



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders



UNIVEN

Research & Postgraduate Studies

NEWS



VOLUME 01
JUNE 2026

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| Welcome Message

Research Management and Administration

Prof Fulufhelo Netswera: Deputy Vice Chancellor: Research and Postgraduate Studies



I am delighted to have made the conscious decision to join the University of Venda (UNIVEN) as the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) for Research and Postgraduate Studies in October 2025. I envision a UNIVEN that ranks among South Africa's Top Five most influential and impactful research universities in the coming ten years. It is important that we contextualise the message and make everyone understand what "influence" and "impact" mean, which have little or nothing to do with UNIVEN's size or shape.

UNIVEN's vision, "...to become a leading university in engaged scholarship" is one of the most progressive public university vision and should be the standard by which we gauge UNIVEN's influence and impact. Hence, UNIVEN's statement of Positioning is for "...Relevance, Excellence and Impact".

To concretise UNIVEN's vision through the Research and Postgraduate Studies Division in our next five-year plan (2026 – 2030), we have prioritised, among others, the following:

Prioritise locally relevant research and innovation work, among our students and academics and through our various partnership agreements, that resonates with our indigenous knowledge systems in all its manifestations, i.e., in agriculture, medicine, culture and heritage.

To prioritise what we term “ONE health”, making sure that our relevant programmes are geared towards supporting healthy living styles through agriculture, nutrition, and other social support programmes.

Promote entrepreneurship among both our students and social entrepreneurship out there in the society that we serve.

We have therefore, in our Research and Postgraduate Studies Divisional Extended Performance Plan 2030, prioritised, among other things, the following, to unlock UNIVEN’s potential impact in our regional context and beyond:

Increase the number of PhD-holding doctoral staff members from 54% to 75% in line with the requirements of South Africa’s National Development Plan 2030. For this reason, we have developed a policy on expectations for doctoral qualifications among our academic staff members. A variety of programmes are offered within faculties and through the Research Office to support our staff members.

Increase the number of research groups, i.e., Centres of Excellence and Institutes. It has been proven that only when researchers work in groups and interconnected networks nationally and internationally, they become more innovative and tackle problems that appear insurmountable to individuals. We have developed a policy to establish centres and research institutes to advance this noble objective. We also continue to support high-flyers among our staff members in becoming NRF-rated researchers and research chairs.

UNIVEN currently hosts FIVE research Institutes as reflected hereunder, and we intend to increase these research groupings to TEN by 2030:

- African Musicology Institute led by Prof Geoff Mapaya
- Institute for Pathogen and Global Health, led by Research Prof Pascal Besong
- Institute for Rural Development led by Prof Joseph Francis
- Green Technology Confucius Institute led by Prof Eric Maluta
- Occupational Health and Safety in Mining Institute led by Prof Lindiwe Zungu

The number of UNIVEN Research Chair Initiatives (SARChI) that are sponsored by the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation and the National Research Foundation (DSTI/NRF) are currently five. SARChI is awarded at either Tier 1 or Tier 2, attracting R3 or R2 million annually, which helps the group appoint postdoctoral fellows, provide bursaries to postgraduate students, and cover operational research costs.

Our intention at UNIVEN is to double this number by 2030. The five that are currently operational are:

- Chair in Biodiversity Value and Change Research awarded in 2017 (Tier 1), led by Prof Lourens Swanepoel
- Chair in Water and Environment awarded in September 2025 (Tier 2), led by Prof Rachel Makungo
- Chair in Antimicrobial Resistance and Global Health awarded in Nov 2025 (Tier 1), led by Prof Pascal Obong Besong
- Chair in Livestock Science for Society awarded in Nov 2025 (Tier 1), led by Prof Michael Chimonyo
- Chair in Climate Change and Rule of Law awarded in Nov 2025 (Tier 1), led by Prof Ademola O. Jegede
- Chair in Entrepreneurship awarded in Nov 2025 (Tier 2), led by Prof Hlanganipai Ngirande

Increase joint conceptualised collaborative research programmes with our stakeholders, e.g., municipalities, traditional authorities, government departments and other organisations. We intend to encourage future research projects carried out by groups of students and researchers that are more visible, have wider coverage, entail a broader scope of work, and are therefore more impactful in policy and practice. For this reason, UNIVEN shall enter into agreements with municipalities, traditional authorities and other stakeholders for collaborative funding and execution of grand research projects.

In subsequent newsletters, either I, the Director of Research and Innovation (Research Management and Development), or the Deputy Deans of Research and Postgraduate Studies, who are responsible for research planning, support and execution in our four faculties, shall share their plans and achievements. We shall also bring you stories of success from the Directors of Research Institutes, Research Chairs, NRF-rated researchers, and postgraduate students (i.e.,

master's and doctoral students), as well as from our alumni. Our intention is that this Newsletter, henceforth monthly, bring to our readers, locally and internationally, important information about UNIVEN's continued embeddedness of its research programmes in society, highlighting various achievements.

The Research and Postgraduate Studies Division embraces evolving technological innovation and, as a result, shall henceforth embark on the extensive use of social media, i.e., YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, among others, to profile its researchers, innovations, and entrepreneurial ventures and experiences.

I hope that the plans we share, the stories of our success and achievements showcased through this platform, or those mentioned above, will draw your attention and that you will enthusiastically await the release of our Newsletter each month.

Champions of Change: Meet UNIVEN's NRF Decadal Plan Research Chairs



Livestock Science for Society Chair:
Prof. Michael Chimonyo

Tier level: 1 | **CESM:** Agriculture, Agricultural Operations and Related Sciences (CESM 01)

Decadal Plan Domain: Nutrition security

SDG: SDG 2 – Zero Hunger

At the heart of rural African livelihoods lies livestock such as chickens, goats, sheep, pigs, donkeys and cattle, on which at least four out of five rural communities depend for food and income. Understating this vital connection, Prof. Chimonyo, a renowned B3 NRF-rated researcher, leads the DSTI/NRF Livestock for Society SARCHI Chair (Tier 1) at the University of Venda. His vision is to blend cutting-edge scientific innovation with traditional knowledge to boost nutrition security for those who need it most, including the sick, the elderly, children, and pregnant women.

The Chair aims to explore the immense potential of indigenous livestock production while identifying climate-smart, unconventional feeds to improve animal health and productivity. Moreover, the Chair focuses on integrating both indigenous and conventional wisdom to ensure water security for livestock, enhancing reproduction efficiency, productivity, milk output, and meat quality/safety. It dives deep into the interconnectedness of livestock productivity, food and nutrition security, sustainable livelihoods, and human health. It further aims to engage directly with traditional-councils and grassroots communities, thus weaving Indigenous Knowledge into its research, uplifting local voices and practices.

In the first year, the Chair is set to launch an exciting and impactful major conference, creating a platform that unites a diverse array of experts, from animal scientists and food technologists to sociologists, rural development specialists, and gender studies scholars. This multidisciplinary research team will collaborate closely, ensuring that students receive guidance from a panel of supervisors representing various fields. This innovative approach will enable theses and dissertations to tackle livestock issues from multiple perspectives. To share insights and findings with the wider community, the Chair will leverage policy briefs, host dynamic feedback workshops, and encourage participation in the conference.

This initiative is fully aligned with UNIVEN's Strategic Plan for 2026-2030, which prioritises innovative solutions to combat hunger and rural poverty, critical challenges for our society. The Chair's efforts also resonate deeply with South Africa's National Development Plan, the African Union Agenda 2063, the NRF's Vision, and the Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger (SDG 2). Together, we are paving the way for transformative change and meaningful societal impact!



Community Antimicrobial Resistance (CAR) Chair:

Prof. Pascal Obong Bessong

Tier level: 1 | **CESM:** Life Sciences (CESM 13)

Decadal Plan Domain: Health Innovation – Improving Quality of Healthcare

SDG: Good Health and Well-being; SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is stealthily emerging as one of the most pressing global health threats we face today, yet the nuances of this crisis, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), often go unnoticed due to a lack of comprehensive data. Tackling this critical gap head-on is Prof. Bessong, who is an internationally recognised virologist and global health researcher, and is a director of the SAMRC-UNIVEN Antimicrobial Resistance and Global Health Unit, Institute for Pathogen and Global Health Research, and also leads the DSTI/ NRF Research Chair in Community Antimicrobial Resistance (CAR) (Tier 1) at the University of Venda.

With a B2 NRF rating and recognition as a Fellow of the African Academy of Sciences, his expertise positions him at the forefront of addressing one of humanity's most daunting challenges: the rise of drug-resistant infections. While AMR affects us all, Prof. Bessong focuses on the unique socio-economic and environmental drivers of AMR in the context of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), which remain understudied and poorly understood yet are critically important.

This gap limits the effectiveness of evidence-based interventions and policy development. The vision of the Chair is to establish a multidisciplinary platform that generates nationally relevant evidence, empowers communities, and builds leadership to tackle AMR at the community level. This evidence-based approach will inform public policy and stewardship efforts. The Chair's objectives reflect a holistic strategy to produce robust data on nationally relevant drug-resistant priority bacteria to inform policy and decision-making; co-produce ethnographically relevant educational materials for AMR stewardship; and train and mentor future leaders in AMR epidemiology and global health.

CAR's work is truly cross-cutting; it integrates infectious disease epidemiology and microbial genomics to track

resistance patterns in the gut, hydrometeorology to study how climate affects bacterial spread, clinical psychology and ethnography to understand human behaviours around antibiotic use, and data science to model AMR trends. The team is examining fascinating hypotheses, such as the idea that colonisation and carriage of enteric-resistant bacteria begin early in life and are influenced by background microbiota; hydrometeorological changes impact the acquisition of the enteric bacterial resistome; and demonstrating how responsive dialogues and community engagement can create scientific data and culturally appropriate materials for AMR stewardship.

The anticipated outcomes of this groundbreaking initiative are impressive. They include generating high-quality, longitudinal data on AMR dynamics in LMIC communities; developing community-driven educational resources for AMR stewardship; and strengthening capacity and leadership in AMR epidemiology and global health. By producing the first long-term, community-based AMR dataset in a South African context, the CAR Chair will fill critical gaps in global AMR knowledge.

These insights will enable policymakers and health practitioners to devise more effective interventions in resource-limited settings. The mission of this Chair is not only aligned with national and global health goals, including UNIVEN's Strategic Plan 2026-2030, NRF's vision, and Sustainable Development Goal 10 aimed at reducing inequalities, but it also builds a research platform that puts rural communities and health leaders at the forefront of the battle against the quiet pandemic of drug resistance. This journey is driven by rigorous science and the strength of local partnerships, ensuring that communities are equipped to face this challenge head-on.



Climate Change and the Rule of Law (CCRL) Chair:

Prof. Ademola Oluborode Jegede

Tier level: 1 | **CESM:** Law (CESM 12)

Decadal Plan Domain: Interdomain, climate change and environmental sustainability, future society, energy and circular economy.

SDG: SDG 13 – Climate Action

Climate change is not just an environmental issue; it presents a complex web of legal and governance challenges that connect local communities to global institutions. At the forefront of exploring these crucial intersections is the Climate Change and the Rule of Law Chair, led by the esteemed Prof. Jegede. As a full Professor of Law and a C2 NRF-rated researcher, he has dedicated his career to understanding how climate change influences our legal frameworks. With valuable experience as a research visitor at prestigious institutions such as the Centre for International Environmental Law in the USA and the Human Rights Institute at Abo Akademi in Finland, Prof. Jegede delves deep into how climate change and biodiversity loss impact the human rights of vulnerable groups.

