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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: PROFESSOR VERONICA MCKAY – EXECUTIVE DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA (UNISA)

SPEAKER	TRANSCRIPTION
DR. MALKA	Hello, I'm Dr. Amaleya Goneos-Malka, welcome to 'Womanity – Women in Unity'. The show that celebrates prominent and ordinary African Women's milestone achievements in their struggles for liberation, self-emancipation, human rights, democracy, racism, socio-economic class division and gender based violence.
DR. MALKA	Joining us on the line today from Pretoria is Professor Veronica McKay who is the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of South Africa (UNISA). She was responsible for establishing the Institute for Adult Basic Education at UNISA which has trained over 90,000 adult basic education teacher practitioners. She has served as a CEO of Curry Goody, the South African Literacy campaign; she is also a co-ordinator of the Department of Basic Education's School Workbook Development Project which provides learning materials for all public schools. Welcome to the show!
PROFESSOR MCKAY	Hi, it's a great privilege to be on your show.
DR. MALKA	Thank you so much for joining us and for being part of our focus in our series on Women in Academia. To begin with, you've been Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education at UNISA since 2014; can you tell us more about some of the work that you do and the responsibilities that come with holding this role.
PROFESSOR MCKAY	Okay, yes, let me begin by describing first of all the faculty or the college that I head; it's a very, very large college. We work across the education sector so we begin with educators or carers from birth to four and then we go right across the spectrum to post schooling, TVek colleges and also adult basic education, so it's a very large college and we supply almost half of the teachers in South Africa so it's a massive role and it's a massive responsibility because you know that you are producing teachers that will be teaching the next generations of South Africa, possibly the next president and so it's a huge responsibility....
DR. MALKA	...and if you consider that you're teaching half of our educators in the country, you are guaranteed that you're teaching half of the country at least, in terms of the teaching staff that UNISA is producing.
PROFESSOR MCKAY	Yes, if one thinks of it in that way, knowing that the teaching force will probably be functioning for the next 30 years, we are teaching half the country and so one has to take very, very seriously the role that the dean of education at UNISA has.
DR. MALKA	What would you say are some of the greatest challenges in this position?
PROFESSOR MCKAY	At the moment there's a massive re-curriculation process. We have a new policy; the Mr. Tech document which is the minimum requirement for teacher education qualifications and then in terms of TVek there are new policies for TVek and there are also new policies for adult basic education or adult and community education. So we're in a massive transition at the moment and gutting that right so that we know that our graduates are going to be well placed in the education sector. You know it's a huge challenge and for us the main challenge is scale; you get it wrong and you get it wrong to scale...
DR. MALKA	...and like you said it's got long-term implications because these people that you're putting through will have an impact on the workforce for 30 years to

	come.
PROFESSOR MCKAY	Yes.
DR. MALKA	And turning towards the future are there any particular milestones that you want to achieve?
PROFESSOR MCKAY	Well basically getting this done, working through the master plan and then we're also moving quite a lot to digitisation to what we call a blended approach; UNISA is a distance institution and a large portion of our teaching has been text based and we're wanting to go online; making sure that we are in line with, for example, international goals, international targets and I work quite a lot at the international level to make sure that we both inform the international agenda but that we also share and draw on ideas.
DR. MALKA	And speaking in terms of international work and continental work, more and more we operate in a globally connected society; can you tell us a little bit more about some of the significant research or collaborative projects that you're working on with your counterparts in other countries?
PROFESSOR MCKAY	Yes I've worked with quite a lot of the international organisations, starting with the British International Development Group and a lot of the work that I did in Adult Basic Education was informed by collaborations and that was reinforced by the work that I did with UNESCO where I now serve as UNESCO's fellow but we worked for example on the development on the new Sustainable Development Goal and especially goal Four for education and all of these initiatives inform the way that education happens in the country and happens globally and how we at UNISA are able to interpret and to make particularly international goals relevant for the kind of work that we do here.
DR. MALKA	And there seems to be a dynamic of its not just about taking information or best practices from other countries but it's also about being able to contribute into the discipline from the work that's done in South Africa too.
