



University of Venda



@Univenofficial



universityofvenda



University of Venda Official



University of Venda
Creating future leaders

Speakers echo messages of Unity during Africa Day Commemoration

On 18 May 2026, the University of Venda's Freedom Square came alive with colour, music, and anticipation as students, academics, diplomats, and distinguished guests gathered to commemorate Africa Day, a celebration dedicated not only to honouring the continent's rich history and sacrifices but also to embracing its future with unity, pride, and determination. Beneath the university's inspiring motto, "Creating Future Leaders", the atmosphere reflected the true spirit of African solidarity as traditional attire, cultural performances, intellectual discussions, and messages of hope filled the square with energy and purpose.



Group photo of the dignitaries

The event served as a reminder that Africa Day is more than a ceremonial occasion; it symbolises the continent's ongoing journey towards unity, economic freedom, self-reliance, and the preservation of African identity. Yet beyond the carefully arranged programme of speeches and performances, the celebration carried a deeper meaning, for among the crowd stood individuals whose conversations, ambitions, and shared dreams would transform the day into the beginning of an unforgettable story.



Professor Fulufhelo Netswera, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Research and Postgraduate Studies, UNIVEN

The celebration commenced with a warm welcome from Professor Fulufhelo Netswera, who acknowledged university leadership, council members, guests, students, and the Ghanaian High Commissioner to South Africa.

Speaking with pride and conviction, he reflected on the significance of Africa Day, describing Africa as the cradle of civilisation and emphasising the continent's growing influence in global politics, economics, and technological advancement. His words carried a message of unity and self-determination, urging Africans to honour their history while boldly shaping the future they envisioned for the continent. To many in the audience, his speech felt less like a formal address and more like a heartfelt call for collective responsibility.



Mr Benjamin Quasshie, the High Commissioner of Ghana to South Africa

As the afternoon progressed, anticipation grew for the keynote address delivered by His Excellency Benjamin Anani Quasshie, the High Commissioner of Ghana to South Africa. Presenting under the theme "Advancing AfCFTA Through Engaged Scholarship: Diplomatic Perspectives on Regional Integration", he spoke passionately about African unity, regional integration, and the responsibility of higher education institutions in shaping the continent's destiny. He praised the University of Venda for embracing diversity by recruiting staff from across Africa and for investing in infrastructure that enhanced teaching, research, and accessibility. His acknowledgement of the university's commitment to African collaboration resonated deeply with students and academics alike.

Drawing inspiration from the vision of Kwame Nkrumah, Quasshie highlighted the African Continental Free Trade Area as a pathway towards economic independence, sustainable development, and continental self-reliance. He stressed that Africa's liberation could not end with political freedom alone, but must extend to economic transformation, intellectual empowerment, and stronger intra-African trade. Speaking with clarity and optimism, he explained that universities were central to this mission through research partnerships, student

exchange programmes, academic collaboration, and the recognition of indigenous knowledge systems that had long been overlooked. His message inspired many young people in the audience, who listened attentively as he challenged them to imagine an Africa shaped by Africans, for Africans.

Addressing the theme "Unity in Diversity", the High Commissioner encouraged Africans to see cultural diversity not as a source of division but as a foundation for strength, innovation, and progress. During the interactive question-and-answer session, discussions turned towards trade barriers, leadership, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. Quasshie acknowledged both the opportunities and challenges presented by AI, encouraging African nations to work together in creating policies that would protect African interests while using technology to advance development and economic growth. His thoughtful responses sparked meaningful conversations among students who saw themselves as part of a new generation capable of transforming the continent.



Dr Segun Obadire, Director of International Relations and Partnership, UNIVEN

Adding to the spirit of solidarity, Dr Segun Obadire delivered a word of support on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal. He reaffirmed the University of Venda's commitment to African unity, academic excellence, and internationalisation. Speaking under the theme "Unity in Diversity: Safeguarding African Integration in Universities", he highlighted the institution's efforts to promote global engagement, decolonised education, sustainable development, and student empowerment. His remarks encouraged African universities to strengthen partnerships through innovation, research, and exchange programmes, reminding students that they possessed the ability to turn Africa's challenges into opportunities for growth and transformation.

As the celebration drew towards its conclusion, the energy in Freedom Square remained alive with optimism and purpose. What began as a formal Africa Day gathering had evolved into something far more profound, a moment of reflection, inspiration, and renewed commitment to the continent's future. Long after the speeches had ended and the music had faded into the cool evening air, many who attended carried home more than memories of a successful event; they carried with them a deeper belief in the possibility of a united, self-reliant, and prosperous Africa built through knowledge, collaboration, and shared purpose.

Read inside

Speakers echo messages of Unity during Africa Day Commemoration 1

UNIVEN is at the Forefront of Building Sustainable Grants Management Systems in Higher Education 2

From Empty Cupboards to Endless Possibilities: UNIVEN and Dodani Foundation Restore Hope 4

Academic Doctors and Traditional Leadership Unite to Advance Education 6

UNIVEN Honours Students Gain Global Conservation Insight Through Innovative Teaching 7

CEMSSA Strengthens Regional Scientific Collaboration Through Strategic Visit to Zambia 8

Members of Community Engagement Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialisation participates at the Rhodes University Community Engagement Conference 9

FMCL Special Wellness Day Promotes Holistic Well-being and Human Connection in Leadership 10

Empowering Students Through Partnership: ABSA Donates to Thoho Ya Nzie Programme 11

Contestant from UNIVEN Green Technology Confucius Institute Gets the Second Prize in the 2026 "Chinese Bridge" Competition South Africa Finals 12



www.univen.ac.za

UNIVEN is at the Forefront of Building Sustainable Grants Management Systems in Higher Education (Part 1/2)

The University of Venda (UNIVEN) recently hosted the Customised Workshop about the University Led-University Capacity Development Programme (UL-UCDP) Project on Grants Management. This Workshop took place recently at the Birchwood Hotel, Oliver Reginald (OR) Tambo Conference Centre in Johannesburg. The workshop was convened under the theme "Strategic and Operational Grants Management: Building an Effective End-to-End System for Compliance, Performance and Institutional Growth." It brought together grants administrators, managers, directors, academics and research support staff to reflect on how historically disadvantaged institutions can strengthen grants management as a coordinated institutional system.