As the Interim Director of the Ismail Mahomed Centre for Human and Peoples' Rights at UNIVEN, he champions the rights of those often overlooked in discussions about climate justice. His groundbreaking research sits at the crossroads of climate change, biodiversity, and human rights, shaping a vision for the DSTI/NRF Climate Change and the Rule of Law (CCRL) SARCHI Chair (Tier 1) at the

University of Venda.

The Chair aims to critically examine how legal frameworks, from local by-laws to international treaties, must evolve to both protect the environment and respond to the challenges posed by climate change. Through his work, he aims to illuminate the path toward a more equitable and sustainable future. Second, it explores New Technologies for Climate Protection (NTCP), Renewable Approaches and the Rule of Law.

The immediate adaptation and long-term mitigation measures aimed at reducing or removing emissions raise substantial questions about whose voices and interests will be served and who will benefit from the emerging legal and policy regime. This stream examines the legal implications of proposed and familiar sustainability solutions to climate change, including NTCP, nature based, market-based, and technology-based solutions. Third, it interrogates the Climate Rule of Law and Populism. There is a need for a better understanding of how climate change and the rule of law are intimately interlinked at every level of governance, to address

the threats climate change poses to the rule of law and the opportunities the rule of law offers in responding to climate change. This research stream aims to interrogate whether and how the pressure of populism may shape legal responses to climate change and sustainability. Finally, the Chair examines Climate Change Lawyering, Litigation, and Judging. How is the standard of climate lawyering unfolding? How can spheres of law best respond to climate change and redress climate wrongs? The potential role of courts and the hurdles to climate litigation are also central questions that require attention. academic scrutiny within this stream, amid concerns about investor-state disputes in the fossil fuel sector, where investors are litigating against states that aspire to end fossil fuel use.

By highlighting the voices of the marginalised groups and the challenges of implementing climate norms, the Chair aims to ensure that South Africa's legal system is prepared to uphold climate justice. This work directly advances SDG 13 Climate Action by strengthening the rule of law as a tool for environmental governance. Prof Jegede's leadership in climate law scholarship is epitomised by his book on climate change and indigenous land rights, which positions him to connect UNIVEN's research to continental priorities in sustainability and human rights. In doing so, the CCRL Chair embodies the UNIVEN Strategic Plan for 2026-2030 key strategic thrust of Health, Environment and People while informing policy and empowering communities to navigate the legal dimensions of climate change.



Entrepreneurship Chair:
Prof. Hlanganipai Ngirande

Tier level: 2 | CESM: : Business, Economics and Management Studies - 04 Decadal Plan Domain: Innovation in support of social progress – increased percentage of publicly funded intellectual property utilised by start-up innovation companies and SMMEs

SDG: SDG 1 – No Poverty

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities

Tackling unemployment and fostering inclusive economic growth are critical priorities on South Africa's development agenda, especially in the rural heartlands of Limpopo. In this challenging landscape, Prof. Ngirande's Entrepreneurship SARCHI Chair (Tier 2) stands out as a powerful force, dedicated to unlocking the potential of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. As a professor of Industrial Psychology at

the University of Venda (UNIVEN), he is on a mission to explore how strategic human resource management (HRM) and innovation can ignite entrepreneurship in underserved communities.

This initiative is not just an academic exercise; it directly responds to South Africa's pressing need to reduce

poverty and create jobs (aligned with SDG 1 and SDG 8). In rural areas, where opportunities are often scarce, entrepreneurship is recognised as a vital engine for job creation. However, many small businesses in these communities struggle against significant challenges, including a lack of institutional support and ineffective management practices. Prof. Ngirande's work aims to turn these obstacles into opportunities, empowering local entrepreneurs and paving the way for sustainable growth.

This Chair's vision is to decode and strengthen the entire entrepreneurial ecosystem, establishing a nationally and internationally recognised research hub that produces high-quality knowledge on entrepreneurship and HRM, while it contributes to inclusive economic growth, sustainable livelihoods, and human capital development in South Africa and comparable emerging economies. It will advance theory and evidence on how local networks, technology adoption and inclusive practices affect business growth, and it will integrate HRM strategies to support entrepreneurs. For example, one objective is to develop practical frameworks that weave HR management into entrepreneurship policy and training, thus equipping small firms to grow sustainably. Another goal is to mentor postgraduate researchers at Honours, Masters and PhD levels in industry-engaged projects and comparative studies, building national research capacity in entrepreneurship.

Key themes include innovation-driven enterprise development, inclusive entrepreneurship, e.g. women, youth and rural entrepreneurs, and the role of HR practices in SMME success. This exciting research initiative will embrace a dynamic, multi-faceted approach that blends qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method designs. Key components will include guiding postgraduate and postdoctoral students, conducting research in collaboration with industry and community stakeholders, and exploring comparative ecosystem studies. The programme will be supported by strategic collaborations with national and international partners and by NRF funding through the South African Research Chairs Initiative. Research will be organised around themes of entrepreneurial ecosystems, innovation and technology adoption,

inclusive entrepreneurship and HRM-driven enterprise. The research is expected to produce peer-reviewed publications, completed Honours reports, Master's and Doctoral theses, postdoctoral outputs, policy briefs, and applied frameworks for entrepreneurs.

The Chair will also strengthen entrepreneurial capabilities, improve HRM practices in SMMEs and enhance local entrepreneurial ecosystems, particularly in rural contexts. In addition, the Chair will support enterprise sustainability, skills development and socio-economic transformation while positioning South Africa as an important contributor to global entrepreneurship scholarship.

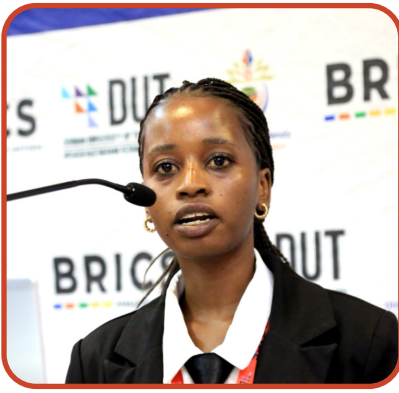
In alignment with UNIVEN's 2026-2030 Strategic Plan and Vision 2040, Prof. Ngirande's work directly addresses the University's push to promote entrepreneurship and innovation. It also supports national priorities, such as South Africa's National Development Plan and Agenda 2063, by providing roadmaps for inclusive growth and skills development. By strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystems in Limpopo, the Chair helps reduce inequalities and prepare communities for the 4th industrial revolution, truly putting the University's mission of social progress into practice. As these exceptional Research Chairs chart new frontiers for the University of Venda, they embody the spirit of rigorous inquiry, community engagement and societal transformation.

Whether empowering rural farmers to overcome hunger, combating the global health threat of AMR, crafting equitable legal frameworks for climate justice, or nurturing local enterprise, their work has real-world impact far beyond academia. Each Chair perfectly illustrates UNIVEN's commitment to impact on society and positions the University as a leader in addressing global challenges through African-focused scholarship. We hope this introduction has ignited your curiosity and pride in UNIVEN's research endeavours. In future issues, we will dive deeper into each Chair's projects, impact and the inspiring people behind the science.

UNIVEN and BRICS Research Institute Hosts the Spirit of Bandung at 71 Conference: Rekindling African Liberation and Global Solidarity

Prof. Fulufhelo Netswera and Prof. Siphamandla Zondi





In an inspiring display of academic collaboration and intellectual engagement, the University of Venda and the BRICS Research Institute came together on April 21, 2026, to host a groundbreaking hybrid conference, marking the 71st anniversary of the landmark 1955 Bandung Conference in a contemporary context. This vibrant event gathered a diverse array of scholars, practitioners, and creative minds from around the globe, all driven by a shared passion for exploring the lasting impact of the anti-colonial struggle, the complexities of development, and the relentless pursuit of global justice. The original Bandung Conference, held in 1955 in Indonesia, was a watershed moment in history, uniting newly independent nations from Asia and Africa in their quest for sovereignty and in their resistance to colonial rule. Delegates sought to chart pathways toward equitable development and foster peaceful coexistence among nations. Now, over seven decades later, the 71st anniversary conference held at UNIVEN, the first of its kind in Africa, aimed to reconnect with this profound legacy, delving into its significance in today's intricate global landscape, characterised by shifting geopolitical realities, economic hurdles, and ongoing struggles for true economic and political freedom and justice.

The primary goal of this conference was to critically examine the enduring legacy of the Bandung Conference through a distinctly African lens. Participants focused on African political thought, diplomatic practices, and the liberation experiences that have shaped the continent's history of decolonisation. Special emphasis was placed on the nations represented at the historic 1955 conference, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Libya, Sudan, and South Africa. The contributions and historical journeys of

these countries provide rich insights into the Bandung moment and its lasting influence on today's ongoing quests for equity and justice.

The conference was a vibrant convergence of ideas, uniting sixty-six passionate participants from eight distinct African nations: Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Cameroon, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and South Africa. Adding an exciting dimension to the gathering were representatives from Indonesia, India, and China, as well as thought leaders from Brazil, Turkey, Italy, and Canada. The event was a showcase of diverse perspectives, with ten participants presenting their insights in person and fifty-six others joining virtually, reflecting an impressive multidisciplinary approach.

Attendees delved deep into a range of fields, from political history and international relations to African studies, political economy, and the complexities of decolonial thought. Instead of merely viewing the Bandung Conference as a historical event, they embraced it as a dynamic political reference point, a lens through which the contemporary issues of African sovereignty, development, and global governance could be re-examined. Key themes included the crucial role of African nations during the Bandung Conference of 1955, its implications for African liberation movements, and its significance in the context of Pan-Africanism and non-alignment. Participants passionately explored post-colonial statehood, neo-colonialism, south-south cooperation, and the pressing global challenges Africa faces today.

The conference was graced by remarkable keynote

speakers, including Prof. Fulufhelo Netswera, the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research and Postgraduate Studies at UNIVEN. He kicked off the event with an inspiring call for unity, solidarity, and inclusive development in the spirit of Bandung. His message was that African scholars should reclaim their narratives, viewing knowledge production as a means to liberation through rigorous research and creative expression. Prof. Netswera emphasised that the spirit of Bandung is not a relic of the past; it should inform contemporary struggles across Africa and in Palestine, underscoring the importance of unity and inclusivity in tackling global injustices. Other esteemed speakers included Prof. Mpho Ngoepe, Prof. Stanley Liphadzi, and Prof. Kedibone Phago, Dean at the University of Mpumalanga. Emeritus Professor Darwis Khudori from Université Le Havre Normandie in France delivered a keynote address virtually, while Prof. Siphamandla Zondi, the Director of the Institute for Pan African Thought and Conversation at the University of Johannesburg, provided another compelling keynote. Professor Khudori illuminated the Bandung Conference's historical significance as a pivotal moment in global power dynamics, where newly independent Asian and African states asserted their sovereignty beyond Western dominance.

He cautioned against emerging economies, particularly in Asia, falling back into extractive, consumer-driven models that they once challenged. He urged a revival of the Bandung Spirit through Africa-Asia solidarity, calling for just, inclusive, and sustainable development pathways. Prof. Zondi articulated the ongoing relevance of BRICS as a contemporary continuation of the Bandung vision. He described BRICS as a hybrid strategy that combines development finance, institutional reform, and coordinated global engagement, while also acknowledging the internal tensions and geopolitical rivalries at play. Ultimately, he positioned BRICS as a bridge-builder for the Global South, imperfect but crucial in reshaping a more balanced and cooperative world order. Beyond the stimulating discussions, the conference generated tangible outcomes. An impressive 125 research abstracts and 66 full manuscripts were submitted, exceeding all expectations. Each submission went through a rigorous double-blind

review, paving the way for several upcoming publications, including three to four edited volumes derived from these notable contributions.

