



## Message from the Vice-Chancellor and Principal

### Season's greetings to all our Alumni

As we approach the end of the year, it is my pleasure to share with you the journey we travelled in 2023 in this special edition of UNIVEN Alumni News.

First and foremost, I wish to express my deepest gratitude for your continued engagement and support on all matters affecting your alma mater. Your involvement in the effective governance of the institution and alumni events has been instrumental in further positioning the University of Venda for impact and relevance, and creating a vibrant network with fellow alumni.

I am pleased to share that our great University continues to be outstanding in various fields, thanks to the dedication shown by our faculties, students, staff and alumni. The University has witnessed phenomenal growth in research initiatives, and programme offerings continue to flourish, making a lasting impact on society. We create leaders at UNIVEN, and our alumni in this regard excel in their respective fields, increasing the prestige and recognition of our institution.

As I reflect upon the journey this year, I see we have had notable achievements: ground-breaking research, engaged scholarship activities, and success stories from our alumni. At the outset, I should single out that the President of Convocation, Mr Sylvester Motadi, is leading from the front in research. His research has an international presence, as showcased in India, where he was bestowed with the Royal Golden Fellow Award for outstanding research, and a paper he presented at the BRICS Conference held in South Africa.

The University of Venda was ranked among the Top 11 from a group of 88 universities in Sub-Saharan Africa by the 2023 Times Higher Education Sub-Saharan Africa University Ranking in terms of performance indicators across five pillars: Access and fairness; Africa impact; Teaching skills; Student Engagement and Resources and finances. Moreover, the University was named one of the top brands in South Africa according to the recent Sunday Times GenNext survey. This survey unearthed the most admired South African brands across 70 categories, including institutions of higher learning. We believe that celebrating these accomplishments, among others, showcases the brilliance within our ranks and society and serves as an inspiration for future generations.

As we enter the festive season, let us remember and take a spirit of free giving into the new year. We have consistently communicated throughout the year during alumni engagements that alumni giving is key in liberating the missing middle and indebted students to join the much-needed professional workforce in South Africa. Together, we can make a positive difference.

**“As we enter the festive season, let us remember and take a spirit of free giving into the new year.”**



Vice-Chancellor and Principal  
Prof Bernard Nthambeleni



Thank you for being an integral part of the University community. It is your continued support and constant engagements which allow us to make a positive impact in our communities.

On behalf of the University Council, Management, staff and students, I extend my warmest wishes for a delightful holiday season and a prosperous new year.

## In this issue...

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Message from the Vice-Chancellor and Principal  | 1  |
| Message from UNIVEN President of Convocation  | 2  |
| President of Convocation Sylvester Motadi joins other scholars at the National School of Government BRICS Conference                | 2  |
| Dr Maanda Rambauli manages plant pests for food security  | 3  |
| A young clerk fulfils her dream at 32 and graduates with a PhD against all odds   | 3  |
| Mr Hlungwani has been appointed as the Development Officer in the Advancement Unit  | 4  |
| From eight years break after matric to Masters in Public Affairs  | 4  |
| Newly elected UNIVEN Mpumalanga Lowveld Alumni Chapter pledges to give back to their Alma Mater                                     | 5  |
| Prof Sampson Mamphweli is appointed to be Head of the Energy Secretariat at the South African National Energy Development Institute | 7  |
| The University of Venda Convocation held a fruitful Induction Workshop for Alumni Chapters  | 8  |
| Vhonani Rerani grew up in a supportive family which valued the power of education   | 10 |
| UNIVEN welcomes the new Manager of the Advancement Unit   | 11 |
| UNIVEN Alumnus, Mr Manenzhe Manenzhe wins Public Sector CFO of the Year Award   | 11 |
| Living with a disability and socio-economic background are no barriers to success   | 12 |
| The President of Convocation, Mr Sylvester Motadi, receives Royal Golden Fellow Award in India                                      | 12 |
| Carol Metwane studies Environmental Sciences to explore her love for nature   | 13 |
| Defining the knowledge contours in the 21st century   | 13 |
| UNIVEN Alumni Graduates gather for the Pre-launch of Mpumalanga Highveld Alumni Chapter   | 14 |

# Message from UNIVEN President of Convocation

## Fraternal and Seasonal Greetings to UNIVEN Alumni



Mr SM Motadi

It has been two years since you elected the Executive Committee of Convocation into office. You elected us in July 2021, one year and five months after the emergence of COVID-19 in South Africa. Due to positive coronavirus cases, the South African government declared the National State of Disaster in 2020, and lifted it in April 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unforeseen circumstances, testing our adaptability and strength. Convocation was no exception, as we had to adapt to online elections on 26-28 July 2022. By the end of 2021, we could not hold the Annual General Meeting to report back to the general membership of Convocation and Alumni of the University of Venda due to continued isolated coronavirus cases and budgetary constraints for the physical general meeting.

We have been working diligently to strengthen our alumni network and provide opportunities for connection, growth and collaboration. In this regard, I am pleased to report that

- In 2022, we embarked on a process to revise and develop Convocation's strategic imperatives to guide its work. Moreover and most importantly, we assessed the state of Alumni Chapters and found that their mandates had long expired and needed to be renewed. We declared the year 2022 as a year

for the renewal of alumni chapter mandates and launch of chapters. We launched Vhembe, Capricorn Waterberg and Gauteng Alumni Chapters with your unwavering support.

- We continued the programme to launch chapters in 2023, and with your support, we launched Mpumalanga Lowveld Alumni Chapter and prelaunched the Mpumalanga Highveld Alumni Chapter. Later, in May 2023, we held a workshop to induct all five Alumni Chapters. The workshop aimed to provide a forum for engaged scholarship: exchanging experiences and sharing best practices and ideas related to the effective functioning of Alumni Chapters.
- The Convocation Gala Dinner and the Annual General Meeting which were scheduled for November 2023 were postponed to March/April 2024. Watch the space, we will announce these upcoming programmes earlier in January 2024. We will be thrilled to bring together our alumni to these special occasions and it will offer us an opportunity to celebrate our shared accomplishments and recognise the outstanding achievements of our graduates.

As we enter our third year in office, we will comprehensively report our accomplishments and future

programmes. Some of our programmes will give our alumni opportunities to give back to current students and recent graduates by offering guidance, advice and professional support. One of the key programmes of Convocation in 2024 is to strengthen the university's international profile and visibility by launching UNIVEN International Alumni Chapter in Europe. We have already begun and will continue to engage UNIVEN international alumni as part of the preparations towards the official launch of the chapter.

In closing, I wish to emphasise the importance of staying connected to your alma mater. Our UNIVEN Alumni News Newsletter serves as a platform for sharing exciting updates, news, upcoming events and valuable resources. We encourage you to regularly check your emails, visit our website and follow our social media platforms to stay informed and engaged.

If you have any suggestions, ideas or feedback, please do not hesitate to contact us. We value your input and believe it will enhance our alumni community and serve you better.

Thank you again for your determination and unwavering support. We are proud to have you as our alumni; we can achieve more together. We wish you peace and hope during Christmas and a new year full of better days.

## President of Convocation Sylvester Motadi joins other scholars at the National School of Government BRICS Conference

On Monday, 17 July 2023, the President of Convocation, Mr Sylvester Motadi, presented a paper titled "Public Administration Reforms and Emerging Challenges" at the National School of Government BRICS Conference that took place at the University of Pretoria Future Africa campus. The National School of Government has organised the conference for 17-19 July 2023 with a specific focus on Governance and Public Administration Reforms as part of a build-up towards the BRICS Summit hosted by the South African government in August 2023. The conference was attended by over 50 scholars from BRICS member countries, senior government officials, and academics from schools of government in Asia, Europe and Africa.

### UNIVEN Alumni News had a telephonic interview session with Mr Motadi

In his introduction, Mr Motadi described public administration reforms as critical in promoting growth and development in BRICS countries because these reforms influence the functionality of governments, delivery of services and the implementation of policies. He also identified challenges that BRICS nations face, such as technological revolution, climate change, equity and resource constraints. Mr Motadi further made an in-depth and comparative analysis

of public administration reforms in the BRICS countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

"The technological revolution brings transformative changes and also multi-dimensional challenges. India and South Africa face access to and successful utilisation of digital technology, which highlights socioeconomic gaps. The public administration of all BRICS countries are exposed to cybersecurity challenges which pose serious national security and citizen privacy", said Mr Motadi about the technological challenges among BRICS nations.