PROFESSOR MCKAY	You know I think South Africa and Africa indeed is a big player in most of the international discussions. So we talk about thinking globally but acting locally but it's an interchange that Africa is feeding into the international agenda but at the same time we learn and we share. There's always the kind of two-way interaction, it's not merely learning and transplanting, it's learning and engaging and then making applications and so we set up the literacy campaign and it was intended to reach 4,7 million and that was partly what I did when I was in government. The other aspect that I was able to learn was when we were in New Zealand we were exposed to the Department of Education's in-house publishing sections and one of the tasks that I did do when I was in basic education was to help to conceptualise the school workbook project and a lot of my insights came from what we saw in New Zealand, in Kenya and in many of the states in the United States and Canada and by last year I know that government had distributed probably 300 million schoolbooks to kids in public schools and that again is the kind of responsibility that is associated with scale. One has to be really careful because you can have a massive impact but you can also have a national disaster if you get it wrong.
DR. MALKA	Scale seems to be a common theme that runs through this which I totally underestimated, I mean you were talking there about 300 million school books; you spoke about 4.7 million people in terms of being able to touch them from a literacy perspective and I think those are all critical functions in society, if someone can't read, if someone can't count, these are the basic tools that you need in order to move ahead and develop in your life.

<p>PROFESSOR MCKAY</p>	<p>It's a fundamental tool. I'm busy helping with what we call the Close-Out Report at the end of the literacy campaign and I'm analysing data from millions of learners to see what kind of impact becoming literate made on their lives and the most important for adults, and you must know these are people who, during apartheid were denied schooling, and we were able to reach them through the Curry Goody Literacy Campaign, which by the way, in Tshivenda means "let us learn," the most significant indicator that all learners indicated was self-confidence; how much better they feel about themselves, how they feel respected now that they can read. So you know that's just the main indicator and then there were a whole range of indicators for example, being able to better understand healthcare messages. Learners, once they've learned to crack the code a lot of these pieces fell into place for them and that they were better able to understand the health message but they were also able to access it and so those were significant indicators. I think the granny who was able to use an ATM for the first time and one of our learners said she had no idea what her monthly pension grant was because she would always send her grandkids and she never, ever received the same amount because they were obviously taking a bit of a commission....</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>...tax...</p>
<p>PROFESSOR MCKAY</p>	<p>...ja and as funny as it is, you know, it's a serious thing that granny can now be in control of her own finances and the number of women who indicated that they were better able to handle finances and household finances and I mean to become a minister of finance at home is a significant elevation. And then the other indicator that we found was the kind of resilience of adult learners that when they were in groups they conceptualised projects, whether they were growing vegetables or going to go and lobby a counsellor because the bridge was broken, but that kind of grit and that fight back was very significant.</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>You know all these stories that you have narrated really echo the power of education, not just in terms of the content, but in being able to apply the thinking, the rationale and advance, put things together and...</p>
<p>PROFESSOR MCKAY</p>	<p>...yes...</p>
<p>DR. MALKA</p>	<p>...comprehension, which people who weren't receiving the benefit of education couldn't do previously. Now our programme 'Womanity – Women in Unity' is all about gender equality and one of the things that I'd like to talk about and we've spoken about literacy which and education which clearly is a fundamental that people need to have, but looking towards women in particular; what are your perspectives about women's empowerment and gender equality legislation, particularly in terms of helping close some of the gender gaps which are still prevalent, whether that is pay differentials, promotion issues, position issues?</p>
<p>PROFESSOR MCKAY</p>	<p>Legislation in terms of gender is critical and that would then guarantee numbers and quotas but I believe that all policies should have a gender awareness about them so that if you're working on no matter what budget, the budget is gender sensitive, that there is a sensitivity of women behind all the policies. What worries me often is the gap between the policy and practice, sometimes we have brilliant policies but the moment it comes to practice it becomes dislocated. If we don't take and re-socialise the men who often are in charge of these policies to get rid of that gap and I'm just going to go back to the school workbooks that I worked on, at the level of children, we were making the boy child aware of some of the problems that the girl child might face; stereotypes, how do....that girls can't do maths</p>

	<p>and so gender sensitivity needs to work across the spectrum; boys need to be made aware of it and girls need to be made aware of challenging barriers and so back to legislation, it's not just something that gets ticked, it needs to be something that is lived and unless men are made aware of even their sort of unconscious bias, we're not going to make a lot of headway with policy. It needs to be cross-cutting and it needs to be affirmative, at the university at the moment there is affirmative possibility that if a man and a woman are both equally appointable for certain positions, we would choose the females. Unless we work on the male species we're not going to get very far.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>You're a hundred percent right and I think that sometimes when we're looking at affirmative policies that sometimes quotas or affirmations are regarded as controversial, but in my opinion, until we get to an equal playing field those are the mechanisms that need to be utilised to help drive equality.</p>