As Prof. Netswera beautifully emphasised, the preservation of academic works in print is essential for making a lasting impact. This effort will empower students and faculty across UNIVEN and its partner universities to weave these fresh perspectives from the Global South into their curricula for generations. The conference wasn't just about scholarly discourse; it also embraced creativity, with a call for poetry and a heartfelt tribute to the vibrant spirit of Bandung. From a remarkable 47 submissions, a distinguished panel curated 18 poems for the Bandung Commemorative Poetry Volume. These powerful reflections on freedom and protest, voiced by emerging poets from Africa and Asia, added a dynamic flair to the proceedings. The highlight was the passionate performance of "We Refuse the Silence" by Mr Kingdom M. Moshounyane during the opening ceremony, reminding us all that liberation extends beyond policy papers, it's also about storytelling and igniting passion. This conference was an exhilarating fusion of scholarship and creativity, signalling that the pursuit of justice is far from over, with the spirit of Bandung continuing to glow brightly and inspire action in the 21st century.

Crucially, the event was intricately tied to UNIVEN's newly adopted Strategic Plan for 2026–2030, which embraces four vital thrusts: student-centeredness, research innovation and entrepreneurship, people, health and environment, and internationalisation and partnerships. The Bandung conference particularly propelled two of these thrusts forward: research and innovation, generating groundbreaking scholarship and fresh research ideas, while simultaneously enhancing international collaboration by linking UNIVEN to BRICS networks and other Global South platforms. Excitingly, a follow-up seminar series will showcase conference speakers alongside student research projects, offering co-authorship opportunities. The Research and Postgraduate Studies Division will monitor the impact of the conference through key indicators such as publication

numbers, citation counts, joint grants, and international postgraduate enrolment growth. These metrics align with our division's strategic key performance indicators under the new plan.

As Prof. Netswera noted in his closing remarks, Bandung is not just a chapter in history; it is a clarion call to action. The collaborative spirit ignited by the conference is now firmly embedded in our future plans. Moving forward, each department is encouraged to reflect on how their work aligns with the themes of Bandung, whether the Arts faculty delves into Pan-African culture or the Economics

school examines post-colonial trade dynamics. As we move towards implementing these innovative ideas, let's embrace the vision set forth in the National Development Plan, which asserts that building a brighter future requires decisive, measurable actions from all societal actors.

As the 80th anniversary of Bandung approaches, UNIVEN indeed aims to rise to the occasion once more, amplifying diverse voices, deepening insights, and fostering greater solidarity in our shared quest for justice and equity.

| Bridging Knowledge and Community: Prof Takalani Mashau and Dr Ndidzulafhi Mudau visit the University of Zimbabwe

Prof Takalani Mashau





On picture above: Dr Ndidzulafhi Mudau



The Deputy Dean for Research and Postgraduate Studies in the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education (FHSSE), Prof. Mashau accompanied by Dr Ndidzulafhi Mudau, visited the University of Zimbabwe on the 8th-10th of April 2026, where he delivered a compelling lecture under the title Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) as Engines of Community Development in Southern Africa. The presentation focused on reclaiming African epistemologies that have long been sidelined in mainstream development conversations. The lecture took a deep dive into how IKS underpin sustainable livelihoods through agroecology and water harvesting, support health and holistic wellbeing via traditional medicine, and promote environmental

stewardship through indigenous land tenure and biodiversity conservation. Prof Mashau also did not shy away from the challenges posed by fragmented policy frameworks and scant institutional support, which leave IKS underutilised in national development agendas.

His call to action urged both scholars and policymakers to move beyond tokenism and embed IKS at the core of academic research and policy formation. On the 9th of April, Dr N Mudau led an engaging workshop aimed at postgraduate students and academic staff. The session covered key topics such as effective time management, the art of critical writing over mere description, ethical

research integrity, and the vital role of dissemination to ensure research matters outside ivory towers. Dr Mudau highlighted the mantra from excellence to impact, encouraging a shift from purely scholarly output to socially responsive research that addressed real world problems.

This focus resonates strongly with the growing call to equip African universities as engines of innovation and relevance. Further discussions were held with the Director of the Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development Institute and the Department of Philosophy, Religion and Ethics, uncovering exciting multidisciplinary opportunities, underscoring institutional commitment and aligning with broader goals such as rural and industrial development. On the 10th of April, the team visited the sprawling University of Zimbabwe farm, which was a true testament to integrated agricultural scholarship and food security innovation.

The farm boasts over 310 hectares of maize, along with

livestock and agro-processing operations, including poultry, baking, and animal feed production. This living lab not only sustains the university community, feeding thousands weekly, but it also provides invaluable practical training for students. In later engagements with the Department of Community and Social Development revealed dynamic academic programmes blending sociology, criminology, and social innovation with a firm commitment to community empowerment. The holistic approach of this department just goes to show how universities can truly be engines of social transformation, marrying theory with applied research to meet the needs of the local communities.

This exchange between both universities truly captured a powerful momentum, a movement to decolonise academia, boost research relevance, and build sustainable partnerships keyed into regional realities.

UNIVEN Launches South African BRICS Youth Association (SABYA) Chapter



Left: Prof. Segun Obadire, Director of International Relations and Partnerships, University of Venda

Right: Mr Raymond Matlala, the National Chief Executive Officer of the South African BRICS Youth Association (SABYA)



Left: : Mr Mirero Makhado, Directorate of International Relations and Partnerships

Middle: Mr Tsundzuka Hakamela, the International Students Administrator in the International Relations and Partnerships Office at the University of Venda

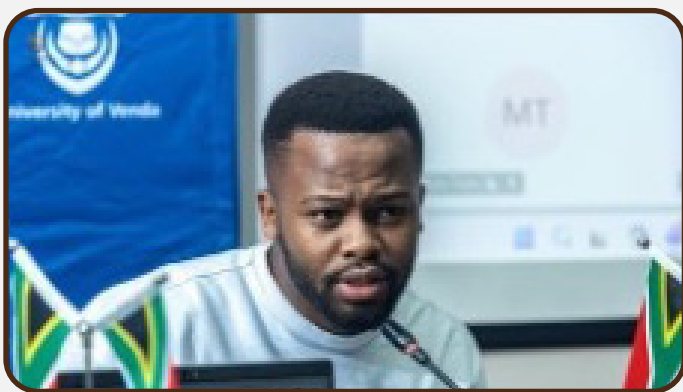
Right: Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Postgraduate Studies at the University of Venda, who also serves as Director of the BRICS Research Institute, Professor Fulufhelo Netswera



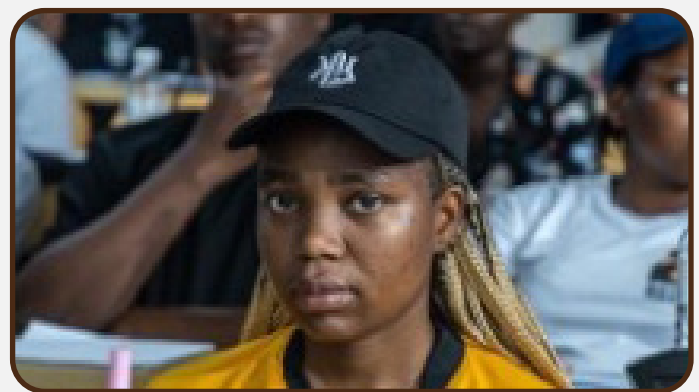
Dr. Keamogetse Morwe, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Youth in Development at the University of Venda, within the FHSSE



Professor Lutendo Murulana, the Deputy Dean for Research and Postgraduate Studies at the University of Venda within the FSEA



SRC Chairperson of Postgraduate Committee, Mr Sejaleotja Tleane



SRC Minister of Information, External and International Relations, Ms Nature Mathebula

The University of Venda proudly launched the South African BRICS Youth Association (SABYA) UNIVEN Chapter on the 16th of April 2026, marking a significant milestone in the university's commitment to youth empowerment, innovation, and research as per its Strategic Plan 2026-2030. The launch event, held under the inspiring theme of Empowering Youth for Inclusive Economic Growth through Innovation and Research, brought together distinguished guests, university leaders, students, and community stakeholders to celebrate a new chapter of opportunity and collaboration. The programme commenced with opening and welcome remarks from Dr Segun Obadire, the Director of UNIVEN's Directorate of International Relations and Partnerships. Dr Obadire formally acknowledged all distinguished guests and stakeholders present, extending a heartfelt appreciation to the members and colleagues of his department whose collective efforts made the launch possible.

Mr Raymond Matlala, the National Executive Officer of SABYA, took centre stage to introduce the organisation in detail, its vision, mission and impact. He shared the inspiring story of SABYA's formation in 2018, highlighting its core motives, roles, vision, mission, impact and strategic objectives. He emphasised SABYA's unwavering commitment to empowering young people within society and local communities, as well as its growing impact within academic institutions. His presentation also painted a clear picture of SABYA as a vital platform where youth can access opportunities, develop their skills and contribute meaningfully to economic and societal development.

Mr Mirero Makhado in his role as Assistant International Relations Officer and Guardian of the SABYA UNIVEN Chapter, expressed strong support for the launch, formally introducing the executive committee of the SABYA UNIVEN Chapter, highlighting the diverse and passionate group of young leaders ready to steer chapter towards success. The Programme Director, Mr Tsundzuka Hakamela, the International Students Administrator at UNIVEN, introduced the keynote speaker, Prof. Netswera who delivered a powerful keynote address, expressing his full support of the launch of SABYA at UNIVEN, describing it as a landmark

initiative that advances students' academic development, economic empowerment and active engagement in research and innovation. He further highlighted SABYA's role as a unique platform where students can access innovative ideas and developmental resources without needing to look elsewhere. He encouraged students to seize this opportunity to grow as leaders, researchers, and entrepreneurs, emphasising that the future belongs to those who innovate and collaborate.

Ms. Maideledzha Tendani, the Information Officer from the Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency (Vhembe Office), delivered an informative address outlining the agency's wide range of financial and non-financial support designed to empower young entrepreneurs. Her presentation further emphasised the commitment of the agency to opportunities, mentorship and training programmes. Mr Mbulaheni Ndivhuwo, a trainer in the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) Thulamela branch, followed with a developmental presentation, detailing the NYDA's comprehensive youth development services, including, both financial and non-financial support. He explained how the agency provides training in business management, supports start-up ideas, and offers funding to young people with viable business concepts.

Dr Keamogetse Morwe, the Senior Lecturer in the Department of Youth in Development within the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education (FHSSE) at UNIVEN, delivered a passionate message of support, both financial and non-financial support. She explained how the agency provides training in business management, supports start-up ideas, and offers funding to young people with viable business concepts. Prof. Lutendo Murulana, the Deputy Dean for Research and Postgraduate Studies in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture at UNIVEN, also expressed strong support for the initiative, assuring attendees that his faculty stands ready to assist SABYA in advancing its mission through education, science, research, and innovation. He further advised that the attendees be responsible leaders and innovators who can distinguish

between right and wrong, professional integrity, morality and immorality.

Representing the University of Venda Convocation, Ms. Shonisani Masutha, the Executive Committee Member of Convocation, delivered a message of support, explaining the role of Convocation within the university and how its objectives align closely with those of SABYA. Ms. Masutha emphasised the importance of collaboration between Convocation and SABYA in advancing youth development and institutional growth. The Student Representative Council (SRC) also voiced its support through the Chairperson of the Postgraduate Committee, Mr. Sejaleotja Abel Tleane, and the SRC Minister of Information and International Relations, Ms. Nature Mathebula. They highlighted the alignment between SABYA's objectives and those of the SRC, pledging to work closely with the association to achieve shared goals and foster mutual development among students.

