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NRF honours UCT champion of transformation in science

Associate Professor Maano Ramutsindela from the University of Cape Town is hard at work grooming the next generation of black scientists. His efforts to transform science in South Africa earned him the 2012/2013 National Research Foundation (NRF) Special Category Award for Transformation of the Science Cohort on 27 August 2013.

The prestigious NRF award recognises Ramutsindela's contribution to the transformation of the science cohort, by attracting more black scientists to academia and helping them become leaders in their respective fields. Ramutsindela explains: "The challenge is that the world of academia is 'never clear' or simple, particularly for people who are suddenly expected to imagine a world they have never been exposed to. Through spending time with potential students before they register, I look for ways to help them prepare – intellectually and psychologically – for the road ahead."

Ramutsindela, of UCT's Department of Environmental and Geographical Science, says he is humbled by the award. "The award rekindles memories of my student years and the obstacles that were systematically placed on my track so that I should only finish the race last, if I were to finish it at all. It is a celebration of my touching the finishing line with some of the best in that race. The award also affirms that I am running on the right track and that I should prepare others to take the baton."

In 2002, Ramutsindela was among the first group of social scientists at UCT to be awarded a NRF P-rating for young researchers (usually under age 40). He is also the first black geographer to edit the *South African Geographical Journal* and the first black African to be elected a Fellow of the Society of South African Geographers.

His efforts to transform science are not limited to South Africa. As editorial board member of several leading global journals, Ramutsindela represents Africa on environmental and geographical matters, and is able to challenge "interpretations and misrepresentations" of African issues. "It is important to play a role at this level of knowledge production because this is where African voices and alternative views could be silenced," he says. "If we ask ourselves why disturbing views about Africa are still prevalent today, we are likely to find out that they have a scientific stamp of approval through major journals that are also used as teaching material."

Ramutsindela was one of three UCT nominees for this year's NRF special awards. Emeritus Professor Lionel Opie was nominated for a NRF lifetime achievement award and Professor

Peter Dunsby for Champion of Research and Capacity Development at Higher Education Institutions in South Africa.

Professor Danie Visser, UCT's Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for research, said: "These awards celebrate remarkable academics whose work has helped position UCT as an African hub of intellectual activity. Researchers and role models such as Associate Professor Ramutsindela are part of our platform for nurturing the next generation of academics."

UCT currently has 416 NRF-rated researchers, including 33 A-ratings and six P-ratings.

ENDS

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