PROFESSOR MCKAY	<p>We have to work with a quota system because of the historical inequality. I can say that over my lifespan in education there's been really huge changes in this sector so policy driven and probably ideologically driven. When I started teaching in the late 70's as a school teacher, a married woman could not be appointed permanently and the moment you got married or if you became pregnant you lost your job and you were put onto temporary staff. So there has been a change in the education sector and you see more and more women in power, just as we have two female ministers of education.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>What would you say have been some of the key drivers to realise this transformation?</p>
PROFESSOR MCKAY	<p>You know one mustn't ever underestimate the apartheid struggle for women. Although there are many contenders that would say that the struggle for liberation in South Africa focused mainly on race and maybe somehow on class but I do believe that with the changes in the country a greater awareness of democracy, of human rights, all of that tried to sweep away the inequalities of the past. Look we haven't got there yet, it's...we're en route, but those changes and a greater awareness of human rights, the human rights culture; the new culture has had to deal with the remnants of the old society that we had. In the school system and certainly in the teacher education that I'm responsible for we look at improving teachers values, even the values of Ubuntu; caring, nurturing, of unlearning the past so that we're able to move into a more equitable society. There's a huge focus in the school system and in university of critical thinking. I don't know if you can hear there's background noise at the moment because on the campus there are protests against gender discrimination and female harassment. So I think the society we're in is not going to tolerate...and most of these atrocities almost are brought to the table and brought...a lot of them are brought to book. With children, when I worked with the school system; look we know gender violence it's rife, it's rife in institutions and it's rife in households too so with the schoolbooks what we tried to do was to make children aware. So there is a greater awareness that we didn't have before and all credit to the struggle for liberation and it was not just a struggle for political freedom; it was a struggle for human rights.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>In the last segment that we've just spoke about one of the factors which I've found coming through loud and clear is that we absolutely do not have to accept the status quo of a society. As humanity we've got the capacity to change, to unlearn elements which are incorrect, to re-programme our thinking and to transform society into the right way, whether we've got active civil movements, you've mentioned on campus that there are protests going on, people are raising awareness about issues that they are concerned about and once that awareness</p>

	has been raised then people can start taking action to address the situation.
PROFESSOR MCKAY	Ja, it is about re-programming and it's about working with children in the school system, even with bullying, bullying in the school setting, no matter how little they are, ways that it can be apprehended, whether it's reporting it to a teacher or protecting another child. The education system is extremely powerful in making these changes. It's certainly about tackling the many oppressions that we have and my own background as a sociologist where probably constantly in my awareness is to look for where are the power blockages; where are the points of oppression and we grew up on a sort of a diet of looking at liberal feminism, Marxist feminism and the radical feminism that would have challenged patriarchy and capitalism and then there's African feminism is a triple oppression of sort of race, class and gender patriarchy and how African women, under extreme adverse situations and often situations of poverty, extreme poverty, migration of part of the families and so on; how they've risen to challenge the barriers of oppression. How the literary campaign was able to assist many women to grow that resilience and to be able to adapt and to challenge and to speak truth to power. There's a lot that we can learn from the struggles of women.
DR. MALKA	Yes I'd say women in the continent have certainly had more than their fair share of struggles to deal with looking at the sectionality of race, class, gender, patriarchy and usually poverty is one of the....
PROFESSOR MCKAY	...poverty, yes....
DR. MALKA	...key areas that they are confronted with.
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to Professor Veronica McKay who is the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of South Africa. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter: @WomanityTalk.
DR. MALKA	Prof McKay I must say that the teaching profession seems to be one sector which is favourably biased towards women. As we've already discussed, they provide an important role in education as well as the development of society; how do you see the responsibilities of universities towards shaping the thinking of students as the countries and continents future socio-political economic players?
PROFESSOR MCKAY	UNISA itself, we are a university with aeight colleges so we work cross-sect orally from engineering and science and human sciences and of course education. We also work in teacher education from, as I mentioned, from birth to four, right across the schooling sector and we obviously in the providing of the human resource capacity, we have a critical role to play, certainly in South Africa, where we are producing at least one third of the graduates across the sector and as I mentioned close on 50% in teacher education. So we are informed by the National Development Policies, by the market intelligence, but our focus also has to be on graduateness; that the graduate is able to function in society, that we try to take care of the ethical side, that they are able to work in terms of the sustainable development goals, so for example the global compact. We looked through the green economy, the blue economy and again to harnessing critical thinking skills so that students don't just graduate as bureaucrats, rule followers and box tickers, but that they actually focus on making a contribution to the developing society we live in.