He encouraged BRICS countries to work together in managing disasters and other challenges brought about by climate change. "Brazil and India face climate catastrophes due to extreme weather events while South Africa and China's economics are dependant on fossil fuels, which make it challenging to implement climate-friendly policies and practices", said Mr Motadi on climate change challenges.

Mr Motadi outlined the findings and analysis of the study, looking at the political will, stakeholder involvement and participation, technological adoption and digitisation of public services as essential drivers of public administration reforms. "A successful reform recipe requires a harmonious blend of political commitment, stakeholder engagement and the effective use of technology."



Mr Motadi (left) pictured with other delegates

**"A successful reform recipe requires a harmonious blend of political commitment, stakeholder engagement and the effective use of technology."**

# Dr Maanda Rambauli manages plant pests for food security



Dr Maanda Rambauli is at the helm of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development as a Scientist Manager responsible for plant health

UNIVEN Alumni News interviewed Dr Rambauli on the road travelled to be the Scientist Manager and also to graduate with a Doctor of Philosophy in Agriculture.

## Tell me about where and how you grew up and your family life.

I grew up in the mountainous and dusty village of Mavunde, under Thulamela municipality, Limpopo. Two

unemployed parents raised me, and my late father passed on in 1994 when I was 14 years old, remaining with only my unemployed mother. We depended solely on subsistence farming for our livelihood. I spent my formative years in the fields, assisting my parents in ploughing and cultivating the land for food security at home. There was no household source of income apart from one of my elder brothers, who had to do private teaching by then to earn some money to sustain the entire family of nine, including my parents. It was at Mavunde Primary School where I started my primary education and then moved to Ndarieni Secondary School, where I matriculated.

## How did your parents influence you?

My parents were so principled and respected in the community; therefore, I always wanted to be like them when I grew up. They kept on inspiring me and say "Pfunzo ndi ifa". My parents cultivated so much life's values in my life and taught me persistence and perseverance. They further instilled a culture of never giving up. Since, my parents were more on subsistence farming, I realised the importance of Agriculture and on how it could sustain the livelihood of village people without spending much money.

## Who is your role model and what do you admire about them?

My role models are close to home. I draw inspiration from my parents and siblings, who have exemplified discipline and respect, which are fundamental values that have shaped my character. These values were crucial in my educational journey to uplift my family from poverty.

## What did you want to be when you grew up?

Growing up in a community deeply rooted in agriculture, I developed a passion for growing vegetables and ensuring food security. Despite the challenges posed by water scarcity, I maintained a backyard garden, nurturing my fascination with agriculture. My family recognised my dedication and encouraged me to pursue a career in the agricultural field.

## When did you study at UNIVEN and which qualifications did you obtain?

I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Horticultural Science in 2002. In our graduation ceremony, I received the Graduation Award for being the best student in Horticultural Science.

## What do you consider to be your greatest achievements-personal, academic and professional?

I am a researcher who has published numerous articles in accredited national and international journals. In the last three years, I worked hard and finally obtained my PhD in Agriculture from the University of South Africa in 2023. My specific focus in my research articles has been on plant health hence the topic of my PhD is "EVALUATION STUDY ON LINKAGES OF SELECTED PIECES OF LEGISLATION AND SPHERES OF GOVERNMENT ON PLANT HEALTH SYSTEM IN SOUTH AFRICA".

## What is your current occupation and how did you become interested in the field?

I am currently a Scientist Manager in the Directorate of Plant Health under the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development. I then

became interested in the field based on my qualifications, which paved the way for such an opportunity. Noting that pests and diseases of plants threaten our farmers, I then developed an interest in developing and drafting plant health legislation, policies and regulations aiming at preventing the introduction and spread of plant pests and diseases from damaging our crops so that we can produce and participate in international trade with our trading partners.

## What do you enjoy doing in your current job?

Developing science-based phytosanitary policies and legislative framework to control and manage plant pests and diseases to protect agricultural sector. I also enjoy engaging with farmers on appropriate measures to prevent the spread of pests and diseases to ensure compliance with national and international measures.

## What advice would you give young alumni aspiring to a similar career path?

The agriculture sector has vast opportunities for young alumni considering a career in agriculture, including agricultural scientists, pathologists, entomologists, soil scientists, agricultural engineers, and more. I encourage the youth to take ownership of their futures and consider careers as employers, not just employees. As part of ploughing back to the community and as an alumni of UNIVEN, I am a member and secretary to UNIVEN Agriculture Alumni Association. I encourage young and fellow alumni to participate in the life of their alma mater.



# A young clerk fulfils her dream at 32 and graduates with a PhD against all odds

It was on the morning of a very hot Thursday, 05 October 2023, when a young clerk's name was called on the stage during the University of Venda Summer graduation ceremony. At the age of 32, Langanani Mbedzi, dressed in a scarlet gown, crossed the stage to loud cheers and a standing ovation from the parents and dignitaries wearing academic dresses, to receive her Doctor of Administration degree.

"I was immensely excited to cross the stage for a Doctor of Administration degree with such ululation and loud cheers from the Auditorium. With all the odds I faced, it looked unachievable until it was done. I am overcoming the post-graduation depression and settling on my new title of a doctor."

Dr Mbedzi was raised by a single mother in a low-income family, facing financial difficulties and the daily struggle to make ends meet. She was the fourth of five siblings, which only added to

the challenges of her upbringing. From a challenging upbringing to being awarded a Doctor of Administration degree, is an inspiring story of never giving up despite all odds stacked against her. Again, being a clerk at the University of Venda Law Clinic never prevented her from reaching the skies but served as a motivation as she was always at the beck and call of advocates and attorneys.

Many hardships marked her educational journey. There were times when her family couldn't afford food or money for breaks during her time at primary and secondary schools, highlighting the financial struggles they faced.

Her mother's steadfast support and care were pivotal in Dr Mbedzi's life. Her mother's encouragement and advice inspired her to pursue a PhD to make a positive impact on the lives of others. Unfortunately, she could

not live to witness her graduation. "When my mom passed away last year, it was not easy for me to continue studying since it was stressful, but through prayers and encouragement, I managed to continue studying."

"My overlapping roles of being an employee, a PhD candidate, wife and a mother to my three-year-old son brought on a unique set of challenges. It was not easy to balance all these roles. I was often exhausted, but I tended to make weekly and monthly goals instead of daily ones to stay on track."

For Dr Mbedzi, knowing your purpose in life, changing your mindset and never giving up are perfect ingredients for academic success. She believes that aspirations never expire and that one's background is not always the predictor of one's future.

# Mr Hlungwani has been appointed as the Development Officer in the Advancement Unit



The University of Venda is delighted to announce the appointment of Mr Mesia Moses Hlungwani as the new Development Officer for the Advancement Unit in the Department of Marketing, Branding and Communication with effect from 01 October 2023.

Mr Hlungwani is an accomplished communication specialist with more

than 12 years experience in the field. Throughout his professional career he occupied various positions in the public sector and government parastatals. Some of the institutions he worked for include the Mpumalanga Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Department of Justice, National School of Government, Department of Correctional Services and Eskom. He is an all-rounder in

the Communication fraternity with expertise in Internal Communication, Marketing, Media Liaison Services, Stakeholder Management and Events Management.

He Kickstarted his career at the Mpumalanga Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism as a Communication Intern where he was later appointed as a Communication Officer on a contract basis. He then joined the Department of Justice as a language practitioner, subsequent to that he was appointed by the National School of Government as a Communication Officer where he contributed immensely to internal and external communication. During his tenure at the National School of Government, he was part of the communication team which assisted the organisation to transition from being called PALAMA (Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy) to the National School of Government. Together with the team, he played a significant role in launching the new National School of Government, rebranding the organisation and developing eLearning platform for public servants.

