



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

UNIVEN Weekly e-Newsletter



Issue 76 | UNIVEN Commemorates Youth Month | 12 June 2026

Youth Month Boost for Future Leaders as UNIVEN Hands Over 105 Laptops to Rural Learners

As South Africa commemorates Youth Month 2026 under the theme “RESET@50 – The Future Calls”, the University of Venda (UNIVEN) is investing in the next generation by equipping 105 Grade 12 learners from rural schools with laptops to strengthen their digital skills and expand access to educational opportunities.



In the picture: recipients of the laptops

The laptops were handed over to learners from Lwandani Secondary School, Marude Secondary School, and Ligege Secondary School through UNIVEN's Skills for the Future Programme (SffP), implemented by the Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialisation (DCEEIIC). The initiative forms part of the University's ongoing

commitment to educational transformation, digital inclusion, and youth empowerment.

Funded by BANKSETA, the programme received additional support through the sponsorship of laptops by UNIVEN's Supply Chain Management Division and internet connectivity provided by the Department of Information and Technology Services. This collaboration highlights the power

of strategic partnerships in creating meaningful opportunities for young people.

The laptop distribution marks a significant milestone for the programme, enabling learners to access digital learning resources, participate more effectively in programme activities, and develop the technological skills increasingly required in higher education and the modern workplace.

While the original BANKSETA funding catered for 38 learners under Digital Literacy and 35 learners under Mathematics, Science and Accounting, these categories were established primarily for administrative purposes. All learners enrolled in the programme benefit from both components, ensuring a comprehensive and integrated learning experience.

The availability of additional laptops has enabled the University to support 32 more learners than initially anticipated, broadening the programme's reach and impact within local communities.

Through the Digital Literacy component, learners acquire practical skills in computer use, digital communication, information management,

responsible technology usage, and online learning. Simultaneously, the Mathematics, Science and Accounting component strengthens performance in subjects critical to future study opportunities, innovation, and participation in South Africa's knowledge economy.

To assess the programme's impact, selected learners participated in reflection and impact interviews following the handover, sharing how improved access to technology is influencing their academic aspirations and future career ambitions.

The Skills for the Future Programme continues to demonstrate UNIVEN's commitment to community engagement that delivers sustainable and measurable outcomes. By combining external funding, institutional support, and access to digital resources, the University is helping to bridge the digital divide and prepare young people for success in an increasingly technology-driven world.

More than a donation of devices, the distribution of 105 laptops represents an investment in opportunity, equity, education, and the future of South Africa's youth.

UNIVEN Graduate Gains Global Recognition for Healthcare Innovation

A young scientist from rural Limpopo is making waves in the global healthcare sector with an innovation that could help fight one of the world's deadliest medical threats. A 21-year-old, University of Venda graduate, Given Mapaya Maboko, is developing a novel antimicrobial treatment for drug-resistant infections, earning international recognition and

placing South African youth-driven innovation firmly on the global map.

Raised in Pax Intransibus village in Limpopo, Given refused to let his background define his future. Instead, he turned his passion for science into a mission to tackle Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR),

one of the world's most urgent health threats. Today, the University of Venda graduate is presenting research on international platforms, earning global recognition, and leading a biotechnology company developing cutting-edge healthcare solutions.



Currently pursuing a BSc Honours in Biological Sciences: Biochemistry at the University of Venda, Given's journey began when he enrolled for studies in Biochemistry and Microbiology. While many students focus on obtaining qualifications, he was driven by a deeper question: how could science be used to solve real-world problems and improve lives?

That question led him to focus on antimicrobial resistance, a growing global crisis in which bacteria become resistant to existing antibiotics, placing millions of lives at risk. Rather than viewing the challenge as someone else's responsibility, Given set out to become part of the solution.

His vision resulted in the establishment of Camellia Innovations (Pty) Ltd, a biotechnology company dedicated to developing next-generation antimicrobial treatments using advanced science and artificial intelligence. The company's flagship innovation, Mellivarin, is a groundbreaking

antimicrobial peptide designed to combat drug-resistant bacteria that no longer respond to conventional antibiotics.

What sets Mellivarin apart is that it is not a modification of an existing medicine but an entirely new molecule with no known equivalent globally. To validate the technology, Given partnered with a leading protein synthesis company in France, demonstrating that world-class scientific innovation can emerge from rural South Africa.

His achievements have attracted international recognition. Among his accolades are winning the Technology Innovation Agency Innovation Challenge, being named among Africa's Top 30 Emerging Innovators, becoming a Mastercard Foundation Entrepreneurship Fellow at Queen's University in Canada, and receiving the prestigious Global Recognition Award for innovation. He has also presented his research in New York, spoken at international forums in Germany, and established collaborations with researchers worldwide.

Despite these accomplishments, Given remains passionate about inspiring other young people. He encourages students to recognise that the knowledge they acquire today could become tomorrow's solutions to society's biggest challenges. He believes graduates should view their qualifications not only as pathways to employment but as tools for innovation, problem-solving, and enterprise development.

He also challenges young people to become job creators rather than waiting for employment opportunities. By identifying problems within their

communities and developing practical solutions, he believes entrepreneurship and innovation can create sustainable livelihoods while addressing pressing social needs.

Beyond innovation, Given advocates for discipline and personal growth. He cautions young people against alcohol and drug abuse, warning that substance abuse often destroys potential and limits opportunities. According to him, focus, self-discipline, and a commitment to continuous learning are essential ingredients for success.

Today, Given continues advancing Mellivarin through laboratory testing, with plans to develop

innovative wound-care treatments to combat drug-resistant infections in hospitals and clinics across Africa. Patent applications, scientific publications, and major funding opportunities are already underway, bringing his vision closer to reality.

His journey from the dusty roads of Pax Intransibus to international scientific platforms offers a powerful lesson for South Africa's youth: where you come from does not determine where you can go. With determination, education, and purpose, even the most humble beginnings can become the foundation for extraordinary achievements.

Young Scholar Challenges Graduates to Become Job Creators



With youth unemployment remaining one of South Africa's greatest challenges, a young scholar is calling on graduates to become job creators rather than job seekers. As the nation marks Youth Month 2026, he argues that higher education should empower young people to identify opportunities,

build sustainable enterprises and contribute meaningfully to economic growth.

That young scholar is University of Venda alumnus Decent Munzhelele, whose journey from the rural village of Mukondeni in Thengwe to international academic platforms reflects both the promise and challenges facing many young South Africans today. Raised by his grandmother, Munzhelele has transformed adversity into opportunity, using education as a tool for innovation, community development and social change.

Despite achieving academic success and building an impressive research profile, he continues to confront the employment challenges affecting thousands of graduates across the country. Rather than allowing these obstacles to define his future, he has embraced education as a means to create opportunities for himself and others. His academic journey began at Mukondeni Primary School, followed by Luvhengo Secondary

School, where he developed a strong commitment to learning. In 2021, he enrolled for a Bachelor of Social Work degree at the University of Venda, a decision that would open doors far beyond the lecture hall.

While pursuing his studies, Munzhelele distinguished himself as a young scholar and leader. His academic excellence earned him an appointment as a Tutor in the Department of Arts and Social Sciences in 2023, where he developed a passion for mentoring students and contributing to academic growth.

Determined to make an impact beyond the classroom, he actively participated in international academic platforms, including the International Conference on Gender and Sexuality organised by the International Institute of Knowledge Management. He later served as a panelist in discussions focusing on the impact of child marriage on girls' education and empowerment, contributing to important conversations on gender justice and human rights.

His growing reputation as an emerging researcher is reflected in his contribution to more than 15 scholarly articles published in DHET-accredited journals. His research focuses on child marriage, youth development, women's empowerment, gender equality, social change and community development issues that directly affect the lives of many South Africans.

Munzhelele also presented research at the Women's Impact Innovation and Sustainability Africa (WIISA) Conference hosted by the University of Johannesburg, where he engaged with scholars, policymakers and innovators working to advance development across the continent.

Despite his achievements, he remains grounded in his rural roots and committed to uplifting others. Through mentorship and academic guidance,

he continues to encourage young people to pursue research, leadership and community engagement opportunities.

At the heart of his message is a belief that collaboration and innovation are critical to solving society's challenges.

"Collaboration is our new competition," he says, urging young people to work together in developing solutions for the communities they know and understand best.

Currently pursuing a Master of Social Sciences in Social Work at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Munzhelele believes education must evolve beyond preparing graduates to seek employment.

"Education is a fundamental human right. We have reached a point where we must confront modern social challenges by using education as a means of self-employment, innovation, and community development. Education should not only prepare us to seek opportunities, but it should also empower us to create them," he says.

As South Africa reflects on the legacy of the 1976 generation, Munzhelele's story serves as a timely reminder that the future belongs to young people who are willing to think differently, collaborate boldly and turn knowledge into action.

His journey from a rural village to international academic platforms demonstrates that success is not determined by where one comes from, but by the willingness to learn, lead and create change. For a generation navigating unemployment and economic uncertainty, his message is clear: education remains one of the most powerful tools for building opportunities, transforming communities and shaping a better future.