DR. MALKA	You mentioned at the beginning of our conversation for instance that there was policy changes that were happening that were causing adjustments to the curriculum and one of the things that I find fascinating about the world that we live in is that it is developing and evolving so quickly that these changes occur

	faster than we've got time to adjust curricula; how do you think we can develop our capabilities for the future to overcome this gap?
PROFESSOR MCKAY	Particularly as a distance education institution where much of our teaching is text based, digitisation is going to be the only solution for enabling us to keep up-to-date with changes and the curriculum is living, it's not something that one does and then it's dead. So we're using increasingly now E-resources that students are able to download text and we're able to update our teaching by looking at the latest journal articles. Open education resources is also a very, very important way that we're able to keep abreast with what is happening across the globe and then trying to move quite a large portion of our textual teaching to online where it can be easily modified and I had this great success when I was working for the Department of Basic Education in that we were doing our own in-house publishing and we were able every year to modify the school books that we were using because it wasn't feasible for the state to warehouse books, it was expensive and so each year materials were printed or they were beamed and quickly downloaded where schools were using tablets, so it just made things that much easier for us to change. Sometimes you had an area in a book that you needed to correct or parts of the curriculum were not that transparent for teachers and schools to follow and so we were able to do quite a lot of updating and modification in that way rather than the textual way of dealing with materials and having one book that the student has to consult for the next five or ten years. So it's dynamic and in order to be dynamic and to have a dynamic curriculum I think one has to move more and more towards using the different ICT platforms that are available to us. But having said that, often our students and one must understand that our students come from across the socio-economic spectrum, often our students are less secure about learning online or having to mediate learning using a digital device. Poorer students haven't grown up with technology or with devices at home and devices in their hands and so we have had students saying it puts us at another disadvantage because we're not able to compete with our peers who have grown up with technology and so that kind of bridging and I think it's a bridging that we need to do in schools and it's bridging of the digital divide where often teachers themselves either don't have access to device, don't have access to data or don't have access to particular skills to use the technology and these are areas that we do have to work quite a lot on. So for example in our new qualification every teacher graduate or every student that comes through our faculty or college has to do a course on ICT literacy and be able to manoeuvre the technology and to start to either use it for their own learning or to integrate into the teaching of learning in their own classrooms. So it's a way of being current, it's a way of being dynamic, but at the same time we as educators and as large institutions need to help students over that barrier and it's the digital divide barrier.
DR. MALKA	It is an enormous barrier that needs to be overcome but ultimately the way our society is progressing and the direction that we're taking, it's a necessity to have ICT skills for everyone and I would almost argue that one day it will probably become a human right to have access to the internet and to online connectivity.
PROFESSOR MCKAY	People ask me, I mean there's quite a lot of discussion that it's a life skill and it is a right, that connectivity becomes a right because it's so excluding and here when I go back even to the literacy learners that I had, the greatest breakthrough was being able to access either an ATM or to be able to send an SMS using a cell phone and that was...that's your entre in. Apart from bridging that gap many of our students are funded by the state

	<p>schemes and we have in education we have Ufunza Lushaka Students, which means they receive a bursary from the Department of Basic Education and that enables them to buy the device and to access data and we're actually asking for free data that they're....and in fact the university has done it, that students could access the university platform for learning zero rated and I think more and more that is the direction that we need to take. What we have done in the interim is we have a joint project between the Department of Higher Education, Basic Education and ourselves as UNISA and we've resourced teacher centres and one....these teacher centres are in every school district so they kind of cover the country so our students have access to all of those. So this is the kind of middle step that we have and we're finding that students are starting to use these as resources instead of having to chew at an internet cafe or whatever. It's for free and they're accessible and as a middle step until students have their own devices, we are starting to bridge that digital divide.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Those are all great enablers that the university has implemented, particularly sourcing aspects of free data, being able to provide devices in order to allow connectivity to occur amongst students and to access our global society. We've spoken about the professional aspects, now I'd like to turn more towards a personal side and one of the questions that I ask my guests on this programme who've made tremendous contributions in their respective fields of expertise is about some of the factors that they consider have contributed to their success. In your opinion what have been some of the key drivers to your success?</p>