As the launch drew to a close, Ms. Sibara Kone, a member of the SABYA Executive Committee at UNIVEN, delivered the closing remarks and announcements. She expressed sincere appreciation to all guests, students, stakeholders, and attendees for their support and participation. The launch concluded on a high note with a vibrant cultural performance by the University of Venda Sports and Recreation, Arts and Culture team. The launch of the SABYA UNIVEN Chapter provided a dedicated platform for young leaders, opening doors to opportunities that will shape students' futures and their communities. As this exciting chapter unfolds, UNIVEN looks forward to seeing SABYA members thrive as innovators, entrepreneurs, and researchers. Together with its partners and stakeholders, UNIVEN is ready to support this vibrant community of young leaders as they contribute to building a more inclusive and innovative society.

| Faculty of Science, Engineering & Agriculture (FSEA) Hosts First-Entering Masters and PhD Induction: A Rallying Call for Research Excellence, Integrity and Impact

Deputy Dean for Research and Postgraduate Studies - Prof. Lutendo Murulana





Head of Student Governance, Mr Andisani Mathelemusa



Ms Khathutshelo Phadziri, Scholarly Communications and Information Support Librarian



Mrs Raphalalani from Research and Innovation



Mr Rudzani Mamphweli, Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialisation (DCEEIIC)



Prof. Ntakadzeni Madala, C1-rated, FSEA



Prof. MM Kabanda, FSEA



Prof. Lufuno Makhado, Y2-rated Researcher, Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS)



Attendees of day 1 (13 May 2026) pose for a group picture



Attendees of day 2 (14 May 2026) pose for a group picture

On the 13th and 14th of May 2026, the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture (FSEA) at the University of Venda convened its first entering Master's and PhD cohort at the 2Ten Hotel, Thohoyandou, Limpopo, for a transformative induction. The event was a no-holds-barred, brutally honest engagement with the realities, challenges and expectations facing UNIVEN's postgraduate students and staff; a decisive declaration of purpose, a blueprint for academic and entrepreneurial excellence, and a call to action for the next generation of researchers and innovators. The induction began with an opening message from Prof. Lutendo Murulana, the Deputy Dean for Research and Postgraduate Studies, who spoke on behalf

of the Executive Dean of FSEA, Prof. Natasha Potgieter. He laid bare the university's strategic trajectory through the Strategic Plan 2026-2030, a roadmap anchored on four strategic pillars: Student-Centeredness; Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship; People, Health and Environment; Internationalisation and Partnerships.

Prof. Murulana emphasised that this strategy is not just theoretical but also actionable; every process, policy, and programme is designed to create an enabling ecosystem in which postgraduate students thrive. But these goals come with uncompromising demands; students must graduate on time, actively publish, and contribute practical solutions to real-world problems. He warned

that delay and stagnation were no longer acceptable. “We want graduates who don’t just get degrees, but who make an impact.” He urged students to leverage the university’s resources and supervisory expertise to graduate promptly and with purpose and guard against becoming those who just register and forget. He underpinned this by the ARISE Value Chain model, which includes Admission, Retention, Instruction, Scholarship, and Enhancement, ensuring quality student admissions, robust support systems, high-quality supervision, and an environment conducive to learning and discovery.

The induction truly tackled real-world issues head-on, including recent campus unrest that disrupted academic activities. Mr Andisani Mathelemusa, Head of Student Governance, addressed the traumatic police incursion into postgraduate residences during protests, offering a formal apology and assuring students of ongoing engagement with authorities to safeguard campus safety. He also underscored the crucial role of student governance in advocating for postgraduate interests in academic, social, and welfare matters. He outlined the comprehensive support available, including the Campus Health Unit, which offers 24-hour medical care and counselling; the Student Housing Department, which manages dedicated postgraduate residences providing safe, study-friendly environments; and the Sports Unit, which promotes physical wellness and cultural diversity. He urged students to leverage these support structures and engage with elected postgraduate leadership to solve problems effectively. His core message was that postgraduate students are a vital community whose welfare matters deeply to the university. He highlighted student-led initiatives such as student-owned campus tuck shops, which provide financial aid and foster entrepreneurship among students.

Ms Khathutshelo Phadziri, Scholarly Communications and Information Support Librarian, showcased the

library’s extensive digital and print resources that support postgraduate research. They demonstrated how students could harness advanced search tools, databases such as Sage Research Methods, and institutional repositories to deepen their literature reviews and strengthen their scholarship. This was coupled with an important reality check: many students underutilise these resources or lack the skills to use them effectively. Noting this, the faculty has committed to providing ongoing library training to help students master research methodologies and effectively access the latest scientific knowledge. Guidance was further offered on managing research data, preparing research protocols, and navigating the complex ethical landscape. Students were urged to develop rigorous research management plans and to see publication not as an optional add-on but a core academic obligation. “A postgraduate degree without published work is incomplete.”

Mrs Raphalalani from the Research and Innovation Directorate provided an in-depth overview of the funding sources available to assist postgraduate students in their academic pursuits. She elaborated on the different types of funding, including scholarships, grants, and bursaries, highlighting the specific criteria and eligibility requirements for each source. During her presentation, she meticulously walked students through the entire application process, outlining essential steps such as gathering necessary documentation, completing application forms, and writing compelling personal statements. She emphasised the importance of meeting deadlines and provided tips to increase the chances of securing funding. Furthermore, Mrs Raphalalani detailed the approval and recommendation processes that take place from the university level to the funding institutions. Overall, her talk served as a comprehensive guide to navigating the complexities of obtaining financial support for postgraduate studies.

One of the standout themes was UNIVEN’s unwavering

commitment to entrepreneurship and innovation. Mr Rudzani Mamphweli, who is attached to the Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialisation (DCEEIIC), laid out a clear innovation pipeline from conceiving groundbreaking research ideas, to protecting intellectual property, to commercialising research outputs, and ultimately launching sustainable enterprises. The story of a postgraduate entrepreneur who developed a liquid soap product approved by SEDA and supported by the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Rapid Incubation (UCfERI) highlighted how UNIVEN's ecosystem bridges academic research and real-world economic empowerment. This narrative was more than inspirational; it was a blueprint for students to view their research as a catalyst for social and economic transformation. One of the standout themes was UNIVEN's unwavering commitment to entrepreneurship and innovation.

The DCEEIIC's entrepreneurial vision is bold and urgent, that postgraduate students must graduate as job creators, not job seekers. Through competitions, incubation programmes, and international collaborations, UNIVEN is equipping its scholars to compete and lead on the world stage. The often-fraught student-supervisor relationship was also candidly explored by Prof. Lufuno Makhado and Prof. Michael Chimonyo in their respective presentations, acknowledging the common conflicts and communication breakdowns that can stall progress and stressing that the resolution lies in mutual respect, clear expectations, and proactive engagement. Supervisors are mentors, not gatekeepers; students must drive their own progress with discipline and honesty. Supervisors, in turn, must provide timely, constructive feedback and foster a supportive environment. Prof. Makhado spoke on the need for formal supervision contracts as a tool to define roles, responsibilities, and timelines, ensuring accountability

on both sides and helping students graduate within stipulated timeframes. Prof. Chimonyo also touched on the characteristics of a successful postgraduate student, urging them to own their research journeys. Postgraduate research thrives only on a foundation of integrity.

Prof. MM Kabanda's presentation on ethics and project management was a sobering reminder of the dangers of plagiarism, data fabrication, and unethical use of AI tools. Students were warned of the severe reputational and career consequences of misconduct, with real examples illustrating how even early-stage research can be scrutinised and exposed. He emphasised the importance of originality, proper citation, and ethical conduct in both the lab and writing. AI, while a powerful tool, must be used responsibly and never as a shortcut to replace genuine scholarship. Prof. Ntakadzeni Madala shared compelling insights drawing from his rich experience as a researcher and mentor. Addressing the students' concerns about silence, he challenged them to embrace the foundational habit of reading deeply and regularly. Reflecting on his own days as a postgraduate student, before the era of laptops and easy digital access, he revealed the rigorous reading regimen that shaped his success. Prof. Madala was forthright in diagnosing a critical obstacle for today's students: an unhealthy preoccupation with immediate financial gain that overshadows the thirst for knowledge.

He emphasised that if money were the solution to our challenges, South Africa would not be in its current state. What we lack is brains, curiosity, and the dedication to learn, urging students to rise above short-term thinking to become lifelong learners and innovators. He further inspired students to focus on producing knowledge that matters, and to aspire to make tangible community impacts beyond just earning degrees. Returning to the stage, Prof. Murulana provided crucial guidance on assessing research proposals and on the official

university approval processes. He explained the roles of key committees, including the Faculty Research and Integrated Committee (FRIIC), and the University Higher Degrees Committee (UHDC). He highlighted the importance of research ethics, detailing the FRIIC Ethics Subcommittee's role, the categories of ethics, and the ethics application process. Emphasising accountability, Prof. Murulana discussed regular reporting requirements, including quarterly progress reports and all necessary documentation to ensure smooth supervision and tracking of student progress. He further clarified the examination process, focusing on departmental non-examining chairs, the intention to submit notification, the critical three-month submission period, appointment of external examiners, and the similarity index check to maintain academic integrity, language editing, quality checks, and the doctoral viva voce (oral defence).

During the event, facilitators stressed that academic writing is not innate but learned through constant reading,

critical thinking, and practice. Prof. Chimonyo went further, challenging the cohort to view postgraduate education as a platform for African knowledge production rooted in local realities and heritage. He reminded students that their research should tackle the continent's challenges, from climate change to health crises, positioning UNIVEN as a leader in transformative education. He reminded students that success is not just about finishing on time but also about contributing to society's pressing challenges. "If you cannot contribute to solving our problems, you are not a useful student." Before concluding, the workshop opened the floor to an engaging discussion on challenges faced by MSc and PhD students across departments. Students and staff actively participated, exchanging ideas and solutions to common hurdles in postgraduate studies. The induction culminated in a stirring reflection on identity and legacy. Students were challenged to ask themselves, "Who am I beyond my degree? What unique contribution will I make to my field, my community, my continent?"

I Celebrating Postgraduate Growth and Excellence: UNIVEN's 2026 Autumn Graduations, the Faculty of Science, Engineering & Agriculture (FSEA), Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences & Education (FHSSE), Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) and Faculty of Management, Commerce & Law's (FMCL) Perspective

We take this moment to celebrate the remarkable accomplishments of our four faculties during the recent graduation season. Join us as we explore the highlights, milestones, and inspiring stories behind this academic triumph.

Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture (FSEA): Insights from Prof. Lutendo C. Murulana

Deputy Dean: Research & Postgraduate Studies



Over the past two years, FSEA has seen remarkable growth in postgraduate success rates and graduations. Under the leadership of Prof. Natasha Potgieter, Executive Dean (FSEA) and Prof. Murulana, Deputy Dean for Research and Postgraduate Studies, the faculty has implemented strategic measures to streamline student progress and reduce residency time. These include faster proposal approvals, strengthened supervision, enhanced

ethical clearance processes, and close monitoring of student progress. As a result, the faculty has been able to support students more effectively, helping them graduate within the expected timeframes. The results speak volumes, with FSEA proudly celebrating 138 Honours, 53 MSc, and 13 PhD graduates at the 2026 Autumn graduations alone.

