



University of Venda
Creating future leaders

Applause to the UNIVEN leadership by the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education for demonstrating stability, strategic vision, and dedication to student success



The morning sun rose gently over Thohoyandou on Monday, 26 January 2026, casting warm light across the University of Venda's sprawling campus. The University hosted the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education – a vital engagement marking a moment of accountability, reflection, and progress.

By 08:30, the Main Administration Building was already buzzing. Members of the Portfolio Committee, led by the Chairperson, Hon Tebogo Letsie, arrived to warm welcomes from the University's leadership, who ushered them toward the Executive Management Boardroom. The atmosphere was cordial but focused – everyone understood the significance of the day.

Before the presentations, the delegation embarked on a site visit, touring key facilities: the Disability student unit, student residences, the registration venue, the Advanced Nursing Simulation building, the Health Sciences building, and Punda Maria road and gate. Everywhere the committee went, they interacted with staff and students, appreciating the spirit of resilience and ambition that characterises the University of Venda.

The formal meeting at the University Auditorium was the emotional heart of the visit. There, the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee delivered remarks that resonated deeply with all in attendance.



During this session, the Chairperson of Council, Mr Rudzani Mushweu, delivered welcome remarks, after which the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Bernard Nthambeleni, delivered a comprehensive presentation on the University's achievements, challenges, and strategic priorities.



The Vice-Chancellor and Principal outlined progress on infrastructure development, financial sustainability, academic performance, research output, and student support initiatives. Other presentations were made by the Chairperson of the Institutional Forum, Prof Thizwilondi Mudau; the SRC President, Mr Tirhani Mathye; the NEHAWU Secretary and President, Mr Ambros Mogashoa; and Dr Justice Makhankhe, respectively. The committee listened attentively, taking notes and engaging with thoughtful questions that demonstrated a deep interest in the University's journey.

Engaging directly with students and staff brings policy closer to lived experience

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The Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee expressed confidence in the University's commitment to transformation, acknowledging the steps taken to improve governance, enhance teaching and learning environments, and expand community engagement initiatives. He emphasised that the University of Venda plays a critical role in advancing access to higher education – particularly for rural and historically disadvantaged communities.

In his concluding remarks, the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee applauded the University's leadership for demonstrating stability, strategic vision, and dedication to student success. At the same time, he urged the institution to continue strengthening areas such as infrastructure maintenance, research capacity building, and partnerships with industry and government.

Above all, the Chairperson encouraged the University to remain steadfast in its mission to empower the region, stating, "The work done here does not only uplift the University – it uplifts families, communities, and the future of our nation."



As the visit concluded at 17:00, a sense of accomplishment filled the air. The day had been constructive, honest, and forward-looking. Council, Executive Management, Staff, and students felt seen and heard, while the Portfolio Committee departed with a deeper appreciation of the University's progress and potential.

The visit became more than an oversight exercise – it became a reaffirmation of the University of Venda's place as a beacon of opportunity and transformation in South Africa's higher education landscape.



Council Members Align on 2030 Priorities at UNIVEN Induction Workshop



Council members pose for a group photo

The University of Venda (UNIVEN) convened its annual Council Induction Workshop on Wednesday, 28 January 2026, at the University Council Chambers, bringing together Council members and executive leadership for a full day of strategic engagement. The workshop focused on aligning Council responsibilities and priorities with the University's 2026–2030 Strategic Plan, strengthening governance oversight, and positioning the institution for sustainable growth and global competitiveness.



Chairperson of Council, Mr Rudzani Mushweu

Opening the workshop, Chairperson of Council, Mr Rudzani Mushweu, set a reflective yet forward-looking tone, emphasising that the induction serves as an opportunity to assess institutional performance against the five-year strategic plan and to build shared understanding around key priorities for the year ahead. He highlighted the importance of reviewing governance structures in line with the revised institutional statute to strengthen internal processes and accountability. Mr Mushweu also reflected on the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee's recent oversight visit, commending the University's strong engagement while noting the need to address matters raised. He concluded by encouraging open, constructive participation throughout the workshop.



University of Venda Vice Chancellor and Principal, Prof Bernard Nthambeleni

Providing an institutional overview, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Bernard Nthambeleni, outlined the University's readiness to commence implementation of the 2026–2030 Strategic Plan. He underscored UNIVEN's commitment to outcome-based planning, describing the institution as "a living institution" focused on defining, measuring, and achieving tangible results. He confirmed that all divisions had finalised and received approval for their operational plans, signalling preparedness for execution. Prof Nthambeleni further highlighted the University's inclusive performance culture, noting that performance agreements now extend across all staff categories, reinforcing shared accountability. He outlined key 2026 deliverables, including strengthening student success, refining academic programmes, accelerating digital transformation, enhancing research outputs, and consolidating governance maturity, concluding with confidence in the University's data-driven performance baseline and implementation readiness.