Delegates who participated in the UL-UCDP Grants Management Customised Workshop

The workshop created a platform for participants to engage with the full grants management lifecycle, from proposal development and award acceptance to implementation, monitoring, reporting, donor/funder liaison, close-out and institutional learning.

A central message throughout the programme was that grants management should not be treated as a routine administrative responsibility, but as a strategic function that protects institutional resources, supports compliance, builds donor/funder confidence and contributes to long-term institutional growth.

Mr Shiba Diketane highlighted that the grants management capacity project, initially conceived by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) as a small UCDP pilot for Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs), revealed broader sector-wide needs.

Evidence showed that grants management challenges extend beyond HDIs, requiring a framework for all higher education institutions and grants.

As the project nears close-out, stakeholder consultations will expand participation and strengthen national implementation.

Prof Lufuno Makhado, Project leader, followed with a presentation titled "Why Grants Management Matters for HDI", outlining the importance of treating grants management as a strategic function for compliance, delivery, donor/funder confidence, and institutional growth. He emphasised that grants management is more than the processing of funds, documents and reports.

According to his presentations, it is a strategic institutional function that enables an institution to convert a grant award into accountable implementation, credible results and future funding opportunities. He explained that effective grants management supports four critical areas: compliance, delivery, trust and growth.

Compliance ensures that donor/funder rules, institutional policies and reporting requirements are met. Delivery ensures that funded activities are implemented in accordance with approved plans and budgets. Trust is built when institutions demonstrate responsible stewardship, proper documentation and transparent reporting. Growth is achieved when strong performance and credibility position the institution for future funding for teaching, learning, research and innovation funding.

A key message from Prof Makhado was that institutions may succeed in attracting grants, but without strong systems they may still face serious operational, financial, compliance and reputational risks. He noted that weak grant management can result in delayed project start-up, unclear handovers, missed deadlines, unsupported expenditure, overspending, incomplete records, procurement gaps, audit findings and reduced donor/funder confidence. He therefore stressed that even technically strong projects can fail when the institutional grants management system is weak.

Prof Makhado also highlighted the importance of role clarity across the grants lifecycle. In his presentation on roles, responsibilities, and the responsibility assignment matrix (RACI), he explained that effective grant management depends on clear ownership, timely consultation, proper approvals, and a consistent information flow.

The RACI approach was presented as a practical tool to clarify who is Responsible, who is Accountable, who must be Consulted, and who should be Informed for each grant management task. His message was that good grants management is not only about having capable people; it is also about making responsibilities explicit before pressure is placed on the system.



Prof Fulufhelo Netswera welcoming delegates to the workshop

The programme opened with a welcome and opening addresses by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Postgraduate Studies at UNIVEN, Prof Fulufhelo Netswera who challenged institutions to actively pursue transformation. He emphasised the need for concrete, actionable plans that will enable historically disadvantaged institutions to overcome their status within the next five years. He encouraged collaboration among institutions, joint research initiatives, and the development of innovative solutions to address national and continental challenges such as water security. His message underscored the urgency of turning transformation from a concept into measurable action.



Prof Jabulani Makhubele, Director for Research and Innovation at UNIVEN providing the purpose and vision for the workshop

Prof Jabulani Makhubele outlined the purpose and vision of the training, noting that grants management is central to donor/funder confidence, compliance, performance and institutional growth.



Prof Lufuno Makhado emphasising grants management as a strategic institutional function

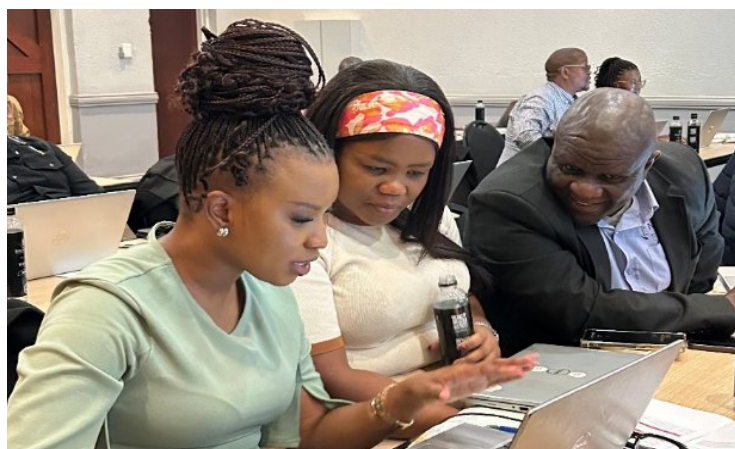


Mr Shiba Diketane, Director of Development Grants from the University of Limpopo, outlining the role of the project in institutional capacity development



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

UNIVEN is at the Forefront of Building Sustainable Grants Management Systems in Higher Education (Part 2/2)



Participants engaging on the role clarity, responsibilities and handover points across the grants lifecycle

Through this discussion, participants were reminded that grants administrators, grants managers and directors each play distinct but connected roles. Grants administrators are central to maintaining files, tracking deadlines, ensuring documentation integrity and supporting audit readiness.

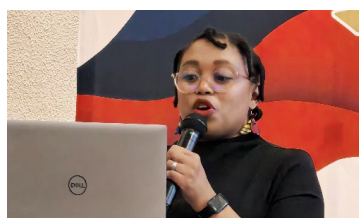
Grants managers monitor budgets and implementation, coordinate reports, manage risks and follow up on corrective actions. Directors provide strategic oversight, make resource decisions, review escalated risks and monitor portfolio performance.

The workshop stressed that weak handovers between these roles often create delays, confusion and avoidable compliance risks.

On the second day of the workshop, participants took part in role-based breakaway sessions for grants administrators, managers and directors.

These sessions were facilitated by experienced grants management experts, including Mrs Thato Tantsi from Nelson Mandela University and the Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA) delegate, as well as Dr Sinah Sekhula, who is the NRF Research Coordinator at UNIVEN and Prof Jabulani Makubele, who is the Director of Research and Innovation at UNIVEN and Project Co-leader.

The sessions allowed participants to reflect on their own institutional realities and to identify where grants management roles, approvals, documentation, reporting and communication processes could be strengthened.



Dr Sinah Sekhula, contributing to discussions on research coordination and grants management.



Mrs Thato Tantsi from Nelson Mandela University/SARIMA, facilitating role-based discussions

A cross-functional grants simulation was one of the workshop's practical highlights.