Staff Achievements and Academic Excellence

An especially proud moment for FSEA is that five PhD graduates were staff members, highlighting the faculty's commitment to building academic capacity within its own ranks. Among these are lecturers, lab technicians, and part-time staff who have pursued doctoral studies alongside their professional duties. The staff members are as follows: Dikonketso Margaret Tlaamela (nGAP Lecturer) - Doctor of Philosophy in Botany; Mpho Edward Mashau (Lecturer) - Doctor of Philosophy in Agriculture (Food Science and Technology); Tabea Mokgalakane Mokhele (Lab technician) - Doctor of Philosophy in Agriculture (Food Science and Technology); Babatunde Solomon Ojelade (Part-time Lecturer) - Doctor of Philosophy in Environmental Science; Shylet Anesu Nyamwanza (Lecturer) - Doctor of Urban and Regional Planning. Honours and MSc students also stood out, with 28 Honours and 16 MSc graduates achieving distinctions. *"This achievement by students reflects the quality of outstanding qualifications and supervisors that we have at the University of Venda. This is true because, especially for MSc, the dissertations are 100% externally assessed by the highly regarded and respected experts in various fields of expertise."* **Prof. Murulana.**

From Research to Real-World Impact

FSEA's students and supervisors continue to produce cutting-edge research with tangible benefits, with some publications in high-impact peer-reviewed journals and others submitted for commercialisation. In 2025, two licensing agreements were signed to commercialise innovations from the Department of Food Science and Technology, including a promising Moringa-based project. Manufacturing is set to begin in 2026 after the licensed small enterprise finalises its infrastructure setup.

The faculty's inventive spirit is further reflected in patents filed, with one led by Prof Maluta, now Director of the Green Technology Confucius Institute (GTCI). The work leading to this patent originated during his tenure in the Department of Physics, where he supervised Livhuwani

Masevhe. Also, in 2025, Professor Rachel Makungo was granted a patent and received a Certificate of Recognition from the National Intellectual Property Management Office (NIPMO) in acknowledgement of this achievement.

Impactful Research Addressing Community Needs and Global Goals

The impact of research is measured by how much the community benefits from it and by its alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Most student research projects directly impact communities and address one or more of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. A couple of exemplary studies include, amongst others, MR Mudau, MSc student, who researched

"Enhancing PCE Prediction for Organic Solar Cells through the Integration of Supervised and Unsupervised Learning". This research is very impactful given the current energy situation and escalating cost of electricity in South Africa. Another MSc student, FD Munyai, attempted to find solutions related to water challenges in South Africa. The project was based on Ground Water Resource Supply Augmentation: A Case Study of Dzamba and Mabulo Villages in Vhembe District, Makhado Municipality, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Looking Back and Moving Forward

"The 2026 Autumn graduations were a great success and showcased the best that the FSEA can offer in terms of the quality of programmes, research projects, PG students, and supervisors. The quality and impact of the research projects were witnessed through the research project topics and citations. In terms of the number of graduates versus the faculty targets, we achieved some annual targets before the academic year 2026 ended. We would like to thank the FSEA academic and support staff members who were out in numbers supporting their students." **Prof. Murulana.**

As we celebrate these accomplishments, we look forward to building on this momentum with continued dedication to research excellence and postgraduate development at the University of Venda.

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education (FHSSE): Insights from Prof. Takalani Mashau

Deputy Dean: Research & Postgraduate Studies



The Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education (FHSSE) has experienced significant growth and success in its postgraduate programmes over recent years. Prof. Mashau, Deputy Dean for Research and Postgraduate Studies, shares reflections on this remarkable journey, highlighting the faculty's achievements, challenges, and ongoing commitment to student support.

A Remarkable Growth Trajectory

Between 2023 and 2026, FHSSE has seen a notable increase in the number of postgraduate graduations. In 2023, the faculty graduated only three Master's and two doctoral students. However, by 2024, Master's graduations rose to 22, with 10 doctoral graduates.

This upward trend continued, with 28 Master's students graduating in 2025. This year, the faculty proudly celebrates 65 Master's and 10 doctoral graduates, alongside 197 Honours students who recently walked the stage. This steady growth reflects FHSSE's dedication to developing a strong postgraduate research culture and maintaining quality academic standards.

Critical focus has been on reducing the time students spend in their programmes. Most of the Master's students graduating in 2026 first registered in 2024, while doctoral graduates who began their studies in 2023 are now successfully completing their degrees.

"This milestone means we are successfully moving students through the pipeline efficiently, ensuring timely graduations"

without backlog," **Prof. Mashau.**

Supporting Students Beyond Funding Challenges

While financial support remains a challenge not only for the University of Venda but across South African universities, FHSSE has introduced innovative ways to support postgraduate students. Since February 2026, the faculty has hosted weekly Saturday evening webinars from 18h00 to 19h30, attended by 180 to 260 students.

These sessions provide valuable academic assistance, allowing students to engage with the institution's academics and experts from partner institutions.

The webinars cover a range of topics tailored to student needs and encourage open dialogue, supplementing the guidance provided by supervisors.

Looking Back and Moving Forward

As FHSSE celebrates these achievements, Prof. Mashau's reflections highlight the faculty's ongoing dedication to fostering postgraduate excellence. The combination of growing graduation numbers, timely completion rates, and innovative student support initiatives signals a bright future for postgraduate education and research within the faculty. As the Research and Postgraduate Division, we look forward to continued success and impact from the faculty's emerging scholars. Prof. Mashau equally encourages all eligible undergraduates to apply for Honours programmes, emphasising that the minimum entry requirement is a 60% academic average. "We encourage all interested students to apply online early. Selection prioritises the highest qualifiers based on available enrolment targets." **Prof. Mashau.**

| Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS): Insights from Prof. Makondelele Radzilani

Deputy Dean: Research & Postgraduate Studies



Graduation is a moment of celebration that marks the end of a long and challenging journey, not only for the postgraduate students but also for the Faculty Administrator, the Faculty Manager, the Executive Dean, the Heads of Departments, Postgraduate Coordinators, Non-Examining Chairs, and Supervisors. The Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) prides itself on having highly qualified supervisors who dedicate their time and expertise to supporting students throughout their academic journey. Successful completion within the residency period requires cooperation, patience, dedication, and openness to constructive feedback.

At the 2026 Autumn graduations, the faculty celebrated the achievements of the 2025 cohort, with all five Postgraduate Diploma students graduating (100%), alongside 25 Honours students (78%), 56 Master's students (42%), and one Doctoral student (6%). While these numbers reflect commendable success, especially in postgraduate diplomas and honours, the low doctoral graduation rate signals the need for renewed focus on doctoral programme development, including strategies for attracting, admitting, retaining, and progressing students.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

As the smallest faculty at the university with a limited postgraduate population, the Faculty of Health Sciences recognises the importance of addressing the challenges affecting the doctoral graduation rate. Prof. Radzilani emphasises the need to identify barriers that impact

student progression and graduation to enhance the faculty's overall postgraduate output in future seasons. Despite these challenges, the faculty remains committed to nurturing postgraduate talent and improving support structures to ensure more students successfully complete higher degrees. The dedication of supervisors and staff remains a driving force behind student success.

Looking Back and Moving Forward

"As a Deputy Dean of Research and Postgraduate Studies in the faculty, I would like to congratulate all the supervisors on this achievement and encourage them to continue improving. To all our graduates, the Faculty of Health Sciences wishes you all the best with your future endeavours. To the Postgraduate Diploma, Honours, and Masters graduates who would like to come back for a subsequent qualification, you are welcome and we will be happy to receive you in 2027 for either of the following qualifications that we render with pride: Master of Arts in Psychology, Master of Nursing, Master of Public Health, Master of Science in Nutrition, Doctor of Nursing, Doctor of Psychology, PhD in Public Health, PhD in Public Health Nutrition." **Prof. Radzilani.**

Looking ahead, the Faculty of Health Science is committed to improving postgraduate outcomes and expanding its impact through robust doctoral programmes and continued support for all postgraduate students. The journey to graduation may be challenging, but with collective effort and dedication, FHS is confident it can nurture the next generation of Health Science leaders.

Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law (FMCL): Insights from Prof. Vusani Moyo

Deputy Dean: Research & Postgraduate Studies



Like all faculties, the Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law (FMCL) celebrated a successful autumn graduation season in May 2026, marked by impressive growth in postgraduate graduations. FMCL experienced a substantial increase in postgraduate graduations in 2026, with a total of 150 Honours, Master's, and PhD graduates compared to 121 in 2025. This boost was primarily driven by a remarkable doubling of Master's graduations from 29 in 2025 to 58 this year. While Honours graduations saw a slight decline from 84 last year to 82 this year, the number of PhD graduates increased from 8 to 10. Overall, the faculty is optimistic about continued growth, anticipating that the total graduations for the entire year 2026 will surpass 186, up from 155 in 2025.

Prof. Moyo attributes this growth to several key factors, including the leadership of the new Deputy Vice Chancellor, Prof. Netswera, whose emphasis on research and postgraduate studies has invigorated the university's academic culture. The faculty itself has implemented improvements in administrative processes, notably speeding up proposal approvals and viva voce (Oral Defence) scheduling. Rather than batching students, these seminars and defenses are now arranged as needed, allowing students to progress without unnecessary delays. Increased pressure on examination sections to follow up on overdue results has also contributed to timely graduations.

Quality and Impact of FMCL Graduates

In addition to growing numbers, the faculty has seen improvements in the quality of postgraduate work. Several Honours and Master's students graduated with distinctions, and many PhD candidates received high commendations in their oral defenses. Notably,

two Doctoral graduates, both prominent community figures, a Municipal Manager and an MMC, were rated as excellent, impressing their examination panels with outstanding presentations. The faculty is also tracking the scholarly output of its graduates. Many PhD students have published articles based on their theses, thereby contributing positively to the faculty's research profile. Some Master's students have similarly disseminated their research through publications. Moving forward, the faculty aims to ensure all postgraduate students publish their work, targeting at least one publication from Master's dissertations and a minimum of two from PhD theses.

Prof. Moyo also highlighted the faculty's commitment to supporting students through initiatives such as proposal-writing workshops. Last year's (2025) workshops saw a high success rate, with about 95% of attendees graduating in May 2026, and others expected to graduate in September. Plans for another workshop later this year are underway, with strong student interest already confirmed. These efforts reflect FMCL's proactive approach to equipping postgraduate students with the skills and support needed for successful research journeys.

Looking Back and Moving Forward

The Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law is energised by these achievements and the growing enthusiasm among supervisors, support units, the office of the DVC for Research and Postgraduate Studies, and students alike. With strengthened leadership, streamlined processes, and continued investment in student development, the faculty is well-positioned to sustain this upward trajectory in postgraduate success. Prof. Moyo, in closing, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share these reflections and looks forward to celebrating even greater accomplishments in future

UNI-VOICES - A GRADUATE'S JOURNEY, A SUPERVISOR'S REFLECTION

In the Face of Adversity, a Doctoral Dream Refused to Die: The Extraordinary Journey of Dr Fhatuwani Godfrey Mbara



In a momentous celebration during the University of Venda's Autumn graduation ceremony, Dr Fhatuwani Godfrey Mbara, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital, proudly stepped into the spotlight as one of UNIVEN's newest PhD graduates, earning his doctorate in Public Health. His story is a stirring testament to inspiration, intellectual rigour and a profound commitment to bridging the delicate balance between tradition and modern medicine.

Dr Mbara's path to earning his PhD in Public Health was anything but straightforward. Balancing the demanding role of hospital CEO with the intense demands of doctoral research truly tested his limits. In 2022, as his executive

duties intensified with his relocation to Gauteng, he found himself overwhelmed by his responsibilities and fatigue from relentless study; he almost stepped away from his academic pursuit. Yet, it was the simple, profound encouragement from his mother, "Once you attain education, no one can take it away from you", that reignited his passion and determination. This phrase became his anchor amidst sleepless nights and mounting pressures, propelling him to complete a journey that would forever change his family's legacy. Dr Mbara today stands as the first in his family to hold both a medical degree and a PhD, a testament to his triumph over adversity.