He then joined the Department of Correctional Services as a Communications Manager for Ehlanzeni District in Mpumalanga where amongst other responsibilities he served as the spokesperson for the department in the district. Prior to joining the University of Venda, Mr Hlungwani was working for Eskom Power Utility as a Senior Advisor Communication and Stakeholder

Management under Generation Division. He was responsible for managing external stakeholders and management of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in all Eskom coal fleets. He was at the forefront of managing stability at Eskom power stations to ensure that all stations operated without interference from stakeholders. He was also part of the Eskom Just Energy Transition (JET) which focuses on reducing the use of coal by power stations to achieve "Net Zero" carbon emissions by 2050. As part of Eskom JET, he was responsible for mobilising and engaging with donors, funders and investors.

Mr Hlungwani is no stranger to the University of Venda. He is a graduate with Media Studies degree from the University of Venda, he further holds the following qualifications: an honours degree in Integrated Organisational Communication, Advance Programme in Marketing Management and Higher Certificate in Public Relations Management all from the University of South Africa (UNISA). He also holds a certificate in Development Communication from Wits University. He is currently pursuing a Masters degree in Communication Science with UNISA.

"Congratulations and welcome to the team! We believe that what a strong group of people can accomplish together is much larger, far greater, and will exceed what an individual can achieve alone," says the Director of Marketing, Branding and Communication, Dr Takalani Dzaga as he welcomes Mr Hlungwani.

## From eight years break after matric to Masters in Public Affairs



"My family played a role in my career because they took part in assisting me to make a decision after eight (8) years of completing my matric, without being enrolled in any tertiary institution," says Mr Gumede about his long road to the lecturership position at Tshwane North TVET College.

Mr Edward Gumede grew up in Mpumalanga Province in Bushbuckridge area. He is the third child in a family of three girls and three boys. Before completing his matric, Mr Gumede went to several schools. He attended several primary schools namely Mpisi primary school in Acornhoek, Saselani Primary school in Saselani Trust and Charlie Mbungele primary school in Rolle.

He began his high school journey at Masana Secondary School in Dwarssloop and later went to Godide High School in Rolle. Despite his hardships and perpetual changes of schools, he completed his matric

in 2001 back at Masana secondary school.

"My parents influenced me positively, because whatever that was happening between them, they did not make it our (kids) burden not to be able to attend school. They cared a lot about education, hence you can see the number of schools I attended."

In the Pythagorean numerology, the number 8 represents victory and prosperity. Mr Gumede became victorious against setbacks to commence his tertiary education after eight years of break. He enrolled for a Bachelor of Arts in Youth in Development in 2010 and completed it with BA (Youth in Development) Honours in 2014.

Mr Gumede is a lifelong learner who furthered his studies with the University of South Africa (UNISA) where he completed a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGCE) in 2019. As if that was not enough, Eddie went to Tshwane University of Technology

and graduated with a master's degree in public Affairs in the October 2023 graduation ceremony.

Mr Gumede is currently working as a lecturer at Tshwane North TVET College, lecturing Management Communication and Office Practice N4. "I became interested in this job because I have discovered myself and realised that I belong in class. I enjoy face-to-face interactions with students as it enhances my knowledge and skills on how to communicate with students and to understand them deeply."

Mr Gumede is the current Deputy Chairperson of UNIVEN Gauteng Alumni Chapter. When UNIVEN Alumni News asked him about his advice to the current students and young alumni of the University of Venda, he said "You need to stay focused, be dedicated, be patient with yourself, be a hard worker and persevere all the time. You should celebrate with others when they have achieved, because tomorrow it is you."

# Newly elected UNIVEN Mpumalanga Lowveld Alumni Chapter pledges to give back to their Alma Mater

On Saturday, 25 February 2023, UNIVEN Alumni from the Lowveld region of Mpumalanga gathered in large numbers at The Capital Mbombela Hotel in Nelspruit for the launch of UNIVEN Mpumalanga Alumni Chapter. It was a memorable occasion characterised by the singing of struggle songs in fond memories of their student days on campus. The theme that ran throughout the launch was about building relationships with stakeholders to seize fundraising, study and job opportunities.



The launch, which the President of Convocation, Mr Sylvester Motadi officiated, was graced by the presence of the University's high-ranking officials led by the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Bernard Nthambeleni.

The President of the Convocation, Mr Motadi, who was facilitating the programme, reminded the audience that the mandate of the Convocation is to deepen relationships between the University and its alumni and unite all alumni of the University Venda. He pointed out that "gradually, we are growing as alumni and as such, some of our alumni are starting to give back to our University. He appealed to those who are not yet employed to be patient and to have hope that things would work out in the end.

**"gradually, we are growing as alumni and as such, some of our alumni are starting to give back to our University."**



"We come from different cultural backgrounds as residents of the Lowveld region. We should unite and become a single force as UNIVEN graduates to help our alma mater to grow for the benefit of others. The greatest challenge facing us that should be tackled head-on is unemployment among graduates. The degree certificates we obtained from UNIVEN have opened doors for us, and we should open doors for others, especially unemployed graduates. The structure we are launching today will survive its constitutional mandate to see through all these challenges," said Adv. Siphosiso Mashele during his opening and welcome address.



Ms Shonisani Masutha gave a brief presentation on the Statement of the Executive Committee of Convocation. She thanked the alumni who were in attendance despite the forecast of Cyclone Freddy and braced for rainy weather conditions of the day. Ms Masutha urged those who would stand for leadership positions to position the University for impact and relevance. She encouraged alumni to give back to UNIVEN in monetary terms or in kind as a way of helping

disadvantaged students to access higher education. She informed the audience that they have developed a programme #40monthsR40 campaign as a way of assisting needy students. She advised alumni who were to be elected to lead the Mpumalanga Lowveld Alumni Chapter that they have a task to make sure that the University's vision, mission, and values are realised. Finally, she commended the coordinators, who were mainly females for ensuring that the event became a reality.



The Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Bernard Nthambeleni, shared the State of the Campus address. He started his speech by remarking that he was pleased to be part of the gathering to witness the birth of UNIVEN Mpumalanga Lowveld Alumni Chapter and that he was encouraged to see SwissFranc Conference Room full to the rafters.

Dr Nthambeleni informed alumni that the University they left many years ago is now a different institution and is developing and growing in shape, character and size.

He informed alumni that UNIVEN is one of the six comprehensive universities in the country, which is continuing on a trajectory to deliver the highest quality teaching, research and community engagement for the citizens of the Republic of South Africa and even abroad.

Regarding academic projects, Dr Nthambeleni reported that in the current 2023-2025 enrolment plan, the total student headcount for

undergraduate and postgraduate students for 2023 is expected to be 15 500. "45% of our student enrolment is in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture and Health Sciences. He highlighted that UNIVEN top the list amongst the comprehensive universities in South Africa with the highest enrolment numbers in science and mathematics. "35% of our students are enrolled in the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education and 20% are enrolled in the Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law".

"Our ministerial target for academic staff with PhDs in 2022 was 40% and currently, 44% of our academic staff have PhDs". He reported that UNIVEN academic staff with PhD qualifications of 44% is above the national average of 38% in the higher education sector.

With the appointment of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research and Postgraduate Studies, we are exploring ways to provide targeted academic capacity development through the National Research Foundation, Thuthuka Rating track to assist academic staff with PhDs to move from emerging researchers to established researchers.

The Vice-Chancellor and Principal indicated that the number of our National Research Foundation (NRF) rated researchers continues to grow. He said these rated researchers contribute significantly to the research outputs of the University. He asserted that UNIVEN continues to provide the best tertiary education and produce quality graduates capable of competing locally and internationally with their peers.

On accreditation of qualifications, he stated that after a lengthy review process by the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants our Postgraduate Diploma in Accounting/CTA had received full accreditation by SAICA and Council on Higher Education and the programme will be offered in 2024. He reported that the LLB programme received its Council on Higher Education accreditation.

Dr Nthambeleni continued to report about the establishment of Law School at the University of Venda. "Our law graduates no longer have to relocate to Polokwane or Pretoria and Johannesburg to do their articles to qualify as lawyers or attorneys," he said.

