

## WITS GRADUATION CITATION: JENNIFER ANNE GLENNIE

Ms Glennie was born in Johannesburg in 1950. She graduated from Wits with a first-class Honours degree in pure mathematics in 1971. After three years as a mathematics teacher abroad, Ms Glennie returned home in 1974 and joined SACHED, the SA Committee for Higher Education. She co-led the team that produced learning materials for the out-of-school youth affected by the 1976 Soweto revolt. This evolved into People's College, a weekly 24-page newspaper supplement carried in *Weekend World*, serving townships countrywide. The apartheid regime reacted to this successful programme by imposing five-year banning orders on the Editor of *World*, the SACHED Director, and the head of People's College in October 1977. Donors wondered if this was "the end of SACHED". But Ms Glennie delayed her planned further studies abroad and, aged 28, took over as SACHED Director, responsible for all programmes and eighty employees in four centres across the country. Over eighteen months, she consolidated the organisation and facilitated the recruitment of its new Director.

She completed her postponed MA in Education and Development at the University of London in 1980. After returning to SA, she set up the evaluation capacity at Wits for the new academic support programmes in several faculties and rejoined SACHED as Deputy Director. Over the turbulent 1980s, she guided SACHED's sustainability and further growth, including new programmes such as Upbeat youth magazine and Khanya College, a recognised preparatory year for university.

In 1993, Ms Glennie became the founding Director of the South African Institute of Distance Education, SAIDE, a new NGO committed to further open learning principles, foster distance education strategies, and enable the use of modern technologies.

In SAIDE, a first dimension of Ms Glennie's leadership has been strengthening distance education at the tertiary level to enable faster, more accessible transformation in the sector. Ms Glennie's first major project was an international review of distance education in South Africa. It identified the changes required to improve completion rates and re-orient staffing and academic offerings to the needs of post-apartheid South Africa. The review also provided a vision of high-quality distance education, upon which SAIDE drew to develop quality guidelines for distance education for the Department of Education. SAIDE has grown over thirty years into a leading institution in its field.

In 1996, Ms Glennie initiated NADEOSA, the National Association of Distance Education and Open Learning in South Africa, a forum of some 65 institutions that at the time were involved in private and public distance-learning provision. NADEOSA recently held its 27<sup>th</sup> congress under the theme "student success", confirming its institutional strength supported by SAIDE and crucially through Ms Glennie's continuing involvement. SAIDE helped NADEOSA develop quality guidelines and case studies of good practice. This has been a second dimension of Ms Glennie's leadership role, bringing student success to the fore in open learning institutions across the higher education sector.

The third dimension has been Ms Glennie's expanding role in higher education governance.

As NADEOSA's inaugural President, she served on UNISA's post-1994 Broad Transformation Forum, followed by three terms on the UNISA Council and its audit committee. In 1998, she was appointed by the Minister of Education to the new Council for Higher Education. Internationally, from 2006 to 2012, she represented South Africa on the Board of Governors of

the Commonwealth of Learning, rising to be Vice-Chairperson. She served on the Minister's review of higher education funding and then chaired the CHE's subsequent exercise.

She was chosen by the Minister in 2013 to Chair the interim Council to set up the new Sol Plaatje University in the Northern Cape. Its new Council took office in August 2014, with Ms Glennie as the Deputy Chair. It opened with 126 undergraduates in 2014 and has expanded to some 3500.

More recently, through SAIDE's Siyaphumelela ("We succeed") programme, Ms Glennie has facilitated collaborations across SA universities to analyse student data towards interventions for improving success. Funded by the Kresge Foundation and strategically overseen by Ms Glennie, the venture has grown to include 17 universities, with Wits as a founding member.

Standing out in its inspiration, originality, and reach is the SAIDE African Storybook initiative, representing a fourth dimension of Ms Glennie's leadership. Guided by Ms Glennie, it uses education technology to enable home-language early reading. Because of traditional publishing costs, most African children never read a book in their own language, damaging their progress to literacy and sense of cultural identity. Started in 2012, using online technology widely available to teachers and librarians, the project by now provides free access to 4000 unique storybooks in 6000 translations covering 240 languages used across 30 African countries. In South Africa, over a million copies have been distributed to schools as part of special "classroom libraries". African Storybook won the Education section and then the Winner of Winners Prize of the global Tech4Good competition. The African Storybook initiative gives continent-wide meaning to decolonising education and the pursuit of social justice that has driven Ms Glennie's work

Ms Glennie's work has been recognised nationally and internationally. In 2002, she was appointed a Fellow of the International Commonwealth of Learning. In 2007, she received the Chancellor's Medal from the University of Pretoria for her contribution to education. In 2024, she received the African Council for Distance Education Legacy Service Award for exceptional contribution to the field of Open Distance and e-learning.

Over a fifty-year period, Jennifer Glennie has made an outstanding contribution to education and social justice in South Africa. Through a range of strategic and innovative education programmes and institutions, she has played a pivotal role in opening access to quality education at all levels for marginalised communities in South and Sub-Saharan Africa. Her major contributions have been in strengthening distance education at tertiary level to enable faster, more accessible transformation in the sector; bringing student success to the fore in open learning institutions across the higher education sector; significant governance contributions in South Africa's higher education sector; and using education technology to enable home language early reading.

Jenny Glennie has shown remarkable visionary and forceful leadership, yet is supportive and inclusive, coupled with executive skills, a rare combination. Her lifelong efforts in South Africa and beyond have anticipated and exemplify the fourth Sustainable Development Goal, which is to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." She is a role model for educationalists everywhere, and therefore, it is befitting that the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg bestows an Honorary Doctorate degree on Jennifer Glennie.