Strong governance and shared accountability are the foundation of UNIVEN's journey towards 2030



Deputy Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, Prof Eucebious (Sebi) Lekalakala-Mokgele



Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research and Postgraduate Studies, Prof Fulufhelo Netswera

Focusing on UNIVEN's core academic mandate, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Teaching and Learning, Prof Lekalakala Mokgele, reaffirmed that teaching and learning remain the primary drivers of student success and institutional performance. She presented a refreshed academic strategy that positions UNIVEN as a student-centred institution, supported by modernised pedagogy, strengthened academic support systems, and curriculum transformation aimed at producing graduates who are locally relevant and globally competitive. Complementing this, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Postgraduate Studies, Prof Netswera, reflected candidly on the research landscape, acknowledging fluctuating research output and outlining targeted interventions to build a stronger research culture. These include clearer publication expectations across academic ranks and a requirement for doctoral candidates to publish before graduation.



Chief Operating Officer, Mr Botwe Kraziya



Chief Financial Officer, Mrs Mavis Madzhie

Turning to operations and finance, Chief Operating Officer, Mr Kraziya, presented the University's drive to create an enabling environment for teaching, learning, and research through operational excellence. He emphasised standardisation, infrastructure modernisation, strengthened ICT systems, effective maintenance, improved stakeholder engagement, and enhanced risk management as critical enablers of efficiency and continuity. Chief Financial Officer, Mrs Madzhie, followed with the presentation of the Financial Sustainability Strategy, aimed at securing long-term financial health. She outlined plans to diversify revenue streams, strengthen financial controls, improve cost management, and enhance return on investment, stressing the importance of aligning financial planning with strategic priorities. She described the CFO portfolio as the custodian of financial sustainability, responsible for safeguarding resources and building reserves to support the University's future.

Council Members Align on 2030 Priorities at UNIVEN Induction Workshop continued...



Deputy Registrar: Governance, Mrs Martha Lewis

On governance reform, Deputy Registrar Governance, Mrs Lewis, announced that the revised institutional statute, recently approved by the Minister and gazetted, strengthens Council composition, updates committee structures, and formally embeds the Chief Operating Officer role.



University Registrar, Dr Joel Baloyi,

University Registrar, Dr Baloyi, expanded on efforts to streamline Council and committee processes, reducing duplication and ensuring clearer reporting lines to Council, while refocusing the Executive Committee on urgent and strategic matters



Mr Fhatuwani Ndou, Head of Governance, Ethics and Compliance

Complementing these initiatives, Mr Ndou, Head of Governance, Ethics and Compliance, outlined the University's roadmap towards achieving level four governance maturity by 2030, guided by ISO standards and King V principles, and supported by an institution-wide Governance, Risk and Compliance framework.



Deputy Chairperson of Council, Mr Bernard Mampeule

In closing, Deputy Chairperson of Council, Mr Bernard Mampeule, commended the quality of presentations and the clarity of strategic direction, describing the collective effort as a "winning formula." He expressed confidence in the University's trajectory, noting that UNIVEN is progressing in step with the higher education sector and positioning itself beyond expectations. Emphasising the importance of graduate success and alumni contribution, he concluded on an optimistic note, affirming the University's momentum and readiness for accountability and external scrutiny.

Institutional Visioning and Policy Refinement Drive UNIVEN's 2021-2025 APP Review and 2026-2030 Enrolment Planning Workshop



Attendees posing for a group photo

The University of Venda (UNIVEN), through the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Postgraduate Studies, ran a four-day 2021-2025 Annual Performance Plan (APP) Review, 2026-2030 Strategic and Enrolment Planning Workshop from 20-23 January 2026 at Mint Resorts, The Blyde, Tswane.

The workshop involved the University leadership, faculty representatives and key stakeholders who reviewed the 2021-2025 APP, shaped priorities for the 2026-2030 cycle and refined postgraduate and enrolment strategies. Through presentations, breakaway discussions and feedback sessions participants worked collaboratively to outline how the institution would improve research productivity, advance engaged scholarship and enhance academic performance in the next planning period.



UNIVEN Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Bernard Nthambeleni

In his opening remarks, UNIVEN Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Bernard Nthambeleni reaffirmed UNIVEN's sustained commitment to support the academic project through deliberate investment in faculties, leadership and institutional support mechanisms. He highlighted a paradigmatic shift from traditional knowledge transmission toward a more integrated institutional model that positions teaching, research, and societal impact as mutually reinforcing. Prof Nthambeleni underscored the imperative for UNIVEN to embody relevance, excellence and impact, emphasising that institutional direction must remain aligned with national and continental frameworks.

Prof Nthambeleni further elaborated on Vision 2040, portraying UNIVEN's long-term trajectory as one rooted in an economy based on international

innovation, underpinned by entrepreneurship, biodiversity and research excellence. He noted the strategic advantage of the University's location within a biosphere region, calling for strengthened research centres and expanded partnerships with industry, government and civil society. Strategic Plan 2026-2030, he asserted, translates this vision into outcome areas centred on student success, innovation, human and environmental well-being, internationalisation, and digital transformation. Achieving these aims, he reminded delegates, requires deliberate planning, supported by robust postgraduate training, relevant academic programmes and purposeful external engagement.

