



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

2025

PROFILES OF **CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE AND INSTITUTES**

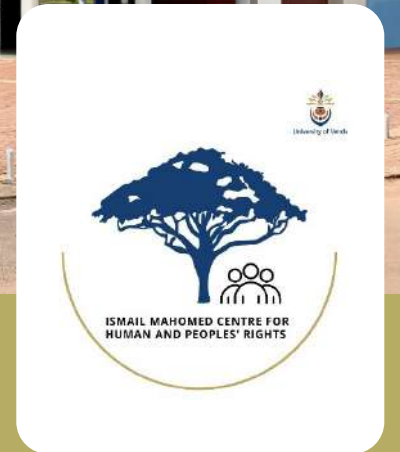
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1.1 ISMAIL MAHOMED CENTRE FOR HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS

PREAMBLE

The Centres and Institutes at the University of Venda (UNIVEN) constitute a critical driving force behind its vision of being “a university leading in engaged scholarship.” They provide practical expression to the mission of producing graduates who are both locally relevant and globally competitive by directly linking academic excellence to societal transformation. Functioning as engines of innovation and knowledge translation, these entities drive the science with and for society agenda, ensuring that research, teaching and community engagement converge to address local development challenges while remaining globally aligned. In doing so, they elevate UNIVEN’s role as a leader in advancing Africa’s development priorities and shaping futures through knowledge that matters.

Collectively, the network of Centres of Excellence and Institutes at UNIVEN builds a powerful ecosystem for inter- or transdisciplinary collaboration, strategic partnerships for local, national, regional, continental and global transformative impact. They integrate African heritage, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, cutting-edge science and/or policy advocacy, while also aligning with local-global development priorities. Each Centre and Institute adds a unique dimension, creating a comprehensive platform for innovation, justice, governance, cultural pride, health, science and rural transformation. In doing so, they amplify UNIVEN’s societal impact and sharpen its global relevance, which makes them indispensable engines of transformation and excellence.

1. CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE

The Ismail Mahomed Centre for Human and Peoples’ Rights (IMCHPR), originally established in 2001 and resuscitated in 2022 within UNIVEN’s Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law, serves as a multidisciplinary hub for advancing research and advocacy on the intersection of social justice and environmental justice with human rights law. Its mission is to generate innovative, evidence-based research on people living in vulnerable conditions, climate change, biodiversity loss, extractives, sustainability and gender-based violence, while leading advocacy, training and policy engagement on these themes. Through applied, multi- and transdisciplinary approaches, the Centre responds to pressing global, continental and national challenges, positioning UNIVEN as a credible voice in human rights scholarship and practice. It operates from dedicated research spaces on campus, integrates its work into Vision 2040, and supports curriculum development and teaching of human rights law and environmental law.

The IMCHPR delivers various impact-driven activities, including applied research, policy briefs, postgraduate supervision, international human rights moot training and professional short courses. It has strong collaborations with entities such as the South African Human Rights Commission, JAMMA International, African Community Resource Rights Alliance, the Environmental Law Association of South Africa and the Climate Mobility Africa Research Network, while also contributing submissions to the African Union and United Nations. The Centre publishes extensively in DHET-accredited journals, runs the African Journal of Climate Law and Justice (an initiative of the current Director), and integrates students into engaged research and community advocacy projects. With a sustainability strategy that diversifies funding, nurtures emerging leaders and embeds reflective learning, the IMCHPR strengthens UNIVEN’s role in shaping governance, human rights and policy debates at national, regional and global levels.



1.2 ES'KIA MPHAAHLELE CENTRE FOR NATIONAL AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE



The Es'kia Mphahlele Centre for National and Global Dialogue (EMCNGD), conceptualised in March 2025, is a pioneering hub for Afrocentric scholarship, transformative education and inclusive dialogue. Named in honour of the Afrocentric intellectual legacy of Es'kia Mphahlele, the Centre is dedicated to advancing African heritage and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) through anchoring debates that reshape global knowledge production. It responds to the persistent dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies in higher education and the marginalisation of African voices in knowledge creation and utilisation. Through providing an institutional platform for critical dialogue, research and postgraduate training, it positions UNIVEN as a continental leader in decolonisation, social justice and knowledge transformation. Its work amplifies Africa's intellectual contributions, empowers communities and influences policies that advance equity, inclusivity and cultural pride. Aligned with UNIVEN's Vision 2040, the National Development Plan 2030 and the African