He informed the audience that the University introduced Performance Management System and developed an Automated Performance Management process which has been rolled out to the entire University. All employees, from the gardener to the vice chancellor, are subjected to performance management with a view to improving individual and overall institutional performance.



Some of the attendees who have attended the launch

# Newly elected UNIVEN Mpumalanga Lowveld Alumni Chapter pledges to give back to their Alma Mater continued..

As he continued, he indicated that the process to establish a TB Research Unit at the University of Venda working with Tshilidzini Hospital is in the pipeline.

The Vice-Chancellor and Principal went on to inform alumni that UNIVEN opened Business Advisory Centre in Makhado Crossing Mall in Limpopo Province after a successful discussion with Dr Mike Nkuna of Masingita Group of Companies. Again in 2022, the University acquired a piece of land in Makhado Local Municipality, and they are moving with plans to establish a UNIVEN satellite campus in Makhado, Louis Trichardt.

The University is in its third year of implementing the strategic plan 2025 and a new service delivery model intended to position UNIVEN for impact and relevance.

Four strategic thrusts underpin the University's five-year strategy: Student Centeredness and Engaged Scholarship; Entrepreneurial University; Governance for Outstanding Scholarship, and Linkages, Partnerships, and Internationalisation.

"We are working hard to safeguard the UNIVEN's brand image. People should feel proud to be associated with our University based on the quality of our offerings, the quality of our students, our research, and community engagement output."

In conclusion, Dr Nthambeleni appreciated the efforts of the Executive Committee of Convocation and assured them of his management support in their plans.

He finally reported that Motsepe Foundation has given the University of Venda R1.3 million rand to assist missing middle students. He made a call to alumni to raise funds for struggling students as Motsepe Foundation promised that for each million rand raised, they would match it.

**"We are working hard to safeguard the UNIVEN's brand image."**



In his inaugural speech, the newly elected chairperson of Mpumalanga Lowveld Alumni Chapter, Attorney of the High Court, Mr Katekani Lamula mentioned that his team will continue to support UNIVEN as an institution that is always open to new ideas. Regarding the electricity crisis, Mr Lamula said that alumni chapters should assist the University by addressing some of the challenges that the University is faced with and provide solutions.



In the highly contested elections which were conducted by the Director of Legal Services, Adv. Eric Nemukula, nine officials were elected. Mr Katekani Lamula was elected Chairperson, Mrs Maria Shabangu as the Deputy Chairperson, Miss Neliswa Motha as Secretary, Ms Vukosi Nicol Ngobeni as Deputy Secretary and Adv. Zanele Maae as the Treasurer. The portfolio holders are Ms Lindokuhle Shongwe (Research and Innovation), Mr Sandile Bob Masango (Membership and Recruitment), Mr Aubrey Mashile (Special Projects and Community Outreach) and Mr Nkosinathi Bhila (Events and Marketing).



The newly elected committee posing for a photo with Dr Nthambeleni, Mr Motadi, Ms Masutha, Mr Ligudu, Adv Nemukula and Dr Dzaga



The newly elected UNIVEN Mpumalanga Lowveld Alumni Chapter committee



The top Five of the newly elected committee

# Prof Sampson Mamphweli is appointed to be Head of the Energy Secretariat at the South African National Energy Development Institute



UNIVEN Alumnus Professor Sampson Mamphweli has been appointed to the position of Head of the Energy Secretariat in the office of the Chief Executive Officer at the South African National Energy Development Institute under the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) with effect from 01 January 2023. The Department of Science and Innovation created an Energy Secretariat as an administrative office that carries out substantive and administrative work for the South African National Energy Development Institute (SANEDI).

SANEDI, as an institute drives, monitors, conducts and promotes energy research and development, and also focuses on developing clean energy and resource-efficient solutions. Prof. Mamphweli, as the administrative head of the Energy Secretariat, will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of energy policy and four flagship programmes: Energy Storage, Renewable and Sustainable Energy Hub and Spokes Programme, Coal CO<sub>2</sub> to X programme (carbon capture and utilization), and Hydrogen South Africa, popularly known as HySA. Moreover, Prof. Mamphweli, in his capacity as the Head of the Energy Secretariat, will in partnership with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Energy-Water Sector Education and Training Authority (EWSETA), coordinate the training of graduates from TVET colleges and universities of technology with a focus on fuel cells, batteries and renewable energy technologies.

"It has been a long research journey since I joined SANPARKS as a Research Field Assistant after graduating with a Bachelor of Environmental Sciences degree when I was completing my Honours degree from the University of Venda. Later I joined University of Cape Town (UCT) briefly as a Research Technician while conducting my Masters at the University of Venda, from which I graduated with distinction in 2004. Then I joined the University of Fort Hare (UFH) as an Eskom Research Fellow while conducting my

**"It has been a long research journey since I joined SANPARKS as a Research Field Assistant after graduating with a Bachelor of Environmental Sciences degree."**

PhD in Physics focusing on biomass gasification. I was promoted to Senior Researcher and later Associate Professor at UFH before being headhunted by Stellenbosch University (SU) for the position of Professor in Process Engineering and Director at the Centre for Renewable and Sustainable Energy Studies. I have since held three positions at SU: Professor, Director of CRSES and Co-Director of the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) Centre of Excellence (CoE) which was started with my assistance in 2018.

Under my leadership and with the support from CRSES staff, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Prof Eugene Cloete, the Dean and the Vice Dean as well as other colleagues within the Faculty of Engineering at the University, CRSES has grown in terms of cash flow, Human Resources, Innovation, students and engineering projects. I bow my head to our collaborators in the DSI Renewable and Sustainable Energy Hub and spokes programme that I was leading, the Eskom chair in Power System studies, ARUA CoE, Scatec Chair, Solar Thermal Research Group, the Bioenergy Research Group, Faunhofer Innovation platform and individual researchers who worked so well with me for the past six years."

Prof. Mamphweli was born in Tshivhulana village under the Tshimbupe Traditional Council where he attended Tshivhulana Primary and Mugoidwa Secondary schools. He later moved to Lwenzhe High school where he matriculated in 1997. Due to his poor socio-economic family background, he failed to enrol for the Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (MBCHB) at MEDUNSA, where he was first admitted to study after matriculation.

It was not a dream shattered for Mamphweli despite his passion for Physics that he turned to his second choice of Bachelor of Environmental Science which he studied at the University of Venda. He completed his Bachelor of Environmental Sciences in the year 2000. In the same institution, Mamphweli completed Honours and Masters in Environmental Sciences-Cum Laude in 2001 and 2003 respectively.

UNIVEN Alumni News had an extensive interview about his greatest achievements, current occupation and interest in the field.

*What do you consider to be your greatest achievements-personal, academic and professional?*

I have several personal achievements in the academic and Energy fields in general. During my PhD studies, I developed a low-cost online gas analyzer system for analyzing syngas coming from biomass gasifiers. This system was later adopted by many researchers in the field around the world because it was a cheaper but reliable system. I also produced a cyclone dust collector system that was very efficient in fine particles and dust collection in biomass gasifiers. This system relied on electrostatics to make additional forces inside the cyclone and improved collection efficiency. As part of supervising Masters and PhD students, I produced a Cyclone heat Exchanger system that captured waste heat from the body of the Cyclone dust collector. I have supervised and co-supervised more than 28 Masters and PhD students to completion. I have published and presented nearly 100 research articles in the field of bioenergy, solar energy and energy policy which also include four book chapters. This resulted in me securing more than 2000 citations (google scholar).

In addition to the latter, I have managed national and international research programmes that resulted in the graduation of more than 200 Masters and PhD Students in the field of Science and Engineering. I have led the coordination of research activities in the energy field that led to the growth of the Centre for Renewable and Sustainable Energy Studies to the extent that we ended up hosting various Centres of Excellence.

My other impact is on community projects. I have implemented several community projects using research products such as biogas digesters and solar energy systems in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo Provinces. These projects included the training of TVET College graduates, Masters and PhD Students in Science, Engineering and Technology while benefitting communities directly.

**"I have implemented several community projects using research products such as biogas digesters and solar energy systems in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo Provinces. These projects included the training of TVET College graduates, Masters and PhD Students in Science, Engineering and Technology while benefitting communities directly."**

*What is your current occupation and how did you become interested in the field?*

I am currently a Professor in the Department of Process Engineering and Director at the Centre for Renewable and Sustainable Energy Studies. I also sit on various advisory committees, including the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research Energy centre's Advisory Committee, the SASOL Advisory Council on Energy, and the Centre for Sustainability Transition at Stellenbosch University. As a Director, I also sit in the Centre for Renewable and Sustainable Energy Studies. I am also part of the team involved in data modelling under the Presidential Energy Crisis committee, responsible for coordinating various data modelling research to establish the impact of the intervention measures announced by the President to deal with the current load-shedding crisis. I am also part of the team dealing with the operationalization of South Africa's Hydrogen Society Roadmap under the National Department of Science and Innovation, as appointed by the Minister.

I developed an interest in energy and renewable energy in particular way back in the year 2000 when I conducted a mini-project on the impact of fuelwood collection along the Luvuvhu river in the Vuwani area. I joined the University of Fort Hare to conduct research on bioenergy after coming across their advertisement about the Research fellow in bioenergy. I had to read a lot on the energy side of things, especially the Physics parts that had to do with thermodynamics and electrostatics, for me to make a valuable contribution in the field. These are fields that I have loved since they were introduced to me at high school level.

**"I developed an interest in energy and renewable energy in particular way back in the year 2000 when I conducted a mini-project on the impact of fuelwood collection along the Luvuvhu river in the Vuwani area."**

I will be taking up the role of the Head of Energy Secretariat at SANEDI from 01 January 2023. Stellenbosch University will still appoint me as an Extraordinary Professor. I also have an appointment with the Durban University of Technology as an Honorary Research Professor.

# The University of Venda Convocation held a fruitful Induction Workshop for Alumni Chapters



The University of Venda Convocation held a successful Induction Workshop for Alumni Chapters from 05-06 May 2023 at the Emperors Palace in Johannesburg. The workshop was organised under the theme "Deepening Engaged Scholarship through Strengthening the Functionality of Alumni Chapters."

Under the facilitation of Prof. Joseph Francis, Director of the Institute for Rural Development, the workshop was attended by the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Bernard Nthambeleni, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) Corporate Services, Dr Robert Martin, the President of Convocation, Mr Sylvester Motadi, members of UNIVEN Senior Management, North West University Head of Alumni Relations, Ms Nicolize Van der Walt, members of the Executive Committee of Convocation and members of Alumni Chapters. The Alumni Chapters that were represented at the Induction Workshop are Vhembe, Capricorn-Waterberg, Mpumalanga Lowveld, Mpumalanga Highveld, Gauteng and UNIVEN Agriculture Alumni Association.

The workshop aimed at improving the functionality of Alumni Chapters and create a more engaged and active alumni community. The workshop was crucial as its main objectives were to strengthen the functionality of Alumni Chapters by providing a platform for alumni to come together, network, and share knowledge and best practices; to provide an opportunity for alumni to understand their roles and responsibilities; to unpack the causes of the dysfunctionality of some of the chapters and learn and develop strategies for renewing and strengthening the chapters; and to orientate participants on the constitution of Convocation and provide an avenue for them to develop a community of practice.



When giving the overview and purpose of the workshop, the Director of Legal Services Adv. Eric Nemukula stated that it is important for the University Convocation to launch chapters in all areas where UNIVEN alumni stay or work. He advised Convocation to explore the programmes of the University and find areas where they can fit in. "The Alumni chapters need to mobilise resources that will assist academically deserving and financially needy students," said Nemukula. Highlighting the University Statute and the Constitution of Convocation, Adv. Nemukula reminded delegates that the purpose of the workshop was to orientate chapters on how to operate and collaborate in realising the vision and mission of the institution. "Alumni are ambassadors of the University and are expected to conduct themselves ethically to protect the University brand," said Adv. Nemukula.



UNIVEN's Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Bernard Nthambeleni

as he welcome members of Alumni chapters, commended the role and leadership of the Executive Committee of Convocation led by the President, Sylvester Motadi. He further applauded all the delegates for the unquantifiable level of sacrifice that they continue to demonstrate by attending alumni events like the induction workshop. Dr Nthambeleni said it takes hard work, perseverance, commitment and sacrifices as well as teamwork to come this far.

Dr Nthambeleni highlighted the University's massive infrastructure development, academic, research and community engagement successes to thunderous applause from the delegates. "We want alumni and all stakeholders to feel the need to be associated with this University," said the Vice-Chancellor and Principal.

During questions and comments after the Vice-Chancellor's remarks, the delegates noted Prof. Sylvester Mpandeli's commitment to donate R150 000.00 from his research funds towards the best performing students. Prof Mpandeli informed the delegates that he will also donate a certain percentage towards crowdfunding for indebted students from the sales of his books. As if this was not enough, the coordinator of Mpumalanga Highveld Chapter, Mr Itani Nematandani pledged to donate R5 000 towards indebted students project and encouraged fellow alumni to follow suit. "The University management is taking the matter of student indebtedness seriously hence debt settlement and discount offers of 15%," said Dr Nthambeleni in responding to one of the questions posed.

**"We want alumni and all stakeholders to feel the need to be associated with this University,"**



In his remarks, the President of Convocation, Mr Sylvester Motadi appreciated the cast of goodwill by Prof. Mpandeli and Mr Nematandani and implored others to do the same. "When we were elected to lead, we promised to deliver and now it is the time to deliver what we have promised," said the President of Convocation. Mr Motadi urged every member to take their responsibilities very seriously. He further said that chapters are expected to submit reports that are fruitful, meaningful and impactful.

"Let us put our boots on and deliver what we have promised. Let us work hard to give back and be thankful for the support we are getting from the University. We should not be ignorant and take the support we are getting from the University for granted," said Mr Motadi.



Deputy Vice-Chancellor Corporate Services, Dr Robert Martin spoke about the importance of strong Alumni Chapters and the role of the University Management in nurturing and strengthening the operations of Alumni Chapters. In prefacing his speech, Dr Martin called upon alumni to make an impact on the world around them and be proud as products of a University based in a rural setting.



# The University of Venda Convocation held a fruitful Induction Workshop for Alumni Chapters continued...

"We don't want graduates who only focus on themselves but those who focus on social entrepreneurship and solving issues around us." He pointed out that strong Alumni Chapters are there to enable the University to do things differently. He encouraged alumni to assist the University to look for Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) opportunities and open doors to companies and funders. The role of the University management is to provide guidance, support and tools that will assist Alumni Chapters to achieve their goals," said Dr Martin in his conclusion.



Ms Salome Makgoka introduced the speaker, Ms Nicolize van der Walt, from North-West University who is the Section Head: Alumni Relations.



Ms Nicolize van der Walt gave a comprehensive presentation about experiences and lessons from the Alumni Associations of North-West University.

She indicated that the role of the alumni chapter is to empower the university. She told the delegates to ask themselves what is it that they can contribute back to the university and not what the university can do for them. On the second day of the programme, Ms van der Walt shared the characteristics of successful Alumni Chapters. Amongst others, she shared ten tips and how to run a successful alumni chapter.



Director Institute for Rural Development, Prof Joseph Francis facilitated the programme on days one and two. Prof Francis's dynamics made alumni chapter members learn to work together. He advised them to be accountable for their own actions. He further talked about elements of integrity. Prof Francis guided alumni that they should communicate with each other and give feedback, and not only when they need something. It has come clear that there should be uniformity of the programmes across the chapters.



Group presentations

This was followed by group presentations where groups presented their plans on how to achieve their goals.



Delegates paying attention to the speakers



Deputy President of Convocation, Mr Rudzani Mushweu spoke about the journey travelled for the launch of alumni chapters. He thanked Prof. Francis for the teachings on how to work as a team in order to achieve intended goals. He said this will assist them to produce a quality report at the end of the term. He further encouraged alumni to contribute R40 every month towards helping students to fund their studies.

"Having laid this foundation we need to put efforts to ensure that we build a good image of the University and give back to our alma mater," said Mushweu.