Participants worked through real-life grants management scenarios involving reporting deadlines, budget monitoring, documentation gaps, donor communication, compliance risks and escalation processes. The simulation demonstrated how weaknesses in one part of the grants system can affect the entire project.

It also encouraged collaboration, practical problem-solving and a stronger appreciation of how different institutional roles must work together.



University of Venda delegates who participated in the workshop

The final day of the workshop focused on institutionalisation and action planning. Prof Makhado guided participants through the process of designing a minimum grants management system for historically disadvantaged institutions.

He explained that such a system does not need to be complex, but it must be clear, consistent, compliant and usable by all relevant roles. The system should cover the full grants lifecycle and include defined responsibilities, required documents, deadlines, approvals and escalation points at each stage.

Participants were introduced to a set of practical tools that institutions should standardise. These included a grants lifecycle map, RACI matrix, grant start-up checklist, grant file structure, reporting calendar, budget monitoring template, risk and issue register, donor/funder communication log, approval tracking sheet, close-out checklist, portfolio dashboard and a 30–60–90-day improvement tracker. Prof Makhado emphasised that these tools do not need to be sophisticated, but they must be used consistently across all grants. Another important message from Prof Makhado was that institutions should not operate grants without minimum controls.

These controls include a signed grant agreement, an approved budget, a start-up briefing, documented approval for major budget reallocations, properly filed procurement evidence, internal review of donor/funder reports, and complete close-out documentation.

Key outputs from the workshop included compliance risk registers, RACI matrices, immediate corrective action plans, reporting calendars, donor / funder communication guidance and recommended system improvements. Participants also identified priority gaps and developed practical improvement roadmaps to guide implementation over the next 30 to 90 days. These roadmaps included actions such as adopting standard grant file structures, clarifying approval points, identifying high-risk active grants, introducing risk registers, piloting portfolio dashboards and standardising close-out procedures.

Mr Diketane congratulated the University of Venda for formulating a framework he believes is a valuable tool that can be adopted by other universities nationally, not just the HDIs. He indicated in his words that "the most captivating fact about this framework is that it was developed by an HDI university, and it is very rare". He further assured that his office is excited to offer additional support to the team and suggested future collaborations, which will be announced as they occur. UNIVEN was well represented by senior academic and professional staff, including Prof Jabulani Makhubele, Prof Lufuno Makhado, Prof Takalani Mashau, Mr Calvin Mulaudzi, Mrs Nontlanhla Ntakana, Dr Pelewe Mphphu, Dr Sinah Sekhula, Mr Bandile Mpukwana, Mrs Doris Mutobvu, Ms Maria Lethuba and Ms Renda Ravele.

In closing, Prof Jabulani Makhubele emphasised that the workshop provided practical tools and strategies to ensure that grants are managed efficiently, responsibly and strategically.

The workshop equipped participants with a clearer understanding of the systems, controls, roles and leadership actions required to strengthen compliance, improve donor/funder relationships and support sustainable research and innovation growth.

The UL-UCDP Grants Management Customised Workshop reinforced the message that effective grants management is not only about managing funds.

It is about building an institutional system that connects people, processes, evidence, controls and leadership decisions.

Through the guidance provided by Prof Lufuno Makhado and the contributions of other speakers and facilitators, participants left the workshop better prepared to strengthen grants management practice, improve accountability and position their institutions for future funding success.



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

From Empty Cupboards to Endless Possibilities: UNIVEN and Todani Foundation Restore Hope (Part 1/2)

On 15 May 2026, the University of Venda (UNIVEN)'s Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning (CHETL) Boardroom became a place of compassion, reflection, and renewed hope as students, UNIVEN staff members, and guests gathered for the Todani@70 Foundation's Food Parcels Handover ceremony. The ceremony highlighted the power of partnership, care, and social responsibility in supporting students facing hardships. Through heartfelt speeches and personal reflections, the programme reminded attendees that acts of kindness can change lives and strengthen entire communities.



Attendees of the Handover ceremony



Dr Takalani Morongwa, Student Counsellor, UNIVEN

Opening the programme, Dr Takalani warmly welcomed the University stakeholders, SRC representatives, and distinguished guests from the Dodani Foundation.

She acknowledged that the initiative came at a crucial time as students prepared for examinations while many continued to struggle with hunger, financial difficulties, and uncertainty.

Speaking with empathy, she reflected on the realities that staff members encounter when working closely with vulnerable students, noting that their struggles are often visible in their faces and circumstances.

Her remarks created a warm and compassionate atmosphere for the gathering.



Prof Lindiwe Mulaudzi, Director of the Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning, UNIVEN

Prof Lindiwe Mulaudzi explained that the purpose of the event was to hand over donations aimed at addressing food insecurity and accommodation challenges among students.

She highlighted the role of the Student Counselling and Development Unit (SCUDU), which works closely with students and has witnessed the growing impact of poverty on student life.

While some students receive NSFAS funding, she explained that the limited allowances are often not enough to sustain them throughout the day.

Prof. Mulaudzi reflected on how universities were once viewed as institutions for the privileged, but today they serve students from all social and economic backgrounds.

She stressed that many students now arrive at university carrying heavy financial burdens, making initiatives like this one essential.

She praised the Dodani Foundation for its continued support through food parcels and accommodation assistance, describing the contributions as invaluable in helping students remain focused on their studies rather than worrying about where their next meal would come from.



Mr Glenton Sambo, Manager: Communication, Digital Marketing and Stakeholder Relations, UNIVEN

Mr Sambo shared reflections from the perspective of staff members who work directly with struggling students.

He said that many of the hardships students experience remain hidden from their families and communities.

Counselling staff, he said, regularly witness stories of hunger, hopelessness, and students standing on the verge of dropping out because of poverty.

Despite the emotional toll, he noted that the team continues to find strength and motivation in seeing students graduate and become sources of hope for their families and communities.

For him, supporting one student often means changing the future of an entire household.



Mr Mzwakhe Matukane, Director for Advancement, Commercialisation and Strategic Partnerships, UNIVEN

Mr Matukane delivered words of appreciation while reflecting on his own journey from a rural village to higher education through financial aid support.

He explained that his personal experiences inspired his passion for student funding and resource mobilisation. Drawing from years of experience in higher education, he highlighted that although government funding supports many students, the need remains far greater than the resources available.

Partnerships with organisations such as the Dodani Foundation, therefore, play a critical role in ensuring that vulnerable students are not excluded from opportunities.

