

GRACE Zimbabwe project leader, and Unisa Library Executive Director, Dr B Mbambo-Thata, elected as Unisa Woman of the Year

Buhle Mbambo-Thata, GRACE Zimbabwe research team leader since the project began, was elected as the 2010 Unisa Woman of the Year at a prestigious Unisa Women's Forum (UWF) Luncheon on 13 October 2010.

The Unisa (University of South Africa) Women's Forum considered a number of portfolios of nominees with outstanding performance across all sections in the University. Criteria used by the UWF Adjudication Panel were: Leadership, Mentoring women in the workplace, Gender Activism and promotion of women's rights, Courage in adversity and Community service.

A brief summary of the motivation of the Panel can be read [here](#).

[this text to be linked] Dr Mbambo-Thata is an outstanding scholar and activist in her field and is recognized for her sustained contributions at local, regional and international levels. Her professional career spans more than three decades of distinguished service and exemplary leadership, and she has achieved recognition internationally as a leader in her field.

It is her extraordinary and sustained leadership, peer recognition and election to high offices, with substantive impacts, that impressed the adjudication panel. She served as the Secretary as well as the Chairperson of the IFLA Africa Section, she is a member of the IFLA Governing Board, and chairperson of Division 5 Regional Activities of IFLA. In this role she co-ordinates the following sections – Africa, Latin America and the Asia Oceania regions. This creates a unique and influential opportunity for Unisa Library and its staff to actively participate in developments and contribute to the federation internationally. Indeed an example of “Unisa in the service of humanity”.

Her four years at Unisa has seen the introduction of several major strategic projects, including the Unisa Institutional Repository; implementation of the Mobile Device Catalogue Access – AIRPAC – the first of its kind on the continent; extended library hours to improve student access and the implementation of Radio Frequency Technology (RFID) to enable self services for clients as well as improving stock management. The latter is a critical feature for the Unisa library, given its size and scope. 2010 sees the library become one of the first to use Mobile Libraries to extend the reach to rural areas and expand Open Distance Library services beyond the major urban centers in the country. Her work on Open Source and Open Access is also pioneering.

As the chair of the Board of Trustees of E-knowledge for Women in Southern Africa (EKOWISA), she leads this NGO in its mission to promote the development of a gender sensitive knowledge society through the effective use of appropriate ICTs at local, national, regional and international levels.

She also plays a leading role in the Gender Research and Women Studies Project (GRACE) on the continent, and amongst others a most notable Zimbabwean project on Gender and Research in Africa into

ICTs for Empowerment, initiated in 2005 involving 14 research teams across 12 countries to examine how women in Africa and the Middle East use ICTs to improve their living conditions and to identify the barriers. In that capacity, she has led various projects pitched at women in higher education and consciously include capacity development of young professionals and academic women in qualitative and feminist research methods.

In conclusion, the panel was convinced that Dr Mbambo-Thata leads by example, and that her phenomenal achievements are a source of inspiration. As a compassionate and trained counselor, she manages to impact positively on the lives and well-being of many of her subordinates and peers. Her assertiveness, high standards and going the extra mile to ensure the necessary resources to ensure success is impressive.

Dr JC Henning

Deputy Executive Director: Unisa Library