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## Professor Pascal Bessong Elected Fellow of the African Academy of Sciences



*Professor Pascal Bessong*

The University of Venda has reached a major milestone in its research excellence journey following the election of Professor Pascal Bessong as a Fellow of the African Academy of Sciences (FAAS), one of the highest scientific honours on the African continent. Following a rigorous, merit-based nomination and peer review process, FAAS describes elected Fellows as individuals who have demonstrated

“outstanding achievement and lasting contributions to science, technology, innovation, and scholarship, and “reflects the very best of African excellence.” Professor Bessong was elected under the Medical and Health Sciences category, joining an illustrious group of researchers working at the forefront of improving public health across Africa. Fellows also play a critical advisory role in policy formulation, serve

on scientific working groups, and contribute to the Academy's strategic programmes.

## **A Career of Scientific Leadership**

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Postgraduate Studies, Professor Fulufhelo Netswera at the University of Venda, extended heartfelt congratulations to Professor Bessong on this remarkable achievement - "Professor Bessong's election as a Fellow of the African Academy of Sciences is an exceptional honour and a powerful affirmation of his lifelong commitment to scientific excellence, leadership, and societal impact. This recognition places him among Africa's most distinguished scholars and underscores the global relevance of the research conducted at the University of Venda." Professor Bessong's election is a recognition of nearly two decades of pioneering contributions to virology, antimicrobial resistance, HIV research, and global health. His work has advanced understanding of viral determinants of HIV drug resistance, community-based prospective cohort research, gut microbiome, and infection and child health areas critical to Africa's fight against infectious diseases.

As Founding Director of major research programmes, including the SAMRC-UNIVEN Antimicrobial Resistance and Global Health Research Unit; Institute for Pathogen and Global

Health Research; and the DSTI/NRF South African Chair on Community Antimicrobial Resistance, Bessong has helped shape South Africa's scientific landscape through building research programmes and developing human capital for biomedical research. Besides South Africa, his network of mentees extends to Cameroon, Canada, Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and the United States.

## **A Milestone for the University of Venda**

His election to the African Academy of Sciences boosts the visibility of the University of Venda on an international stage. This achievement also reinforces the University of Venda's growing stature as a hub of high-impact research and scholarly leadership in Africa. It underscores the University's growing contributions to cutting-edge biomedical research and its impact on global health, and affirms the institution's increasing role in African scientific advancement.

We are immensely proud of Professor Bessong for flying the UNIVEN flag high on the continental and international stage. His achievement serves as an inspiration to our academic community, particularly emerging researchers, and aligns strongly with our vision of advancing impactful, solution-driven research that responds to Africa's development priorities.

## **Background Is Not Destiny: UNIVEN PhDs Inspire Courage at Dimani Agricultural High**

Grade 12 learners at Dimani Agricultural High School were inspired to rise above limitations and pursue academic excellence during a powerful motivation session held on 10 January 2026, aimed at equipping the Matric Class of 2026 for the demanding year ahead.

The session was led by a formidable team of eight PhD-staff members from the University of

Venda (UNIVEN), whose mission was clear: to ignite confidence, instil discipline, and awaken a deep belief in the learners' potential. Adding exceptional impact to the engagement was the presence of three Dimani Alumni, Dr Pandelani Budeli, Dr Ndiambani Makhavhu, and Dr Israel Creleanor Mulaudzi, the latter holding two doctoral degrees. Their return stood as living testimony that greatness can emerge from humble beginnings.



On picture: A team of eight UNIVEN PhD Staff during a motivation session aimed at inspiring the Matric Class of 2026

Delivering a deeply personal and relatable address, Dr Israel Mulaudzi reflected on her own journey, reminding learners that she once occupied the same classrooms and faced similar uncertainties about the future. She emphasised that her success was not shaped by privilege or chance, but by discipline, faith, perseverance, and unwavering self-belief.

"Your background does not determine your destination," she told learners. "Struggle is not a sign of failure—it is a sign of growth. Education gives you freedom, choice, and the power to change your family's story."

Dr Mulaudzi, whose academic portfolio spans English, Education, Educational Management, Educational Psychology, and Theology, further shared how she has expanded beyond academia into farming and entrepreneurship, including decoration, catering, and Mashonzha production. Her message reinforced the idea that education is a foundation for lifelong learning, innovation, and self-reliance.

Learners were also challenged to embrace the "3Ds for Success":

**Discipline** – resisting distractions such as

excessive social media use, substance abuse, and unhealthy relationships.

**Dedication** – developing and strictly following a personal study timetable.

**Determination** – seeking clarity from teachers, practising past examination papers, and using learning platforms such as YouTube to strengthen understanding.

All speakers encouraged learners to start revision early, remain focused, and strive to stay ahead of the curriculum rather than wait until examinations approach.

The session concluded with a powerful reminder that the world does not need perfect people, but courageous individuals who refuse to give up.

The motivation session left Dimani's Grade 12 learners energised, confident, and ready to confront the 2026 academic year with renewed purpose and belief. It further reaffirmed the vital role of institutions such as the University of Venda in nurturing future leaders and opening pathways to higher education, particularly for learners from rural communities.

# University of Venda Positions Itself as a Global Cybersecurity Leader through IFIP-UNIVEN-CSIR

The University of Venda (UNIVEN), through its Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law, has further strengthened its position as a leader in cybersecurity by successfully hosting the prestigious International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP)-UNIVEN-CSIR International Cybersecurity Conference, underscoring its growing influence as a regional and global innovator in digital security.

Held recently in Pretoria, South Africa,

the conference placed UNIVEN firmly on the international cybersecurity map, fostering pride among stakeholders while advancing critical conversations on safeguarding digital economies. The faculty, under the leadership of Executive Dean Professor Kanyane, demonstrated its commitment to addressing complex cybersecurity challenges facing governments, industries, and societies worldwide.



The conference was officially opened by the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law, Professor Modimowabarwa Kanyane and Dr Jabu Mtsweni from the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). In their opening remarks, they emphasised the urgent need for robust cybersecurity frameworks and collective action to protect digital infrastructure, setting a confident, forward-looking tone for the event.

Among the standout presentations was Dr

Willard Munyoka's paper titled "A Multidimensional Review of Cybersecurity Vulnerabilities in E-Government Systems: The Case of South Africa." His research identified three critical vulnerability domains—technical, human, and organisational factors that continue to undermine the resilience of e-government systems. Dr Munyoka introduced a multidimensional risk map linking these vulnerabilities to systemic threat vectors, offering policymakers a practical and strategic tool to strengthen South Africa's digital governance landscape.



Adding an international perspective, Professor Ruidong Zhang, an Adjunct Professor at the University of Venda from the Zhejiang University Business School (ZIBS) in China, delivered an insightful presentation on Large Language Models (LLMs). He highlighted the global consensus that LLMs have revolutionised artificial intelligence by enabling advanced natural language processing across applications such as conversational AI, text summarisation, and coding assistance. However, he cautioned that these advancements introduce significant security and privacy risks, calling for comprehensive risk awareness and robust mitigation strategies.

Showcasing emerging innovation, Ms Livhuwani Mutshafa presented her pioneering study, "Towards Facial Expression Analysis for Enhanced Threat Detection in Surveillance." Her work demonstrated the innovative application of deep learning technologies, inspiring optimism for the development of safer, smarter, and more responsive security systems.



By convening global experts alongside homegrown researchers, the University of Venda is actively strengthening South Africa's digital resilience and making a meaningful contribution to national cybersecurity strategies. The conference proceedings, now published, further elevate UNIVEN's reputation as a leading cybersecurity research hub, attract future collaborations and funding opportunities, and position South Africa as an influential player in global cybersecurity innovation.



# ► NEW VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

## VISION AND MISSION

*“Vision is the art of seeing the invisible”*  
~ Jonathan Swift

Our vision defines what we want to become by 2040. It is an aspirational description of what we would like to achieve in the long term.



### VISION

A University leading in engaged scholarship



### MISSION

The University of Venda produces graduates who are locally relevant and globally competitive



## INSTITUTIONAL VALUES

The University of Venda is guided by a set of core institutional values that shape its culture, inform decision-making, and underpin the university's strategic priorities. These values include:



### EXCELLENCE

Striving for the highest standards in teaching, research, and service



### INTEGRITY

Acting with honesty, ethics, and transparency in all we do



### ACCOUNTABILITY

Taking responsibility for our actions and delivering on our commitments



### DIVERSITY

Embracing and promoting inclusivity, equity, and different perspectives



### RESPECT

Valuing the dignity and contributions of every individual

## POSITIONING STATEMENT

Positioning the University of Venda for Relevance, Excellence and Impact