Mr Matukane also reflected on the harsh realities faced by students who miss classes and examinations because they are hungry or lack accommodation. He emphasised that every act of support extends far beyond the individual student, as many carry the hopes of entire villages and communities.

He described the donations not simply as charity, but as strategic investments in future leaders who will one day uplift others in return. Reflecting on his own upbringing, he shared how the support he once received inspired him to encourage young people in his community to pursue higher education.

He thanked the foundation for its ongoing partnership with the university and expressed hope for even stronger collaboration in the future.



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

From Empty Cupboards to Endless Possibilities: UNIVEN and Todani Foundation Restore Hope (Part 2/2)



Dr Dannie Mamburu from
Todani@70 Foundation



Mr Calvin Mogale, Students' Representative
Council President, UNIVEN



Mr Andisani Mathelemusa, Head of Student Governance,
UNIVEN

Responding on behalf of the foundation, Dr Dannie Mamburu spoke passionately about the organisation's commitment to supporting disadvantaged students.

Reflecting on his own difficult upbringing and educational journey, he explained how poverty shaped his life and strengthened his desire to give back to communities.

He stressed that hungry students struggle academically and highlighted the importance of ensuring that students receive accommodation and support, especially during examination periods.

Dr Mamburu reaffirmed that the foundation was "here to stay" and described the relationship between the university and the foundation as one of family rather than a temporary partnership.

He encouraged stronger cooperation between the institution and the foundation to ensure that resources and support reach students effectively and without delay.

Speaking on behalf of students, SRC President Mr Calvin Mogale expressed sincere gratitude to the foundation for choosing to invest in the University of Venda.

He described the initiative as planting seeds of hope in students' lives, seeds that would one day inspire recipients to help others in return.

Mr Mogale spoke openly about the struggles many students face, including hunger, lack of funding, and the inability to afford necessities such as bread.

He praised the efforts of the foundation and university leadership in ensuring that students receive support, particularly during examinations, and expressed confidence that the donations would make a meaningful difference.

Delivering the vote of thanks, Mr Andisani Mathelemusa praised the foundation for demonstrating parents' care and responsibility towards students. He reflected on the severe social and economic hardships many students endure, explaining that some are forced to support entire families using their limited allowances while struggling to survive themselves.

In one of the programme's most powerful moments, he described the donation as "a peace agreement between students and their empty cupboards", capturing both the seriousness of student hunger and the dignity restored through acts of generosity. Mr Mathelemusa further commended the strong partnership between the University of Venda and the Dodani Foundation, noting that their collaboration continues to bring hope, dignity, and opportunity to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As the programme came to an end, it was clear that the event represented far more than the handing over of food parcels. It was a reminder that compassion, unity, and shared responsibility have the power to restore hope and transform lives.



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

Academic Doctors and Traditional Leadership Unite to Advance Education

In a powerful demonstration of humility, leadership, and community service, a group of academic doctors from the University of Venda recently paid homage to Thovhele Makumbane Thivhulawi at Tshisahulu. The visit reflected deep respect for traditional leadership while strengthening the relationship between academia and indigenous governance in community development.



L-R: Dr Israel Mulaudzi, Dr Livhuwani Tshikukuvhe, Dr Livhuwani Makumbane, Dr Colbert Mukwevho, Thovhele Thivhulawi Makumbane, Dr Mulatedzi Mulaudzi, Dr Fulufhelo Sikhwari, Dr Ndiambani Makhavhu

During the engagement, the academics expressed appreciation for the leadership and guidance of Thovhele Makumbane and pledged their commitment to supporting educational development in schools under his leadership.

They emphasised the urgent need to improve academic performance and increase the number of learners obtaining Bachelor passes to qualify for admission into universities and other higher education institutions.

The delegation proposed a series of outreach programmes aimed at empowering learners, teachers, School Governing Bodies (SGBs), and parents.

They stressed that educational success requires collective responsibility from all stakeholders and highlighted the importance of discipline, effective study methods, time management, and academic commitment among learners.

The doctors further underscored the need to workshop teachers, parents, and SGB members on their respective roles and responsibilities in creating a conducive learning environment. According to the delegation, restoring discipline and accountability in schools is essential for improving teaching and learning outcomes.

In a profound show of humility, the academics acknowledged that despite their qualifications and achievements, they remain servants of the community who respect and submit to traditional leadership structures.

They noted that both academic and traditional leadership are responsibilities entrusted by God for the benefit of communities and future generations.

Thovhele Makumbane warmly welcomed the delegation and described the visit as historic, noting that it was the first time he had witnessed academic

doctors formally paying homage to the royal family in such a respectful manner. He commended the delegation for its spirit of humility, respect, and service, and expressed appreciation for its commitment to advancing education within the community.

The royal family extended warm hospitality throughout the engagement, while the academics carefully observed all cultural protocols as a sign of respect for traditional authority.

The atmosphere of unity and mutual respect highlighted the important role that collaboration between traditional leadership and academia can play in community upliftment.

The visit stands as an inspiring example of how education, culture, and leadership can work together to strengthen communities, empower young people, and create better opportunities for future generations.



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

UNIVEN Honours Students Gain Global Conservation Insight Through Innovative Teaching

The Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Venda continues to strengthen innovative teaching and student development through the BIO 5111 Conservation Biology Honours module, coordinated by Dr Tshililo Mphephu and Prof Lourens Swanepoel, Interim NRF SARCHI Research Chair in Biodiversity Value and Change.



In the picture: Conservation honours students attending a guest lecture at the SARCHI Museum Hall in the Department of Biological Sciences, Life Science Building

To expose students to practical, career-driven, and globally relevant conservation perspectives, Dr Mphephu introduced an interactive teaching approach by inviting local, national, and international conservation experts to engage students through guest lectures on Microsoft Teams.

Dr Mphephu said the initiative aims to make honours students globally competitive by connecting them with experienced professionals across various conservation fields. He encouraged other academics to adopt collaborative teaching approaches that bridge classroom learning with real-world expertise and international opportunities. Although only three experts participated this academic year, he described the initiative as a valuable step towards expanding students' professional networks and global exposure.

The first guest lecture focused on conserving native biodiversity to support natural enemies used in suppressing agricultural pests. The session highlighted the ecological importance of biodiversity conservation

in promoting sustainable agriculture and biological control programmes. It was presented by Mr Jufer Musedeli, a researcher from the Insect Ecology division at the Agricultural Research Council Plant Health and Protection in Pretoria, with more than a decade of experience in the field.