Some of the speakers and invited guests.

## The University of Venda Convocation held a fruitful Induction Workshop for Alumni Chapters continued...



On the way forward, Ms Shonisani Masutha, who is a member of the Executive Committee of Convocation, presented the functionality of alumni chapters; programme of action or action plans; reports and reporting by chapters to EXCO of Convocation through the Alumni Relations Officer and Exco member representation. She highlighted the importance of relationship building with alumni; financial pledges and fundraising; alumni profiling; capacity building; collaborative programme implementation; Circulation and Archiving by Alumni Office; Chapters 'operational parameters; contracting and initiating official communications. She further encouraged members of Alumni Chapters to play their respective roles to strengthen the operation of the chapters.



Some of the speakers and invited guests.



In her vote of thanks, Prof. Vhonani Netshandama said to allow leaders

to emerge, it is critical to developing mentorship programmes. We need leaders who will multiply to produce more leaders who find solutions for the challenges communities are confronted with. Find space and contribute to taking the University to greater heights. Prof Netshandama appreciated the commitment demonstrated by members of the Convocation and Alumni Chapters. She further urged the Executive Committee of Convocation and Alumni Chapters to develop programmes aimed at supporting the University's strategic direction.



Director Marketing, Branding and Communication, Dr Takalani Dzaga handled the item on introductions and housekeeping.

## Vhonani Rerani grew up in a supportive family which valued the power of education



Mr Vhonai Rerani

In this feature article, UNIVEN Alumni News delves into Vhonani's background, academic and professional journey, and valuable insights he offers aspiring lawyers.

Vhonani grew up in a small, loving family of five, with his parents, a younger brother, and a sister. Though not afforded the opportunity of higher education, his parents valued the

power of education. They believed in the importance of education and provided unwavering support to their children's educational pursuits. They acted as his home teachers during his primary school years, ensuring he was prepared for each lesson and fostering a deep appreciation for education.

His educational path began at Tshifhire Primary School in Maelula Village, where he started his primary education in 1994, the dawn of democracy in South Africa. His secondary education commenced in 2001 at Mopani Intermediate School, a boarding school outside Musina, where he matriculated in 2005.

After matriculation, he registered and obtained a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) degree from the University of Venda. Mr Rerani doesn't have a specific role model but considers himself a protégé of those who've paved the way for him. He is particularly grateful to Mr Ronald Ozzy Lamola, a fellow alumnus from the University of Venda, who provided him with an opportunity in

Ndobela and Lamola Incorporated for articles of clerkship and an associate position, opening the doors to his legal career. This experience underlines his belief that established attorneys should provide opportunities for prospective lawyers and remove artificial barriers that hinder candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds or historically disadvantaged universities.

Later, after adequate experience both in public and private institutions, Mr Rerani co-established with Mr Sihle Mdludla a law firm, Rerani Mdludla Incorporated, in 2020. The firm, in Menlyn, Maine, specialises in labour law, general civil litigation, and workplace investigations. As a managing director and attorney, Vhonani networks and ensures clients receive expert legal advice. He finds chairing and initiating disciplinary hearings particularly interesting, allowing him to uphold South Africa's labour laws.

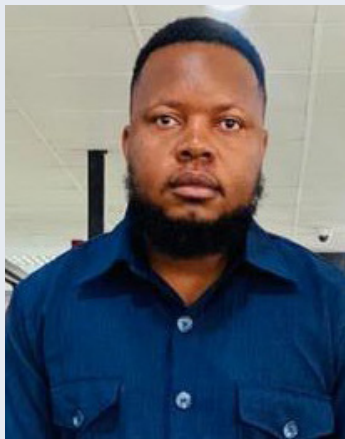
"During the beginning of 2020, I was retrenched from employment. At this

point, I knew that the universe was sending a clear signal that I should practice on my own account. It was a moment to face my fears, and I leapt to establish a legal practice."

In conclusion, when asked about his recipe for success, Vhonani states that "the recipe for success mirrors the words of Jack Canfield: 'Super successful people aren't the most gifted; they work, study, and practice more than the competition.'" Success, according to him, "is a product of dedication, effort, practice, and the ability to learn from one's own and others' mistakes".

**'Super successful people aren't the most gifted; they work, study, and practice more than the competition'**

## UNIVEN welcomes the new Manager of the Advancement Unit



Mr Shandukani Percy Ngobeli has joined the University of Venda (UNIVEN) as the Manager of the newly established Advancement Unit within the Department of Marketing, Branding, and Communication. His appointment is effective from October 1, 2023. The primary objective of the Unit is to develop and expand third-stream income for the University.

Mr Ngobeli brings a wealth of experience and expertise to his new role. He holds an Honours degree in International Politics from UNISA, a

Bachelor of Arts in International Relations from UNIVEN, an Advanced Management Development Programme certificate from TUT, and an Effective Investment Facilitation and Development certificate from the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization in Turin, Italy.

He is an astute professional with 12 years cumulative experience in Trade and Investment facilitation. Before joining UNIVEN, Mr. Ngobeli held the following positions at the National Department of Trade, Industry and Competition: Trade and Industry Advisor, Assistant Director: Trade Opportunities, Deputy Director: Export Development and lastly Deputy Director: Investment Lead Management within the InvestSA Branch. Mr. Ngobeli's extensive experience and expertise make him an invaluable addition to the University of Venda. His appointment as the Manager of the Advancement Unit will undoubtedly contribute to the growth and success of the University, as it strives to secure additional sources of income.

In his previous positions, Ngobeli held significant responsibilities in investment mobilization, facilitation, and aftercare. Until recently, he served as the Manager of Export Promotion at Trade & Investment, KwaZulu Natal, a Public Entity of the Provincial Government of KZN. This esteemed organization is dedicated to promoting

and positioning KZN as a premier investment destination, facilitating market access for value-added goods and services produced in KwaZulu Natal, and serving as a comprehensive resource for investment matters.

During his tenure as Manager of Export Promotion, Mr. Ngobeli played a pivotal role in ensuring market access for KZN-produced value-added goods and services in targeted high-growth markets. His wealth of experience in stakeholder and project management has greatly contributed to his success in this position. Notably, he has successfully facilitated numerous Trade and Investment initiatives between various countries, including China, Northern Ireland, Italy, Switzerland, Thailand, Mozambique,

Rwanda, Zimbabwe, India, and the UK, among others.

Mr. Ngobeli's expertise and dedication have been instrumental in fostering mutually beneficial relationships and driving economic growth. His ability to navigate complex international markets and establish fruitful connections has consistently yielded positive outcomes for both KZN and its global partners. His commitment to excellence and his proven ability to forge successful partnerships make him an invaluable resource for any organization seeking to expand its global reach and maximize its investment potential.

Director Marketing, Branding and Communication, Dr Takalani Dzaga welcomed Mr. Ngobeli and said "Mr. Ngobeli's remarkable skills will be a great addition to our Marketing, Branding and Communication team and the entire University community. We are confident that he will deliver results, excel, and make us all proud."

He urged the University community to give Mr. Ngobeli the necessary support in his new role as Manager of the Advancement Unit.

## UNIVEN Alumnus, Mr Manenzhe Manenzhe wins Public Sector CFO of the Year Award



UNIVEN Alumnus and CFO of North West Legislature, Mr Manenzhe Manenzhe won the Africa Public Sector CFO of the Year Award during the Association of Chartered Certified Accounts (ACCA) inaugural Africa Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Awards held under the theme "CFOs leading recovery, growth and sustainability". These awards are a regional initiative to recognize excellence and finance officers' role in building resilient organizations, sustainable business models and nurturing CEOs for the future.

The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants is one of the world's leading bodies for professional accountants. Some of its specific objectives include raising the profile of outstanding CFOs, recognition and celebration of excellence, brand visibility and sharing best practices. Apart from the Public Sector CFO of the Year Award, there are other categories: CFO of the year, Young CFO of the year, Financial services sector CFO of the year, Micro, small and medium sector CFO of the year and Environment, social and governance sector CFO of the year.