Institutional Visioning and Policy Refinement Drive UNIVEN's 2021-2025 APP Review and 2026-2030 Enrolment Planning Workshop cont...



UNIVEN DVC for Research and Postgraduate Studies Prof Fuluwelo Netswera

In his presentation, the UNIVEN Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Postgraduate Studies, Prof Fuluwelo Netswera stressed the need for data-driven strategies and a stronger research workforce, noting that 75% of academic staff members should acquire doctoral qualifications in line with the national expectations. He outlined the need for firm policies on research output, staff performance and the establishment of centres and institutes, with a target of 90–100% feedback before finalisation. He highlighted priority areas such as Agro-processing, genetics and school leadership, while also urging continued investment in disciplines where UNIVEN is already performing strongly, including agriculture, environmental sciences and public health. Prof Netswera further encouraged efforts to build a more supportive research culture, raise postgraduate completion rates, strengthen supervisory capacity and broaden international exposure for staff and students, adding that when unity shines, everybody shines.

The breakaway sessions and feedback engagements across the four-day workshop collectively addressed the UNIVENs core strategic priorities, covering strategic planning, strategic support, policy refinement and future enrolment growth. Discussions focused on reviewing the 2026–2030 Strategic Plan targets, strengthening research culture, enhancing engaged scholarship and refining leadership development in line with the University's mission. Participants also explored improved performance monitoring, standardised reporting, and the digitisation of Research and Postgraduate Studies processes. Policy sessions examined key academic and research frameworks, while entrepreneurship and innovation breakaways considered curriculum integration and stronger partnerships. Enrolment-planning engagements concluded the programme by reviewing postgraduate trends, PQM alignment and pathways for institutional growth.

Strategic vision, collaborative planning, and data-driven action are shaping UNIVEN's path to academic excellence and societal impact



Attendees listening to speakers during the first day of the workshop



Various groups during breakaway sessions



Prof Ramesh Baruthram, Emeritus Professor, University of Western Cape

Prof Ramesh Baruthram, Emeritus Professor, University of Western Cape, closed the breakaway and feedback session by reminding delegates that successful institutional transformation requires a vision embraced by the executive management and action rooted in knowledge and best practices. He stressed that universities thrive when they stop being "an HR admin department" and instead become strategic enablers of academic excellence. Looking ahead, he urged participants to work collaboratively rather than in silos, emphasising that time is changing, "we are running out of time," and that the way forward demands cohesive planning, strengthened postgraduate support, and collective commitment to acting in a different way to achieve meaningful change.

Other sessions included presentations from Dr Alice Mkuzangwe who presented the Programme Qualification Mix/review including the Postgraduate Enrolment Plans and Figures.

Prof Fuluwelo Netswera closed the planning workshop by acknowledging the strong participation and constructive contributions made throughout the four days, noting that the collaborative engagements helped refine policies, clarify priorities and strengthen alignment across the 2026–2030 Strategic Plan and enrolment planning processes. He highlighted how the collective discussions, feedback sessions and shared insights contribute to a more coherent institutional direction, with each stakeholder playing a meaningful role in shaping UNIVEN's future planning cycle. Prof Netswera also recognised the dedication shown by colleagues and partners during the workshop, affirming that their continued involvement supports the university's progress in research, postgraduate development and strategic planning.

University of Venda's Participation at the Science Forum South Africa (SFSA)

Dr Nyadzani Nevhudoli, under the Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation, and Commercialisation (DCEIIC) together with Ms Matenane Kgothatso Sebei and Mr Mapaya Given Maboko, students under the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture (FSEA) participated in Science Forum South Africa (SFSA) 2025 held recently in Pretoria, South Africa at the CSIR International Conversation Centre in Pretoria, South Africa.

The objective of the Forum was to ignite vibrant discussion on the role of science in society, between all stakeholders, the scientific community, government, industry and civil society at large. It comprises opening and closing plenaries that ignite conversations and involve leading South African and international scientists, experts, and leaders. The panel discussions were structured under the following themes: Youth in science technology and innovation (STI) and Africa, Science, technology and innovation partnerships in G20, bridging science and economic diplomacy in policy-making, shaping innovation, Powering the future industries, Global science for humanity, Agriculture, health, climate change, just transition, Bringing science communication and science journalism together.



Minister of the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation, Honourable Prof Blade Nzimande

The Science Forum South Africa (SFSA) 2025 was officially opened by the Minister of the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation, Honourable Prof Blade Nzimande, who delivered a compelling address reaffirming South Africa's national commitment to advancing science, technology, and innovation as key drivers of the country's development agenda. In his opening remarks, the Minister underscored the importance of strengthening collaboration across government, academia, industry, and communities to reinforce the national system of innovation, promote inclusive knowledge production, and ensure that scientific advancements translate into meaningful societal impact.

Prof Nzimande's remarks set the tone for a week of impactful engagement and meaningful dialogue. He emphasised that the Science Forum South Africa has evolved into the continent's foremost platform for strategic discourse on science, technology, and innovation.