The second lecture explored entrepreneurship within the environmental and conservation sectors. Students were encouraged to view their academic training as a foundation for becoming independent ecologists and conservation practitioners capable of serving both private companies and government institutions.

The session was delivered by Mr Jerry Molepo, founding director of Mora Consulting (Pty) Ltd, a biodiversity impact assessment company operating across South Africa. Significantly, Molepo is a University of Venda alumnus and former BIO 5111 student, reflecting the long-term impact of the programme in developing conservation professionals.



Dr Edwin Tambara lecturing students on current global conservation issues via Microsoft Teams

The final lecture broadened students' understanding of biodiversity conservation beyond South Africa by focusing on global conservation challenges and international wildlife conservation practices.

The session was presented by Dr Edwin Tambara, Director of Global Leadership at the African Wildlife Foundation in the United States of America.

Students gained valuable insight into the intersection of conservation science, international policy, leader-

ship, and global cooperation in addressing biodiversity loss and wildlife protection.

Reflecting on the session, Dr Mphephu acknowledged that the lecture highlighted the need to further strengthen and expand the current teaching scope of BIO 5111.

Students actively engaged with the presentations and expressed appreciation for the module's relevance to both local and international conservation priorities.



In the picture: Conservation honours students on an early morning game drive while conducting wild animal population assessments at the Maremane Nature Reserve.

To complement their theoretical and professional engagements, students also participated in practical conservation activities at Maremani Nature Reserve, gaining hands-on field experience within a local conservation landscape.

As part of the initiative, students reflected on their learning experiences. One student, Mr Ronald Molebela, noted that the programme helped students identify whether their interests lie in fieldwork, laboratory research, or academia, while also highlighting entrepreneurship opportunities within conservation biology.

All guest lecturers expressed interest in continuing to contribute towards the academic and professional development of students enrolled in the BIO 5111 module.

In addition, an assistant professor from the Life Science Department at Louisiana State University has commended the initiative and committed to joining the programme as a guest lecturer from 2027, focusing on global conservation of aquatic systems.

This collaborative teaching initiative reflects the University of Venda's commitment to providing transformative learning experiences that connect academic training with real-world conservation challenges and global opportunities.



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

CEMSSA Strengthens Regional Scientific Collaboration Through Strategic Visit to Zambia

The Director of the UNIVEN's Centre of Excellence in Mass Spectrometry in Southern Africa (CEMSSA), Prof Edwin Madala, recently led a strategic scientific visit to the Copperbelt University (CBU) in Zambia as part of efforts to advance regional integration and strengthen scientific collaboration across the SADC region. He was accompanied by Prof Luke Chimuka (Wits) and Prof Ashwell Ndhala (UL) following an invitation from the Head of Chemistry at CBU. The visit builds on CEMSSA's broader regional engagement programme, which previously included a similar outreach visit to the University of Zimbabwe in March 2025.



The visiting professors standing with the management of CBU. From left to right: Prof. Indra Singh (Head of Chemistry), Prof. Paul Chisale (Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs), Prof. Edwin Madala (CEMSSA), Prof. Imasku Anayawa Nyambe (Vice-Chancellor), Prof. Luke Chimuka (Chemistry), Prof. Kenneth Maseka (Dean of Science), Prof. Ashwell Ndhala (Plant Sciences), and Prof. Bernard Hang'ombe (Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation)

During the visit, the delegation held high-level engagements with CBU leadership, including the Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellors and Director of Research.

Discussions focused on strengthening collaboration between researchers at CBU and CEMSSA, expanding existing partnerships, and enhancing research capacity in mass spectrometry and analytical sciences.

The collaboration between the institutions has already yielded tangible outcomes. Earlier in 2025, two Chemistry students from CBU visited the University of the Witwatersrand and later conducted research on mass spectrometry at the University of Venda.

During their stay at UNIVEN, more than 50 plant extracts were analysed using advanced mass spectrometry systems.

Faced with challenges in interpreting complex MS data, the students received support from the UNIVEN team and were introduced to SIRIUS software, significantly improving their data analysis capabilities.

A major focus of the visit was the urgent need for investment in high-speed computing infrastructure to support the growing demands of MS data analysis.

CBU management expressed a commitment to investing in entry-level analytical instrumentation to enable local scientists to conduct preliminary analyses in-house while benefiting from shared MS data generated through collaboration with UNIVEN.

The engagements also extended to the government level, with a Director from Zambia's Ministry of Science participating virtually in discussions.

The Ministry highlighted challenges with several non-functional HPLC systems procured in Zambia, due to

limited technical expertise, and requested support from the visiting delegation to assist in restoring the equipment and to advise on future scientific infrastructure procurement.

The Ministry further commended the establishment and operational model of CEMSSA, particularly its strong emphasis on capacity building and regional collaboration.

Through CEMSSA, Prof Madala committed to continued support for CBU scholars with mass spectrometry-related research needs.

The collaboration has already resulted in three manuscripts currently under development from shared datasets, with at least two publications anticipated within the year.



Prof. Edwin Madala delivering a public lecture at CBU on mass spectrometry research conducted at UNIVEN

As part of the academic programme, the three visiting professors delivered lectures in their respective areas of expertise. Prof Madala presented a lecture titled "From UHPLC-MS Metabolomics to Metal Protection: Cinnamic Acid Derivatives as Green Corrosion Inhibitors." The presentation resonated strongly with the university community, particularly given CBU's location in Zambia's mining-intensive Copperbelt Province. The lecture highlighted the potential use of plant-derived compounds as environmentally friendly corrosion inhibitors and provided insight into the chemical complexity of plant systems and the influence of environmental factors on metabolomic diversity. The visit also included capacity-building sessions on manuscript and proposal writing, which were especially well received by junior academic staff. The professors shared practical guidance on developing high-quality, publishable scholarly work and strengthening research competitiveness.

On the final day, Prof Madala delivered a lecture on the application of artificial intelligence in scientific data analysis. The session explored how tools such as ChatGPT and Google Colab can be used alongside Python programming to analyse scientific data and generate simplified infographic models for MS data reporting. The lecture also addressed the ethical use of AI in academia, emphasising its value as a tool for learning, innovation and productivity while cautioning against misuse in generating unsupported academic content. The visit marked another important milestone in advancing scientific collaboration, research capacity and regional integration within Southern Africa. Discussions toward finalising a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the institutions are underway, with expectations that the partnership will continue to grow and deliver impactful scientific outcomes across the region.