His doctoral research, titled Development of Guidelines

to Strengthen the Relationship between Western and Indigenous Male Circumcision Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa, addresses one of the most sensitive and impactful public health challenges of our time. His thesis citation read during the graduation ceremony highlighted that male circumcision in Limpopo Province transcends a mere medical intervention linked to HIV and Infection prevention; it embodies a deeply rooted cultural rite of passage. His study thoughtfully places this practice within its socio-cultural and biomedical contexts, acknowledging the historical marginalisation of indigenous methods by formal health systems, while also recognising the health risks associated with unsafe traditional procedures.

Through a rigorous mixed-methods approach, Dr Mbara integrated qualitative insights from traditional leaders and healthcare practitioners with robust quantitative health data. His findings revealed significant challenges stemming from mistrust, fragmented regulation, and communication barriers that compromise both the safety and effectiveness of circumcision practices. In response, his thesis proposes context-specific, evidence-based guidelines to strengthen collaboration, improve training and oversight, and promote culturally sensitive healthcare delivery that respects tradition while safeguarding lives. This transformative work holds the promise of enhancing outcomes for communities and embodies a commitment to a brighter and healthier future. His supervisors, Prof. MT Mulaudzi and Dr AG Mudau, spoke of his journey with deep respect and pride, highlighting a candidate whose distinguished career was matched only by his intellectual curiosity and unwavering work ethic. They emphasised that Dr Mbara's work transcends academic rigour and represents a vital contribution to public health policy and social cohesion in South Africa.

Prof. Mulaudzi reflected on her supervisory experience, stating, "One of the most remarkable aspects of this supervision journey was Dr Mbara's humility and willingness to learn. Even as a qualified medical doctor and hospital CEO, he approached the doctoral process

without a sense of entitlement or superiority. His ability to separate his professional accomplishments from his academic journey allowed him to thrive as an independent researcher while upholding rigorous scholarly standards. His esteemed position and vast experience within the healthcare sector fostered meaningful engagement with healthcare practitioners, traditional leaders, policymakers, and community stakeholders, enriching the study and ensuring that the proposed guidelines were firmly rooted in both practical realities and scholarly evidence."

Dr Mudau added, "It has been a privilege to serve as co-supervisor to Dr Mbara throughout his doctoral journey. His work bridges biomedical perspectives with Indigenous knowledge systems, offering practical, culturally sensitive guidelines that foster collaboration, safety, and mutual respect. Despite the demands of his role as a hospital CEO, he remained disciplined, humble, and fully committed to his studies, consistently delivering high-quality work. His professionalism and openness nurtured a strong and collegial supervisory relationship. Supervising him became a profound learning experience, particularly in valuing the practical dimensions of leadership, resilience, and dedication."

Dr Mbara's story powerfully exemplifies how leadership and scholarship can intertwine to drive real-world change. His research stands poised to influence national and provincial policies, advocating for safer circumcision practices while building trust between biomedical and indigenous health systems. This narrative embodies a vision of preserving cultural heritage alongside advancing healthcare standards. As the Research and Postgraduate Studies Division proudly honours Dr Mbara's groundbreaking achievement, his journey stands as an inspiring beacon for scholars, healthcare professionals, and leaders across South Africa and beyond. It is a vivid reminder that education transcends personal ambition; it is a legacy that not only empowers individuals but also strengthens communities and shapes the future.

Congratulations, Dr Fhatuwani Godfrey Mbara. Your story inspires us all!

I A Vision for Tomorrow: Dr Patrick Pikisayi Maweto's Groundbreaking Research on Climate Rights for Future Generations in the SADC Region



In a region grappling with the harsh realities of climate change, Dr Maweto has emerged as a pioneering voice and visionary scholar championing the rights of those yet to come and challenging us to think beyond the present. Awarded his Doctor of Philosophy in Public Law from the University of Venda, Dr Maweto's thesis, 'The Right of Future Generations to a Safe Climate in the SADC Region,' supervised by Prof. Ademola O. Jegede and Dr LJJ Kandala, tackles a critical and urgent question of how law can protect the climate rights of future generations in Southern Africa, a climate hotspot identified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Dr. Maweto's academic journey began in 2014 as an international LLB student. Despite financial challenges that led him to take a gap year in 2019, his determination never faltered. With the unwavering support of his supervisor, Prof. Jegede, he persevered, enrolling for

his PhD in 2022 after completing his Master's degree. "It was not an easy journey,...I went through three different research topics before settling on this one." Dr. Maweto. His thesis focuses on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, using case studies from countries including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Tanzania. Dr Maweto uncovered a significant legal ambiguity, which is the lack of clear recognition and protection of future generations' rights to a safe climate. This uncertainty threatens fundamental rights related to food, health, water, life, and a clean environment for future populations.

"My work argues that human rights cannot have a time limit, the rights current generations enjoy, like access to food and a healthy environment, should be extended to future generations." He recommends practical legal pathways, such as a generous interpretation of the SADC Treaty

and regional human rights laws, or the establishment of a dedicated Protocol specifically safeguarding the climate rights of future generations. Prof. Jegede reflected on Dr Maweto's work with so much pride: "Patrick embodies resilience and intellectual rigour. His research challenges the time-neutral approach of law by emphasising intergenerational justice. It is original, topical, and critically important for Africa's climate future." He highlighted that the study's regional scope and detailed case analyses elevate it as a foundational work that will inform scholarship and policy for years to come.

Dr Maweto's recommendations aim to influence policymakers and legal frameworks to adopt a forward-thinking stance on climate rights. The implications of

this research extend far beyond academia. Dr Maweto envisions Southern Africa becoming a global pioneer in climate justice by adopting his proposed Protocol, setting a precedent for protecting future generations worldwide. "If achieved, we will lead the international community in establishing legal protections for future generations' climate rights." Dr Maweto. Dr. Maweto's journey, from a determined student overcoming challenges to a pioneering scholar, is marked by his groundbreaking work that extends well beyond the University of Venda. This work serves as a call to action to reconsider and reshape the laws that protect not only the present but also the future. The University of Venda proudly celebrates Dr Patrick Píkisayi Maweto, whose pioneering research is charting a bold course for climate justice in Africa and beyond.

| Dr Mpho Daswa's Fight for Gender Equality in South Africa's Water Sector



Guided by her supervisors, Prof. Rachel Makungo and Dr EJ Mwendera, Dr Daswa tackled one of South Africa's pressing social challenges of gender discrepancies in decision-making positions within the water sector. Her thesis, 'Development of a Framework for Addressing Gender Discrepancies in Decision-Making Positions in the Water Sector in South Africa,' uncovers the power imbalances that have long denied women equal access to leadership roles and resources. Through a thorough situational analysis, stakeholder engagement, and policy review, she developed a comprehensive framework aimed at empowering women and closing these gaps. Notably, her research highlights how both the work environment and community environment shape women's participation in leadership, with community factors exerting a particularly strong influence.

Dr Daswa candidly shared that her journey was far from easy. "It took years, dedication, and a constant balancing act between family, work, and studies" but her resilience paid off. Today, she stands proud as Dr Mpho Daswa, a scholar whose work holds the promise of tangible change. Her research goes beyond theory; it's a call to action. She stresses the need for her framework to be implemented by the government, the private sector, and communities alike to truly bridge the gender divide. "Research must translate into real societal impact," she insisted, emphasising that water sector leaders must champion these changes to empower women in decision-making roles.

When asked about the persistent stereotypes that women are too emotional to lead, she firmly disagreed, asserting that women are already leading and making impactful decisions. Her study shows that the barriers are less about capability and more about external factors, social, economic, and environmental, that need to be addressed. Her PhD journey also transformed her worldview. It demanded rigour, broadened her perspective by exposing her to international best practices, and deepened her commitment to gender equality. She calls for policy reforms that not only increase women's participation but also ensure their voices shape decisions and outcomes, leveraging the unique insights they gain from community and family experiences.

Beyond academia, Dr Daswa leads as the Managing Director of a water testing laboratory, embodying the leadership she advocates. Her vision is clear: a society where women confidently take on leadership roles without fear or limitation. To young girls and women aspiring to break into male-dominated sectors, Dr Daswa offers a powerful message: "Your dreams are valid. Work hard, persevere despite challenges, and know that where there's a will, there's a way." Her story is a beacon of hope and a blueprint for change, inspiring a new generation of women leaders in South Africa and beyond. The University of Venda proudly celebrates Dr Mpho Daswa, whose groundbreaking research and leadership are paving the way for gender equality in the water sector and empowering women to shape a better future.

Driving Accountability and Economic Transformation: The Journey of Limpopo MEC, Honourable Dr. Tshitereke Baldwin Matibe



Honourable Dr Matibe, MEC for Economic Development, Tourism, and Environment in Limpopo, embodies the powerful synergy between academic rigour and public service. His doctoral research, titled 'Effectiveness of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in Promoting Financial Oversight and Accountability within the Limpopo Provincial Government,' explores the critical role of legislative oversight in fostering transparent and responsible governance.

Grounded in five key theories including Principal-Agent and Constitutionalism theories, Dr. Matibe's thesis offers a comprehensive analysis of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA) and its influence on financial accountability. While his research confirms that SCOPA plays a significant role in enhancing integrity and audit outcomes, it also exposes challenges such as limited authority to enforce resolutions, political interference, and the redeployment of committee members. Dr Matibe proposes a robust model to measure the effectiveness of public accounts committees, aiming to guide future improvements and policymaking.

Reflecting on his academic journey, Dr Matibe shared how his transition from Parliament in 2019 to the Limpopo Legislature in 2022 revealed persistent governance challenges, particularly unauthorised, fruitless, and wasteful expenditures. "When I arrived at the legislature as Deputy Speaker, we were still at unqualified audit status, and I committed to pushing for clean audits," Dr Matibe.

His leadership contributed to achieving two consecutive clean audits, and this pursuit of clean governance continued when he joined the executive branch. He emphasises the real-world impact of education: "What you learn must translate into meaningful societal change."

His research directly informs his work in government, focusing on eliminating wasteful spending and improving service delivery for citizens.

Addressing the question of how to move from producing graduates to developing problem solvers, Dr Matibe highlighted an innovative collaboration with the University of Venda. "We must not just graduate degree holders; we must graduate entrepreneurs."

The recently signed Memorandum of Understanding aims to position the university as a hub for entrepreneurship in Limpopo, nurturing graduates who create jobs rather than seek them. He also stresses the importance of aligning academic research with economic realities. He actively reviews research topics and recommendations, especially those related to Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), ICT, and industrial development, seeking to implement findings that address local challenges and drive economic growth.

Integrity stands at the heart of Dr Matibe's vision for governance. "Graduates must carry integrity as their guiding principle. When government officials act with integrity, public trust is restored, and communities thrive." He envisions Limpopo as South Africa's new economic frontier, fuelled by natural resources and strategic partnerships, including revitalising industrial parks and leveraging mining opportunities responsibly.

To graduating students, Dr Matibe offers powerful advice: "Don't be job seekers; be job creators. Utilise government funding, innovate, and build enterprises that generate employment." His message resonates as a call to action for graduates to become agents of transformation. His research and leadership inspire a future where accountability, entrepreneurship, and integrity drive Limpopo and South Africa towards sustainable prosperity.

The Inspiring Master in Nursing Journey of Ms Shingane Mano



If you ask Ms Shingane about her Master of Nursing journey, she'll tell you it was tough, but worth every moment. She will further tell you that balancing a full-time job and demanding responsibilities while producing impactful research that resonates beyond academia wasn't easy. Ms Shingane's journey was marked by both challenges and rewards. There were long nights, moments of doubt, and times when juggling everything felt overwhelming. Yet, through it all, she never lost sight of why she started.