Union's Agenda 2063, the Centre supports strategic priorities in engaged scholarship, transformative education and African heritage. It hosts conferences, workshops and scholarly exchanges, produces high-impact publications and mentors junior staff and postgraduate students, to strengthen the next generation of African scholars. With its vision, "to be a leading African hub for transformative education and Afrocentric dialogue that shapes policy, scholarship and knowledge systems globally," the Centre generates new intellectual pathways rooted in African perspectives. It cultivates critical spaces for dialogue across communities, policymakers and international partners, thereby ensuring Africa's voice claims its central position in providing solutions to national and global challenges. Through reclaiming Africa's intellectual voice, the EMCNGD advances transformative education and inclusive scholarship whilst positioning UNIVEN as a leading think-tank in Afrocentric knowledge production and global dialogue for national, regional and international transformation.



1.3 MER MATHIVHA CENTRE FOR AFRICAN LANGUAGES, ARTS AND CULTURE



The MER Mathivha Centre for African Languages, Arts and Culture (MMCALC), reconfigured in 2025 within the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, is a transformative hub for research, advocacy and community engagement on African languages, arts and culture. Named in honour of Prof. Matshaya Edward Razwimisi Mathivha, the Centre embodies a legacy of scholarship and activism dedicated to advancing African identity, linguistic diversity and cultural heritage. The MMCALC responds to the enduring marginalisation of indigenous languages and cultural expressions despite constitutional recognition of multilingualism in postcolonial Africa. It seeks to reverse the marginalisation of African languages and arts via embedding Indigenous Knowledge Systems into education, research and policy. The Centre promotes multilingual inclusivity, ensuring that communities access knowledge in their mother tongues, while positioning African arts and culture at the centre of academic and societal transformation.

Its alignment with UNIVEN's Vision 2040, the National Language Policy Framework, the National Development Plan 2030 and

the African Union's Agenda 2063 enables the MMCALC to champion the integration of African languages and perspectives into knowledge systems. The work advances curriculum relevance, transformation, translation services, cultural advocacy and arts-driven innovation, while contributing to the broader project of decolonising and Africanising higher education. Through teaching, research and community engagement, the MMCALC nurtures multilingual education, develops language digitalisation and translation tools, strengthens the use of indigenous languages and documents African stories, and artistic and cultural expressions. Partnerships with heritage councils, government agencies and cultural institutions ensure that its scholarship translates into real societal impact.

With its vision, namely "to be a leading hub for the promotion, preservation and advancement of African languages, arts and culture", MMCALC preserves Africa's past and also shapes its future. Cultivating cultural pride and expanding perspectives in education and amplifying African voices, helps the Centre strengthen UNIVEN's role as a custodian of African heritage and a driver of inclusive, knowledge-based development across the continent.



1.4 CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE IN MASS SPECTROMETRY

The Centre of Excellence in Mass Spectrometry (CEMS) was set up in 2025 as a continental hub for advanced mass spectrometry research, training and innovation. It addresses the historic lack of high-end analytical infrastructure in Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs), positioning UNIVEN and Southern Africa as leaders in Africa-focused science and innovation. The CEMS integrates state-of-the-art instrumentation, artificial intelligence and big data analytics to transform how Africa tackles complex challenges in metabolomics, environmental monitoring, proteomics, climate science, forensic science, biodiversity conservation, agro-processing, indigenous knowledge systems and drug discovery. Central to its mission is the scientific validation of African Traditional Medicine, promoting health solutions that honour African heritage through science-driven empowerment. The Centre's work is aligned with UNIVEN's

Vision 2040, the National Development Plan 2030, the Bio-economy Strategy and diverse development priorities. Its focus spans climate change impacts, sustainable food systems, smart agriculture, environmental sustainability, precision medicine and bio-economy growth.

Through postgraduate training, mentorship and collaborative partnerships with industry, government and international institutions, the CEMS develops the next generation of African scientists and innovators. Its activities strengthen research excellence, human capital development, rural transformation and community engagement, ensuring that cutting-edge science responds directly to societal needs and aspirations. With its mantra, "Driving African Innovation through Advanced Mass Spectrometry", the CEMS fills critical infrastructure gaps and redefines Africa's role in global science, delivering measurable impact in health, environment, food security and sustainable development.