Prof. Madala, together with two other visiting professors, poses for a photo with CBU Chemistry staff after the writing workshop.



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

Members of Community Engagement Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialisation participates at the Rhodes University Community Engagement Conference



L-R: Prof Vhonani Netshandama, Mr Rendani Nematswerani, Ms Nnakiseni Nemadodzi, and Dr Nyadzani Dolphus Nevhudoli at the Conference

The International Community Engagement Conference 2026 that was held under the theme "Higher Education Community Engagement: Reparative Futures for the Cultivation of Humanity," took place from 5 - 7 May 2026 at Rhodes University in Makhanda, Eastern Cape Province.

The purpose of the conference was to bring together academics, practitioners, policymakers, students, and community partners to reflect on and strengthen the role of higher education institutions in advancing socially responsive scholarship, human development, social justice, and transformative community engagement.

The conference further sought to explore how universities can contribute towards reparative futures by embedding humanity, inclusivity, ethical leadership, and collaborative knowledge production within teaching, research, and community engagement practices.

On the first day of the conference, Prof Netshandama participated as a panelist in a dialogue titled: 'Higher Education Institutions as Reparative Universities: The Inclusion of Human Values Education in Community Engagement Policies for the Cultivation of Humanity,' further deepening critical conversations on embedding human values within institutional policies and practices.

Professor Netshandama shared the stage with Dr Rajesh Tandon who is the Founding President of Participatory Research in Asia and Co-Chair United

Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education and other eminent scholars.

The panel discussions focused on topical questions, one of which was 'How can human values education be embedded in community engagement policy in ways that transform practice rather than become another compliance requirements' - to which Prof Netshandama's response put emphasis on the power of intentionalisation, inducting students on critical cross-field competencies so that the students' awareness and sensitivities maybe triggered.

This came on the eve of her contribution through a book chapter entitled Cultivating Humanity: Reflexivity in Higher Education Community Engagement in South Africa.

This is part of the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) work with other universities, convened by Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCE) team.

The keynote addresses were delivered by esteemed guests, including Dr Rajesh Tandon, Dr Sharli Paphitis, and Professor Tim Eatman who focused on transformative role of universities and reparative justice to youth citizenship, knowledge systems, and publicly engaged scholarship, contributing to rich dialogue on the future of higher education.

Speakers highlighted that Universities are disconnected from lived realities of communities. They amplified by showing real pictures of what communities would be worrying and protesting about whilst the university nearby has unengaged 'experts' in the field that the communities could benefit from. They further indicated that, knowledge systems still shaped by colonial structures and epistemicide.

Speakers called for ecologies of knowledge: recognising oral traditions, lived experience, rituals, local practices as legitimate knowledge. Shift from Eurocentric knowledge to plural, community-rooted epistemologies.

Prof Saleem Badat and Prof Mabizela indicated that Universities must redefine their social purpose and that Community Engagement should not be peripheral, it must be centred on teaching, research, and innovation.

They emphasised that engagement must be dialogical, reflexive and co-constructed. Universities must act as anchor institutions, and evaluation must move beyond metrics to relational processes.

The conference highlighted a fundamental shift on the way universities conceptualise and practice community engagement.

A central lesson was the transition from engagement as a technical or outreach activity toward a framework of reparative justice, requiring universities to actively address historical injustices, challenge extractive research traditions, and build ethical, reciprocal partnerships with communities.

This reorientation is closely linked to a second shift from knowledge transfer to knowledge co-creation, where communities are recognised not as passive beneficiaries but as co-producers of knowledge, with mutual learning and shared authority at the centre of scholarly practice.

The Conference underscored the importance of shifting from disciplinary silos to systems thinking approaches, emphasising interdisciplinarity, participatory methodologies, and ecosystem-based perspectives to address complex social challenges.

Collectively, these lessons signal a paradigm shift toward context-responsive, justice-oriented, and co-produced models of higher education transformation.

"The discussions on reparative justice, Ubuntu, social innovation, and the Scholarship of Engagement resonated with UNIVEN's vision and mission of being a leader in engaged scholarship, a socially responsive university that advances human development through collaborative partnerships and student centred and community-centred approaches," said Dr. Nevhudoli Nyadzani Dolphus.



L-R: Prof Tim Eatman, Prof Darren Lortan, Prof Busiswe Nkonki-Mandleni, Prof Andre Keet, Dr Rajesh Tandon and Prof Vhonani Netshandama during panel discussion



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

FMCL Special Wellness Day Promotes Holistic Well-being and Human Connection in Leadership

The Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law (FMCL) hosted a highly engaging Special Wellness Day. This wellness day took place on 14 May 2026 at the Old Maths Building Boardroom. It brought together Heads of Departments, Special, and Administrative Staff in a shared commitment to strengthen holistic well-being in the workplace. The wellness-focused engagement was aimed to provide a supportive environment for senior leadership to reflect on their personal well-being, professional demands, and overall wellness. Recognising the pressures associated with leadership roles, the programme was intentionally designed to address both the mental and physical dimensions of well-being, fostering a more balanced and sustainable approach to leadership.



Group photo of the attendees



Prof Tharien van der Walt, Executive Dean,
Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law

In her opening remarks, Prof Tharien van der Walt set a warm and informal tone, welcoming participants and acknowledging the realities of busy leadership roles, including constant connectivity through laptops and mobile phones.

Light-hearted exchanges about work pressures and the difficulty of switching off from duties added a relatable, human dimension to the day, reminding everyone that they were not only professionals but individuals navigating similar challenges.



Ms Zama Mopai leads communication exercise

The programme unfolded through a series of interactive and deeply practical sessions designed to connect wellness with everyday life.

Ms Zama Mopai, Lecturer in the Department of Public Law in the School of Law, led a communication activity that revealed how easily messages can be distorted when passed through multiple people, highlighting the impact of stress, assumptions, and poor communication on teamwork. The session created a relaxed yet reflective space where leaders were encouraged to pause and consider the balance between their professional responsibilities and personal health.



Mr Samuel Baloyi,
Coach from Par Excellence

Guest Mr Samuel Baloyi delivered a powerful reflection on self-care, emotional intelligence, and leadership, emphasising that true wellness begins internally.

He encouraged participants to cultivate self-awareness, discipline, and healthy boundaries, while also warning against the emotional toll of negativity, overwork, and unhealthy workplace dynamics.

The discussion that followed was open and honest, with participants sharing real workplace experiences and exploring how confidence, patience, and emotional control influence professional relationships.



Precious Lebea from the Department of Biokinetics,
Recreation and Sports Science, UNIVEN

A strong focus was placed on physical well-being through an interactive session facilitated by Precious Lebea from the Department of Biokinetics, Recreation and Sports Science at the University of Venda. She introduced biokinetics as the use of movement and exercise as medicine, explaining how it supports both physical recovery and mental wellness.

Her presentation connected everyday workplace habits, such as prolonged sitting, laptop use, and stress, to conditions like back pain, fatigue, and reduced concentration. Through practical demonstrations, participants engaged in blood pressure checks, grip strength testing, and simple stretching techniques, making the science of movement both accessible and immediately applicable. The session was well received as staff experienced first-hand how small, consistent movements can ease tension and improve overall well-being. The day concluded with guided breathing and stretching exercises that encouraged participants to release tension in the neck, shoulders, and back, reinforcing the importance of movement in managing workplace stress. Across all sessions, there was a strong sense of openness, participation, and shared learning, as managers reflected on their own wellness journeys and workplace challenges.

The FMCL Executive Managers' Wellness Day ultimately highlighted that effective leadership is not only about performance and productivity, but also about self-care, emotional balance, and the ability to sustain one's well-being in demanding environments.



Attendees participating in breathing and stretching exercises



Male and female groups portray how the message can be distorted



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

Empowering Students Through Partnership: ABSA Donates to Thoho Ya Nzie Programme

On 18 May 2026, the spirit of compassion and partnership filled the CHETL Boardroom at the University of Venda as ABSA Bank officially handed over a donation to the Thoho Ya Nzie Student Welfare Programme. The event marked more than a ceremonial occasion; it symbolised a shared commitment towards uplifting students and restoring hope to those facing financial and social hardships. Distinguished university officials, student leaders, and representatives from ABSA gathered to celebrate an initiative aimed at strengthening student welfare and promoting academic success. Through heartfelt speeches and words of appreciation, the programme reflected the power of collaboration between higher education institutions and corporate stakeholders in building a brighter and more inclusive future for young people.

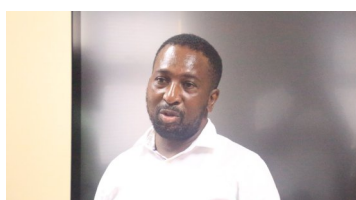


Stakeholders



Mr Mzwakhe Matukane, Director for Advancement, Commercialisation and Strategic Partnerships, UNIVEN

Mr Mzwakhe Matukane, Director of Advancement, Commercialisation and Strategic Partnerships at the University of Venda, warmly welcomed representatives from ABSA Bank, University stakeholders, and student leadership during the donation handover programme. In his remarks, he expressed sincere appreciation for ABSA's presence and the continued support towards student welfare initiatives, highlighting the importance of building meaningful partnerships that contribute to the well-being and success of students. He further acknowledged UNIVEN staff members from various University departments, including Finance, Student Governance, and the Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning, for their collaborative efforts in strengthening institutional relationships and advancing student support programmes at the university.



Mr Glenton Sambo, Manager: Communications, Digital Marketing and Stakeholder Relations

Mr Glenton Sambo expressed a sincere appreciation to ABSA Bank and all stakeholders for their support towards student welfare initiatives at the University of Venda, highlighting the significant impact such contributions have on students facing financial hardship and food insecurity. He noted that many vulnerable students can continue their studies, regain hope, and avoid academic exclusion thanks to these initiatives. Mr Sambo further described the support as an investment that will pave a better future for both students, society and ABSA, emphasising that the students being assisted today may one day become successful professionals who will also give back to their communities and society. He encouraged continued partnerships that place student wellbeing at the centre of development and transformation. Mr Sambo concluded by stressing that empowering young people through education remains one of the strongest tools for breaking the cycle of poverty and building a better future for generations to come.



Mr Calvin Mogale, SRC President, UNIVEN

Mr Calvin Mogale acknowledged ABSA Bank for its continued support towards vulnerable students, highlighting the daily challenges faced by many unfunded students who struggle to access food and other necessities while pursuing their studies. He noted that initiatives such as the university's breakfast drive play a vital role in ensuring that students write examinations with dignity and focus. Mr Mogale further emphasised the importance of partnerships that uplift disadvantaged students and contribute towards academic success, student wellbeing, and long-term social transformation. He added that many students remain hopeful and continue with their academic journey because of the support received from caring stakeholders and institutions. He concluded by encouraging stronger collaborations that place the needs and well-being of students at the centre of development initiatives.



Prof Lindiwe Mulaudzi, Director of the Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning (CHETL), UNIVEN

Prof Lindiwe Mulaudzi, expressed sincere gratitude to ABSA Bank for supporting the Thoho Ya Nzie Student Welfare Programme, highlighting the importance of assisting vulnerable students facing food insecurity and financial hardship.

She emphasised that all donations are distributed through a transparent screening process to ensure that support reaches deserving students, while also encouraging more organisations to partner with the university in advancing student wellbeing and success. Prof Mulaudzi further noted that many students silently struggle to meet their daily needs, making such contributions essential in restoring hope and dignity.

She described the partnership as a meaningful investment in the future of students and the broader community.



Mr Relax Baloyi, ABSA Acquisition Banker

Mr Relax Baloyi, ABSA Acquisition Banker, expressed sincere appreciation for the growing partnership between ABSA Bank and the University of Venda, highlighting the bank's commitment to supporting vulnerable students through meaningful initiatives. He shared that conversations inspired the donation initiative with student leaders and the realisation that many students struggle with hunger and financial hardship while trying to pursue their studies. Drawing from personal understanding and empathy, Mr Baloyi emphasised that every student's story matters and that even small contributions can restore hope, dignity, and opportunity. He further described the partnership as an investment in the future, noting that the students being supported today may one day become leaders and professionals who will positively transform their communities and society.