Mr Manenzhe is a qualified Accountant and a Fellow of ACCA) with a BCom Degree from the University of Venda and qualifications in Advanced Principles and Applications of South African Taxation from Rand Afrikaans University (University of Johannesburg); Investment Appraisal and Risk Analysis from Cambridge

Resources International; and Practical Leadership in a political environment from the University of Florida.

Mr Manenzhe is a quinquagenarian who was born in Meadowlands, Soweto in Gauteng Province. The seventies were the "black power" years in South Africa which compelled many black parents to take their children back to the black homelands to attend schools there. Mr Manenzhe was no exception. "I appreciate the knowledge received from the local educational institutions I attended namely the University of Venda, Edison Nesengani Secondary School, Khwevha Commercial School and Tshivhazwaulu Primary School. I wish all students in these institutions all of the very best with their studies and that they should take inspiration in this award," said Mr Manenzhe during the interview with UNIVEN Alumni News.

The Public Sector CFO of the Year Award comes as no surprise as Mr Manenzhe is a seasoned Chief Financial Officer. He worked as a Chief Financial Officer in the National Parliament of the Republic of South Africa from 2013 to 2019 with clean audit outcomes in the 2015, 2016 and 2017 financial years. From 2019 to 2022, he worked at the City of Joburg as the Group Financial Officer where he effectively ensured the implementation of internal control systems and compliance with provisions of the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) in general. Mr Manenzhe is currently the Chief Financial Officer of the North West Provincial Legislature.

# Living with a disability and socio-economic background are no barriers to success



“Through various piece jobs, including digging pit toilets, mixing cement with sand, and bricklaying, my mother ensured her family never went hungry. It was a challenging time, but Mukhatshelwa’s unwavering determination instilled in her daughters the value of hard work and independence”, says Marcia about her mother’s struggle during the interview with UNIVEN Alumni News

**Tell me about where and how you grew up, and what your family life was like**

I grew up at Dzwerani Ha-Madala village in the Thulamela subregion of Limpopo Province. After my father, who had seven wives, passed away, my maternal sisters and I were raised by a single mother who kept our heads above the water. She was a mixer of cement and sand during building constructions, loaded sand in trucks, made bricks to put bread on the table, and took us to school.

**Where and when did you attend primary and secondary education**

Despite my physical disability as a person with paraplegia, when it was time for me to go to school, my illiterate mom broke the mould by advocating for inclusive education before we could even taste the democracy we are enjoying today. She blazed the trail at the time by registering me in a local Mahematshena Primary School rather than at a special school. I completed my Standard Ten at Ndaedzo Secondary School in 1995.

**Who is your role model, and what do you admire about her**

My role model is my mom, who encouraged me to study harder in my earlier years to secure a better future. “I want you to go to school so that you can be independent before I die. If I die and leave you depending on other people with your condition, you will suffer.” She is a nonagenarian who turned 90 years old this year. I follow

her healthy diet, which keeps her strong and healthy.

**When did you study at UNIVEN, and which qualifications did you obtain**

I studied from 1996 and obtained my Bachelor of Administration degree in 2002. In 2001, I took a break on an exchange programme sponsored by Disabled People of South Africa (DPSA) to study in Denmark. The programme looked at how African countries were dealing with issues concerning persons with disabilities in their countries in the areas of education, health services, public transport, social development, and accessibility to public buildings.

**What did you want to be when you grew up**

When I grew up, I wanted to be a social worker, but discrimination based on my disability prevented me from studying for a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work. Despite having qualified for the degree, I was rejected because the qualification required fieldwork, and as a disabled person, it would be challenging to do fieldwork. In 1999 when I was elected as the chairperson of the Disabled Student Council (DSC) in the SRC, I advocated for students with disabilities to be admitted to the social work qualification. The door that was closed for me helped me to fight for the injustices against students living with disabilities. In 2000, the new intake included students with disabilities.

**What do you consider to be your greatest achievements-personal, academic and professional**

My first position was at Eskom, where I was appointed telephonist / switchboard operator, opening more

doors. I am currently in the Property Management Department at Eskom. I am involved in the fieldwork, the requirement that was the basis of my rejection to study social work. I visit different Eskom offices throughout the province of Limpopo and other provinces. I received many awards, including the winner of the Highly Commended Women of the Year Award for the category Inclusive Leader in recognition of exceptional value to Eskom and Women’s advancement in South Africa. This award opened the door for me to the Middle Management Development Program (MMDP) offered by DUKE University, which I will complete in August 2024.

**Did you have any life-changing experiences that shaped your life**

My life-changing experience shaped my life. I was not born with a disability, but due to post-polio disease, I ended up in this condition in which my lower limb is paralysed. It made me to be an activist who advocated for the rights of persons living with disabilities.

**How do you relax at the end of the day**

I spend quality time with my family, travelling and watching soccer on TV and in the stadiums. My passion for taking youth out of the streets motivated me to spend my time with a soccer team (Madala Silver Stars FC). I mentor +/- 65 boys and girls who play for this team in my community. I am a member of an NGO / charity organisation (Corsa Diamond Life -CDL) that fights poverty throughout South Africa. During the weekends/holidays, I participate in the projects that CDL offers to needy families or contribute financially.

## The President of Convocation, Mr Sylvester Motadi, receives Royal Golden Fellow Award in India

The President of UNIVEN Convocation, Mr Sylvester Motadi, received an International Royal Golden Award during the award ceremonies hosted by the International Research Council of Eudoxia Research Centre at Radisson Blu Hotel Guwahati in India. Mr Motadi attended the occasion of the awards on the 30th of August 2023. The award was conferred as a token of appreciation for his outstanding contribution to leadership, management and research.

In congratulating Mr Motadi, the President of Eudoxia Research Center, Prof. Rheturaj Saikia said, “In a contemporary society that places a premium on flexibility and specialised knowledge, Mr Masa Sylvester Motadi emerges as a symbol of unwavering commitment and notable accomplishments. The individual’s trajectory, distinguished by a strong emphasis on scholarly rigour, effective leadership, and a steadfast dedication

to effecting meaningful change, serves as a compelling illustration of the transformative potential of education. Mr Motadi’s enduring legacy as a mentor, scholar, public servant, and visionary serves as a source of inspiration for future generations. It serves as a poignant reminder that a strong desire for knowledge, combined with a deep commitment to serving others, possesses the capacity to effect transformative change in both individual lives and communities worldwide”.

“Heartfelt congratulations on your remarkable achievement. It is amazing to see such a professional research institute in the Asian continent recognising your leadership and research prowess. You are a true embodiment of our mission of producing locally relevant and globally competitive graduates. I believe that this achievement will strengthen the



Mr Motadi(middle) receives the award

foundation upon which the University alumni can publish more research papers to increase our research units and research throughput rate,” said

the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Bernard Nthambeleni, in praising Mr Motadi for a well-deserved award.

# Carol Metwane studies Environmental Sciences to explore her love for nature

In the 2023 October graduation ceremony, Ms Carol Metwane graduated with a Master of Environmental Sciences in Ecology and Resource Management on the topic "Perspectives on Wetlands' Cultural Ecosystem Services and Indigenous Wetland Management Practices in the Limpopo Province, South Africa". "Studying Environment Sciences offered me an opportunity to explore my love for nature to understand the ecosystem and management of wetlands," says Ms Metwane about her recent research.

Her family's background in environmental conservation and her love for nature led her to pursue a Bachelor of Environmental Sciences at the University of Venda in 2004. She continued her studies at the University of South Africa, where she obtained a BSc Honours in Environmental Management and a BA Honours in Development Studies.

For young alumni aspiring to follow a similar career path, Carol offers valuable advice. She emphasises the importance of having a genuine love for nature, a willingness to learn

continuously, and the openness to collaborate with diverse stakeholders. Her journey exemplifies the rewards of hard work, perseverance, and embracing every opportunity to grow.

She attributes her success to her maternal grandmother, who encouraged her and her younger brother to attend school. The words, "tšenang sekolo gore le seke la tla la ja tshila tsa thaka tsa lena" (go to school so that you will not be a beggar), became a driving force. The positive reinforcement for a pass at school was a chicken party, a memory that motivated her to excel academically.

Carol Metwane's journey from a small village in Sekhukhune District to her role as the Environment and Waste Management Manager at Makhuduthamaga Local Municipality is nothing short of inspiring. Her story is a testament to the power of determination, hard work, and an unyielding love for nature.

Carol is the firstborn child of Mashishimane and Mogale Metwane, born and raised in the village of Madibong in Jane Furse. Her family

faced financial challenges, with her mother working as a domestic worker and her father hustling for a living. Growing up in a village with limited opportunities, she learned the value of education early on.

She is a newly married mother whose dedication to her studies remains resolute. She secured a bursary from the Local Government SETA during her Honours studies, an important stepping stone in her career. In 2007, as an intern, she introduced an Environmental Management unit at Makhuduthamaga Local Municipality, where she later became the Manager. Her efforts contributed to the municipality's recognition as the most improved municipality in waste management in 2009, and she successfully protected seven wetlands in the area.

For those who want to prosper in life, Carol advises them to develop good plans, have faith and work hard to achieve their dreams. She takes inspiration from Proverbs 21:5, NLT version: "Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, and nasty shortcuts lead to poverty." She integrates this



wisdom into her life, inviting God into all her plans, emphasising time management, and drawing strength from her supportive family.

Despite her demanding career and academic pursuits, Carol finds time to relax at the end of the day. Light exercises, a soothing cup of chamomile tea, and quality moments with her loved ones provide her with the balance and tranquillity needed to recharge.

## Defining the knowledge contours in the 21st century



On Wednesday, 29 November 2023, the Chief Executive Officer of Freedom Park, Dr Jane Mufamadi, delivered a webinar entitled "Defining the knowledge contours in the 21st century: Freedom Park as the knowledge centre". The University of Venda, Central University of Technology and the University of Mpumalanga co-organised the webinar. She outlined that Freedom Park is a knowledge centre that, among others, looks at research and development as its knowledge areas of focus.

In Freedom Park, there is a memorial named Wall of Names, where 185,000 names have been inscribed and collected through research and development. The Park conducts biographical research where they profile individuals through biographies and has a vast archive of biographies. All these biographies are meant to heal past sufferings, divisions

and injustices and honour those who suffered for justice and freedom.

Dr Jane Mufamadi has recently obtained a PhD in African Studies at the University of Venda with a topic on "Socio-Cultural and Philosophical Importance of Rituals in Traditional Medicine". She found that rituals are the backbone of healing and allow a patient to reconnect with the spirits, family, ancestors and the community. Her interest in indigenous knowledge grew from the University of Venda's initiative of the Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledge Systems Curriculum. For Jane, lasting solutions can be found through research, participatory involvement in solution-seeking, partnership and collaboration.

### *Valorising and unmuting the African voices*

She further reveals that the strategic purpose of Freedom Park is to craft indigenous knowledge systems as a niche area within which to derive scholarship and concretise research in tandem with the African Union Agenda 2063 of building 'Africa we want'. The African voices need to be valorised and un-muted to free Africa.

"For us, the emancipation of the African voice means freeing ourselves to a point of beginning to eradicate the many social challenges and ills we face, which lead to unintended consequences like violence within the African system."

Jane Mufamadi, a name synonymous with dedication, resilience, and a lifelong commitment to service, has carved an indelible mark in education, heritage, and community healing. Her journey

from humble beginnings on a South African farm to her current role as CEO of Freedom Park is a testament to the transformative power of education, self-belief and unwavering determination.

Growing up on the Beskow farm near Musina, Jane's parents were farm workers, embodying values of love, respect, humility, and a profound sense of community. Despite limited resources, her family was known for their open-heartedness, often welcoming and sharing with strangers and travellers, including those en route to Zimbabwe. This nurturing environment instilled the core values shaping Jane's life and career.

Jane's educational journey began at Makungwi Primary School, a stepping stone that later led her to Mudimeli Village for her primary and secondary education, ultimately completing her matric at Mudimeli Secondary School. A twist of fate took her to the University of Venda, where she initially aspired to become a pilot but found her true calling in psychology. She is a bonafide alumna of the University of Venda, where she completed all four degrees: BA, BA (Honours), Masters of Arts, and recently, a PhD in African Studies. This educational path was serendipitous, as it was through psychology that she discovered her passion for indigenous knowledge systems and heritage.

Jane's mother, a source of unwavering support and inspiration, played a pivotal role in her life. A woman of incredible strength and kindness, worked as a domestic worker who also engaged in various farm-related tasks to ensure Jane

and her siblings received an education. Jane fondly recalls her mother's sage advice: "Whatever you put your mind to, you can achieve." Her mother's steadfast love, resilience, and boundless spirit profoundly influenced Jane's personal and professional journey.

Jane also played a pivotal role in completing Freedom Park's permanent exhibition, leading a turnaround project that concluded within a record-breaking eight months. As the CEO of Freedom Park, she has created a space that transcends heritage; it is a centre for healing and reconciliation, bridging the divide between communities, and giving voice to the voices of the past.

Jane Mufamadi's story is an inspiration for young alumni who aspire to follow a similar path. Her advice is grounded in her journey: believe in yourself, work hard, persevere, and know that your background does not define your future. Education, commitment, and a strong sense of self are the key ingredients to success.

Jane's resilience was further tested when she was struck by lightning in 1988, leaving her severely injured and in a coma. The incident, traumatic as it was, strengthened her faith and her belief that destiny cannot be hindered by life's challenges.

After a day of making a difference in the world, Jane finds relaxation in reading inspirational books, spending quality time with her family, and the soothing notes of music. These moments of reflection and rest prepare her for the challenges and opportunities that await her each day of her life.

# UNIVEN Alumni gather for the Pre-launch of Mpumalanga Highveld Alumni Chapter



The University of Venda intends to launch a Chapter in the Mpumalanga Highveld Region. The envisaged alumni chapter will serve as a platform for interaction among UNIVEN alumni and their alma mater. The President of Convocation, Mr Sylvester Motadi and other members of the Executive Committee of Convocation held a successful Alumni Chapter pre-launch meeting with selected alumni from the Highveld region. The session was held at ANEW Witbank Hotel in eMalahleni on Saturday, 11 March 2023.



Adv Sipho Mashela rendered the welcome and set the context of the occasion. In his remarks, he thanked alumni for their commitment to their alma mater by attending the alumni pre-launch session. He made a call for unity among alumni in the Highveld region. Adv. Mashela concluded the pre-launch gathering by proposing a vote of thanks.



The President of the Convocation as the programme director highlighted the purpose of the Alumni Chapter pre-launch. He informed the gathering that UNIVEN is in the process of reconnecting and building relationships with its alumni who live and work in the Mpumalanga Highveld Region. He further told the audience that the session was the first step towards establishing a fully-fledged Alumni Chapter in the region.

He informed the attendees about the chapters which Convocation has already launched, including the Mpumalanga Lowveld Alumni Chapter which was recently launched in Mbombela.



In his presentation on "What is an Alumni Chapter". The Alumni Relations Officer, Mr Mashudu Ramaleba gave a background on how the oldest and first Alumni Chapter started in 1840 and the subsequent chapters in different countries and different universities. He informed the audience that chapters began as an intellectual society of graduates, and then grew

to adopt constitutions and held annual general meetings. He went on to explain the focus of subsequent alumni associations, which varied: friendship and unity among graduates, the welfare of the alma mater, good relationships with the alma mater and enhancing the experience of registered students. He highlighted actionable steps for starting an Alumni Chapter. He described the focus of UNIVEN Alumni Chapter: being an ambassador, supporting strategic goals, unity of graduates, fostering a positive image, building relationships between industries and UNIVEN and also engaging in fundraising.



Ms Shonisani Masutha expressed her appreciation for those who attended the occasion of the pre-launch. She cautioned and reminded graduates that the reputation and prestige of UNIVEN lie in its graduates or alumni. She implored alumni in attendance to assist UNIVEN Convocation in launching a successful chapter. She concluded by urging alumni to constantly update their information on the website through the Devman link.

**We would like to hear from you!**

**UNIVEN Alumni News is your communication channel.**

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