PROFESSOR MCKAY	<p>Gosh, it's weird because one doesn't look at oneself as being successful, but probably if I...grit is what I would want to use, that I...probably I'm like a dog with a bone and I really persevere and I don't allow...if I have a path that I'm going to follow, I do so with grit and when one does hit a number of barriers whether they are political barriers, social barriers, challenging systems that sometimes are not conducive to good learning or to being able to live on one's mandate, one needs to have grit and to be resilient and not to be let down. And then also from a very early age I had...from the age of probably five/six, I developed my own kind of social conscience. So I grew up on the mines in Johannesburg and I was always quite amazed that I'd begun to read and I was able to read prices in the shop and then to be surrounded by these big strong mineworkers, many of them were migrant labourers who couldn't read and I think one from an early age became aware of the kind of social injustices in our society and equalising society has always being a goal that I had and I suppose sometimes it could be hard to grow up with a social conscience and see that most of the society is oppressed and is unequal. You know it became almost a life mission and probably education is one of the paths to dealing with social inequalities.</p>
DR. MALA	<p>It's a very powerful motivation to pursue in terms of equalising society. You've mentioned some of your experiences like being surrounded by the mine labourers; can you share some of the pivotal moments of your life growing up?</p>
PROFESSOR MCKAY	<p>Yeah I grew up on Crown Mines in Jo'burg and just the way the men worked or lived for example, so you would have had the men's single quarters and those were for white men and then the mine compounds and because we were kids able to roam freely amongst the mine dumps and the mining community, ja I was always very, very aware that black men were put in compounds and I mean we got close enough and we could see the slabs that were makeshift beds and we could see the men's single quarters and so from very early we grew up as children without kind of racial barriers because you mixed and you were always treated as a child in the form of Ubuntu sort of very kindly but often then being asked by a</p>

	<p>mineworker in a shop, and I'm going back to age six/seven, can you tell me what the price is and showing you a hand full of coins and saying do I have enough in my hand to pay for that, or, asking...being given an address to go and do part-time gardening which is what the mineworkers did and could I show them where that particular address or street was. So it was kind of...growing up with that kind of consciousness and yeah maybe you know I was fortunate, I've been really fortunate in having that kind of exposure and recognising social injustices from an early age and yeah just being able... I suppose sociology and education were both pathways into the kind of life that I've chosen and the career that I've chosen.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Social injustice and inequality have clearly been strong influences in your life; who would you say have been some of the strong women in your life and how have they made you become who you are today?</p>
PROFESSOR MCKAY	<p>My own mom was a very strong woman and my grandmother was a strong woman and there was an awareness again amongst them, for example my mom was a piano teacher and in those days you would have gone to jail for teaching black learners in your home but that was never, ever an issue and there were black music students coming into our home and that was how we grew up as children. This is the week of Mama Mandela's funeral and she signified a great woman, her striving for political freedom, her striving for the underdog, her kind of self-sacrifice and you know one coming through a struggle history and early on in my own life I was very aware of Mama Mandela for example and the critical role and the self-sacrifice that she made. One also becomes aware of one's on privilege and I think what's important is the recognition of privilege and how one uses one's privilege to help underprivileged, I think these are important lessons that sometimes we don't think about ourselves as being privileged, but what can we do with our privilege.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Thanks for sharing those important reflections and lastly as we close out the conversation today could you please share a few words of inspiration or wisdom that you'd like to impart to younger women listening to us on the continent?</p>
PROFESSOR MCKAY	<p>I spoke earlier about unlearning and I think unlearning is very important because we often learn to be who we are and often we need to unlearn who we are and I'm talking to black and white women that there's quite a lot that we all need to unlearn. We need to rethink the way that we think, I think that's important and that one of your questions earlier on was is equality possible and equality is possible and we are equal but we struggle with the way that society perceives this equality and so it's about unblocking, unlearning, unthinking and rethinking and taking on the different challenges and the blockages and also rules that are unworkable, there are many rules that are unworkable that need to be un-thought and re-thought. So ja that is my message.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>I think it's a really strong motivational message on the ability to change things that aren't working and if it means changing yourself then so be it. Thank you so much for joining us today, it's been a real pleasure hearing about the work that you do, the changes that you're driving in society both from a South African perspective as well as into the continent and the impact that it is going to have on generations of the future.</p>
PROFESSOR MCKAY	<p>Thank you.</p>
	<p>PROGRAMME END</p>