1.5 VUWANI SCIENCE RESOURCE CENTRE

The Vuwani Science Resource Centre (VSRC) is an entity of the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture. It was established in 2005 as a pioneering rural-based hub dedicated to advancing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education. Strategically located in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, it provides learners and teachers from mainly under-resourced schools with enhanced access to modern scientific tools, hands-on demonstrations, robotics programmes and professional development. The Centre is one of a few institutions of its kind in rural South Africa, which fills a critical gap via addressing poor laboratory exposure, limited mentorship, and weak performance in mathematics and science. It serves as a national reference point for rural science communication and outreach. The VSRC builds a pipeline of future scientists, engineers and innovators

while directly contributing to South Africa's knowledge economy.

The VSRC's core mandate is to promote experiential learning, teacher support and community engagement in ways that prepare youth for the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Its programmes span STEM outreach, teacher training, robotics and coding, career guidance and science festivals, supported by partnerships with the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI), South Africa Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA) and industry stakeholders. Overall, the VSRC embodies UNIVEN's commitment to rural transformation, bridging educational divides and advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on quality education, innovation, reduced inequalities and inclusive growth.



2. INSTITUTES



2.1 AFRICAN MUSICOLOGY INSTITUTE

The African Musicology Institute (AMI), established in 2025 at the University of Venda (UNIVEN), is envisioned as the leading global hub for African musicology research, education, innovation and cultural preservation. In partnership with Kabarak University (KABU), Kenya, the Institute addresses the historical marginalisation of African music by advancing scholarship grounded in indigenous epistemologies and entrepreneurial practice. The institute's mandate is to decolonise and globalise African music scholarship through rigorous research, accredited degree programmes from undergraduate to PhD levels, and community engagement initiatives such as cultural festivals, traditional ensembles and music industry training. It also develops new theoretical frameworks, such as African Musicology from Within to reposition African musical thought as a global force in academia and practice.

Fully aligned with UNIVEN's Vision 2040, as well as national and continental priorities in education, heritage and the creative economy, the AMI contributes to research excellence, innovation, teaching and community engagement. Its strategic activities include hosting biannual African Musicology Conferences, publishing through Utafiti Academic Press, running the UNIVEN African Music Festival, and establishing world-class facilities such as recording studios and music labs. Beneficiaries of its work include students, scholars, local artists, cultural custodians and the wider African diaspora. The Institute embeds cultural entrepreneurship, builds pan-African partnerships and mobilises diverse funding streams, thereby positioning UNIVEN as a continental leader in reclaiming African musicology for liberation, economic empowerment and global recognition.

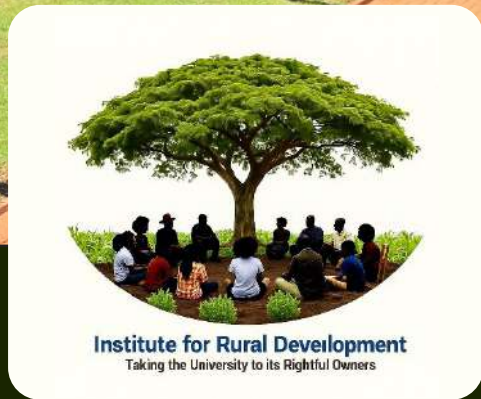


2.2 INSTITUTE FOR PATHOGEN AND GLOBAL HEALTH RESEARCH

The Institute for Pathogen and Global Health Research (IPGH) is a cross-disciplinary platform dedicated to advancing global understanding of microbial infections. It was established in 2025 and builds on earlier key milestones such as the SAMRC-UNIVEN Antimicrobial Resistance and Global Health Research Unit and the Solidarity Fund-supported pathogen surveillance project. The Institute integrates genomics, bioinformatics, and systems biology to investigate pathogen evolution and transmission. Guided by a strong One Health approach, the IPGH conducts large-scale studies, including child and adult cohorts on antimicrobial resistance, wastewater-based pathogen surveillance and HIV drug resistance. These are organised into four research units and two programmes covering antimicrobial resistance, pathogen surveillance, drug discovery, child health, community advocacy and policy, and human capital development. Partnerships with universities and research entities in South Africa, the United States of America and Uganda, as well as grassroots

communities and global health agencies, considerably strengthen the IPGH.

Translational research, policy influence and knowledge co-production with communities to ensure real-world impact are prioritized. As a semi-autonomous entity of the university, the Institute emphasizes postgraduate training, capacity building and inclusive collaboration, while driving national and global health priorities such as the Sustainable Development Goals and African Union Agenda 2063. Its sustainability strategy is anchored on competitive grant funding, long-term partnerships and institutional alignment. Structurally, the IPGH is equipped with molecular biology and sequencing facilities, robust ICT infrastructure and governance mechanisms such as scientific and community advisory committees. With a strong foundation of scientific excellence, community engagement and international networks, the Institute is poised to shape innovative, evidence-based responses to antimicrobial resistance, epidemic prevention and global health challenges.



