrecht, the University of Witswatersrand and Ndlovu Care Group. Connecting a university from a developed country, to a university of a low & middle income country performing research together in the rural areas. Bulding infrastructure, knowledge transfer and empowerment of research capacity stood central.

'Sharing Science, Shaping Tomorrow' is not a theme that we preach, but live by, day by day.

Professor Geert Blijham, former president of the UMCU and currently Chairman of the Board of the Ndlovu Care Group, helped to establish the Ndlovu Research Center. Here,

translational, epidemiological, social and clinical HIV, and recently SARS-CoV-2, research are brought together.

So, I have guided you along the road from laying the first bricks for a small Primary Health Care Clinic to a multi-faceted organisation in which over 240 dedicated people work for improved health care, education and life perspective.

In this honorary doctorate the many friends and colleagues who have been companions on the road I just described, are honoured. To them, and to my honorary promotores Prof John de Wit and Prof Rick Grobbee as well as the Board of the University Utrecht, I express my gratitude for bestowing this great honour on me.

Be convinced that our journey and collaboration will continue.