"I learned patience, strength, and how hard work truly pays off... There were difficult days, but I stayed focused on my goals." Ms Shingane. Despite facing difficult times, she stayed unwaveringly focused on her academic goals. Her commitment and perseverance culminated in a proud moment when she graduated with distinction, an achievement she attributes to consistent effort and resilience. Ms Shingane's research addressed a deeply

relevant topic, 'The Impact of Grief on Youth Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic In The Mopani District'. This work not only contributed academically but also heightened awareness of the critical importance of mental health support for young people, underscoring the real-world significance of her study.

Ms Shingane acknowledges that she didn't walk this path alone. Integral to her success was the mentorship and support from her supervisors, Prof. Hilda N. Shilubane and Dr Valeria Baloyi, who were constant sources of encouragement and guidance. "Their support made a huge difference; they pushed me to think critically and helped me improve my skills without ever losing faith in me." Ms Shilubane. From the perspective of her supervisors, guiding Ms Shingane was a deeply rewarding experience. The research project's success and cum laude distinction were the fruits of a strong collaborative relationship among the supervisors, the student, and the

community partners involved. Continuous mentorship, timely constructive feedback, and frequent deliberations ensured high academic standards and fostered critical thinking and independence in Ms Shingane.

The supervisors also highlight the meaningful engagement with community stakeholders, whose trust and confidence reinforced the project's relevance and impact. Community leaders' requests to initiate and continue the research reflect the professionalism and commitment that was shared by the entire team. Equally noteworthy is Ms Shingane's determination and resilience. Despite the pressures of balancing full-time work and study, she demonstrated discipline, a positive attitude toward feedback, and a strong work ethic. Her cooperation and

ability to overcome challenges played a pivotal role in the successful completion of the project. Through mutual respect, teamwork, and shared commitment, Ms Shingane and her supervisors achieved a research outcome worthy of distinction.

As we tell her story, we hope it also inspires future postgraduate students, at UNIVEN and beyond, especially those balancing multiple roles, to believe that unwavering focus and support can transform challenges into celebrated success. Her achievement enriches the University of Venda's tradition of excellence and impactful research. Congratulations to Ms Shingane on her outstanding accomplishment and the journey that made it possible.

I Excellence Quantified: Postgraduate Graduation Statistics



We proudly recognise the outstanding achievements of 3,326 graduates in the Class of 2025. Women lead this remarkable cohort, comprising 62% of the graduates, reflecting the growing empowerment and leadership of women in academia and beyond. This year, our university has proudly awarded a total of 681 postgraduate qualifications, comprising of 418 Honours degrees, 224 Master's degrees, 34 Doctoral degrees, and 5 Postgraduate Diplomas.

These accomplishments underscore the dedication, hard work and excellence of our graduates, who are poised to make meaningful contributions to their communities, the province, and the nation. As we celebrate their success, we reaffirm our commitment to supporting their continued growth and leadership in the years to come. Cheers to the Class of 2025, may their journeys inspire us all!

Closing Reflections on Graduation



As we conclude, we are honoured to share reflections from Limpopo Premier, Dr Phophi Ramathuba, whose words resonate deeply with the aspirations of our graduates and the province's commitment to their future.

"Today, we celebrate not only the achievements of our graduates but also the promising pathways that lie ahead for young professionals in Limpopo. It is with great pride that I acknowledge the diversity and excellence among our graduates, particularly in commerce and public administration, fields critical to our government's priorities and challenges. Among those graduating are distinguished individuals, including a Doctor of Philosophy in Public Administration, members of the Executive Council, and municipal leaders who have demonstrated exceptional dedication to public service. Their accomplishments inspire us all. As I often emphasise, leadership requires maintaining common sense and vision. To foster a thriving economy and create meaningful employment opportunities, we must continue to support and empower our young professionals. The graduates we honour today embody the future of Limpopo's growth and success."

UNIVEN's Inaugural Doctoral Gala: Beyond the Thesis, Leading the Charge for South Africa's Future



Dr Mpho Daswa



Mr Murendeni 'Musanda' Ndanduleni



Professor Ndanduleni Bernard: Nthambeleni Vice-Chancellor and Principal



Prof Fulufhelo Netswera: Deputy Vice Chancellor: Research and Postgraduate Studies



MEC Dr Tshitereke Matibe



Dr Richard Shilenge, Collins Chabani Municipal Manager

The University of Venda hosted its very first Doctoral Gala Dinner on the 21st of May 2026 at the Premier Hotel, Thohoyandou, Limpopo. The gala was an unforgettable celebration that marked the beginning of a new era of academic excellence and societal transformation. A powerful declaration that the University of Venda is rising, boldly, unapologetically to lead South Africa's future through innovation, knowledge and relentless determination. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Postgraduate Studies, Prof. Fulufhelo Netswera, welcomed guests, highlighting the purpose and importance of the event. He further invited them to deeply engage with the brilliant minds in the room, collaborate with the doctoral graduates, and harness their research to transform municipalities and communities. This was a call to break down silos and build bridges between academia and society.

The evening's Master of Ceremonies, Prof. Takalani Mashau, infused the event with free-spirited humour and warmth. Most notably, he took an opportunity to remind the graduates and everyone in attendance that earning a doctorate is not the finish line; it's the launchpad. Graduates owe it to themselves and society to publish and share their knowledge widely. The Vice Chancellor and Principal, Prof. Bernard N. Nthambeleni, delivered a keynote that placed the gala within the broader context of South Africa's National Development Plan 2030. He highlighted the urgent need to increase PhD production

to drive innovation and economic growth, noting that while the country currently falls short of its targets, the University of Venda is rising to the challenge. From just a handful of PhDs at graduation ceremonies in 2019, the university now celebrates hundreds, doubling research output and positioning itself as a beacon of academic excellence in a rural setting.

Prof. Nthambeleni highlighted that earning a doctorate is not just a personal achievement but a societal imperative. The newly minted graduates were called upon to be agents of change, innovators, leaders, and collaborators who will engage deeply with communities, municipalities, and industries to solve real-world challenges. Further reiterating that the journey does not end with the conferral of a degree; it is a lifelong commitment to learning, mentoring, and impactful research. Prof. Mashau reinforced this call, highlighting the university's remarkable growth in research output and the importance of ongoing collaboration and mentorship among graduates and faculty. Returning to the stage, Prof. Netswera shared his vision for an ideal doctoral journey, one marked by strong supervision, emphasising the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and meaningful engagement across disciplines, institutions, and borders, to elevate the quality and relevance of doctoral research. He envisioned a future where graduates actively participate in municipal advisory committees, contribute to provincial research institutes, maintain vibrant networks that extend globally, and engage meaningfully

with municipal and provincial stakeholders. He urged graduates to maintain lifelong networks locally and internationally, ensuring their research is relevant, impactful, and connected to real societal needs.

Prof. Lindelani Mushaphi, speaking on behalf of the Executive Deans, celebrated the resilience, curiosity, and dedication of the graduates. She reminded them that earning a doctorate is not just an academic milestone but a call to serve society. "Use your knowledge to tackle real challenges, and make a tangible impact beyond the pages of your thesis." Dr. Risenga Richard Shilenge, representing the graduates, shared candid reflections on his own doctoral journey, from changing topics and proposal rejections to balancing work, family, and study. His own research on financial resource mobilisation in rural municipalities underscored the vital link between academic inquiry and practical solutions for community development. The evening also celebrated the growing success of female scholars, with Prof. Mashau highlighting their determination and camaraderie in overcoming technological and academic hurdles.

Honourable Dr Tshitereke Baldwin Matibe, MEC for Local Economic Development, Tourism and Environment, spoke as an alumnus and proud doctoral graduate. He emphasised the university's role in driving economic transformation in Limpopo, calling for research that supports mining beneficiation, job creation, and provincial development. Dr Matibe

urged graduates to remain engaged with the university and the university's convocation, contributing their skills and knowledge to uplift the province and beyond. Ms Livhuwani Priscilla Nemaangani, a representative from the university's Directorate of Research and Innovation, announced upcoming Doctoral Graduate Alumni Article Writing Workshops designed to help graduates transform their theses into impactful publications, further enriching the university's research footprint and contribution to the knowledge economy.

Throughout the evening, the recurring theme was engagement; engagement with communities, municipalities, fellow scholars, and the broader world. As Prof. Mashau humorously and poignantly illustrated, true engagement means standing together, pushing boundaries, and refusing to settle for anything less than excellence. The inaugural Doctoral Gala Dinner was not just a celebration of academic success; it was a clarion call for continued growth, a promise, and a movement declaring the University of Venda a crucible of knowledge, innovation, and change. The event emphasised that the moment marked not the beginning, but a continuation of our journey. Our doctoral graduates will persist in their roles as leaders, inspirers, and transformers of our nation. To our graduates: wear your doctorates with pride, stay engaged, and continue to be the change-makers our communities and nation so urgently need. This is just the first of many milestones on a journey of lifelong learning and impactful scholarship.

Building Research Excellence

Quarter One (1) 2026

Facts and figures



Research Publications and Productivity

For the academic period between January and March 2026, the UNIVEN yielded a strong research output, with 248 publications generating 189,2941 units, including notable contributions in high-impact journals (24,41 units in Quantile 1 and 26,30 units in Quantile 2).

Table 1.1: Number of Research Publication Units in Quantile 1 and 2 Journals

FACULTY	QUANTILE 1		QUANTILE 2		
	Units	No. of Articles	Units	No. of Articles	Total Units Q1&Q2
FHS	5,3732	10	7,2	9	12,5732
FHSSE	0	0	1,8	3	1,8
FCML	1	2	1,43	4	2,43
FSEA	19,04	47	15,87	30	34,91
Total Units for Q1 and Q2					51,7132

Table 1.2: Number of master's Students' Publications

FACULTY	NO. MASTER'S STUDENTS	NO OF JOURNAL ARTICLES	NO OF UNITS
FHS	6	5	2,1667
FHSSE	4	4	2,5000
FMCL	3	3	3
FSEA	4	4	1,9166
TOTAL	17	16	9,5833

Currently, 16 journal articles have been produced by 17 master's students, totaling 9.5833 units. This reflects a total institutional achievement of 37%. The Faculty of Health Sciences contributed 5 publications from 6 students, achieving 62.5% and generating 2.1667 units.

The Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education produced 4 publications from 4 students, achieving 50% and generating 2.5000 units. The Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law has produced 3 publications from 3 students, achieving a performance at 60% and generating 3.0000 units.

The Faculty of Science, Engineering, and Agriculture produced 4 publications from 4 students, achieving 100% and generating 1.9166 units.

Table 1.3: Number of Doctoral Students' Publications

FACULTY	NO. DOCTORAL STUDENTS	NO OF JOURNAL ARTICLES	NO OF UNITS
FHS	1	1	0,5
FHSSE	1	1	0,25
FMCL	11	18	12,3
FSEA	4	4	0,8667
TOTAL	17	24	13,9167

At mid-year, the University recorded **24** journal articles produced by **17** doctoral students, representing **77.42%** of the mid-year target of 31 publications.

Academic staff with doctoral degrees and those who are registered for doctoral degrees.

KPI 2.1.2 Percentage (%) of academic staff with doctoral degrees **(target 23%)**

KPI 2.1.3 Percentage (%) of academic staff registered for doctoral degrees **(target 45%)**

FACULTY	TOTAL NUMBER OF	ACADEMIC STAFF REGISTERED FOR MASTERS DEGREES		ACADEMIC STAFF REGISTERED FOR DOCTORAL DEGREES		LESS THAN MASTERS DEGREE HOLDERS
		REGIS-TERED	HOLDERS	REGIS-TERED	HOLDERS	
FMCL	170	5	48	70	16	31
FHSSE	145	0	52	28	48	17
FHS	98	2	28	19	42	7
FSEA	157	0	92	37	56	9
GRAND TOTAL	570	7	220	154	162	64

The University has a total of 481 academic staff members, of whom 162 hold doctoral degrees, translating to 34%. This exceeds the institutional midyear target of 23% for KPI 2.1.2 (Percentage of academic staff with doctoral degrees) by 11 percentage points, indicating strong performance and positive progress towards enhancing staff qualifications. The Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law (FMCL) recorded the highest number of doctoral degree holders (70), followed by FHSSE (48), FHS (42), and FSEA (56).