2.3 INSTITUTE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Institute for Rural Development (IRD) at the University of Venda is a continental pioneer of societal liberation science, which is a philosophy that redefines rural development as citizen-driven, participatory and innovation-rooted. Established in 2000 as a Centre within the then School of Agriculture and firmly institutionalised in 2012, the IRD mobilises grassroots communities, traditional leaders, Municipalities, local community-based organisations and scholars to co-create solutions that transform rural economies, restore Africans' dignity and drive inclusive development. Its work integrates African heritage, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, One Health and modern innovation to ensure locally relevant and globally impactful transformation.

Prominent flagship initiatives of the IRD include Amplifying Community Voices, Localising Sustainable Development Goals in villages, Advancing the University

Town Framework, Cleaning Citizen Mindsets to Trigger Responsible Action and Nurturing Innovation Champions for Local Economic Development. Furthermore, the IRD leads postgraduate (Honours, Master's and Doctoral) training in rural development, thereby nurturing Africa's next generation of leaders, scholars and innovators. Anchored on assorted structured conversations on contemporary issues, an annual rural development conference series under the theme, Harnessing Societal Liberation Science to Reignite Hope for the Transformed Africa We Want, and strategic partnerships with traditional authorities, government, civil society, academia, business and international agencies as ecosystem partners, the Institute advances work in food and nutrition security, digital inclusion, biodiversity, One Health, leadership and governance. Its long-term vision is to yield a liberated, resilient and vibrant rural Africa where citizen voices, African heritage and modern science converge to shape inclusive and sustainable futures.



2.4 OR TAMBO INSTITUTE OF GOVERNANCE AND POLICY STUDIES

The OR Tambo Institute of Governance and Policy Studies (ORTIGPS), first established in 1999 within School of Business, Economics and Administrative Sciences, and reimagined plus reformulated in 2025, is dedicated to advancing governance, capacity building of public servants and policymakers in governance and policy formulation, designing and delivering short courses in public management for the public sector, conducting applied research on governance and public policy, democracy and ethical leadership in Southern Africa. Anchored on the values and legacy of Oliver Reginald Tambo, the ORTIGPS seeks to become a continental hub for evidence-based policymaking and governance innovation. It addresses persistent challenges, such as weak policy implementation, corruption, and limited capacity in public institutions, by mounting applied research, leadership training, and platforms for sustained policy dialogue. The Institute directly supports UNIVEN's Vision 2040 and local to global perspectives on strong institutions, quality education and

inclusive development, in particular.

The revitalised ORTIGPS integrates research, teaching, community engagement and innovation to fill a critical gap in governance scholarship and practice at Historically Disadvantaged Institutions. Its programmes include postgraduate training, short courses, leadership schools, applied policy research and the development of digital tools for inclusive policymaking. Beneficiaries include policymakers, public officials, traditional leaders, civic organisations, postgraduate students and grassroots communities. Through partnerships with government, regional bodies and donor agencies, the ORTIGPS hosts policy dialogues, publishes policy briefs and trains leaders to champion ethical and transformative governance. Institutionalisation of strong governance mechanisms and ensuring financial sustainability are the institute's principal tenets for establishing UNIVEN as a credible thought leader in governance and policy innovation, driving societal transformation in South Africa and across the continent.



CONCLUSION

The launch of a suite of Centres of Excellence and Institutes at the University of Venda will redefine scholarship, innovation, and community engagement in Southern Africa and beyond. This celebration signifies much more than just an administrative milestone; it reaffirms our commitment to the guiding principles of this institution: excellence through engaged scholarship, transformation through knowledge, and service to humanity. The success of these centres of excellence and institutes depends on collaborative partnerships and sustainable funding. These centres of excellence and institutes will serve as catalysts for innovation and transformation, integrating African heritage, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and cutting-edge. The launch of a suite of Centres of Excellence and Institutes at the University of Venda will redefine scholarship, innovation, and community engagement in Southern Africa and beyond.

We invite all stakeholders—academics, students, industry, and government—to partner with us in advancing our Centres of Excellence and Institutes on this transformative journey. Together, we will ensure that the University of Venda remains a beacon of hope, excellence, and innovation globally.



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