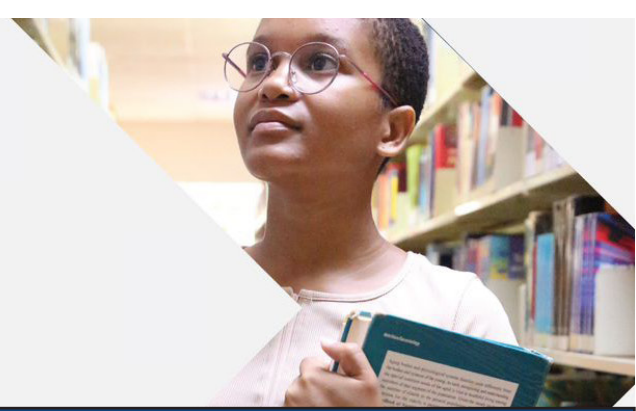




University of Venda  
Creating Future Leaders

# UNIVEN Weekly e-Newsletter



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## The University of Venda concludes its 2025 Participatory societal evaluation of community engagement projects panel



*Attendees pose for a group photo*

The workshop held on the 26 and 27 August 2025 at 2Ten Hotel in Sibasa, was convened with the support of DHET - University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) to elevate awareness of the principles of the scholarship of community Engagement and co-creation methodologies. As UNIVEN concludes its strategic plan 2021-2025, the workshop also served an opportunity for member check. Member checking, also known as respondent validation or participant feedback, is a qualitative research technique where researchers return collected data (e.g., interview transcripts, preliminary analyses, or synthesised findings) to participants. This step allows participants to confirm, clarify, or correct the interpretation of

their own contributions, enhancing the study's credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity.

More than 100 participants including researchers, students, and community partners embarked on a reflective session of the societal impact participatory evaluation journey embarked since 2024. The aim of the societal impact review for UNIVEN's community engagement projects is to evaluate and document how these initiatives have realised the ideals of societal relevance while also cultivating a participatory evaluative, and reflective culture to inform future plans and sustainability goals.



*Prof Joseph Francis, Acting DVC: Research and Postgraduate Studies at the University of Venda*

In his opening and welcome remarks Prof Joseph Francis, Acting DVC Research and Postgraduate Studies likened an engaged person to someone with “big ears, eyes, and nose but a small mouth”, symbolising the need to listen and learn from communities rather than just talking. He stressed that researchers and academics should approach communities with humility and openness, recognising community partners as “co-researchers and joint researchers”. He further questioned “at what point are we going to publish our papers with our community partners?” and highlighted the need for collaborative research outputs, policy briefs, and community intervention plans. He encouraged participants to “engage openly, challenge assumptions, and express confidence” in their work, with the goal of igniting new partnerships and pathways for community transformation.



*Dr Mammusa Lekoa, Director for Bioepiderm Research Consultants, Community Engaged Scholarship Expert*

Dr Lekoa facilitated the importance of community-driven and asset-based approaches, reciprocity, and mutual benefit in community engagement. “You do not go in those communities as a professor or as a doctor,” she said, adding that academics should work collaboratively with community partners, valuing their knowledge and involving them in all stages of research, from design to dissemination, to ensure impactful and sustainable projects.



*Project Leaders, Review Panel Members and DCEIIC Staff Members*

In terms of the University of Venda participatory evaluation framework, panel members consisted of community leaders, retired professors, industry partners, and government officials. Post graduate students served as research assistants.



*Research Assistants of the 2025 Community Engagement Review Process, From the back: Mr T. Mokoena, Mr T. Mathivha, Mr D. Maumela, Mr K. Kalobo, Mr J. M Mundandi, Miss M. Maumela, Ms R. Ramaano, Ms A. Nengwekhulu, Ms C. Shikwambana and Ms Z.P Mateka*

The highlight of the two-day session was the reflective session co-facilitated by Professor Netshandama and Dr Lekoa. Students who served as research assistants shared their lifelong intergenerational learning moments, how they valued time spent with elders, community leaders, and most importantly with

retired professors. “Participation in the review process was transformative and skills enhancing for me. Now I understand mixed method, I can do both”, one student intimated, a sentiment shared by all of them. “The retired professors also assisted us with our studies. I would be very early during meetings so that I can ask questions about my own studies and the challenges”.



*Prof Vhonani Netshandama, Director of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation, and Commercialisation*

Professor Netshandama facilitated a session on knowledge co-creation principles of reciprocity, mutual benefit, respect, shared decision making, capacity building and sustainability. She encouraged participants to reflect on how knowledge is largely a series of hypotheses that still need further probing. There is still a lot that we do not know about how the universe works. New discoveries challenging what we thought we already knew are made each day. Good research and innovation processes acknowledge the possibility that a life-changing solution to the complex and complicated challenges in society lies in the intersection between the University's interaction with society.

On Day one, researchers, who are recipients of the 2024/2025 University of Venda community engagement seed fund, presented their findings in collaboration with community partners and students. Their topics, largely founded on principles of Ubuntu, intersected on topical community challenges of teenage pregnancy, mental health, substance abuse, and cooperatives development. One highlighted project, a flagship project in the faculty of Health

Sciences brought together various transdisciplinary research teams to showcase how Ubuntu philosophy is applied to community educational interventions.

Day two centred on the panel presentations, made jointly by panel chairpersons and the team. The following projects were evaluated:

- 1) The Vuwani Science resource centre project, chaired by retired district education director Vhembe East Dr G Rambiyana.
- 2) Bioenergy Community Pilot Project (Limpopo) and Vuwani Science Resource Centre Project, chaired by the retired Professor Mudzielwana.
- 3) Innovation Champions for Local Economic Development (IRD), Biogas Renewable Energy, Chaired by Dr Mukhodobwane, lecturer and mathematician at the Department of Mathematical and Computational sciences.

The findings revealed useful insights to assist the university, indicating that although more needs to be done per project, inputs of the University have yielded transformative outcomes notably appreciated by the intended beneficiaries. Recommendations across the three projects were encouraging the university to strengthen sustainability measures, expand reach and improved access.

In her closing remarks, Prof Vhonani Netshandama, Director of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation, and Commercialisation, expressed sincere appreciation to the panel chairpersons, community partners, external ecosystems' partners for the time devoted on the review process. She encouraged students that “ I hope the experiences shared will assist you to redefine your academic value. To those of you graduating next week congratulations! Now the real academic journey begins. I hope you learned to be humble, respectful of ecologies in the knowledge production process.

She highlighted the importance of co-creation and co-authoring, and encouraged the students, partners and retired professors to continue to co-author. "Peer reviewed publications, is one component, there is a need to co-author policy reviews, and community educational material such as posters and fliers in the relevant African languages mostly spoken in the area," she said.



VARSITY FOOTBALL WOMEN'S FIXTURES							
UJ SOWETO STADIUM							
5 SEPTEMBER - ROUND 1							
 CPUT	 WITS	 UP-TUKS	 UNIVEN	 UJ	 NWU	 UWC	 TUT
13:00		15:00		17:00		19:00	
6 SEPTEMBER - ROUND 2							
 NWU	 CPUT	 TUT	 UP-TUKS	 WITS	 UJ	 UWC	 UNIVEN
13:00		15:00		17:00		19:00	
7 SEPTEMBER - ROUND 3							
 UWC	 UP-TUKS	 UJ	 CPUT	 NWU	 WITS	 TUT	 UNIVEN
13:00		15:00		17:00		19:00	

## Water Research Commission Meets with Limpopo Stakeholders at UNIVEN

The Water Research Commission (WRC), in collaboration with key provincial partners, hosted the Limpopo Provincial Partnership Roadshow from 1–2 September 2025 at the University of Venda's Research Conference Centre in Thohoyandou. Under the theme 'Strengthening water and sanitation resilience through research and innovation,'

the event brought together stakeholders from government, academia, civil society, and industry to address Limpopo's pressing water and sanitation challenges. Through plenary sessions, workshops, and innovation pitches, the roadshow served as a dynamic platform for knowledge exchange, strategic collaboration, and the unveiling of research-driven solutions

aimed at enhancing service delivery and climate resilience in the province.



*The Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Postgraduate Studies, Prof Joseph Francis*

In his welcome remarks, the Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Postgraduate Studies, Prof Joseph Francis, highlighted the importance of collaboration and action in addressing water security and sanitation challenges, stating, “When we strengthen partnerships, we secure water. When we secure water, we secure life.” He noted the University of Venda’s commitment to water research, citing examples of cutting-edge projects, and encouraged participants to work together to drive forward practical solutions to the water crisis. Prof Francis also cautioned against making commitments that are not followed through, saying, “I hope that the partnerships that we are going to construct here are partnerships that we will really use to drive forward solutions to the water crisis.”



*Dr Jennifer Molwantwa, CEO of the Water Research Commission*

Dr Jennifer Molwantwa, CEO of the Water Research Commission, discussed the organisation’s stakeholder-centric approach and its efforts to make research funding more accessible. She highlighted the WRC’s commitment to supporting research and innovation in water and sanitation, stating, “When you have a postgraduate student who is doing a PhD, they can apply for funding from the Water Research Commission and hire a professor to advise them.” Dr Molwantwa also pointed out the importance of learning from indigenous knowledge systems and enhancing them with scientific approaches. She announced the WRC’s plan to establish a rural water and sanitation research centre between the University of Venda and the University of Limpopo, with a commitment of R5 million per annum, and invited partners to support this initiative.



*Mr Thivhonal Masindi, the Director at the Department of Water and Sanitation in Limpopo Province*

On behalf of Ms Lucy Kobe, Provincial Head of the Department of Water and Sanitation, Mr Thivhonal Masindi, the Director at the Department of Water and Sanitation in Limpopo Province, said the department is inspired and fully committed to the theme of strengthening water and sanitation through research and innovation. The department faces challenges such as water quality issues, old infrastructure, theft and vandalism, and degradation of environmental resources. Masindi thanked participants and wished them a successful convention.



*Prof Natasha Potgieter, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture*



*Prof Rachel Makungo, an Associate Professor at the University of Venda*

Professors Natasha Potgieter and Rachel Makungo from the University of Venda presented on the institution's strategy for water, food, and sanitation. Prof Potgieter's presentation highlighted the university's commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6, "to provide clean water and sanitation for all". Prof Makungo showcased the university's Water Research Commission-funded projects, exploring areas such as building climate resilience, hydrology, and water treatment. The university aims to promote sustainable development and improve access to clean water and sanitation through its research and initiatives.



*Dr Cornelius Ruiters from Lepelle Northern Water*

Dr Cornelius Ruiters from Lepelle Northern Water highlighted the challenges of providing water services in Limpopo, citing "water treatment and water quality, deteriorating resources, emerging contaminants, climate change, and ageing infrastructure" as major concerns. To address these issues, Lepelle Northern Water aims to collaborate with academics and other water companies to conduct cutting-edge research, develop advanced skills, and support research and development. As Dr Ruiters noted, "through these collaborations, we will be able to conduct cutting-edge research which will augment existing efforts." Lepelle Northern Water operates 20 water treatment works and four wastewater treatment works across the province, serving all five district municipalities.



*Mr Tshilidzi Nelwamondo from the Limpopo Office of the Premier*

Mr Tshilidzi Nelwamondo from the Limpopo Office of the Premier, presenting on the state of water supply in Limpopo province, highlighted the province's water services challenges, stating that "the province has serious issues in providing water to communities, which poses development challenges." He noted that despite implementing infrastructure projects, additional people are not gaining access to water services, and the province has regressed from 86% to 79.5% in water access between 2011 and the recent census. The province has developed a strategy to address these challenges, including exploring groundwater sources and improving project management. Mr Nelwamondo said, "The biggest challenge was the decline from where we were previously to where we are at the moment."

Over the course of the two-day Limpopo Provincial Partnership Roadshow, a series of insightful presentations and interactive sessions showcased the depth of research, innovation, and collaboration driving water and sanitation resilience in the province. Experts from the Water Research Commission (WRC), academic institutions, government departments, and civil society shared practical solutions ranging from groundwater management and climate-smart agriculture to digital water technologies and sanitation innovations. These presentations directly addressed the challenges identified in Limpopo, such as deteriorating infrastructure, water quality concerns, and governance gaps, while reinforcing the WRC's stakeholder-driven approach. By aligning technical expertise with local needs, the roadshow exemplified how bottom-up engagement and research-based interventions can catalyse sustainable transformation in vulnerable regions.

Limpopo Province faces acute water scarcity, deteriorating infrastructure, and increasing vulnerability to climate change, compounded by its reliance on groundwater and the demands of mining and agriculture. In response, the WRC has adopted a stakeholder-centric strategy that prioritises bottom-up engagement and locally informed research interventions. The roadshow forms part of this broader initiative, aiming to empower municipalities with practical tools, foster partnerships, and promote innovations in water governance, sanitation management, and climate-smart agriculture. Through aligning research outputs with community needs, the WRC seeks to catalyse sustainable transformation across Limpopo's water sector.



*Dr Harrison Pienaar, Deputy Chairperson of the Water Research Commission Board*

Dr Harrison Pienaar, Deputy Chairperson of the Water Research Commission Board, thanked attendees for their participation in the two-day Limpopo Provincial Partnership Roadshow, saying it had been “really stimulating” with “fruitful discussions”. The programme unfolded with presentations and deliberations that confirmed the “enormous problems” related to water and sanitation in the province. Dr. Pienaar stated that the Water Research Commission would work closely with stakeholders, including the Universities of Venda and Limpopo, in partnership to address the water challenges identified. He thanked the host, the University of Venda, for their hospitality and looked forward to future partnerships and initiatives. Dr. Pienaar concluded by appreciating the unique programmes and pockets of excellence in the province.

Prof Joseph Francis, Acting DVC: Research and Postgraduate Studies at the University of Venda came back to the podium again to close the Water Research Commission Limpopo Provincial Partnership Roadshow. He noted that the roadshow had brought together diverse stakeholders, including government, academia, and NGOs, to share knowledge and expertise. Prof Francis stated that solutions must be inclusive, context-specific, and collaborative. He celebrated the achievements of institutions, such as UKZN, which was top in the list for water-energy food nexus research publications. Prof Francis concluded by saying “water is life, and partnerships are the lifeline,” and that nurturing partnerships wisely would enable communities to thrive.





Bridging Borders, Inspiring Solutions:  
Internationalisation for a Resilient and Inclusive Future

# A Value Driven ICT to Enable Digital Transformation and Global Collaborations in Higher Education Institutions

By: Dr. Nkhumbuleni T. Ratshitanga  
Head: ICT Support Services - University of Venda



Date 28<sup>th</sup> of Augus2025



Dr. Nkhumbuleni T. Ratshitanga, Head of ICT Support Services, attended and presented a paper entitled 'A Value Driven ICT to Enable Digital Transformation and Global Collaborations in Higher Education Institutions' (HEIs) at the 27th Annual Conference organised by the International Education Association of South Africa, held in Stellenbosch from 26 to 29 August 2025. Numerous studies indicate that HEIs globally have adopted ICT solutions to support and advance their core operations. Nevertheless, many ICT and digital transformation initiatives do not achieve their intended or expected outcomes, which can adversely affect institutional objectives.

To address these challenges, the paper emphasised the importance of adopting a value-focused approach when implementing digital transformation initiatives. It also examined the role of ICT in fostering global collaborations, underscoring the necessity of aligning such initiatives with organisational strategies to maximise value delivery. The research utilised ITIL 4 Foundation best practice, highlighting the principle of value co-creation and the significance of the service value system, where stakeholder and user engagement are central to delivering high-quality services.

The study concluded that HEIs should pursue value-driven ICT strategies to facilitate effective

global collaborations and successful digital transformation. It recommended that service offerings consistently meet customer requirements and stressed the critical importance of stakeholder engagement for achieving value in ICT within HEIs. The paper is to be submitted to a DHET-accredited journal for publication.

Dr. Ratshitanga expressed appreciation for the support provided by Mr. Sam Khoza, Director of ICT Services, and Mr. Botwe Kraziya, the Chief Operating Officer. He acknowledged their ongoing commitment to equipping staff with the knowledge and skills necessary for professional excellence.



**UNIVERSITY OF VENDA**

**2025 September Graduation Ceremonies**

The Chancellor of the University of Venda, Adv Mojanku Gumbi, invites all successful graduands to the 2025 Spring Graduation Ceremony, comprising **ALL Faculties in ONE session**, to take place at the University Auditorium on Friday, 05 September 2025 at 09:00 am.

NB: For more information, contact the Faculty Administrators as follows:

NAME OF FACULTY	FACULTY ADMINISTRATORS	
Faculty of Health Sciences	Aluwani Bugane	015 962 8942
Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education	Gumani Tshimange Mashudu Mainganye	015 962 8888 015 962 8969
Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law	Julius Netshidzivhe	015 962 8961
Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture	Maxwell Maboho Mishumo Nengwekhulu Mukondeleli Masia	015 962 8880 015 962 8954 015 962 8086

Graduands and Guests should arrive **TWO HOURS BEFORE** the start of the ceremony.

Visit the UNIVEN website: [www.univen.ac.za](http://www.univen.ac.za)



**32ND ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2025**

HOSTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

*Theme:*  
Towards Excellence: Enhancing Funding Pathways and Student Outcomes through Human-Centric AI, Impactful Research, and Operational Intelligence

**Date:** 27 - 31 October 2025  
**Location:** Kalahari Waterfront, Thohoyandou, Limpopo

**Registration Is Open**

**Members:**  
Only attending the pre-conference workshop = **R1,000.00**  
Only attending the conference = **R6,900.00**  
Attending both the pre-conference and conference = **R7,900.00**

**Non-Members:**  
Only attending the pre-conference workshop = **R1,600.00**  
Only attending the conference = **R7,500.00**  
Attending both the pre-conference and conference = **R8,500.00**

For more Information Visit:  
[www.saair-web.co.za](http://www.saair-web.co.za)



If you spot anything out of the ordinary on campus - contact the **University Hotline** by calling toll free number 0800 212 755 or email: [univenhotline@tip-offs.com](mailto:univenhotline@tip-offs.com)

## Improper conduct includes the following...

1. Financial misconduct,
2. Misuse or misappropriation of University assets,
3. Health and safety risks,
4. Plagiarism,
5. Fraud and corruption.