Regarding KPI 2.1.3 (Percentage of academic staff registered for doctoral degrees), 162 academics are currently registered for doctoral studies, representing 28.4% of the academic staff number, against the annual target of 45%, indicating that performance is also above target, as we are at 70%, which is above by 25%. The Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture (FSEA) leads in doctoral registrations with 56 academics, followed by FHSSE (48), FHS (42), and FMCL (16).

Postdoctoral Fellowships

The university has a total of 41 Post Doctoral Research Fellows (PDRF) appointed in various faculties and divisions. The Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture is hosting most PDRF's as compared to other faculties. Majority of these postdocs are externally funded by the National Research Foundation through the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI), other NRF freestanding fellowships, South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), Water Research Commission (WRC) and through partnerships with other higher education institutions.

NO.	FACULTY/DIVISION/CENTRE/INSTITUTE	NO. OF PDRF
1	DVC RPS BRICS Research	1
2	FHSSE	1
3	Research & Innovation	1
4	Centre of Excellence in Mass Spectrometry for Southern Africa	1
5	Green Technology Confucius Institute	2
6	FHS	3
7	OHS in Mining Institute	3
8	Institute for Pathogen and Global Health Research, UNIVEN	3
9	FMCL	4
10	Ismail Mahomed Centre for Human and Peoples' Rights	5
11	FSEA	17
Total		41

National Quota = 55% Females

NO.	GENDER	%PDRFS
1	Female	54
2	Male	46
TOTAL	17	24

Grant Applications and Awards

A total of 24 new research grants has been received from January-June 2026, from various sponsors and partners.

UNIVEN received funding from the Department of Science, Technology & Innovation (DSTI), National Research Foundation (NRF), National Department of Tourism (NDT), Atlas Network, Research Councils including the Council for Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), Water Research Commission (WRC), and through partnerships with other higher education institutions; namely, University of Pretoria (UP), University of South Africa (UNISA) and the University of Witwatersrand.

A total of 135 Honours, 82 Masters and 36 PhD candidates have been funded by NRF. In addition, 1 student has been funded by Queen Elizabeth Commonwealth Scholarship Doctoral, 1 by SAMRC Doctoral and 2 by SAMRC Masters.

Total number of Honours, First-time recipients of Master's and Doctoral NRF Funded students per faculty to date

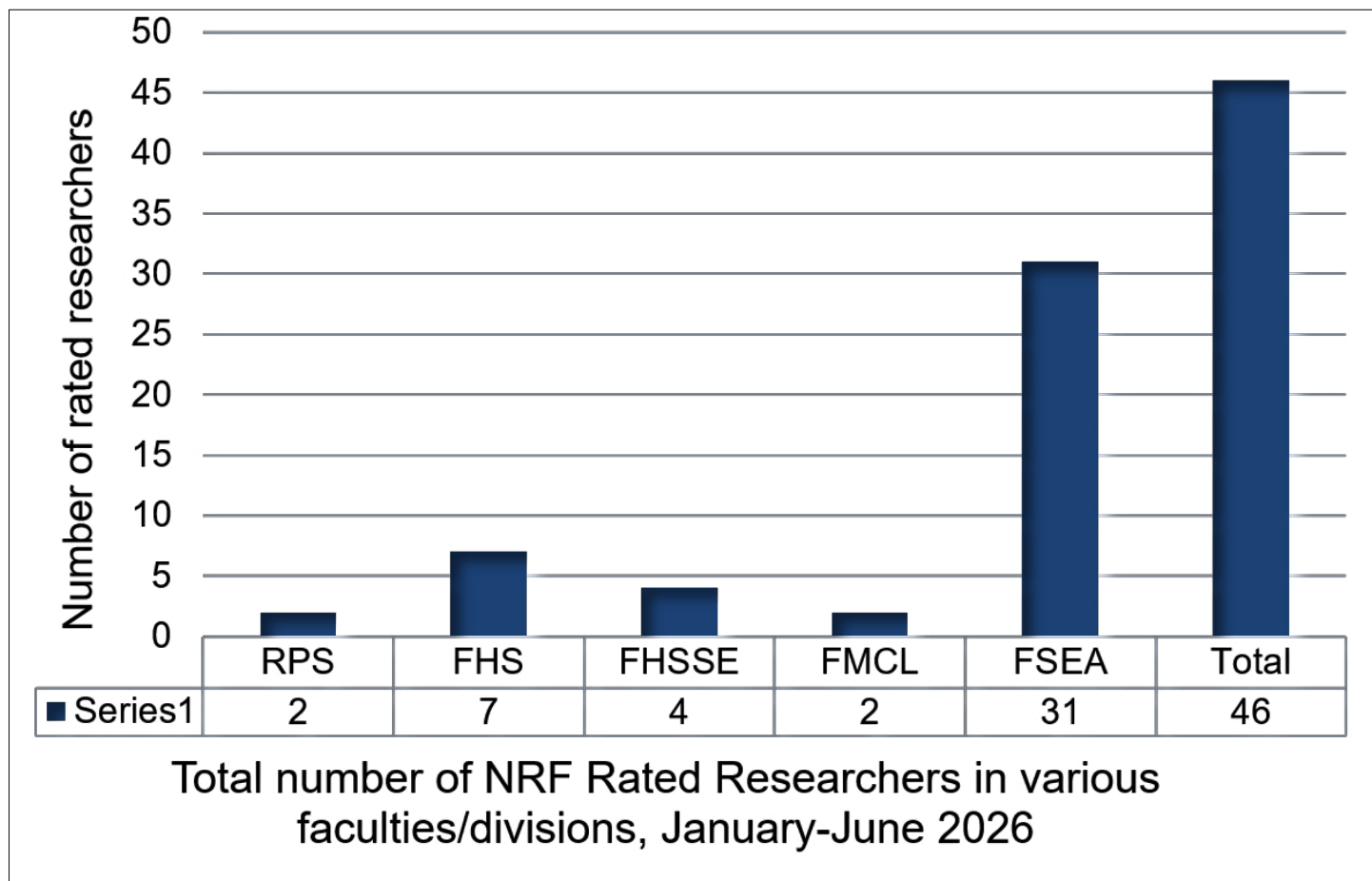
NO.	LEVEL OF FUNDING	FHS	FHSSE	FMCL	FSEA
1	Honours	3	15	41	76
2	Master's	7	13	6	56
3	Doctoral	3	2	12	19
TOTAL		13	30	59	151

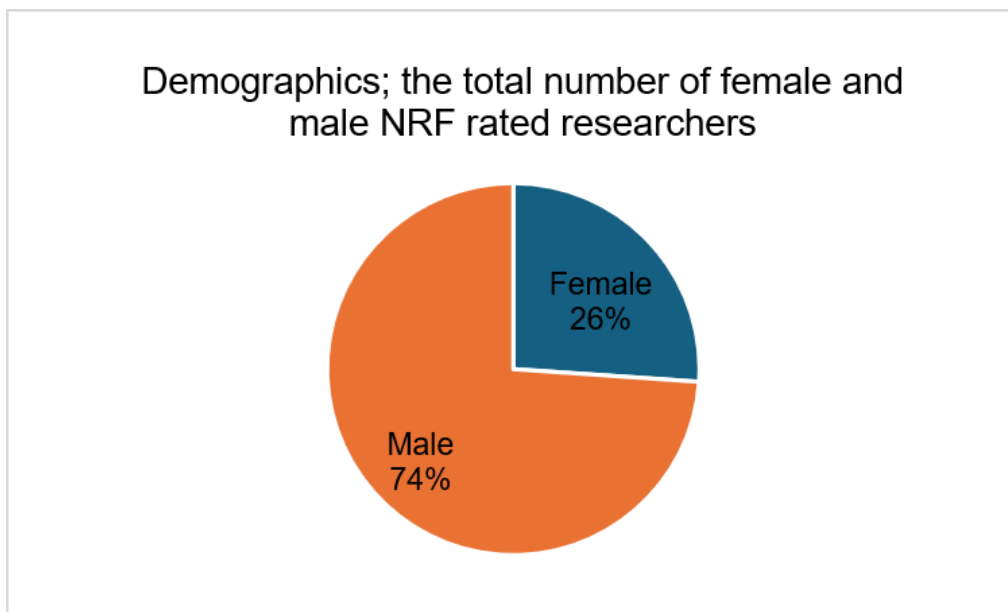
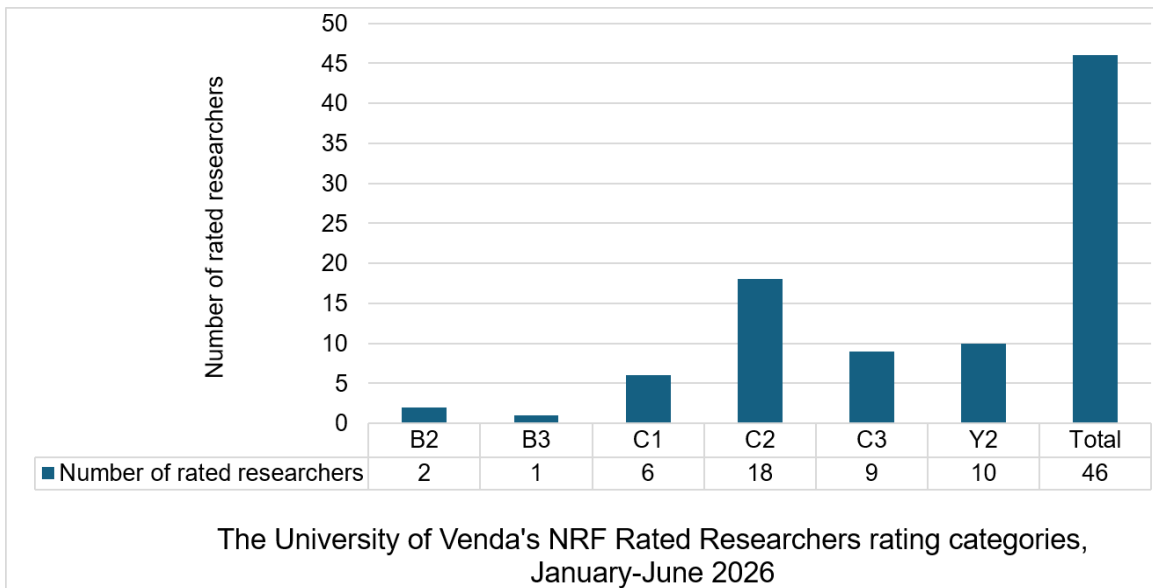
The Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture recorded the highest number of NRF awards, due to the NRF focus areas split: 80% of funded students should be from the Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) disciplines, and 20% from the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) discipline.

A total of 330 postgraduate students have been funded to date, with 326 funded by the NRF, while the remaining four students received support from other external sponsors. The institution is still awaiting additional awards from the NRF for the Ad-Hoc scholarship linked to the SARChI chairs, which were submitted for funding consideration in the 2026 academic year.

NRF Ratings and Researcher Development

A total of **46 NRF rated researchers** are reported by June 2026 with the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture hosting the majority of the rated researchers, with active support for new rating applications. Continued support through workshops and mentorship is planned to maintain and grow this critical research capacity.





May Graduation Postgraduate Output



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**The University of Venda offers programmes
in the following faculties**

Faculty of Health Sciences

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law

Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture