



Beyond Commemoration: UNIVEN Youth Month Lecture Inspires Action for South Africa's Future

The University of Venda's Department of Youth in Development in the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education hosted a thought-provoking public lecture that challenged students, academics, and community members to rethink the role of education, leadership, and nation-building in contemporary South Africa.



Dignitaries of the public lecture

Held at the university's E-Block under the theme "Nation Formation, Nation Management, and National Interest Articulation as the Strategic Mandate of South African Youth, 50 Years After 1976: Lessons from John Henrik Clarke, Amos Wilson, and Kwame Ture" the lecture was delivered by a renowned scholar, policy strategist, and youth development advocate, Dr Mukovhe Masutha, Head of Research, Strategy and Advisory at the Centre for Emerging Researchers (CER) and Special Advisor to the Minister in the Ministry of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities.

The event formed part of the university's broader Youth Month programme and sought to commemo-

orate the spirit of the 1976 generation while encouraging young people to become active participants in shaping South Africa's future.

In his opening and welcoming remarks, Dr Baloyi warmly welcomed students, staff, guests, and stakeholders to the University of Venda's Youth Month public lecture.

He highlighted the significance of the gathering as an opportunity to honour the legacy of the 1976 generation.

He also encouraged contemporary youth to reflect critically on their role in shaping South Africa's future.

Dr Baloyi emphasised the importance of dialogue, learning, and active participation in addressing the social, economic, and educational challenges facing society.

He further acknowledged the contributions of the university leadership, organisers, partners, and participants whose collective efforts made the event possible, and expressed confidence that the lecture would inspire meaningful engagement, critical thinking, and a renewed commitment to social transformation and nation-building among young people.



Dr Mafemani Baloyi, Faculty Manager, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education



Dr Mukovhe Masutha, Head of Research, Strategy and Advisory at the Centre for Emerging Researchers and Special Advisor to the Minister in the Ministry of Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities

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Some of the audience

In his keynote address, Dr Masutha challenged conventional views of education, arguing that contemporary education systems largely prepare young people to become workers rather than leaders, innovators, and owners of productive resources.

Drawing on the work of Dr Amos Wilson, he maintained that education in many post-colonial societies continues to serve existing economic structures instead of empowering people to transform them. He argued that measuring educational success primarily through graduate employability overlooks critical questions of ownership, control, and the distribution of economic power.

According to Masutha, education should be assessed by its ability to secure societal survival, address community challenges, and advance national interests, with universities producing graduates capable of managing and controlling strategic sectors of the economy rather than merely supplying labour to multinational corporations.

He further emphasised the importance of economic sovereignty, arguing that although South Africa possesses abundant natural resources, much of this wealth does not adequately benefit ordinary citizens. Meaningful development, he argued, depends on greater national control over wealth-producing assets and ensuring that resources are used to improve the lives of local communities.

Economic policies should prioritise dignity, basic security, and survival before focusing solely on profit generation, while young people should engage critically with issues of ownership, governance, and national development.

Dr Masutha also addressed migration, inequality, African identity, and the role of higher education institutions in shaping society.

He argued that migrants are often used as scapegoats to divert attention from deeper structural economic challenges created by neoliberal economic policies, which have concentrated wealth among a small elite while increasing social divisions.

While supporting effective border management and proper documentation, he cautioned against blaming migrants for poverty and unemployment.

Referencing African civilisations such as Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe, he challenged the perception that Africa was historically dependent on external intervention, emphasising that African societies possessed sophisticated systems of governance, trade, and education long before colonialism.

He called for the restoration of African confidence, dignity, and collective purpose through recognition of African knowledge systems and intellectual traditions.

Reflecting on universities, Masutha argued that higher education institutions continue to operate within neoliberal frameworks that prioritise rankings and market-oriented outcomes over social transformation.

He called for curriculum reform, alternative funding models, and stronger community-centred research, arguing that universities should be judged by their contributions to national development, social well-being, and the advancement of public interest rather than international prestige alone.

During the discussion session, participants engaged Dr Masutha on issues relating to curriculum transformation, the role of universities, migration, territorial integrity, African history, and economic sovereignty.

Responding to these contributions, Dr Masutha argued that while effective migration management

and border control are necessary, migrants should not be blamed for deeper structural inequalities created by neoliberal economic systems.

He emphasised the importance of reclaiming African history, identity, and confidence by recognising the achievements of pre-colonial African civilisations and institutions.

He further called for universities to move beyond market-driven approaches and become agents of social transformation by producing graduates capable of critical thinking, advancing national interests, and contributing to economic development and nation-building. He concluded by encouraging students to evaluate dominant narratives critically, distinguish between facts and political scapegoating, and actively participate in shaping Africa's future.

As the programme concluded, Professor Thobejane delivered the vote of thanks, calling upon students to embrace what he termed the "Spirit of 2026," as previous generations had embodied the spirit of 1976.

He encouraged young people to become agents of change who actively engage with the social, political, and economic realities of their time.

Professor Thobejane thanked the organisers, university leadership, student volunteers, and all participants for their contributions to the event's success. He noted that many of the issues raised by Dr Masutha would continue to shape classroom discussions, research agendas, and future engagements at the university.

The lecture ultimately served as more than a commemoration of Youth Month. It became a platform for critical reflection on education, sovereignty, economic justice, and the role of young people in shaping Africa's future.

Through robust debate and intellectual engagement, participants were challenged to reconsider what education should achieve and how universities can contribute to building a more equitable, sovereign, and self-determined society.



Professor Tsoaledi Thobejane, Youth in Development, Gender Studies Unit Coordinator

Fuelling Futures: SRC Breakfast Drive Champions Student Wellbeing During June Examinations

In commemoration of Youth Month under the theme, "Skills for the Changing World: Empowering Youth for Meaningful Economic Participation", the Student Representative Council (SRC) of the University of Venda has reaffirmed its commitment to student wellbeing through the SRC Breakfast Drive. Implemented during the crucial June examination period, the initiative goes beyond the provision of breakfast by serving as a powerful demonstration of care, solidarity and support for students navigating academic pressures.



Students during the SRC Breakfast Drive

Through the generous contributions of sponsors, including Kalahari Waterfront, Khomhs, Fish and Chips and other valued partners, the programme ensures that students begin their day with a nutritious meal, recognising that academic success is closely linked to meeting fundamental needs.

Running from 01 to 23 June 2026, the SRC Breakfast Drive not only promotes student welfare and academic readiness but also reflects a broader investment in South Africa's future by empowering students to perform at their best during this important period.



Mr Calvin Mogale, SRC President, University of Venda

SRC President Calvin Mogale emphasised that the SRC Breakfast Drive is not merely a welfare initiative, but a deliberate effort to uphold student dignity and academic performance during a demanding examination period.

He noted that many students face significant financial and emotional challenges, and that initiatives such as this serve as a reminder that they are seen, valued, and supported. According to him, a hungry student cannot perform at their best, and therefore addressing basic needs is a critical part of academic success.

He also expressed appreciation to all sponsors who have contributed to the initiative, highlighting that continued collaboration between institutions and partners is essential in strengthening student support systems and building a better future for the country.

Mr Mogale further reflected on the broader meaning of Youth Month, describing it as a period that honours

the sacrifices of young South Africans who fought for access to education and opportunity. He stated that the SRC's work is guided by the belief that without the youth, there is no future for South Africa, as today's students represent the next generation of leaders across all sectors of society.

He also raised concern about substance abuse among students, noting that academic pressure, financial strain, and personal challenges may lead some to harmful coping mechanisms.

Students were urged to avoid drugs and to seek help when facing difficulties, with emphasis placed on the importance of courage in asking for support. In addition, Mr Mogale highlighted student wellbeing and mental health as central priorities, encouraging students to utilise available support structures and speak openly about their struggles.

He also encouraged students to think beyond graduation by embracing entrepreneurship and innovation as tools for economic empowerment and job creation.



Some of the sponsors during the SRC Breakfast Drive

Sponsoring partners commended the SRC Breakfast Drive as a valuable youth development initiative that extends beyond immediate student support.