Mr Andisani Mathelemusa, Head of Student Governance, UNIVEN

Mr Andisani Mathelemusa expressed profound gratitude to ABSA Bank and all stakeholders for supporting the Thoho Ya Nzie Student Welfare Programme, describing the partnership as a powerful investment in the dignity, well-being, and future of students facing financial hardship. He emphasised that although many beneficiaries remain unseen, the support they receive through initiatives such as breakfast programmes and welfare assistance plays a vital role in helping them continue with their studies and preserve their confidence. Reflecting on the spirit of Ubuntu, Mr Mathelemusa shared an inspiring story about former Chief Justice Raymond Zondo to highlight the importance of extending kindness and support without expecting anything in return. He concluded by reminding attendees that meaningful change is achieved when communities work together to uplift one another, ensuring that no deserving student is denied an opportunity to succeed because of poverty.



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

Contestant from UNIVEN Green Technology Confucius Institute Gets the Second Prize in the 2026 “Chinese Bridge” Competition South Africa Finals (Part 1/2)

On 14 May 2026, Ndinale Kevinae Mapila (Ma Kaiwen) from the Green Technology Confucius Institute (GTCI) at the University of Venda (UNIVEN) got the second prize at the South Africa Finals of the 25th “Chinese Bridge” Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students, held at the University of the Western Cape. Competing against 22 top students from leading South African universities, including the University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University, Rhodes University, University of Johannesburg, and Durban University of Technology, Kevinae stood out, and his achievement marks the best result in UNIVEN's history. Another contestant from UNIVEN, Tshililo Khwathisi (Wang Li), was awarded with an encouraging prize.



The “Chinese Bridge” competition was themed “One World, One Family” and consisted of three sections: a written test (knowledge of China), a themed speech (Chinese Language Ability), and a talent showcase (Chinese Cultural Skills), comprehensively evaluating contestants’ Chinese proficiency and learning achievements. In the opening written examination round, Ndinale Kevinae Mapila scored an outstanding 95 points, tying for first place and laying a solid foundation for his exceptional performance in the subsequent stages of the competition.

During his time in Wuhan, he witnessed China's social development firsthand and experienced the warmth and friendliness of the Chinese people. He recalled that whenever he heard the welcoming greetings of local China residents, he felt as though the winding Yangtze River was connecting people across the world. In his speech, he mentioned that, as the younger generation, they have a responsibility to explore the world and to build more bridges. His remarks offered a profound interpretation of the theme “One World, One Family.”



In the subsequent speech section, contestants shared their personal China stories and interpretations of the theme “One World, One Family”. Drawing on his experience visiting the ancient chime bells in Wuhan, Hubei Province, Mapila Ndinale Kevinae spoke about his understanding of the philosophy of “harmony in diversity”. In his speech, he explained that the most distinctive feature of the chime bells is their ability to produce “two tones from one bell”—when struck at different points, a single bell generates two distinct yet harmonious musical notes. He said that this perfectly reflected his understanding of “One World, One Family”: although people come from different civilisations and express different voices, a spirit of inclusiveness allows mutual respect and harmonious coexistence despite differences.



During the talent section, Tshililo Khwathisi (Wang Li) performed a medley of the Chinese songs ‘I rise to face the World and Song of the Mermaid.’ With his melodious voice, dynamic delivery, and engaging stage presence, he took the audience into a captivating musical world. Mapila Ndinale Kevinae then took the stage to recite the Tang Dynasty classic ‘Invitation to Wine’. With his spirited energy and passionate performance, he captured the audience's attention from the very first line. Through his powerful yet lyrical delivery, he immersed the audience in the bold and majestic spirit of the Tang Dynasty. Following the poetry recitation, Kevinae surprised the audience with a Tai Chi sword performance. As he delivered the final sweeping strike, the venue erupted in enthusiastic applause and cheers.



Another contestant from GTCI, Tshililo Khwathisi (Wang Li), shared his experiences from participating in a “Chinese Bridge” student exchange program in China.

At the end, Mapila Ndinale Kevinae secured second prize with an overall third-place ranking in the competition. This marks the first breakthrough for UNIVEN in this world-renowned Chinese language contest and represents a significant milestone for the GTCI since its establishment two years ago.

As a non-Chinese major who had studied Chinese for only two years through GTCI's interest classes, Kevinae made history. GTCI made history. UNIVEN made history.



From UNIVEN to the national stage, and from the Chinese classroom to the forefront of international cultural exchange, the two GTCI students demonstrated the outstanding qualities of UNIVEN's young scholars through their impressive language skills, confident stage presence, and deep understanding of Chinese culture.

Their achievements also highlight GTCI's remarkable success in advancing international Chinese-language education and promoting cultural and people-to-people exchanges between China and South Africa.



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

Contestant from UNIVEN Green Technology Confucius Institute Gets the Second Prize in the 2026 “Chinese Bridge” Competition South Africa Finals (Part 2/2)



Warm congratulations to the two GTCI contestants for their outstanding achievements! Sincere thanks are extended to GTCI instructors—Mr. Ted XIONG and Ms. Gloria GUI, sponsoring organisations, and everyone who has accompanied and encouraged the students throughout their journey of growth.

Special appreciation goes to the event organiser, the Confucius Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine at the University of the Western Cape.

Looking ahead, the GTCI will continue to use the Chinese language as a bridge to cultivate more outstanding talents with global perspectives and intercultural communicative competence, contributing to deeper exchanges and cooperation between China and South Africa in education, humanities, and technology.

Below are photos of other contestants:



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

We would like to hear from you!

Nendila is your communication channel.

Nendila editorial committee:

Dr Takalani Dzaga
Chief editor

Mr Glenton Sambo
Editor

Welheminah Mabogo
Coordinator

Peter Mashishi
Contributor

Rofhiwa Mukwevho
Pfariso Makhado
Interns

Mushoni Mulaudzi
Preservation (Library)



SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO:

Welheminah Mabogo,
Nendila Coordinator
University of Venda,
Private Bag x5050
Thohoyandou, 0950

CONTACT DETAILS:

Tel: 015 962 8525
e-mail: welheminah.mabogo@univen.ac.za

If you spot
anything out of
the ordinary on
campus

contact the University
Hotline by calling
toll free number

0800 212 755

or email:

univenhotline@tip-offs.com

**Improper conduct
includes the following:**

1. Financial misconduct,
2. Misuse or misappropriation of University assets,
3. Health and safety risks,
4. Plagiarism,
5. Fraud and corruption.



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders