



Human Rights from the Ground Up: Advancing Community Justice in South Africa



Mr Victor Mavhidula, Provincial manager, South African Human Rights Commission, Limpopo Provincial Office

In commemoration of Human Rights Day, the Ismail Mahomed Centre for Human and Peoples' Rights at the University of Venda hosted a public lecture on 12 March 2026 at the Research Conference Centre under the theme "Human Rights from Below: Achieving Rights for True Community Development in South Africa." The event featured a keynote address by Victor Mavhidula, Provincial Manager of the South African Human Rights Commission in Limpopo, who highlighted the importance of grassroots participation and community-driven initiatives in advancing the realisation of human rights and sustainable development. The lecture brought together students, academics and community members to engage in dialogue on practical strategies for promoting social justice and empowering local communities, emphasising the crucial role of both citizens and institutions in strengthening human rights from the ground up.

Delivering the keynote lecture, Mavhidula encouraged the audience to reflect on the origins and meaning of human rights by posing questions such as, "What rights do people have and where do these rights come from?" and "Who gets to make decisions for others and on what basis?" He traced the historical foundations of the rule of law, citing the signing of the Magna Carta, which marked an important step in limiting the abuse of political power. Mavhidula also emphasised the role of cooperation in human progress, noting that "the reason why we survive is because we cooperate." Reflecting on South Africa's history, he explained that apartheid deliberately divided communities so that people "are not united." He further reminded the audience that the struggle for rights came at great cost, including the Sharpeville Massacre, where "69 people were shot dead." He concluded by stressing that development is closely linked to the

protection of rights, stating that "you can't develop any community without giving them their rights."

Just after the keynote lecture, a discussion focused on the progress and challenges of human rights protection in South Africa, about 30 years after the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa was adopted by the Constitutional Assembly and signed into law. Participants raised concerns about common human rights complaints, particularly among youth, including access to education, abuse, disability discrimination, and lack of basic services such as water. The Human Rights Commission emphasised the importance of public education, community engagement, and accountability, while acknowledging ongoing challenges such as corruption, limited resources, land ownership issues, and the need to balance development with the preservation of cultural and traditional systems.



(L-R) Mrs Zama Mopai, Prof Ademola Oluborode Jegede, Mr Victor Mavhidula, and Dr Tondani Nethengwe during the Question and Comments session

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Dr Tondani Nethengwe, Head of the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University of Venda

Dr Nethengwe also welcomed the keynote speaker and underscored the relevance of the lecture's theme, explaining that human rights should not remain theoretical concepts but must become "lived realities for communities on the ground." She concluded by encouraging meaningful engagement among students, academics and community members, expressing confidence that the lecture would inspire participants to contribute to "a more just and equitable society."



Prof Ademola Oluborode Jegede, Director of the Ismail Mahomed Centre for Human and Peoples' Rights and DSTI/NRF SARChI Chair in Climate Change and the Rule of Law (CCRLL).

Opening remarks were delivered by Prof Ademola Oluborode Jegede, who acknowledged the presence of colleagues, students, and guests and thanked participants for attending despite the challenging weather conditions. Prof Jegede reflected on the broader context of the lecture, noting that the year's Human Rights Day theme, "Bill of Rights at 30: Making Human Dignity Real," marks thirty years since the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

He explained that the lecture topic encourages reflection on the meaning of "human rights from below," focusing on whether rights are genuinely realised at the community level, where development matters most. According to him, South Africa's history of racial discrimination under apartheid continues to influence present inequalities. He emphasised that the concept calls for prioritising the needs of marginalised communities and ensuring their active involvement in development processes. The theme also highlights issues such as poverty, inequality, and access to services, noting that "poverty is a significant barrier to community development." He encouraged participants to reflect on the realities faced by communities today and to consider the most pressing human rights challenges at local levels.

Prof Jegede's remarks set the tone for critical reflection on the realisation of human rights at community level, highlighting the need to address inequality and prioritise inclusive development



Dr Mantwa Madiba from the Department of Private and Mercantile Law

Dr Mantwa Madiba proposed a vote of thanks, expressing appreciation to all who contributed to the success of the lecture and thanked the keynote speaker for his insightful presentation. Reflecting on the discussions of the day, she emphasised the importance of historical awareness, stating that "it's important for us to know where we come from so that we can understand where these rights were actually established." She also highlighted the need to sustain dialogue on human rights, noting that "we need to continue the discussion about human rights." Dr Madiba concluded by acknowledging the organisers, staff, students and participants whose contributions ensured a successful and meaningful public lecture.



University of Venda Staff and guests

Spirit, Democracy and the Public Square: A Gathering at the Crossroads of Faith and Politics



Attendees of the Conference

Scholars, Church Leaders, and Researchers from across the continent recently gathered at the University of Venda (UNIVEN) in Thohoyandou, Limpopo, for the Annual Conference of the Southern African Society of Pentecostal Studies. Under the compelling theme, "Democratisation, Prophecy and Politics in Pentecostalism," fuelled by the melodies of the UNIVEN Choir,

This three-day event marked a significant moment in examining the dynamic relationship between Spirit-filled Christianity and Africa's democratic realities.

Set within a region where Pentecostalism continues to shape social imagination and political consciousness, the conference provided an important platform for exploring how prophecy, governance, and life in general intersect. Through keynote addresses and parallel academic sessions, participants engaged critical questions about ethical leadership, electoral participation, socio-economic justice, regulatory frameworks, and the evolving role of Pentecostal theology within democratic societies.



UNIVEN Choir entertaining the audience

Prof Mashau noted the steady growth of the Society, reflected in the high number of paper submissions and the rapid progress of the African Journal of Pentecostal Studies, which has achieved accreditation and international indexing within a relatively short period.

Encouraging delegates to participate fully and remain engaged until the conclusion of the conference, Prof Mashau emphasised that the theme, democratisation, politics and Pentecostalism, calls the Church to renewed prophetic engagement with contemporary political challenges, including corruption, maladministration, and social injustice in post-colonial Africa.



Deputy Dean of Research and Postgraduate Studies in the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education, University of Venda

Prof Takalani Mashau formally welcomed delegates, scholars, students, and distinguished guests to the 2026 Southern African Society of Pentecostal Studies Conference, hosted at the University of Venda. Speaking on the behalf of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Postgraduate Studies, he expressed gratitude for the presence of academics and institutional representatives from across Africa, including Ghana, Botswana, and Zimbabwe.

He highlighted the conference's dual significance as both an academic forum and a spiritual gathering, one fostering intellectual exchange, unity, and collaboration.



Prof Solomon Kgatle from the University of South Africa

Serving as the Chairperson, Prof Solomon Kgatle from the University of South Africa (UNISA) acknowledged executive members, academics, students, church leaders, and international guests, both in attendance and participating online.

Positioning the conference within ongoing scholarly debates concerning Pentecostalism and politics in Africa, Prof Kgatle argued that Pentecostal communities must move

beyond a privatised understanding of faith and participate constructively in democratic processes. Drawing on theological and political scholarship, he underscored the importance of prophetic imagination in confronting injustice and holding political authority accountable.

He further emphasised the principle of the "sovereignty of the community", maintaining that power ultimately resides with the people, echoing democratic ideals articulated in South Africa's Freedom Charter.

When delivering the keynote address online, Prof Chammah Kaunda who is the Academic Dean for the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies affirmed the pioneering role of Pentecostal Studies in developing new theological frameworks emerging from African contexts.

Prof Kaunda's address was centred on indigenous prophetism as a distinctive epistemological formation. He argued that prophetic knowledge often arises from marginal and liminal spaces, frequently beyond state-sanctioned structures, and serves to challenge dominant political narratives. Prof Kaunda expressed that indigenous prophetism disrupts linear conceptions of time by introducing an eschatological imagination in which the future presses meaningfully into the present.

The programme reflected notable depth and diversity. Discussions ranged from prophetic epistemology and political possibility in Africa to climate justice in Zimbabwe, electoral culture in Ghana, regulatory oversight in South Africa, and theological tensions between the Kingdom of Christ and worldly kingdoms. Different papers addressed themes of unity, poverty eradication, digital discipleship, gender, collective memory, and constitutional debate, demonstrating that Pentecostalism extends beyond the sanctuary and actively shapes the public square.

More than a purely academic exercise, the conference embodied a movement reflecting critically on its own influence. It captured a generation of scholars grappling with pressing questions such as: How should Pentecostals discern political alliances? Can prophecy remain faithful without becoming partisan? What form should Spirit-led leadership take within contexts marked by inequality, corruption, and social fragmentation?

As voices from South Africa, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and further afield contributed to the conversation, the gathering stood as a living expression of African Pentecostalism in motion, seeking integrity, justice, and meaningful participation in democratic life.

The conference served as a reminder that theological reflection and political engagement are deeply interconnected in the African context. It closed with a renewed call for ethical leadership and public responsibility rooted in faith and justice

UNIVEN Welcomes Limpopo Premier's Office Students for Chinese Language Programme



Students pose for a photo with UNIVEN and the Limpopo office of the Premier representatives

A sense of anticipation filled the air on Monday, 09 February 2026 as 12 students from the Limpopo Premier's Office took their first steps into a new linguistic and cultural journey at the University of Venda's Green Technology Confucius Institute (GTCI). Gathered at the GTCI boardroom, students were officially welcomed during an opening session that signalled the start of a two-week Chinese language programme, and promised an immersive experience in both language learning and cultural exchange.



Mr Ted Xiong, Manager at GTCI

Setting the tone for the programme, Mr Ted Xiong, Manager at GTCI, opened the proceedings by warmly welcoming the cohort and outlining the purpose of the gathering. He explained that the session formally marked the beginning of the students' participation in the Chinese language classes, describing the programme as a structured learning journey aimed at equipping them with foundational language skills while deepening their appreciation of Chinese culture over the two-week period.



Mr Thabo Dikgale

Adding broader context to the initiative, Mr Thabo Dikgale spoke about the role of the GTCI programme in advancing international engagement and cultural understanding. He noted that the initiative seeks to "promote Chinese language and culture" while supporting key provincial priorities linked to economic development, tourism and energy. Encouraging students to make the most of the opportunity, Mr Dikgale reminded them that the experience was not just about language, it is about culture, urging them to approach the programme with pride and purpose as "the start of your journey" in strengthening South Africa-China relations.



Prof Pfarelo Matshidze, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

Delivering remarks on behalf of Prof Tawanda Runhare, the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education (FHSSE), Prof Pfarelo Matshidze, described the programme as "more than just a visit" and "the beginning of a journey" with the potential to shape students' future. She drew attention to Chinese as "one of the most spoken languages in the world" and aligned the initiative with the faculty's people-centred academic mission, stressing that language remains one of the most important tools for understanding humanity and would "add value to your life" as students grow into globally minded citizens.



Mr Ndivhuwo Phathela, Director at Limpopo Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO)

The message of support was reinforced by Mr Ndivhuwo Phathela, Director at Limpopo DIRCO, who reflected on South Africa's close ties with China and its growing influence on the world stage. Mr Phathela spoke of the importance of early exposure to language and culture in easing cultural shock and preparing students for international engagement, reminding the group that the opportunity was highly competitive and that they should consider themselves very lucky.

The programme concluded on a note of appreciation, with Mr Ted Xiong extending thanks to the Department of International Relations and Partnerships for their "massive support" in making the initiative possible. He also acknowledged the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education for its collaboration, expressing confidence that the inaugural group of students would be well supported and would pave the way to encourage the next groups as the programme continues to grow.



UNIVEN welcomes 12 students for the Chinese language class

Beyond the Textbook: UNIVEN's Skills for the Future Programme Redefines Career Coaching for Vhembe Teachers



Participants of the teachers' career development workshop

The Skills for the Future Programme (SfFP), a student-led project within the Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation, and Commercialisation (DCEEIC), recently successfully hosted its 3rd Career development training workshop for life orientation teachers across Vhembe East District, offering insights into career guidance and holistic learner support. The workshop, themed 'Demystifying career guidance,' was made possible through the BankSeta funding. SfFP received a total of R1.2 million in grants from BankSeta in 2026 to support ongoing programmes, including Digital Literacy, Maths and Science support, and Career Development Programme for Life Orientation teachers from both Vhembe East and West Districts. The teacher's career development aimed to equip educators with essential skills, knowledge of emerging careers, and tools to effectively guide learners toward informed, meaningful career choices and personal growth.

In his opening and welcome, Mr Donald Morema, Economic Activation Manager within CEEIC, highlighted that it is the teacher's responsibility to effectively guide our learners to choose careers that make sense to them, as it is vital to be in a discipline you are interested in. He further highlighted that the most challenging issue in our country is unemployment, and the most contributing factors are at the foundation level, where we prepare our learners for their future endeavours.

Ms Tshinakaho Tshilamulele, SfFP project manager, provided the programme's purpose and background, and gave an overview of career development as a lifelong learning curve, proactive planning, adaptability to the evolving job market, and networking. The importance of career development for both teachers and learners were discussed in an interactive session. She introduced a holistic approach to career choices, integrating personal, academic, and social dimensions while also instilling self-efficacy. She further emphasised holistic learner support through Active listening, empathy, and helping learners with learning barriers. Challenges most teachers face include learners with learning barriers. The workshop helped map these barriers in schools and identify possible solutions to alleviate them.

The workshop enhanced teachers' capacity to provide informed, holistic career guidance. It also supported better preparation of learners for future career choices



Ms Tshinakaho Tshilamulele giving the purpose of the workshop



Ms Elelwani Netshituni, Regional Manager, speaking on behalf of the sponsor.

Speaking on behalf of the funder, Ms. Elelwani Netshituni, a Regional Manager at Bankseta, encouraged the teachers to adapt to the evolving 4IR world and guide learners to choose careers that will be relevant in the future, such as actuarial sciences, engineering, and computer sciences. She acknowledged the UNIVEN Skills for the Future team and the Department of Education, Vhembe East District, for their

collaboration and partnership in organising a successful and impactful workshop on teachers' career development. Furthermore, she indicated that the learners would benefit significantly from the knowledge acquired during the workshop.

In closing, Mr Rudzani Mamphweli, Community Engagement Officer, Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation, and Commercialisation, acknowledged all workshop participants, the Department of Education, and Bankseta. He added that the workshop was crucial in preparing Life Orientation teachers to understand trends in career development, enabling them to deliver career guidance in new ways. He commended the UNIVEN Skills for Future Programme team for their commitment to developing skills in youth and lifelong learners that foster employability and resilience, anchored in meeting learners' needs and the ever-changing labour market. The past few years have shown how fast things can change. In the future, jobs will require people who can adjust to new tools, roles, or business models without losing focus. The capacity to learn, unlearn, and relearn is essential for the future, and preparing learners at an early age is equally important. The workshop concluded with the handover of certificates to participating teachers.



Teachers receiving certificates of participation after the workshop.

Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture Prepares Honours students for the Year Ahead



The University of Venda has its strategic focus on strengthening research capacity, enhancing student success, and producing graduates who contribute meaningfully to society. The Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture successfully hosted its Honours Orientation and Induction Workshop to prepare them for the year ahead on 27 March 2026 at 2Ten Hotel, marking the official start of the postgraduate journey for the 2026 Honours cohort.

The workshop was attended by academic leadership, support units, and students to provide a comprehensive introduction to Honours studies in their 2026 academic year. This initiative is to equip Honours students with the necessary academic and institutional support, as UNIVEN continues to advance its mission of being a catalyst for knowledge generation and community development.



The Deputy Dean: Research and Postgraduate Studies in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture, Prof Lutendo Murulana on behalf of Prof Natasha Potgieter duly welcomed and iterated the purpose for the workshop to students and emphasised the importance of academic excellence, research integrity, and resilience in postgraduate studies.

He highlighted that the University of Venda has successfully achieved most of its previous strategic objectives and is now guided by its Vision 2040, which focuses on key pillars such as student-centredness, entrepreneurship, research, innovation, sustainability, and global partnerships. He emphasised that students are at the core of the university's mission, with all institutional efforts aimed at enhancing their experience, well-being, and success. The vision reinforces the university's commitment to growth, relevance, and impact, positioning students as central drivers in achieving its long-term goals.

He said the workshop aims to support honours students by providing guidance, fostering interaction, and ensuring they understand key academic processes, expectations, and available support systems. Prof Murulana stressed the importance of knowing faculty structures, meeting deadlines, securing supervisors, and progressing efficiently to complete the programme within one year. The session also serves to address student challenges, promote effective supervision, encourage use of resources such as the library and counselling services, and ensure students stay on track to successfully submit their research by the set deadlines.

The programme outlined critical support structures available to students, including the Directorate of Research and Innovation, Library Services, Student Affairs, and counselling services. Key institutional policies such as research ethics, anti-plagiarism, and postgraduate training frameworks were also presented to ensure students are well-prepared for their research responsibilities. Prof Mwombeki Kabanda ethics and integrity when conducting research and how to conclude the qualification within stipulated timeframe

The workshop reaffirmed UNIVEN's commitment to supporting postgraduate success through structured academic guidance and institutional support. It also laid a strong foundation for Honours students to begin their research journey with clarity, discipline, and purpose



Presenters during the Workshop Session

Sessions on effective supervision, project management, and navigating the Honours journey equipped students with practical tools to manage their academic workload and meet submission deadlines. The afternoon session focused on expectations, including supervisor and project allocations, ethics clearance processes, and important academic timelines.

The most important message was clear on Prof Murulana Expectations on Honours students, he emphasised that honours students must have supervisors, clearly defined research projects, and a structured plan with regular supervisor engagement to ensure steady progress. He stressed that ethical clearance is compulsory before starting any research, and that strong communication, adherence to timelines, and early intervention in challenges are key to success. Students are expected to understand that an honours mini-dissertation focuses on applying existing knowledge while demonstrating critical thinking and strong academic writing. Most importantly, he underscored strict compliance with key deadlines, particularly

the submission of the mini-dissertation by 27 November with all required documents reinforcing a zero-extension culture and a collective commitment to 100% on-time submission.



The workshop concluded with an open discussion on student challenges and a vote of thanks from the SRC Postgraduate Chairperson, Abel Tleane reinforcing a shared commitment to academic success and collaborative growth. Abel further expressed appreciation to Prof Murulana for arranging the session.

UNIVEN Welcomes International Students



Mr Matome Mokoena, International Relations Officer, University of Venda

The International Student Orientation Programme at the University of Venda marks a significant milestone in welcoming students from across the globe into a vibrant academic and cultural community. Held on 20 March 2026 at the Research Conference Centre, this programme is designed to provide essential guidance, foster inclusivity, and ensure a smooth transition into university life.

The orientation serves as a vital platform for equipping international students with the knowledge, resources, and support systems necessary for academic and personal success. Through a series of informative sessions and interactive engagements, students are introduced to key institutional services, cultural diversity, and opportunities that will shape their university experience.

Delivering the welcome remarks, Mr Mokoena described the event as “a very good occasion” and emphasising the institution’s commitment to global engagement. He highlighted that “internationalisation plays a big role within this university” and stressed the importance of creating “an international footprint and... an international community on campus.”



Dr Nthambeleni Netshisaulu, Tshivenda Lecturer, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, University of Venda

A presentation on African Languages was delivered by Dr Netshisaulu, who introduced students to the basics of Tshivenda and highlighted the cultural significance of language. He explained that language is deeply rooted in identity and community, demonstrating how greetings differ based on gender and context. He further noted that when responding to greetings, “you are not referring to yourself... you include even those that are at home,” reflecting the collective nature of African cultures.

Addressing perceptions about African languages, Dr Netshisaulu remarked that “people think that Tshivenda is very difficult,” but emphasised that all languages have their own complexities. He also encouraged students to appreciate linguistic diversity and cultural practices, noting the importance of respect in traditional settings and communication.



Mr Mirero Makhado, Assistant in International Relations and Partnerships

Taking to the podium, Mr Mirero Makhado spoke reassuringly about the support available to international students, emphasising the university’s commitment to their success. He explained that students are not alone in their journey, highlighting that there are systems in place to guide them through both academic and social challenges. Encouraging active participation, he urged students to make full use of these services, noting that they are there to ensure a smooth transition into university life and to help them thrive within a new environment.



Ms Maggie Hlungwani from UNIVEN Campus Clinic

Following this, Ms Hlungwani addressed the audience with a strong focus on well-being, reminding students that good health is fundamental to academic success. She encouraged them to take care of themselves and to seek assistance whenever needed, stressing the importance of both physical and mental health. With a caring tone, she highlighted the availability of campus health services, reassuring students that support is always within reach and that maintaining a healthy balance is key to a successful university experience.



Mr Mfaniseni Mnguni from Students housing

Mr Mnguni provided a detailed overview of accommodation services, explaining that the university offers both on-campus and accredited off-campus residences. He reassured students that support is readily available, stating that residence staff is there “to assist you with adapting in terms of residence life” and to ensure a comfortable stay. Emphasising academic responsibility, he noted that “you pass, we accommodate you,” highlighting the requirement for students to maintain a minimum academic average. He further encouraged students to seek help when facing challenges, adding that “we do not want to see a failure... we are creating future leaders, not future failures.”



Mr Tsundzuka Hakamela, International Students Administrator, University of Venda

Concluding the programme, Hakamela delivered the vote of thanks, expressing appreciation to all organisers, speakers, and participants for contributing to the success of the event. Reflecting on the significance of the day, he described it as “a very beautiful day because it’s when we bring all the communities in the world together.” He also commended the university community for its continuous growth and reaffirmed that the institution remains “the best place to be,” encouraging students to take pride in their academic journey and fully embrace the opportunities available to them.



Attendees

The event highlighted UNIVEN's strong focus on internationalisation and student support. It also reflected the university's continued efforts to build a diverse, inclusive, and globally engaged campus community



Group of International Students and some UNIVEN staff members

Mining Lives: Rethinking Extraction and Futures in the Limpopo Basin

On Wednesday, 11 March 2026, scholars, practitioners, and community representatives convened at the University of Venda's Research Centre for the Mining Lives Symposium, an event dedicated to examining the long-term impacts of mining and envisioning sustainable futures for post-extraction landscapes. The symposium was organised and hosted by the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture, University of Venda. Prof James Chakwizira is a project co-investigator for the Dutch Research Council through the Merian Fund and National Research Foundation (NRF) funded project, whose Principal Investigator (PI) for South Africa is Prof. Dr Hannah Kellsey le Roux (University of Witwatersrand), and Prof. Dr Fransje Hooimeijer (Delft University of Technology (TU Delft), Netherlands). The purpose of the symposium was to bring together interdisciplinary expertise and community knowledge to understand how extractive industries shape social, ecological, and spatial systems over time, and to co-develop strategies for sustainable, post-mining futures that balance environmental integrity, community wellbeing, and resource use.



Prof Lutendo Marulana, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture at the University of Venda

Professor Lutendo Marulana delivered the opening remarks, welcoming delegates from universities, government, municipalities, research institutions, traditional authorities, and community organisations. He emphasised the symposium's role in fostering collaboration, noting, "Your presence here reflects a collective commitment to understanding, transforming and imagining a better future for mining and post-mining landscapes." He highlighted the University of Venda's commitment to engaged scholarship and dialogue between academia, industry, government, and communities, before officially declaring the symposium open.



Professor Dr. Fransje Hooimeijer (TU Delft) and Professor Dr. Hannah le Roux (University of Sheffield / University of the Witwatersrand)

Professor Dr. Fransje Hooimeijer (TU Delft) and Professor Dr. Hannah le Roux (University of Sheffield / University of the Witwatersrand) presented an overview of the transdisciplinary WEF (Water, Energy and Food) POST LONGUE DURÉE project. They highlighted how historical analysis, systems thinking, and collaborative design approaches are being employed to understand the impacts of mining on local environments and communities, while exploring strategies to restore and reimagine post-mining landscapes through interdisciplinary research and participatory design.

Kennedy Manduna, Rosa Luxemburg Scholar, presented online on "Extractive Industry Indigenisation in Zimbabwe: Neoextractivism, Resource Nationalism and Uneven Development." He situated Zimbabwe's mining sector within a global context of increasing competition for critical minerals, noting sub-Saharan Africa's strategic significance. Manduna discussed how indigenisation and resource nationalism policies, intended to empower historically marginalised communities, have often produced uneven development, with limited benefits reaching local populations. He highlighted the complex interconnections between economic instability, environmental pressures, unemployment, and the legacies of land reform and deindustrialisation, calling for more inclusive, transparent, and sustainable governance of extractive industries.



Ms Mphatheleni Makaulule, Director of Dzomo la Mupo

Ms Mphatheleni presented on Indigenous Knowledge Systems, emphasising the intergenerational wisdom embedded in community practices and their essential role in environmental justice. He described how sacred sites, rivers, wetlands, and traditional agricultural practices are under threat from mining activities, citing projects such as Coal of Africa in the Iwebembe biosphere and Lake Funduzi. Makaulule stressed that Indigenous knowledge provides critical guidance for sustainable decision-making, community wellbeing, and climate justice, advocating for local voices to be central to environmental governance.

The symposium fostered meaningful dialogue on the impacts of mining and the need for sustainable, inclusive solutions for post-mining futures



Professor Michael Solomon, University of Cape Town

During the afternoon session, Professor Michael Solomon discussed design futures and alternatives for mining regions. He explained that although mining is often viewed as unsustainable due to the extraction of non-renewable resources, it can support long-term sustainability if it stimulates other sectors of the economy. Using examples from South Africa's platinum belt, he highlighted the risk of significant job losses as mines decline and stressed that without careful planning, mining towns may collapse once operations end. Solomon emphasised the need for long-term, data-driven planning and collaboration between government, industry, and communities to manage mine closures and support economic diversification in post-mining landscapes.

The symposium brought together scholars, practitioners, and community representatives to reflect on the long-term impacts of mining and explore sustainable post-mining futures. Presentations and discussions created space for dialogue on issues such as resource governance, indigenous knowledge, and economic diversification. The event highlighted the importance of collaboration, planning, and inclusive engagement in addressing the challenges faced by mining-affected communities.



Prof Chakwizira facilitating the programme



Group of attendees

UNIVEN Students Advances to National Stage of Hult Prize Competition



UNIVEN Hult Prize winning Teams: (L-R) Tshifhungo Matsheketsheke; Tekollo Moila; Given Mapaya; Rinae Mudau; Tshifhiwa Tshavhungwe; Mokie Mokgotho; Sindiswa Wolf

The Culture of innovation and social entrepreneurship was on full display at the University of Venda (UNIVEN) as students recently gathered at the UNIVEN Centre for Entrepreneurship and Rapid Incubation (UCFERI) for the highly anticipated Hult Prize Campus Competition. This world-class event brought together aspiring entrepreneurs determined to create impactful, scalable business solutions aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The competition served as a stepping stone for student-led startups to transition from theoretical concepts to market-ready ventures. This programme is housed under the Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialisation (DCEIIC), within the Office of Technology Transfer (OTT), with strategic support from the Economic Activation Office (EAO) and UCFERI.

Ms Makole Magoro, from the Office of Technology Transfer, delivered the opening remarks for the Hult Prize Local Competition held at the UCFERI Auditorium. In her address, she set the strategic context for the day by highlighting how the competition serves as a primary vehicle for the University of Venda's 2026-2030 Strategy.



Ms Makole Magoro giving the opening remarks to commence the Hult Prize Competition

Ms Makole Magoro emphasised that the program is specifically designed to help student entrepreneurs transition from theoretical concepts to scalable, market-ready ventures. She challenged the participants to build resilient and innovative enterprises that address systemic global challenges.

The competition followed an intense international pitching format. Each student startup team delivered a high-stakes four-minute pitch, followed by a focused four-minute Questions and Answers session. Ventures were evaluated using a universal four-pillar scorecard assessing team structure, depth of the problem and innovation of the solution, impact through alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and growth KPIs, as well as overall business viability, including revenue models and competitive advantage.

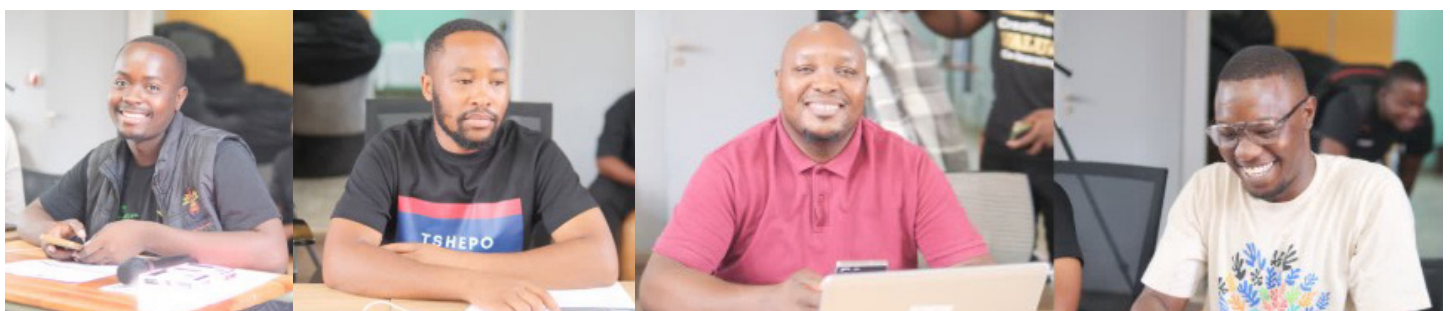
The judging panel comprised Mr. Donald Morema, Manager of EAO, Mr. Promise Nyalungu, Marketing Officer at UCFERI; and Mr. Thato Mahosi, Business Development Officer at the Vhembe TVET Centre for Entrepreneurship and Rapid Incubation. The process was further strengthened by Mr. Mufandilani Marcus, who served as the official timekeeper, ensuring strict adherence to pitching and Questions and Answers timelines and reinforcing the professionalism and integrity of the proceedings.

The winning startups collectively demonstrated strong alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals through context-responsive innovation.

Phi Sentry (1st Place): Cyber Hygiene addresses the critical vulnerability of SMMEs and individuals in the digital economy who lack access to high-end cybersecurity by delivering a comprehensive Cyber Hygiene platform offering simplified, automated security audits, real-time threat detection, and localized educational content.

By lowering barriers to digital safety, it enables small businesses to operate securely in a global market, aligning primarily with SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) through resilient digital infrastructure and secondarily with SDG 4 (Quality Education) via digital literacy and cybersecurity awareness.

The journey for these innovators now advances to the national stage, representing a critical milestone in the UNIVEN strategic ambition to position itself as a leading institution in engaged scholarship and internationalisation. The winning teams will compete at the Hult Prize National Competition taking place in Cape Town on 27 and 28 March 2026, an event that serves as the final gateway to the Global Regional Summits, where student entrepreneurs from around the world compete for \$1,000,000 in startup capital to launch life-changing social enterprises.



Judging Officials: Marcus Mufandilani (top-left); Thato Mahosi (top-right); Donald Morema (bottom-left); Promise Nyalungu (bottom-right)

UNIVEN Students Advances to National Stage of Hult Prize Competition continued...



Hult Prize Participants pitching their Business Ideas



A group picture of the winning team;(from the back to front) Tekollo Moila, Tshifhiwa Tshavhungwe, Rinae Mudau, and Sindiswa Wolf

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5. Fraud and corruption.

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