The forum also featured presentations and panel discussions amongst other was exploring the interface between students, SMME's, and industry experts on commercialising Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS)-based technology innovations.

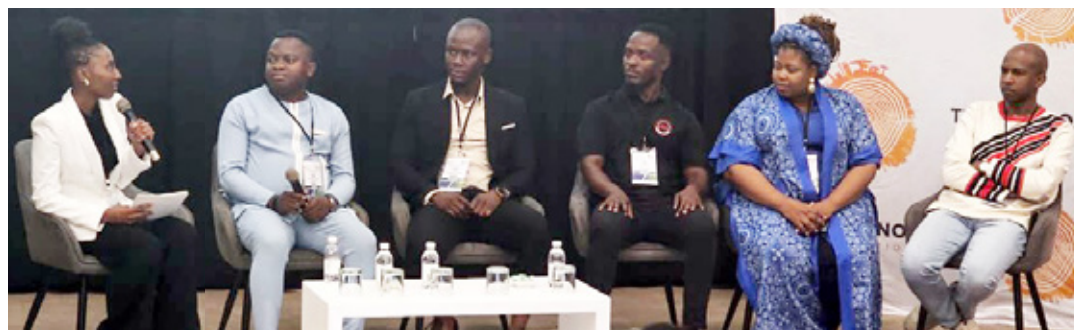


L-R: Dr Nyadzani Dolphus Nevhudoli, Ms Matenane Kgothatso Sebei and Mr Mapaya Given Maboko

Dr Nevhudoli highlighted that, amongst others, the Science Forum South Africa (SFSA) 2025 showcased how community-based research can help solve societal problems. The gathering also strengthened collaboration across government, academia and industry, demonstrating the best of African innovation while fostering professional connections, mentorship opportunities and sustainable solutions.

During the Science Forum the Minister, Honourable Blade Nzimande's emphasis was on the global recognition of South Africa's leadership in Indigenous Knowledge Systems. He re-minded attendees that UNESCO has designated South Africa as the African Institute for Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS), a Category II Centre, mandated to promote and support the contribution of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems. This aligns strongly with one of the University of Venda's niche areas: Indigenous Knowledge Systems and African Heritage.

Furthermore, the Minister highlighted the need for institutions of higher learning to strengthen mathematics and science education in public schools, placing science at the centre of society. This message strongly resonates with the Skills for the Future Programme (SFFP) within the Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialisation. The programme focuses on building capacity in digital literacy, mathematics and science support, peer-to-peer mentorship, career guidance and counselling, entrepreneurial skills, and the Matric Rewrite Programme for Grade 12 learners, says Dr Nevhudoli.



Panel discussing shaping the future of teaching and Learning with local Education Tech

Four final-year Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledge Systems students from the University of Venda delivered virtual presentations. Ms Sagwadi Nkuna presented on Indigenous Organic Bath Scrub; Ms Lusani Dzaga showcased her innovation on Water-Saving Bio Gel; Ms Tshilidzi Manenzhe presented on an Organic Laxative; and Ms Lindelani Munyai shared insights on her Indigenous Educational Consulting.

The panel on "Shaping the Future of Teaching and Learning with Local EdTech" at Science Forum South Africa brought together leading educators, innovators, and practitioners to explore the role of locally developed educational technologies in transforming teaching and learning. Panellists discussed how home-grown EdTech solutions can enhance learners' engagement, support inclusive education, and prepare students for a rapidly evolving digital landscape. The dialogue highlighted both opportunities and challenges, emphasising the need for collaboration between universities, schools, and industry to ensure that local innovations are sustainable, scalable, and aligned with South Africa's educational priorities.



Dr Nyadzani Nevhudoli visiting the Nelson Mandela University stall

Cybersecure Tech Hackathon 2025 Empowers the Youth to Safeguard South Africa's Digital Future



A group of participants

The CSIR International Convention Centre in Pretoria recently hosted the CyberSecureTech Hackathon 2025, a flagship youth innovation initiative that convened 85 young innovators, entrepreneurs, and tech enthusiasts from higher education institutions across Gauteng and Limpopo. Participants were drawn from higher education institutions, including the University of Venda (UNIVEN), Vhembe TVET College, University of Limpopo, University of Johannesburg, Tshwane University of Technology and other participating institutions, reflecting a growing inter-institutional commitment to strengthening cybersecurity capability and digital resilience in South Africa.

Selected from over 500 applications, 85 participants engaged in 72 hours of intensive collaboration, translating real-world cyber security challenges into practical, ethically grounded solutions. The hackathon positioned cyber security not only as a technical discipline, but as a socio-economic imperative closely linked to public trust, service delivery, digital inclusion, and national resilience.

This perspective was further reinforced in the opening keynote address by the Deputy Director-General (DDG) of the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI), who emphasised the extent to which digital systems have become integral to daily life, underpinning everything from banking and financial transactions to access to essential public and private services. He noted that even systemic challenges such as load shedding carry cyber security implications, as disruptions to power and connectivity can expose vulnerabilities in ATMs, electronic payments, and cash-digital withdrawal systems. The DDG emphasised that cyber threats are constant and often invisible, with attempts to compromise systems occurring continuously. However, due to reputation and risk considerations, cyber incidents are rarely disclosed publicly, creating a false perception that such threats are infrequent.

In an increasingly interconnected digital ecosystem, he cautioned that a breach in one system can have wide-ranging ripple effects, underscoring cyber security as a national, economic, and societal priority. Against this backdrop, initiatives such as the CyberSecureTech Hackathon play a critical role in developing the next generation of

innovators capable of designing resilient systems and safeguarding South Africa's digital future.

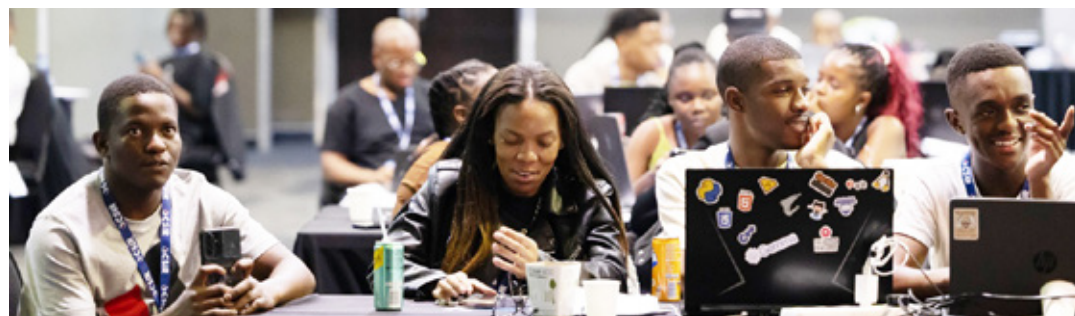
Working alongside industry mentors and facilitators from Adapt IT, Geekulcha, TakeNote IT, CSIR, and UNIVEN, teams developed functional prototypes rooted in African contexts and informed by ethical

principles, Ubuntu, and social impact. Led by Ms Shumani Nembudani CA(SA) from UNIVEN's Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law, the CyberSecureTech Hackathon has rapidly evolved into a nationally recognised platform for interdisciplinary innovation, skills development, and youth empowerment. The initiative was further supported by 6 UNIVEN staff and 9 student assistants drawn from the Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law, International Relations and Partnerships, ICT Services, and the Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialisation, reflecting a collaborative institutional approach to experiential learning and innovation.

The top-performing teams showcased a diverse range of innovative solutions that address some of the most pressing cybersecurity and digital trust challenges facing society today. Their ideas spanned areas such as fraud and scam prevention, phishing detection, protection against misinformation and deepfakes, ethical and POPIA-compliant AI systems, secure digital communication, emergency response technologies, regulatory compliance tools for small businesses, and smart community applications. Collectively, the pitches reflected a strong understanding of real-world risks and demonstrated how cybersecurity can be leveraged to protect communities, strengthen public trust, and enable inclusive digital participation. The quality of the prototypes and presentations underscored participants' ability to translate complex cybersecurity concepts into practical, scalable solutions relevant to African contexts.



Adapt IT Mentors and First Place Winners: From L to R: Titelo Maleka (from TUT), Sigidane Khumbudzo (from UNIVEN), Mukhumo Sandra (from UNIVEN), and Phooko Mokgomme (from UNIVEN)



A group of participants

Cybersecure Tech Hackathon 2025 Empowers the Youth to Safeguard South Africa's Digital Future continued...

The event's panel of judges reflected the depth and calibre of the programme. The final judges' panel was led by Dr Pulane Modiha, a seasoned banking executive and 2025 Mail & Guardian Power of Women Award recipient (Banking and Finance), alongside Prof Ruidong Zhang from Zhejiang University International Business School, whose expertise spans cloud computing, blockchain, machine learning, and data analytics. Pre-final judging included Lovemore Nalube, Technical Product Owner and Engineering Lead at Nedbank; Pranisha Rama, cybersecurity scholar and Lecturer at the University of Johannesburg; and Pratish Lakhoo, Senior Manager at Adapt IT with expertise in strategic initiatives and technology-enabled process optimisation.

The hackathon concluded with a formal Pitch Day where 11 finalist teams, down from 18 presented their prototypes and business pitches to the final judging panel. Teams were evaluated on technical innovation, relevance to real-world challenges, feasibility, and social impact. The closing session culminated in the announcement of winners and prize allocations, followed by reflections from judges and partners on the quality and maturity of the solutions presented.

Following an impressive round of final pitches and demonstrations with the final judges, the top-performing teams were announced. Mzansi Shield was awarded first place and received R25,000 in prize funding. Cyber Blockers secured second place with a prize of R15,000, while Data Defence Solutions and Zero Trust jointly received third place, each awarded R5,000. The winning teams were recognised for the strength of



L-R: Mr Matome Mokoena (IRP) Mr Lovemore Nalube (Judge) Ms Shumani Nembudani (UNIVEN – Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law), Ms Pranisha Rama (Judge), Mr Pratish Lakhoo (Judge), Mr Siveshen Chettier (Mzansi Bites)

their technical solutions, their relevance to real-world cybersecurity challenges, and the clarity of their execution.

Beyond the competition itself, the hackathon prioritised sustainability and post-event impact. All finalist teams will receive six months of structured mentorship, technical support, and business development guidance, ensuring that promising solutions continue to mature beyond the event.



Final Judges: Dr Pulane Modiha, Prof Ruidong Zhang



Prof Ruidong Zhang (Final Judge), Dr Pulane Modiha (Final Judge), Dr Jabu Mtsweni (CSIR: Head of Cybersecurity Centre), Ms Shumani Nembudani (FMCL)



Top 3 Finalists with mentors, judges and the Organising Committee

Supported by the UNIVEN, CSIR, the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation, and industry partners, including Adapt IT, Cisco, Eskom, TESP, the CyberSecureTech Hackathon has delivered more than prototypes; it has strengthened pipelines for graduate employability, innovation-led entrepreneurship, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Building on the success of the 2025 edition, plans are underway to continue the CyberSecureTech Hackathon as an annual initiative, with the 2026 edition envisaged to expand inter-institutional participation, industry partnerships, and post-hackathon incubation support.

The outcomes of the CyberSecureTech Hackathon 2025 reaffirm a clear institutional and national message: 'when African youth are trusted with responsibility, provided with the right platforms, and supported through meaningful partnerships, they deliver solutions that are both globally relevant and locally grounded'. The hackathon serves as a practical demonstration of how higher education, industry, and government can collaborate to enhance graduates' capacity to participate meaningfully in the digital economy while safeguarding South Africa's digital future.

UNIVEN CEEIIC Launches Community Industry Co-Creation Advisory Forum to strengthen the ecosystem and promote shared accountability

An advisory forum to structure the ecosystem engagement to improve Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation, and Commercialisation was launched recently to strengthen the ecosystem with Industry, civil society, municipalities, and government. The launch of the Advisory Forum marks a significant step in institutionalising an ecosystem of engaged scholarship and partnership that supports Vision 2040 and the University's transformation agenda. It reflects the University's commitment to ensuring that our work remains responsive to societal needs, enhances sustainable socio-economic development, and positions the University as a catalyst for change within the region and beyond.



Prof Vhonani Netshandama, Director of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation, and Commercialisation, while setting the scene for the launch

Prof Vhonani Netshandama, the Director of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation, and Commercialisation (CEEIIC), emphasised the importance of collaboration, co-creation, and mutual benefits between the university, industry, government, and civil society to address societal challenges and foster socioeconomic development.

She highlighted the need for the University of Venda (UNIVEN) to transition from the traditional "ivory tower" model to an engaged university model. An involved university fosters mutual benefits through cooperative activities, shared understanding, and co-creation with external communities. The forum aims to produce employable graduates who can create value in society and contribute to socioeconomic development. It seeks to establish a regional network of entrepreneurial universities that promote industry, culture, and co-creation. The forum will focus on curriculum development, income generation, and the practical application of research findings to benefit society. She acknowledged the historical challenges universities have faced, including working in silos and failing to address the implications of research findings. Prof Netshandama urged stakeholders to commit to the forum and actively participate in its initiatives, emphasising the need for a deliberate, collaborative approach to ensure its success and long-term sustainability.



Dr Eugene Machimana, Head of Curricular Community Engagement at the University of Pretoria

Dr Eugene Machimana, Head of Curricular Community Engagement at the University of Pretoria, delivered an insightful keynote address. Dr Machimana emphasised the University of Pretoria's commitment to being an agent of social change through its Curricular Community Engagement (CCE) framework. He highlighted the importance of engaging stakeholders for mutual benefit and of integrating teaching, learning, and research with community engagement to achieve sustainable, impactful outcomes. He further outlined the seven-step pathway to impact, which includes embedding the CCE philosophy, building capacity, conducting stakeholder analysis, fostering collaboration, piloting initiatives, monitoring and evaluating outcomes, and ensuring sustainability.

Dr Machimana commended Prof Netshandama and the CEEIIC team for successfully securing the participation of key stakeholders, including university executives, students, traditional leaders, community partners, and representatives from both the private and public sectors. It was an honour to share the platform with Prof Fulufhelo Netswera, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Postgraduate Studies, and Prof Joseph Francis, Director of the Institutes for Rural Development, among other distinguished dignitaries. Their addresses and visible support for CEEIIC were both insightful and inspiring.



Prof Fulufhelo Netswera, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Postgraduate Studies, launching the CEEIIC Co-Creation Advisory Forum

In his launching speech, Prof Fulufhelo Netswera, highlighted that historically, Universities operated as Ivory Towers, i.e., Theology Colleges in Europe, whose ideals were elitist, exclusive, and detached from society. Over the years, universities have transformed, pioneering and finding solutions to societal challenges in both the corporate and government sectors. Hence, in the 1990s, a new model of a university was developed, commonly referred to as the triple helix model. He mentioned that the triple helix model argues that universities should collaborate with the government and the industry. Prof Netswera added that around the 2000s, the Quad Helix Model was developed, suggesting that the university should not function solely in partnership with government and industry, but also with civil society.

"My personal vision for UNIVEN is to see a university embedded in society, executing society's informed research agenda. The CEEIIC Co-Creation Advisory Forum responds particularly to that agenda, championing solutions that are driven by research and community engagement through problem-based learning and problem-based teaching." Said Prof Netswera.

University-Industry Co-Creation (UNIIco-create) advisory has been made possible in part by the Erasmus + CBHE funding dedicated to transforming entrepreneurship education in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. Led by Higher Education Reform Experts Africa (HERE-Africa) and coordinated by the Technological Higher Education Network South Africa (THENSA), the project aims to build entrepreneurial universities that foster co creation between universities, industries, and civil society.

The launch of CEEIIC Co-Creation Advisory Forum has been made possible by the Erasmus + CBHE funding dedicated to transforming entrepreneurship education in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, led by Higher Education Reform Experts Africa (HERE-Africa) and coordinated by the Technological Higher Education Network South Africa (THENSA), the project aims to build entrepreneurial universities that foster co-creation between universities, industries, and civil society.

List of the CEEIIC Co-Creation Advisory Executive Committee:

Portfolio	Names	Organisation
Chairperson	Mr Hosi HC Mugakula	Makuleke Tradition Authority
Deputy Chairperson	Mrs Queen Munyai	CEO-Consumer Goods and Services Ombud (CGSO).
Secretary	Vhamusanda Prof F.J. Mundalamo	Tshitavha Traditional Leader
Deputy Secretary	Mrs Hulisani Mudau	Head of Sales- Ecovado Factory
Project Coordinator	Mr Charles Nkomo	Manager - Ecovado Factory
Additional Members		
	Dr.Ndivhuwo Makondo	IBM Research Africa
	Mr Lawrence Madzwara	Copula Solutions Pty Ltd.



Executive Members of the CEEIIC Co-Creation Advisory Forum

University of Venda Enhances Global Research Engagement at Madiba Nexus International Workshop



Prof Lufuno Makhado during engagement at the Mandela Nexus International Workshop

The University of Venda (UNIVEN) continues to strengthen its global research engagement through the participation of Professor Lufuno Makhado from the Department of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, at the Madiba Nexus International Workshop: Advancing Balanced North-South Research Partnerships. The workshop was held from 20 to 23 January 2026 at Nelson Mandela University's Summerstrand South Campus.

Renowned for its commitment to fostering equitable, ethical, and impactful global research collaborations, the workshop brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including researchers, research managers, institutional leaders, and funding partners. Supported by the British Academy through its Equitable Partnerships Workshops Follow-On Funding, the initiative provided a dynamic platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and capacity building. In collaboration with several prestigious universities from Africa and beyond, the workshop aimed to enhance the quality, reach, and sustainability of research through inclusive partnerships that address pressing global challenges. Participants engaged in rich discussions and shared best practices, underscoring the central role of collaboration in advancing innovation and knowledge across borders.



Prof Azwinnidini Muronga, DVC Research, Innovation and Internalisation, Nelson Mandela University



Prof Peter Wisiuba Bukhala, DVC Planning, Research and Innovation (PRI), Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), Kenya.

Prof Peter Wisiuba Bukhala, DVC Planning, Research and Innovation (PRI), Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), Kenya.



Dr Ying Chen from the University of Southampton, UK



Dr Conor Snowden from the University of Edinburgh, UK

Professor Makhado participated primarily in the Research Management Stream, which focused on strengthening institutional systems and research support across the entire research lifecycle. Sessions in this stream were facilitated by leading experts, including Dr Snowden from the University of Edinburgh, Dr Chen from the University of Southampton, and Dr Palesa Mthapo from Nelson Mandela University. Key topics included partnership development, proposal submission, award management, project closure, and the evolving role of research offices. Critical discussions on equity in international research collaborations featured prominently, particularly in sessions such as Reflecting on Equity: Where Imbalances Arise and Moving Toward Equitable Partnerships. These engagements highlighted how institutional policies, administrative practices, and power dynamics influence research outcomes, providing Professor Makhado with valuable insights to support the University of Venda's growing international research footprint.



Prof Nelson Torto, The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (STINT) Senior Science Fellow; Dr Mellanie Cilliers, Stellenbosch University; Prof. P.W. Bukhala, DVC PRI, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST) in Kenya; Prof L Makhado; Dr Nokhuthula Mchunu, NRF; Dr Palesa Natasha Mthapho, Director Research Support and Management, NMMU; Dr Denise Schaeel, Director Institute for Coastal and Marine Research (CMR), NMMU; Mr Zolani Dyosi, NRF; and Ms Maria Norton, University of Southampton, UK, Posing after the Funders' Round Table Discussion

Running concurrently with the Research Management Stream was the Researcher Stream, which focused on postgraduate supervision and academic leadership. Led by Dr Julie Reeves from the University of Southampton, this stream emphasised supervisor development through train-the-trainer models and reflective practices to enhance research quality and mentorship across diverse institutional contexts.

A key highlight of Professor Makhado's participation was his involvement in the Madiba Nexus Funders' Roundtable, held on 21 January 2026. Facilitated by Ms Maria Norton (University of Southampton) and Dr Palesa Mthapo (Nelson Mandela University), the roundtable convened public and private funders, institutional leaders, researchers, and research managers under Chatham House rules. Discussions focused on funding priorities, policy frameworks, expectations for equitable partnerships, performance indicators, and emerging measures of research success. This engagement offered Professor Makhado valuable insights into funders' perspectives and global trends in research financing, strengthening his capacity to engage ethically and strategically in international funding opportunities.

The second day of the workshop concluded with a Gala Dinner, highlighted by an inspiring address from the Vice-Chancellor of Nelson Mandela University, Professor Sibongile Muthwa. Her message called for the strengthening of equitable, long-term partnerships grounded in mutual benefit. She emphasised the importance of expanding the Madiba Nexus beyond its current scope

and advocated for a balanced approach that values both North-South and South-South collaborations. Her address resonated strongly with participants, reinforcing a shared commitment to sustainable partnerships that honour Nelson Mandela's legacy.

The Madiba Nexus International Workshop attracted strong participation from leading institutions, including the University of Edinburgh, the University of Southampton, Nelson Mandela University, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, and the Science for Africa Foundation. The broader Madiba Nexus network also included representatives from the University of Venda, University of Zululand, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Stellenbosch University, and Walter Sisulu University, further strengthening South-South and North-South institutional linkages.

Professor Makhado's participation significantly enhanced the University of Venda's visibility and strategic positioning within global networks of higher education and research management. The knowledge and insights gained will inform the university's research governance, capacity development initiatives, and partnership strategies, particularly within the Department of Public Health and the broader research enterprise. Through Professor Makhado's active engagement at both technical and strategic levels, the University of Venda reaffirms its commitment to nurturing equitable global research partnerships and positioning itself as a key contributor to inclusive, high-impact research ecosystems at national, continental, and international levels.



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

Advancement Unit partners with Santam to strengthen Student Wellness and Success through Thoho ya Nzie Student Welfare Programme

The University of Venda, through its Advancement Unit, has partnered with Santam in a strategic collaboration marked by a R100,000 donation in support of the Thoho Ya Nzie Student Welfare Programme, reaffirming the institution's commitment to student wellness, dignity, and academic success.

This donation represents more than financial assistance; it is a strategic investment in the holistic well-being and academic resilience of students facing severe socio-economic hardship. At a time when rising living costs and economic pressures continue to threaten student retention and success, this collaboration is critical in enabling the University of Venda to safeguard access to education and create environments where students can thrive. The Thoho Ya Nzie Student Welfare Programme is a flagship social welfare programme of the University of Venda, designed to provide essential non-perishable food items, basic stationery, and personal care products to students who are unable to meet their most basic living and learning needs. The initiative prioritises students who fall within the "missing middle" and those whose financial circumstances place them at risk of academic exclusion.

The initiative recognises that academic excellence cannot be separated from physical, emotional, and psychological well-being, and that student success is best achieved through comprehensive, student-centred support. Through sustained support such as that provided by Santam, the Thoho Ya Nzie Student Welfare Programme continues to make a significant contribution to improved academic focus, emotional stability, and overall student well-being, while strengthening social solidarity within the UNIVEN community.



The partnership between the Advancement Unit and Santam underscores the power of purposeful partnerships in advancing social impact within higher education. For UNIVEN, a rural-based institution with a strong developmental mandate, this donation is vital in extending institutional capacity and deepening student support interventions. Santam's contribution reflects a shared commitment to social responsibility, education, and inclusive development. It demonstrates how private-sector partners can play a transformative role in strengthening public universities and supporting national priorities related to youth development, education access, and socio-economic upliftment.

The Thoho Ya Nzie Student Welfare Programme stands as a testament to the University of Venda's unwavering commitment to student-centred development. Through strategic

partnerships, compassionate leadership, and a strong culture of care, UNIVEN continues to build a university community where students are supported not only academically, but also as whole individuals. The partnership with Santam reinforces the belief that student wellness is foundational to academic excellence and that sustainable success in higher education is achieved when institutions and partners work together to uplift, empower, and inspire the next generation.

While formally acknowledging Santam's generous support, the University of Venda recognises that addressing student poverty demands a collective, coordinated, and sustained response. The University, therefore, calls on industry partners, alumni, friends of the institution, and prospective sponsors to join UNIVEN in strengthening and scaling efforts to support vulnerable students.

UNIVEN and Santam partnered to support the Thoho Ya Nzie Student Welfare Programme, providing essential resources to students in need. This collaboration promotes student well-being, resilience, and academic success.

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**

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.**

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