Miss Ndamulelo Murida, one of the beneficiaries of the SRC Breakfast Drive

The sponsors noted that the collaboration between the SRC, community stakeholders, government departments, and private partners has strengthened awareness of funding opportunities, training programmes, and employment pathways available to young people, particularly those from rural backgrounds. They described the initiative as a practical example of how partnerships can drive inclusive economic growth, while also ensuring that students are supported during one of the most demanding academic periods of the year.

One of the students, voiced out during the breakfast indicating that exams can be stressful and overwhelming, but the Breakfast Drive served as a reminder that students are not alone. What may have seemed like a simple meal was, in fact, a thoughtful gesture that brought encouragement and motivation during a demanding academic period.

She further stressed that a full stomach truly makes the mind lighter, helping students to focus and face the day with renewed energy. She emphasised that she was sincerely grateful to the UNIVEN SRC, led by President Calvin Mogale, for thinking of students during Youth Month and for showing such care and support for student wellbeing.

Ndamulelo indicated that initiative was more than just breakfast, it was a reminder that students are seen, valued, and supported as they work towards their goals.

As Youth Month continues, the SRC Breakfast Drive stands as a reflection of leadership rooted in compassion, responsibility, and action. It highlights the importance of addressing both the academic and basic needs of students, while reinforcing that meaningful youth empowerment is achieved through care, collaboration, and sustained investment in student success.



UNIVEN students having breakfast before their exams

UNIVEN Student obtains position two during the 2026 Indigenous Knowledge-Based Technology Innovation Investment Summit

In the evening of 3 June 2026, participants of the Indigenous Knowledge-Based Technology Innovation Investment Summit held the Gala Dinner to Award students whose business plans and products are promising to be worth been taken to the international market.



Ms Baleseng Mukweho, Final year (fourth level) student in Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Health Care obtained position two in the Student Entrepreneurship Pitching Award. Ms Mukweho thanked her mentors because they have taught her on how to craft and present a business plan.

If it was not because of them, she would not have made it this far. Ms Mukweho advised other students who are in the Entrepreneurship space to never give up because the journey is not smooth, but with passion, creativity and resilience, they will reach the targeted goal and probably be amongst the best entrepreneurs globally.

Ms Mukweho is the founder of CavityGuard, an oral

health business idea focussed on addressing tooth decay through innovative and accessible approaches inspired by indigenous Knowledge systems. She said that this idea was inspired by her grandmother's wisdom and indigenous knowledge that deepened her interest in natural and community-based health solutions.

During the Gala dinner, Ms Yansie Niehouse, the National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF) Executive Director of Tech Forum mentioned that the National Science and Technology Forum is in the business of connecting people. She said this three-day Investment Summit is the culmination of the new partnership that will bear fruitful results.

Dr Kenny Tenza, Acting Deputy Director General (DDG) at the Department of Science, Technology Innovation (DSTI) said we need to take village champions to global championships arena through these science technology innovation investments summits.

He mentioned that the government has put programmes together to make sure that this task becomes a success. Dr Tenza continued to highlight that IKS is not a thing of few people who are uneducated, it is products and services of knowledgeable individuals.

"After this summit, we need to turn what was discussed here into the sector wide market. We need

to invest in supporting young people to push their products in to the industry. They need to start making a living through these Indigenous Knowledge products."

He concluded his talk by mentioning that this summit has shown a pipeline that exists to push products into the market. "We need to connect the Indigenous Knowledge holders with the global market. This summit should be an annual summit", he concluded.

Indigenous Knowledge holders are working closely with young people to make sure that Indigenous Knowledge creates jobs for young people and generations to come. This will be an economic boost for the country.



UNIVEN Co-Hosts SRI2026 Africa Regional Conference, Championing African-led Solutions for Sustainability Transformation

Cape Town, South Africa – The University of Venda (UNIVEN) played a pivotal role as a co-host of the Sustainability Research and Innovation (SRI2026) Africa Regional Conference, held at the Southern Sun Cape Sun hotel from 24-26 June 2026. This was a landmark gathering that brought together more than 300 researchers, policymakers, innovators, grassroots community representatives, development practitioners, students and sustainability experts from across Africa and beyond to advance African-led solutions for sustainability transformation. The conference featured five plenary sessions and 54 breakaway sessions held across different venues and meeting rooms.



SRI2026 Africa Regional Conference participants during the opening ceremony

Convened under the theme, “Advancing African-led Solutions for Sustainability Transformation,” the conference was hosted by the National Research Foundation (NRF), as the secretariat for the Future Earth Africa Hub and its Leadership Centre, in partnership with UNIVEN.

The event underscored Africa’s growing influence in shaping global sustainability discourse while accelerating locally relevant responses to challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, food and water insecurity, public health, social inequality, and sustainable economic development.

The University of Venda’s role as a co-host followed its successful response to the NRF’s call for Expression of Interest (EoI) in 2025 and reflected the institution’s strategic positioning as a leading contributor to Africa’s sustainability science agenda.

Its involvement was further strengthened through its co-leadership of the Future Earth Africa Hub

Southern Africa Regional Node, where it collaborated with regional and continental partners to advance sustainability science, strengthen science-policy interfaces and foster multi-stakeholder partnerships across Africa.



Prof Bernard Nthambeleni

In his contribution during the official opening of the conference, UNIVEN Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Bernard Nthambeleni, described the gathering as a defining moment in Africa’s sustainability journey.

He pointed out that “Africa is not merely a beneficiary of global sustainability initiatives. It is a driver of transformative change. The solutions we seek must be grounded in African realities, informed by indigenous knowledge systems, strengthened by science and

shaped through collaboration with communities.”

Prof Nthambeleni further highlighted the evolving role of universities as catalysts for innovation and societal transformation, emphasising that institutions of higher learning should move beyond traditional knowledge production to become ecosystem leaders that address real-world challenges.

This message resonated strongly throughout the conference, where delegates repeatedly emphasised the need to move beyond knowledge generation towards co-knowledge that transformed lives.

While acknowledging Africa’s growing scientific capacity, participants highlighted persistent challenges, including inadequate investment in research and innovation, weak science-policy integration, and fragmented institutional systems.

Another recurring call was for stronger, more inclusive science-policy interfaces to ensure that research findings are translated into meaningful action and policy implementation.



Prof Brando Okolo

In his keynote address, Prof Brando Okolo, Head and Senior Advisor on Science Technology and Innovation at AUDA-NEPAD, emphasised that the sustainability challenge is no longer the generation of scientific evidence, but rather ensuring that such evidence meaningfully shapes policy and practice.

He argued that stronger mechanisms are needed to bridge the gap between knowledge production and decision-making, while also equipping policymakers to effectively utilise research findings.



Dr Angus Paterson

Reinforcing this perspective, the interim NRF CEO, Dr Angus Paterson, highlighted his institution’s commitment to sustainability research in its Strategy 2030.

The latter prioritises support for African researchers developing solutions with tangible societal impact.

A major intellectual contribution to the discussions that unfolded later came from UNIVEN through a series of sessions showcasing the institution’s distinctive approach to community-engaged scholarship and sustainability transformation.



Prof Joseph Francis

One of the conference’s most engaging and unique sessions was led by Prof Joseph Francis, Director of the Institute for Rural Development (IRD) at the University of Venda (UNIVEN). Through a dynamic blend of African heritage-based engagement tools, interactive games, innovation challenges, and participatory learning approaches.

The IRD team, comprising academics, students, interns, and traditional leaders, showcased how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are being localised within communities under Traditional Authorities across the Vhembe District of South Africa.

The session challenged conventional top-down development models by presenting communities not as recipients of development but rather as active architects of their own futures.

Conference participants were introduced to a practical framework of gendered, structured community deliberations that bring together children, youth in and out of school, adults, the elderly, and traditional leaders to assess the extent to which SDGs were achieved and opportunities for cocreating locally relevant solutions.

This facilitated the generation of community-owned knowledge, strengthening of collective agency, and production of actionable insights that inform both local interventions and broader development strategies.

Throughout the session, it was clear that sustainable development is most effective when communities become co-designers, co-producers and co-implementers of change. Traditional leadership institutions were highlighted as critical platforms for convening dialogue, mobilising collective action, safeguarding indigenous knowledge and advancing locally driven development. Thus, it was not surprising that traditional leaders who were part of the co-facilitation team spoke positively about the UNIVEN approach to localising SDGs. They noted its refreshing departure from conventional research practices in which communities are often excluded from decision-making platforms.

This collaborative model ensures that research outcomes are relevant, locally owned, and more likely to be sustained over time.

UNIVEN Co-Hosts SRI2026 Africa Regional Conference, Championing African-led Solutions for Sustainability Transformation continues...



SRI 2026 Africa Regional Conference participants from UNIVEN

From 21 to 23 June 2026, the conference also saw the active participation of students in both the organisation and presentation of conference activities.

These included Mr Nedzungani Mutshidzi and Ms Tumiso Kobola, who are both fourth-year students registered for the Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledge Systems programme; Ms Nkateko Sombane, a Master's student in Rural Development; Ms Refiloe Rametse and Ms Xolani Shaun Mashego, who serve as a research assistant and an intern, respectively, at the Institute for Rural Development. Their participation reflects the University of Venda's commitment to providing students with transformative learning opportunities that promote academic excellence, experiential learning, research capacity, and active engagement in knowledge generation and societal development.



Participants during the Science Diplomacy workshop



In the picture: Prof Bernard Nthambeleni (second from left) poses for a photograph with fellow dignitaries and speakers during the opening ceremony.

Before the main conference programme, UNIVEN researchers, Prof Vhonani Olive Netshandama, Dr Segun Obadire, Dr Nyadzani Dolphus Nevhudoli, Mr Matome Mokoena and Mr Rudzani Mamphweli participated in a Science Diplomacy Workshop for Emerging and Mid-Career Researchers, convened by the Future Earth Africa Hub and its global partners.

The workshop explored the growing role of science diplomacy in bridging science, policy, and international cooperation, while strengthening Africa's influence within global sustainability governance processes. It highlighted the importance of science diplomacy in advancing South-South collaboration, amplifying African voices in

international policy arenas and ensuring that sustainability solutions emerging from the continent help shape global agendas. The institutional capacity to connect scientific knowledge with policy engagement and international partnerships in support of African-led development pathways was strengthened through participation throughout the conference. The science diplomacy workshop provided valuable insights into communicating science effectively at the nexus of policy, funding, and societal impact, thereby strengthening their ability to translate research into meaningful societal and policy outcomes.

The workshop provided an intensive exploration of

the "art and craft" of science diplomacy, focusing on the transition from technical expertise to effective policy influence through interest-based negotiation, audience-centred communication, and strategic relationship building.

Through practical exercises, participants mastered writing short policy briefs and delivering 60-second "science pitches" that transform data into urgent, human-centred narratives. The significance lies in gaining a transferable toolkit, including horizon scanning and policy translation that enables the shift from domain expert to credible "bridge" between research and action.

The workshop offers a roadmap for breaking down institutional silos and improving internal decision-making by applying diplomatic skills to committee work and departmental negotiations. Ultimately, for Africa, the workshop serves as a catalyst for regional empowerment, equipping African scientists to anchor their research in continental priorities such as the African Union Agenda 2063 and to negotiate more equitably in global forums, ensuring that local solutions are developed for local challenges.

Throughout the SRI2026 conference, a clear message emerged: Africa is not short of solutions. Across its universities, grassroots communities, governments, entrepreneurs and indigenous knowledge systems lies a wealth of expertise, creativity and resilience

capable of addressing the continent's most pressing challenges. The priority now is to strengthen partnerships, unlock investment and accelerate the conversion of knowledge into measurable impact. Against this backdrop, UNIVEN stood out for leading in science, with and for society, and for its centrality in development and innovation.

Furthermore, through its co-hosting role and contributions to community-centred sustainability research, UNIVEN demonstrated how locally grounded institutions can influence global conversations while remaining deeply connected to the realities of local communities.

As Africa increasingly takes the centre stage in the global sustainability transformation, UNIVEN is not merely contributing to the conversation; it is helping to lead it.



Prof Vhonani Olive Netshandama (left) deliberating during Plenary 5 of the SRI Conference: Bridging Africa's Regional Strengths - A showcase of Collaborative Innovation

Celebrating Innovation Excellence: Recognition of Intellectual Property Creators at UNIVEN

The Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialisation (CEEIIC) through Technology Transfer and Commercialisation Office (TTCO) is celebrating researchers from the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture as their recognition is awarded for the patented invention. Innovation remains a cornerstone of societal progress and the recognition of those who contribute to advancing knowledge and technology is essential in fostering a culture of creativity and impact. In this regard, the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI), through the National Intellectual Property Management Office (NIPMO) has honoured a group of UNIVEN researchers for their outstanding contribution to Intellectual Property (IP) development.



Prof Rachel Makungo (Left) and Dr Adeyemi Ojutalayo Adeeyo (Right)

The recognition is awarded for the patented invention titled "Dicerocaryum Eriocarpum Plant Extract-Metal Nanoparticles for Water Purification and Disinfection", with Patent No. 2023/01982.

The recognised inventors are Prof Rachel Makungo, Dr Adeyemi Ojutalayo Adeeyo, Dr Abimbola Motunrayo Enitan-Folami and the late Prof John Ogony Odiyo, all from the University's Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture.

Their collaborative effort highlights the power of collaboration in solving real-world problems and underscores the importance of investing in locally relevant scientific solutions.

This recognition not only celebrates individual and team achievements but also reinforces UNIVEN's role

in driving innovation and technology development.

Prof Rachel Makungo is the DSTI/NRF-UUW-UNIVEN Research Chair in Water and the Environment in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture

Furthermore, the acknowledgement serves as an inspiration to emerging researchers and students, encouraging them to pursue impactful research and actively participate in the innovation pipeline.

It also highlights the critical role played by the TTCO in supporting innovation, facilitating IP protection, management and commercialisation.

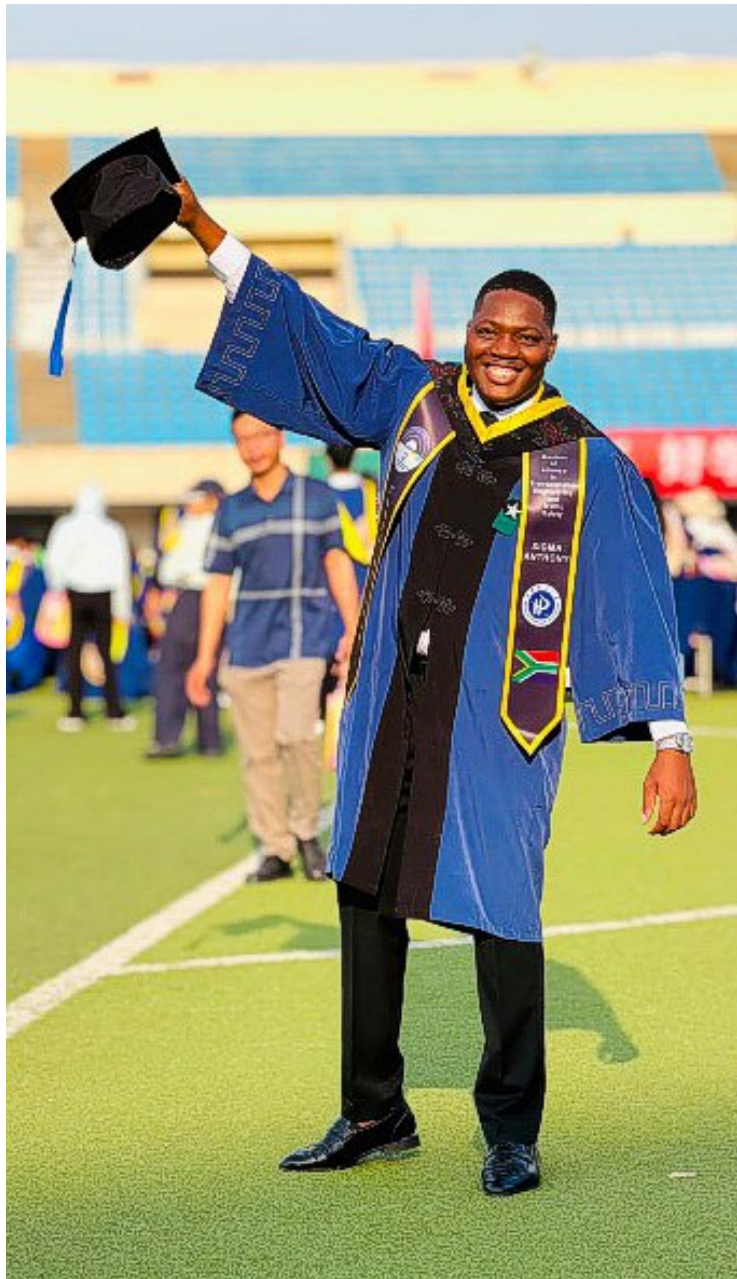
The Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture is proud of the achievements and is in full support of their research and innovation activities.



Dr Abimbola Motunrayo Enitan-Folami

From Venda to China: A Journey of Academic Excellence and Global Engagement

Sigama Anthony's journey from Limpopo to the People's Republic of China is a testament to the transformative impact of international partnerships, academic excellence, and global engagement. Through the collaborative efforts of the University of Venda's Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture, the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, the Directorate of International Relations and Partnerships, and the University's leadership, he was afforded an opportunity that would shape both his academic and personal development.



Pursuing a Master of Science in Transportation Engineering at Henan Polytechnic University, Anthony spent three years immersed in advanced transportation technologies and innovative research.

His studies focused on emerging fields such as autonomous vehicles, artificial intelligence, robotics, drone technologies, and transportation simulation systems, equipping him with knowledge and skills relevant to the rapidly evolving global transportation sector.

Beyond his academic coursework, Anthony actively participated in research and scholarly activities, publishing and presenting work on topics including high-speed rail systems, smart ports, autonomous vehicle technologies, and vehicle theft prevention.

Among his notable achievements was the development of a vehicle identification model inspired by transportation and security challenges in South Africa. The project later received recognition through a student award at the South African Transport Conference (SATC).

His experience in China extended far beyond the classroom. Through cultural exchange, international collaboration, and engagement with students and academics from diverse backgrounds, Anthony gained valuable global perspectives while proudly sharing South African culture and heritage.

These experiences reinforced the importance of international partnerships in fostering mutual understanding, innovation, and academic advancement.

Today, Anthony graduates with a Master of Science degree awarded cum laude, marking a significant milestone in his academic journey.

His achievement reflects not only personal dedication and perseverance but also the opportunities created through the University of Venda's commitment to internationalisation and global collaboration.

As he embarks on the next chapter of his professional career, Anthony remains committed to applying the knowledge, skills, and international perspectives gained through his studies to contribute meaningfully to South Africa's development.

His story serves as an inspiration to aspiring students, demonstrating how international opportunities can broaden horizons, unlock potential, and create pathways to success on the global stage.



Learners from Lwandani, Marude, and Ligegege Secondary Schools received laptops sponsored by UNIVEN and BANKSETA to enhance digital skills

The University of Venda continues to advance its commitment to educational transformation, digital inclusion, and youth empowerment through the Skills for the Future Program (SfFP) within the Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialisation (DCEIIC). In a significant milestone for the program, 105 laptops were distributed to Grade 12 learners from Lwandani Secondary, Marude Secondary, and Ligegege Secondary schools, creating expanded access to learning opportunities and strengthening the program's ability to support young people with future-focused skills. The program is funded by the BANKSETA, and support has further been enhanced through the sponsorship of laptops by the University's Supply Chain Management and wifi from the Department of Information & Technology Services. The collaboration demonstrates how strategic partnerships within and beyond the institution can unlock greater impact for communities.



In the picture: Learners unboxing their laptops during a digital class

The original BANKSETA funding allocation supported 38 learner places under Digital Literacy and 35 learner places under Mathematics, Science, and / or Accounting.

However, these funding categories were established for administrative and resourcing purposes and do not limit learner participation across the programme offerings. Importantly, all learners enrolled in the Skills for the Future Programme benefit from the full learning experience, irrespective of the category under which they were funded.

Every participating learner receives exposure to both Digital Literacy and Mathematics, Science and/or Accounting support, ensuring an integrated and holistic learning journey. The sponsorship of laptops has further strengthened this model by enabling the University to accommodate and support 32 more learners than originally anticipated under the funded numbers. Access to laptops allows learners to participate more effectively in programme activities, continue learning beyond contact sessions, and build confidence in using digital technologies as tools for academic success and future career opportunities.

Through the Digital Literacy component, learners develop practical competencies in computer usage, digital communication, information access,

responsible technology use, and foundational digital skills required in higher education and the workplace. At the same time, the Mathematics, Science and Accounting component supports academic achievement in subjects that remain essential for participation in the knowledge economy and access to future study and employment pathways.

Beyond academic development, the programme also seeks to understand and document its broader

impact. Following the laptop distribution, selected learners participated in reflection and impact interviews to share their experiences and illustrate how improved access to learning resources shapes educational aspirations and future opportunities.

The Skills for the Future Programme reflects the University of Venda's continued commitment to community engagement that creates meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

By combining external funding, institutional collaboration, and access to digital resources, the University is expanding opportunities for young people and ensuring that more learners are equipped to thrive in an increasingly digital and knowledge-driven society.

The distribution of 105 laptops, therefore, represents more than access to technology. It is an investment in equity, learning, opportunity, and the future of South Africa's next generation.



In the picture: recipients

Bringing University to the Village: UNIVEN Empowers Bungeni's Class of 2026

The journey to higher education does not have to begin in a city. Sometimes, it begins in a village where dreams are nurtured, and opportunities are brought directly to young people.



Mr Takalani Thabo (middle) from UNIVEN with learners during the UNIVEN student recruitment presentation

On 26 June 2026, Bung City Non-Profit Company (NPC), in partnership with Hluvuka High School, hosted a career guidance and university information session in Bungeni Village, Vhembe District Municipality, Limpopo Province. The event brought together more than 200 Grade 12 learners from Hluvuka Secondary School and Maruleng Secondary School, giving them a valuable opportunity to explore their future study and career options.

The University of Venda (UNIVEN) was among the key exhibitors, providing learners and parents with practical information on academic programmes, admission requirements, student funding opportunities and residence applications. Learners were also reminded that applications for the 2027 academic year close on 30 September 2026, encouraging them to apply early and secure their future.

Addressing the learners, UNIVEN Administrative Officer in the Department of Marketing, Branding and Communication, Mr Takalani Thabo, encouraged them to make informed decisions when choosing a university.

"Choose a university that offers quality education while remaining close to home and affordable. Studying far from home often comes with additional financial and personal challenges. The University of Venda was established to serve communities such as ours, and learners should seize the opportunity to study at an institution that is both accessible and committed to academic excellence," he said.

His message resonated with many learners, who expressed excitement about the prospect of studying at UNIVEN in 2027 and taking the next step towards achieving their career ambitions.



Left: Mr Daniel Baloyi Hluvuka secondary Deputy Principal together with a member of the School Governing Body (SGB)

Right: Guests receive a warm welcome from Mrs Bevel Mabunda, Chairperson of the Hluvuka Secondary School Governing Body, together with representatives of the Hlanganani Circuit School Governing Body

Hluvuka Secondary School Deputy Principal, Mr Daniel Baloyi, described the exhibition as a landmark initiative and the first career exhibition of its kind to be hosted within the Hlanganani Circuit.

He commended the organisers for bringing higher education opportunities directly to rural learners.



Left: Mr Watson Maringa delivering his presentation. Right: A learner actively engaging in the deliberations of the day

Chairperson of the Bung Career Exhibition Organising Committee, Mr Watson Maringa, said exposing learners to universities and career opportunities motivates them to work harder and improve their academic performance so they can qualify for their careers of choice.

He added that learners who remain focused on their education are less likely to be distracted by social challenges such as substance abuse.

As South Africa continues to strive for equitable access to higher education, initiatives such as this demonstrate the power of taking opportunities directly to communities. By reaching learners where they live, UNIVEN is breaking down barriers to higher education and ensuring that geography does not determine a young person's future.

For many learners in Bungeni, the exhibition was more than a career guidance session; it was a reminder that university is within reach. Through continued outreach to rural communities, UNIVEN is empowering young people and their families with the knowledge, confidence, and support they need to make informed decisions, pursue their dreams, and shape a brighter future.



Learners from different schools expressing their excitement about studying at the University of Venda in 2027



Event organisers and exhibitors posing for a group photo

University of Venda Equips Female Security Officers to Combat Sexual Violence

As part of an ongoing commitment to fostering a safe, inclusive and violence-free learning environment, the University of Venda (UNIVEN) hosted a Sexual Violence Workshop in the Senate Chamber under the theme, 'Preventing Sexual Violence and Promoting Safe Communities.' The workshop brought together female security officers to strengthen their capacity as first responders in preventing, identifying and responding effectively to incidents of sexual violence on campus.



Group photo of participants



Ms Tshilidzi Makhado, Manager: Investigations

Welcoming participants, Ms Tshilidzi Makhado said she was delighted to receive about the number of female staff members who have attended this workshop which is aimed at raising awareness about sexual violence and its devastating impact on individuals and institutions.

She noted that the workshop was also intended to empower female security officers to play a leading role in preventing and responding to incidents of sexual violence, while contributing to the creation of a safe, inclusive and supportive university environment.

In her remarks, Ms Makhado reaffirmed the University's commitment to fostering a safe, respectful and violence-free learning and working environment.

She said that, by equipping female security officers with practical knowledge, legal understanding and victim-centred response skills, the University of Venda is strengthening its capacity to protect students, staff and visitors while promoting a culture of accountability, dignity and respect.



Ms Tshilidzi Makhado, Manager: Investigations

Prof Tsoaledi Thobejane highlighted that sexual violence encompasses a broad range of non-consensual acts, including sexual harassment, assault, exploitation, trafficking, child abuse and intimate partner violence. He explained that these offences are often rooted in unequal power relations, harmful social norms, substance abuse, poverty and weak community support systems. He further outlined the far-reaching consequences of sexual violence, including psychological trauma, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), physical injuries, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), social isolation, economic hardship and the erosion of community safety.



Adv Rudzani Makhema Head: Employee Relations

Advocate Rudzani Makhema unpacked South Africa's legal framework governing sexual offences, focusing on the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007 (Act 32 of 2007). He emphasised that the legislation protects victims' rights, promotes dignity throughout the justice process and places a legal obligation on those who witness sexual offences to report them. As first responders, security officers have a duty to report all incidents of sexual violence without delay. He also reminded participants that UNIVEN maintains a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual harassment, with perpetrators facing disciplinary action, including dismissal, while survivors are referred to victim support centres where confidentiality and dignity are guaranteed.



Dr Refilwe Pila-Nemutandani, Head of Student Counselling and Career Development Unit, University of Venda

Dr Refilwe Pila-Nemutandani from Student and Staff Counselling Services urged security officers to respond to survivors with empathy, compassion and professionalism. She cautioned that judging or blaming victims may retraumatise them, discourage reporting and negatively affect their psychological wellbeing. Dr Pila-Nemutandani encouraged officers to provide survivors with a safe and private environment where they can speak freely before being referred for professional counselling and psychosocial support.



Adv Rudzani Makhema Head: Employee Relations

Captain Mokgadi Mamokhwane of the South African Police Service (SAPS) outlined the support available through SAPS Victim Friendly Rooms, where survivors can open criminal cases and receive assistance throughout the justice process.

She explained that while victims have the right to withdraw complaints, SAPS remains committed to providing continuous support and guidance throughout the investigation and prosecution process.

The workshop concluded with a renewed commitment from participants to serve as informed, compassionate and proactive first responders in the fight against sexual violence. Through the knowledge and practical skills gained, the female security officers are now better equipped to prevent, identify and respond appropriately to incidents of sexual violence while supporting survivors with dignity and respect. The initiative reaffirmed the University of Venda's unwavering commitment to creating a safe, inclusive and violence-free campus where every student, staff member and visitor can learn and work in an environment founded on human rights, accountability and mutual respect.

UNIVEN Strengthens Global Research Presence at 5th BRICS Postgraduate Forum in Brazil

The University of Venda (UNIVEN) strengthened its international research profile at the 5th BRICS Postgraduate Forum hosted by the University of Campinas (UNICAMP) in Brazil from 9 to 11 June 2026. The University was represented by 11 postgraduate students, seven doctoral candidates and four master's students who showcased their research and engaged with emerging scholars and academics from across the BRICS nations.



Delegates, postgraduate students and academic leaders at the 5th BRICS Postgraduate Forum

Held under the theme "Advancing Innovation, Sustainability and Development through BRICS Research Collaboration," the Forum brought together postgraduate students, postdoctoral researchers and young academics to present research, exchange ideas and establish long-term collaborative partnerships.

UNIVEN's participation reflects the University's commitment to postgraduate excellence, internationalisation and research cooperation, aligned with its mission of producing graduates who are locally relevant and globally competitive while advancing South Africa's role in BRICS and Global South collaboration.

Throughout the three-day programme, UNIVEN students presented research on governance, digital inclusion, rural development, land redress, youth empowerment, social protection, sustainable development, development finance, institutional transformation and innovation. Their presentations received positive feedback and highlighted the value of locally grounded research in addressing global development challenges.

The Forum opened with addresses by leading academics, including UNIVEN Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Postgraduate Studies and

Head of the BRICS Research Institute, Prof Fulufhelo Netswera, alongside representatives from UNICAMP, RUDN University and the Higher School of Economics University in Russia.

The first day focused on trade, economic resilience, public governance, institutional reform and education. UNIVEN students contributed through presentations on women's leadership in higher education, sustainable development, institutional innovation, inclusive digital governance and regenerative tourism.

The University's academic leadership was further demonstrated when Prof Hlanganipai Ngirande chaired a session on Green Industrialisation and Energy Transition.

Day two centered on technological and human development transformations, covering digital innovation, entrepreneurship, social inclusion, and sustainable development.

UNIVEN students presented research on land redress, youth empowerment, local government innovation systems, women-owned businesses, social protection and e-government services in rural municipalities.



Nhlolotelo Ivyn Chabalala from the University of Venda receives recognition during the 5th BRICS Postgraduate Forum awards ceremony



Petronele Mugwagwa from the University of Venda is recognised for her outstanding presentation during the 5th BRICS Postgraduate Forum



Sengani Delicia Ndou from the University of Venda receives her certificate during the closing and awards ceremony of the 5th BRICS Postgraduate Forum



Award recipients display their certificates during the closing and awards ceremony of the 5th BRICS Postgraduate Forum at the University of Campinas, Brazil



UNIVEN postgraduate students and representatives participate in the 5th BRICS Postgraduate Forum, reflecting the University's growing contribution to BRICS research collaboration

UNIVEN Strengthens Global Research Presence at 5th BRICS Postgraduate Forum in Brazil continues...



Delegates, postgraduate students and academic leaders gather during the 5th BRICS Postgraduate Forum at the University of Campinas, Brazil



Delegates also participated in a social networking programme, including watching a soccer match together as part of the forum's informal engagement activities

A key highlight was the panel discussion on "Governance, State Capacity, and Sustainable Development in BRICS Economies," featuring Prof Netswera alongside international scholars from Russia.

The discussion underscored the importance of capable institutions, effective governance and research-informed policymaking in addressing shared development challenges across emerging economies.

The academic programme was complemented by a vibrant Cultural Exchange evening, where delegates celebrated their diverse cultures through traditional attire, music and cuisine.

The event strengthened people-to-people connections and reinforced the role of cultural understanding in fostering meaningful international research partnerships.

On the final day, discussions focused on governance, tourism, development finance and the future of BRICS cooperation. UNIVEN students continued to make notable contributions through presentations on

youth inclusion in the BRICS development agenda and governance reforms in development finance institutions.

The Forum concluded with a guest lecture on BRICS' efforts to reform the international monetary and financial system, followed by an awards ceremony recognising outstanding postgraduate research.

UNIVEN students excelled in the awards category. Nhlohlotelu Ilyn Chabalala received second place overall in the Master's category and won the Social Inclusion and Development Justice award.

Sengani Delicia Ndou shared third place overall in the Master's category and received the Education and Knowledge Economies award. Petronella Sphiwe Mugwagwa was honoured with the PhD award in Urban Sustainability and Infrastructure.

Delegates also participated in networking activities that fostered collaboration and strengthened professional relationships beyond the academic sessions, creating a memorable experience that combined scholarship, culture and international engagement.

The Forum was coordinated through the BRICS Research Institute in partnership with UNICAMP, HSE University, RUDN University, Durban University of Technology and TV BRICS.

The Institute also commended South African universities that sponsored postgraduate students to participate, including DUT, the University of Limpopo, UNISA, North-West University, Vaal University of Technology and Walter Sisulu University.

UNIVEN's successful participation in the 5th BRICS Postgraduate Forum underscores the University's growing influence in international postgraduate education, BRICS research cooperation and sustainable development scholarship.

It further affirms UNIVEN's commitment to producing globally connected graduates equipped to contribute to transformative development and knowledge generation in South Africa, the BRICS community and the wider Global South.



In the pictures above and below, participants take part in the Cultural Exchange programme, which created space for cultural sharing, networking and people-to-people cooperation among BRICS delegates



UNIVEN Strengthens Strategic Partnerships with China to Boost Education and Innovation

The University of Venda (UNIVEN) continues to strengthen its position as a globally connected institution through strategic international partnerships that create meaningful opportunities for students, educators, researchers, and communities.



As part of this commitment, from 22 to 28 June 2026, a delegation comprising members of the University's Senior Management, together with the Senior District Director of the Vhembe East Department of Education, undertook a strategic educational visit to Beijing and Wuhan in the People's Republic of China.

The delegation comprised Dr Sannah Mativandela, Director: Institutional Research and Planning, and Head of Delegation; Dr Mutshinyalo Ratombo, Director Strategy and Risk, Office of the Vice-Chancellor; Dr Takalani Dzaga, Director: Marketing, Branding and Communication; Mrs Beauty Mutheiwana, Director: Supply Chain Management and Expenditure; Professor Pfarelo Matshidze, Deputy Dean, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education; Dr Matodzi Raphaelalani HoD African Languages; Professor Ernest Klu Department of English; and Mr Rendani Munzhelele, Acting Senior District Director, Vhembe East, Department of Basic Education.

The visit was facilitated under the auspices of the Green Technology Confucius Institute (GTCI) as a "Chinese Bridge" education visit programme, with the in-China arrangements coordinated by the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC) and Hubei University of Technology (HBUT).

The visit formed part of the growing partnership between UNIVEN and HBUT, one of China's leading institutions in engineering, technology and innovation. The primary objective of the visit was to deepen institutional collaboration, identify new areas of academic and educational cooperation, strengthen research and innovation partnerships, and explore opportunities to benefit both higher and basic education within the Vhembe District. The delegation engaged with university leaders, visited innovation centres, and interacted with stakeholders involved in technology, education and sustainable development.

These engagements provided valuable insights into international best practices while laying the foundation for long-term collaborative programmes between the two institutions. "This visit marked a significant step in positioning the University of Venda as a globally connected institution," said Dr Takalani Dzaga, Director of Marketing, Branding and Communication at UNIVEN. "Strengthening our brand visibility beyond South African borders is essential in attracting international partnerships, research collaborations, and student exchange opportunities. Our engagement with Hubei University of Technology and the support of the Chinese Bridge programme have reinforced UNIVEN's reputation as a forward-looking university committed to internationalisation and innovation."



In the picture: The UNIVEN delegation visiting the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC) of the Department of Education in Beijing



In the picture: The delegation is being warmly welcomed by the HBUT team, headed by the Vice-President, Prof. HE Xingyang

A key highlight of the visit was the continued strengthening of the partnership between UNIVEN and HBUT, the co-founder of GTCI at the University of Venda. The GTCI is the first Confucius Institute in the world to feature green technology and serves as a centre of excellence for Chinese language teaching, cultural exchange, green technology, innovation, and sustainable development.

The visit reaffirmed both institutions' commitment to expanding the activities of the Green Technology Confucius Institute and leveraging it as a catalyst for educational excellence, technological innovation and international collaboration. Recognising that educational transformation begins long before learners enter university, the inclusion of the Senior District Director of the Vhembe East Department of Education proved to be a strategic milestone.

The visit strengthened collaboration between the University and the Department of Basic Education and established a shared vision for extending the benefits of the UNIVEN-HBUT partnership to primary and secondary schools throughout the Vhembe District.



In the picture: The HBUT Vice-President Prof HE Xingyang presents gifts to Mr. Rendani Munzhelele, Acting Senior District Director, Vhembe (East) District, Department of Basic Education

Through the Office of the Senior District Director, the Department of Education will facilitate partnerships between UNIVEN and selected schools to implement programmes coordinated through the Green Technology Confucius Institute.

These initiatives will include:

- Introduction of Chinese language learning in selected schools.
- Cultural exchange and international education programmes.
- Green technology and environmental sustainability education.
- Capacity-building programmes for educators and learners.
- Exposure to innovation, entrepreneurship and global learning opportunities.

Bergvliet Primary School has already been identified as one of the pilot institutions that will collaborate with the Green Technology Confucius Institute, particularly in advancing Chinese language education and promoting green technology awareness. This pilot programme will serve as a model for future expansion to other schools within the district.

The visit also strengthened plans to establish strategic partnerships with technically oriented schools. Marude Secondary School has been identified as a potential partner for technical education initiatives that align with UNIVEN's planned introduction of Civil Engineering and the future expansion of engineering programmes.

These collaborations are expected to:

- Strengthen the pipeline of learners pursuing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers.
- Improve learner preparedness for engineering and technology programmes at university.
- Increase awareness of career opportunities in engineering, innovation and emerging technologies.
- Encourage greater participation in technical education and skills development.

The delegation also explored opportunities for learners from the Vhembe District to access higher education opportunities in China through scholarships, student exchanges and collaborative academic programmes. These opportunities have the potential to broaden students' global exposure while equipping graduates with internationally relevant skills required in an increasingly interconnected world.

Dr Mutshinyalo Ratombo, Director of Strategy and Risk in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, noted: "What makes this visit particularly meaningful is the direct link between international partnerships and local impact. The inclusion of the Vhembe Department of Education in this delegation ensured that the benefits of our collaboration with HBUT will extend beyond the university campus to schools and communities across the Vhembe District. This is a powerful story of how global engagement can transform local education."



In the picture: Dr Mutshinyalo Ratombo, Director of Strategy and Risk, Office of the Vice-Chancellor, giving a speech at the welcome reception by HBUT

UNIVEN Strengthens Strategic Partnerships with China to Boost Education and Innovation continues...

Beyond student mobility, discussions with HBUT identified opportunities for expanded collaboration in research, staff exchanges, curriculum development, innovation, postgraduate training, and joint projects addressing sustainable development and green technologies. These initiatives will further strengthen UNIVEN's internationalisation agenda while enhancing the quality of teaching, research, and community engagement.

The visit demonstrated how international partnerships can directly contribute to local development. Through collaboration between the University, the Department of Education and international partners, learners and educators in the Vhembe District will gain access to educational opportunities that were previously beyond reach.

The anticipated benefits include:

- Expanded access to quality international educational programmes.
- Increased opportunities for scholarships and international student mobility.
- Enhanced STEM education and technical skills development.
- Greater exposure to the Chinese language and Chinese culture.
- Promotion of innovation, entrepreneurship and green technologies.
- Professional development opportunities for educators.
- Stronger pathways from basic education to higher education.
- Enhanced research collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Other related pictures:



In the picture: The delegation visiting the School of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, the School of Life and Health Sciences, the School of Economics and Management, the School of Foreign Languages, the School of International Education, the School of Intelligent Manufacturing Industry, and the Grid-Forming Photovoltaic Engineering Training Base at Hubei University of Technology

- Improved graduate employability and global competitiveness.
- Long-term socio-economic development through education and skills development.

To ensure that the outcomes of the visit translate into measurable impact, the University of Venda will develop a comprehensive implementation framework in consultation with the Vhembe Department of Education, participating schools, and Hubei University of Technology. The framework will outline priority projects, stakeholder responsibilities, implementation timelines, monitoring mechanisms, and measurable performance indicators to ensure the sustainability of the partnership.

The strategic visit to Beijing and Wuhan marks another significant milestone in the University of Venda's journey towards becoming a globally recognised institution that creates local impact through international collaboration.

By strengthening partnerships with Hubei University of Technology and the Vhembe Department of Education, UNIVEN is creating new opportunities for learners, educators, researchers, and communities while advancing internationalisation, innovation, sustainability, and educational excellence.

The University remains committed to building partnerships that transform lives, empower communities and prepare graduates to thrive in a rapidly evolving global knowledge economy. Through these initiatives, the benefits of global collaboration will extend far beyond the University campus, contributing meaningfully to the educational and socio-economic development of the Vhembe District, Limpopo Province and South Africa.



The delegation is listening to the introduction of students' products at the School of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Hubei University of Technology



The delegation is experiencing the ancient Chinese musical instruments Bianzhong and the Zhongruan at the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation in Beijing



The delegation admiring the ancient Ding at the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation in Beijing



The delegation visiting the China Bridge Museum in Wuhan



The delegation conducting a cultural tour by visiting the symbolic building of Wuhan – the Yellow Crane Tower



The delegation visiting the OS-easy digital company and experiencing the Smart Campus and AI+ Education



Climate Law, Populism and Africa's Future: Forging Pathways for Resilient Governance

As Africa confronts the escalating impacts of climate change, the need for strong legal frameworks, accountable governance, and effective environmental protection has become increasingly urgent. Against this backdrop, the University of Venda hosted the Conference on Climate Law and Populism in Africa, which brought together leading academics, legal practitioners, policymakers, and researchers from across different institutions in Africa and beyond to examine the complex relationship between climate governance and populist politics.



Attendees of the two-day conference

The Conference, which was a hybrid event held on 25-26 June 2026 at the Student Parliament of the University of Venda, was organised by the DSTI/NRF Chair in Climate Change and the Rule of Law, the Ismail Mahomed Centre for Human and Peoples' Rights, and the Environmental Law Association of South Africa (ELA). It successfully attracted over 60 participants, including 48 speakers from diverse regions such as the United States of America, the Netherlands, Kenya, South Sudan, Tunisia, Namibia, Ghana, Eswatini, Cameroon, Nigeria, and India. Notably, 25 of these speakers and other participants joined virtually, while the remaining attendees participated in person, showcasing the conference's commitment to inclusivity and broad representation. The two-day session provided a platform to explore how populist politics are influencing climate law, environmental governance, and sustainable development across the continent while identifying practical legal responses to safeguard climate justice.

Through keynote addresses, scholarly presentations and interactive discussions, delegates explored a broad range of issues, including climate litigation, environmental accountability, renewable energy governance, indigenous knowledge systems, climate-induced migration and community participation in environmental decision-making. Throughout the conference, participants emphasised the importance of protecting climate governance from political interference while ensuring that legal responses remain inclusive, evidence-based, and responsive to Africa's unique development challenges.

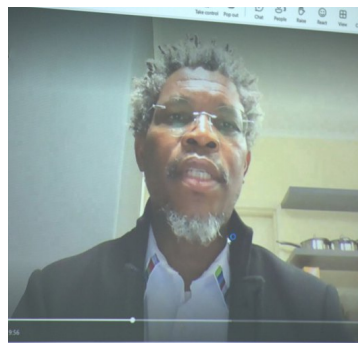


Professor Ademola Oluborode Jegede

Opening the conference, Professor Ademola Oluborode Jegede welcomed delegates from South Africa, across Africa, and the United Kingdom, describing the gathering as both globally significant and particularly relevant to Africa's growing climate vulnerability. Professor Jegede noted that although Africa contributes relatively little to global greenhouse gas emissions, it continues to bear a disproportionate share of climate-related disasters, including prolonged droughts in Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya, devastating floods in South Africa, Nigeria, Mozambique, and South Sudan, and increasing water scarcity across Southern Africa.

Professor Jegede pointed out his observations, that climate change is unfolding alongside the rise of populist politics. While populism can amplify the voices of marginalised communities and encourage democratic participation, it can also oversimplify complex climate issues and portray climate policies as elitist or externally imposed. Such narratives, he argued, risk delaying urgently needed climate action by deepening political divisions.

He lastly stressed that effective climate governance requires a careful balance between democratic participation and scientific evidence, arguing that climate law must remain both people-centred and scientifically informed. He encouraged delegates to exchange ideas, build lasting partnerships and explore how Africa can harness the positive aspects of democratic participation while limiting the risks posed by divisive populist narratives.



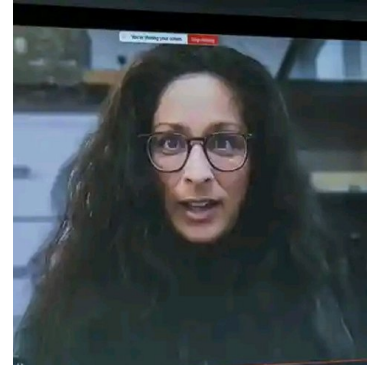
Professor Fulufohelo Netswera, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Postgraduate Studies

Delivering his address virtually, the University of Venda's Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Postgraduate Studies, Professor Fulufohelo Netswera, welcomed representatives from academia, government, civil society, and the private sector. He commended the collaboration between the University of Venda, the Environmental Law Association, the Department of Science, Technology, and Innovation, and the National Research Foundation for organising the conference.

Professor Netswera highlighted the importance of balancing climate action with Africa's broader development priorities. While the continent remains one of the world's lowest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, it is among the most vulnerable to droughts, floods, and extreme heat. He argued that climate policies should simultaneously advance environmental protection, poverty reduction, industrialisation, economic growth and equitable access to energy.

He further noted that populist perspectives often challenge climate measures perceived to constrain development and employment while reinforcing the principle that those most responsible for climate change should bear the greatest responsibility for addressing its consequences. He encouraged scholars to develop practical, equitable, and evidence-based approaches to climate governance, examining issues such as the just energy transition, natural resource governance, climate-induced migration, biodiversity conservation, food and water security, renewable energy, and carbon markets.

Reflecting on international climate agreements, including the Rio Summit, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement, Professor Netswera challenged delegates to consider whether global climate governance has delivered equitable outcomes for both developed and developing nations. As he concluded, he expressed confidence that the conference would generate policy recommendations and scholarly contributions capable of influencing climate governance both nationally and internationally.



Professor Melanie Murcott, Chairperson of the Environmental Law Association of South Africa

Delivering a virtual goodwill message, Professor Melanie Murcott congratulated Professor Jegede and the organising committee for convening a timely conference that addressed the intersection between climate governance and populism.

Professor Murcott warned that democratic institutions, particularly Africa's deliberative democratic traditions founded on accountability and constitutional checks and balances, face growing pressure from exclusionary forms of populism. As climate change intensifies existing inequalities, she noted that vulnerable communities become increasingly exposed to both environmental and political marginalisation.

Drawing on the African philosophy of Ubuntu, she emphasised that individual well-being is inseparable from the well-being of communities and the natural environment. She cautioned that exclusionary populist movements often silence minority voices, weaken democratic institutions, and undermine accountability.

Professor Murcott further argued that populist narratives frequently portray climate laws as economic burdens instead of recognising them as essential instruments for addressing historical injustices rooted in colonialism, extractivism, and racial capitalism. She encouraged delegates to critically assess when populism can strengthen grassroots climate justice movements and when it becomes detrimental by reinforcing exclusionary politics. She concluded by reaffirming ELA South Africa's commitment to advancing climate justice across the continent.



Professor Oliver Ruppel of Stellenbosch University

Climate Law, Populism and Africa's Future: Forging Pathways for Resilient Governance continues...

The conference keynote address was delivered virtually by Professor Oliver Ruppel of Stellenbosch University under the theme; When Climate Forces Movement: The Rise of Strategic Litigation for Climate Migrants. Professor Ruppel explained that climate-induced displacement is no longer a future concern but an increasingly urgent global reality. He argued that existing international refugee and migration frameworks remain poorly equipped to protect people displaced by climate change, creating significant legal protection gaps.

He noted that by late 2025, more than 3,000 climate-related legal cases had been filed across 55 jurisdictions and before 24 international or regional courts, many addressing human rights, displacement, and climate mobility. Drawing on landmark cases from New Zealand, Australia, Argentina, and international courts, he observed that legal success often depends less on proving climate harm than on effectively framing claims within existing legal systems.

Professor Ruppel also highlighted recent advisory opinions issued by the International Court of Justice and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which increasingly recognise climate-related displacement as a human rights issue. While these opinions strengthen international legal norms, he cautioned that they do not automatically guarantee relocation or protection for climate migrants.

Describing strategic litigation as an essential mechanism for strengthening government accountability and advancing human rights, Professor Ruppel acknowledged that legal action remains costly, time-consuming, and often inaccessible to vulnerable communities.

Concluding his address, he argued that one of the defining legal challenges of the twenty-first century will be ensuring both "mobility with protection" and "immobility with dignity". He called for legal systems that protect people's meaningful choice to move or remain in their communities as climate impacts

continue to intensify. Across the two-day programme, scholars examined climate governance through a wide range of legal, political, and social perspectives.

Day one presentations explored theories of populism and environmental governance across Africa, with presentations focusing on climate governance in Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, and Tunisia. These discussions thoroughly examined renewable energy governance, fossil fuel dependence, sustainable development, sovereignty, and the political dimensions of climate law.

Subsequent sessions focused on political actors and climate obligations, addressing climate adaptation legislation, judicial activism, climate litigation frameworks, indigenous politics, subsidy regimes, sexual and reproductive health rights, water governance, and responses to climate shocks.

Attention then turned to climate accountability and public participation. Presentations examined corporate accountability, customary land tenure, forest governance, state climate obligations, hydrological modelling, climate mobility governance, and refugee protection. Comparative insights from South Africa, Nigeria, Cameroon, Uganda, the United Kingdom, and the United States highlighted the growing importance of accountability mechanisms in strengthening climate governance.

The final sessions of the first day explored climate technology, indigenous knowledge systems, and environmental law. Speakers emphasised the importance of integrating indigenous ecological knowledge with technological innovation to support equitable energy transitions, strengthen community participation, and develop more sustainable approaches to climate governance.

The second day commenced with a keynote address by Houda Mejri, an international consultant for SED Gender and Governance Tunisia and a former UN Public Information and Gender Officer. She examined

the role of institutions and communities in responding to climate governance challenges. Delivering the Day Two keynote address virtually, international consultant Houda Mejri called for climate governance that is rooted in social justice, inclusivity, and meaningful public participation, arguing that climate policies can only succeed if they are socially legitimate and improve people's everyday lives. She highlighted Africa's rich tradition of indigenous environmental knowledge, emphasising that environmental protection is fundamentally about the relationship between people, nature, and future generations.

Outlining the day's discussions, she identified three priorities for advancing climate governance: building resilient institutions supported by transparent governance, independent courts, and effective accountability mechanisms; strengthening community-led climate action through the active participation of women, young people, indigenous communities, and civil society; and fostering visionary leadership capable of driving cross-sectoral and intergenerational collaboration.

Mejri challenged perceptions of Africa as merely vulnerable to climate change, instead describing the continent as a centre of climate innovation, legal creativity, and political reform. She further called for stronger environmental diplomacy, enhanced South-South cooperation, and greater knowledge-sharing across Africa and the Arab region, expressing confidence that African leadership and solutions will play a defining role in shaping the future of global climate law and governance.

Discussions focused on how courts, civil society organisations, and local communities are resisting opposition to climate action through litigation, advocacy, and public participation. Presentations explored climate-related conflicts, NGO involvement in landmark legal cases, populist narratives in the Niger Delta, climate litigation in Kenya, and the livelihoods of West African fishing communities.

The conference concluded on a high note with discussions on protecting climate governance from politicisation through stronger legal and institutional safeguards. Presenters examined administrative law, judicial approaches to climate rights, forestry governance, climate policy implementation, sustainable human resource management, and the political economy of climate law enforcement in South Africa and Nigeria. Delegates emphasised the importance of strengthening independent legal institutions capable of resisting political interference while ensuring long-term environmental governance.

A recurring message throughout the conference was the urgent need to strengthen legal and institutional frameworks capable of protecting climate governance from political interference, policy instability, and short-term populist pressures. Delegates identified persistent challenges, including weak implementation of climate legislation, competing economic interests, governance failures, and the continued marginalisation of vulnerable communities.

At the same time, the conference showcased innovative approaches to climate justice through strategic litigation, indigenous knowledge systems, community-led environmental governance, and rights-based legal frameworks. Participants highlighted the increasingly important role of courts, civil society, academic institutions, and local communities in advancing accountability and protecting environmental rights.

By bringing together experts from across Africa and beyond, the Conference on Climate Law and Populism in Africa reinforced the central role of law in promoting sustainable development, protecting human rights, and ensuring that climate governance remains inclusive, transparent, and resilient. The discussions made a significant contribution to ongoing efforts to develop legal and policy responses capable of addressing the complex relationship among climate change, governance, and populism in the twenty-first century.





University of Venda

Creating future leaders

School of Law Alumni Association (SLAA)

Tel: 073 478 0154 (Chairman) | Tel: 072 288 8105 (Secretariat) | Email: Advbossmike@gmail.com

Our Ref: Vacational Work Placements | Your Ref: N/A | Date: Wednesday, 17 June 2026

2026 SUMMER (NOV/DEC) VACATIONAL WORK PROGRAMME AND 2027 PRACTICAL VOCATIONAL TRAINING (PVT)- ARTICLES PLACEMENT

1. The above matter refers;
2. The University of Venda School of Law Alumni Association (SLAA), hereby call on all interested parties, Law Firms, etc, to avail themselves to take in Final Year LLB Univen students for 2026 Summer (November / December) Vocational Work Programme. During this period, students are afforded an opportunity to observe what you do in your respective offices, this opportunity to observe shall add value to what they learn at the University curriculum and further be a motivation them. It closes the gap between substantive law and practical training. Students are expected to comply with all working conditions in your practice at **NO** remuneration as this is a training opportunity.
3. Furthermore, a plea is extended to all Legal Practices having capacity and willing to offer qualifying students with Law Degree, Practical Vocational Training (Articles) with effect from 2027 placement to also specify their availability and willingness to assist.
4. Interested parties in respect of the above can contact **Mr Harman Nethononda** on **078 7510 772** (Call / WhatsApp) OR on **info@hnattorneysinc.co.za** for further information.
5. We hope that the above is in order and we thank you in anticipation for your willingness to assist.

Adv Rudzani Michael Netshiavha

Chairperson | UNIVEN SLAA | Cell: 073 478 0154

Issued electronically and thus not Signed

Executive Committee: Adv Rudzani Michael Netshiavha (Chairperson), Adv Oscar Mudimeli (Deputy Chairperson), Adv N Ralikhuvhana (Deputy Secretary), Mr Harman Nethononda (Treasurer), Adv Tshembeka Constance Mukhari (Additional Member), Mr Samna Williams Kovani (Additional Member), Adv Ndwamato Eric Nwedo (Additional Member)

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