



University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

UNIVEN Weekly e-Newsletter



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Faculty of Science, Engineering, and Agriculture Empowers Livestock Farmers Through Animal Health Workshop



Attendees

The University of Venda's Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture, through its Experimental Farm, successfully hosted an Animal Health Workshop for Sustainable Agro Processing on 23 June 2026 at the Agricultural Hall. The workshop brought together livestock farmers from across the Vhembe District, including participants from Thulamela, Collins Chabane, Musina, and Makhado municipalities.

The event also attracted postgraduate students from the Department of Animal Science, representatives from the Department of Agriculture at Tshwane University of Technology and the University of Zululand, traditional leadership structures, and industry partners, including MSD Animal Health and Mathuba Farming Academy.



Prof Natasha Potgieter, Executive Dean Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture (FSEA)

The workshop was officially opened by the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture, Prof Natasha Potgieter, who emphasised the importance of animal health in achieving sustainable agro - processing. In her address, she highlighted that agro processing begins on the farm and that healthy livestock form the foundation of a successful livestock value chain.



Ms Thifheli Kutama, Experimental Farm Manager

The organiser and Farm Manager of the University of Venda Experimental Farm, Ms Thifheli Kutama, presented the purpose of the workshop. She noted that the initiative forms part of the University's commitment to community engagement, knowledge transfer, and farmer development. The workshop also serves as one of a series of activities leading up to the University's Annual Farmers Day, scheduled for August 2026.



Prof Lutendo Murulana, Deputy Dean, Research and Postgraduate Studies

The event received messages of support from the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research

and Postgraduate Studies, Prof Fulufhelo Netswera, and Dr Mlungisi Ganto from the Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialization. Both speakers reaffirmed the University's commitment to supporting communities through research, innovation, and skills development.

Representing Vhembe District Municipality, Mr Mukundi Mushaphi encouraged farmers to actively participate in the workshop and take advantage of the opportunity to learn from industry experts and fellow farmers.



Top to bottom: Mukundi Mushaphi, Dr Mlungisi Ganto, Dr Judas Mavhungu

Speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Vhembe, Dr. Judas Mavhungu commended the collaboration between the University of Venda and the Department. He further highlighted the various support programmes available to farmers and emphasised the importance of universities in transferring knowledge and practical skills to farming communities.

The workshop featured presentations by leading experts in livestock production and animal health. Dr Moses Ratsaka delivered a presentation on nutrition for sheep, goats, and beefcattle, highlighting the role of proper nutrition in animal health and productivity. Dr Princess Moswakato from MSD Animal Health presented on livestock hygiene, common livestock diseases, disease prevention, vaccination programs, vaccinology, and biosecurity. Mr Emmanuel Mudau from Mathuba Farming Academy shared insights on sustainable livestock farming and breeding practices. At the same time, Dr Mpho Tshikororo encouraged farmers to view farming as a business and explained how investment in animal health contributes to profitability and sustainability.



Dr Mpho Tshikororo

Top to bottom: Dr Moses Ratsaka , Dr Princess Moswakato, and Mr Emmanuel Mudau

One of the highlights of the workshop was the practical demonstration session held at the University of Venda Experimental Farm. Farmers received hands-on training in livestock handling and vaccination techniques for both small and large stock animals. The demonstrations were facilitated by Mr Mudau and Dr Princess Moswakato, providing participants with practical skills they can apply directly in their farming operations.



Attendees during the farm demonstrations

As a key outcome of the workshop, farmers agreed to organise themselves into groups when purchasing vaccines. Through collaboration with State Veterinarians from the Department of Agriculture and MSD Animal Health, farmers will receive technical support and advisory services to strengthen disease prevention and improve livestock health management. This initiative is expected to contribute towards reducing disease outbreaks, improving productivity, and strengthening sustainable livestock production in the Vhembe District.

The workshop demonstrated the value of collaboration between the University, government departments, municipalities, industry partners and farming communities in addressing agricultural challenges. It further showcased the University of Venda's commitment to making a meaningful impact in society through community engagement, research, and innovation. Three lucky farmers won vaccination hampers courtesy of MSD and the Experimental Farm. As the University continues its preparations for the Annual Farmers Day, the Animal Health Workshop is an important step towards empowering farmers with the knowledge and practical skills needed



to build a more productive and sustainable agricultural sector.



Dembe Mutshinyalo Redefines the Purpose, Leadership, and Impact at UNIVEN



As South Africa concludes Youth Month, Dembe Mutshinyalo embodies the spirit of a generation that is resilient, purpose-driven, and determined to shape a better future. Her journey reminds us that true success is not defined by the absence of setbacks but by the courage to transform challenges into opportunities for growth. Through her excellence in leadership, public speaking, entrepreneurship, and community impact, she represents the vibrant potential of South Africa's youth. Dembe is living proof that when young people are empowered with opportunities, mentorship, and the confidence to pursue their purpose, they become catalysts for meaningful change. Her story is not only a celebration of personal achievement but also a powerful reflection of the University of Venda's commitment to nurturing future leaders who are locally relevant and globally competitive.

At the age of 22, Dembe Mutshinyalo has established herself as one of the University of Venda (UNIVEN)'s most outstanding student leaders, public speakers, and emerging entrepreneurs. Her story is one of resilience, courage, self-discovery, and an unwavering commitment to creating meaningful change. It is a story that demonstrates how life's greatest disappointments can often become the foundation for its greatest achievements.

Dembe matriculated from Mbilwi Secondary School in 2021 with a clear vision for her future. Like many young people, she aspired to become a medical doctor and dedicated herself to pursuing that dream. Following matric, she enrolled at another institution, where she spent two years completing a bridging programme in preparation for admission into Medicine.

For many years, Medicine had been the career she envisioned for herself. However, as time passed, she realised that the journey was taking a significant toll on her mental and emotional well-being. In 2024, she made one of the bravest decisions of her life. She chose

to step away from the path she had pursued for years and enrolled for a Bachelor of Science degree in Botany and Zoology at UNIVEN.

She expressed that, at that time, the decision felt devastating. It felt like she had failed. She felt as if she was starting all over while her peers were moving forward. "Little did I know that what appeared to be a setback would soon become the turning point that would change my life forever," she said.

When Dembe arrived at the UNIVEN, she felt disappointed and uncertain. However, the institution presented her with opportunities that would help her to rebuild her confidence and discover talents that she never knew she possessed.

One of those opportunities was joining the UNIVEN Debate Fraternity. Although she had always enjoyed speaking, she had never formally participated in debating or public speaking throughout her school career. Driven by a desire to learn and improve, she joined the fraternity without knowing that it would become one of the defining experiences of her life.

In October 2024, she participated in a novice-friendly debating tournament against students from the University of Mpumalanga, the University of Limpopo, and Tshwane University of Technology Polokwane Campus. Despite being new to the competitive debating environment, she advanced to the finals, a moment that marked the beginning of an extraordinary journey.

The following year, she represented UNIVEN at the prestigious Jozi Rumbles Tournament hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand. Competing against some of South Africa's finest student speakers from more than thirty universities, Dembe delivered an exceptional performance and was crowned 1st Best Public Speaker.

Her success continued when she represented UNIVEN at the Southern African Universities Debating Championship (SAUDC), hosted by the University of Pretoria. The competition attracted participants from across Southern

Africa, including South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, and Zimbabwe. Among more than fifty competitors in the public speaking category, Dembe secured the title of 2nd Best Public Speaker and received the Best Delegate Award, bringing home the first-ever SAUDC public speaking trophy for UNIVEN.



The pinnacle of her public speaking journey came later that year when she represented the UNIVEN at the Pan African Universities Debating Championship (PAUDC). The championship brought together more than 57 institutions from 11 African countries, including Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, and Botswana.



Certificate and medal awarded to Dembe Mutshinyalo at the 17th Pan African Universities Debating Championship (PAUDC) 2025

Competing against some of Africa's most talented speakers, Dembe advanced to the finals and was ultimately recognised as the 7th Best Public Speaker in Africa. Beyond the accolades, the experience deepened her appreciation for Pan-Africanism, collaboration, and the power of young Africans working together to address shared challenges and opportunities.

While many students would consider such achievements enough, Dembe continued pushing herself beyond her comfort zone.

Towards the end of 2025, she came across a call for applications to join the executive leadership of Enactus UNIVEN. She applied, successfully progressed through the selection process, and was appointed President of Enactus UNIVEN.

Known by many as a true "Boss Lady", Dembe has demonstrated exceptional leadership by inspiring and empowering those around her. Her leadership journey reflects confidence, resilience, vision, and a commitment to uplifting others. Rather than seeking personal recognition, she has consistently focused on creating opportunities for fellow students and helping them realise their own potential.

Through Enactus, a global organisation that uses entrepreneurial action to create positive social and economic change, Dembe has led teams of talented student innovators and entrepreneurs who are committed to transforming communities through sustainable solutions.

One of the student enterprises under her leadership recently qualified for the Harmony Top 10 Challenge, competing against hundreds of student entrepreneurs from institutions across South Africa. The team is currently pursuing a wildcard position for the national competition in Sandton. If successful, the enterprise could potentially follow in the footsteps of the University of Venda's 2017 Enactus team that represented South Africa on the global stage, this time with the possibility of competing in Brazil.

Her success as President is particularly

remarkable because she did not consider herself an entrepreneur when she first joined the organisation. She simply believed in her leadership abilities. Through mentorship, exposure, and practical experience, she developed an entrepreneurial mindset and began recognising the immense potential of entrepreneurship as a vehicle for social change.

Dembe's growth has not been limited to debating and entrepreneurship. She is also a contributor to the University of Venda's podcast segment, *The Future*, where she engages in discussions on issues affecting students and society. Through this platform, she continues to strengthen her communication skills while contributing meaningfully to conversations about leadership, innovation, development, and the future of young people.

Her involvement in multiple activities reflects a personal philosophy that she often shares with fellow students: university education should be about more than simply obtaining a qualification.

She believes that students should actively seek opportunities that provide practical experience, leadership skills, exposure, networks, and personal development. According to her, every student is busy, but not every form of busyness contributes to growth and long-term success.

Having once believed that opportunities could only be found elsewhere, Dembe now strongly advocates for the University of Venda. She encourages prospective students to recognise the value of institutions that invest in student development and provide platforms for leadership, innovation, and personal growth.

Through the University of Venda, she has travelled to places she never imagined visiting, participated in national and continental competitions, attended high-level conferences and events, stayed in prestigious hotels, and shared spaces with influential leaders and change-makers from across Africa.

These experiences have expanded her worldview, strengthened her confidence, and

inspired her to dream beyond the limitations she once placed on herself.

When asked what she hopes to achieve in life, Dembe's answer remains simple yet powerful: she wants to make a difference.

Whether through advocacy, entrepreneurship, leadership, public speaking, or policy development, she is committed to contributing towards a better South Africa and a better Africa. She believes that meaningful change is created by individuals who are willing to step forward, embrace challenges, and become pioneers in their chosen fields.

Today, the young woman who once thought her future had been derailed has become a symbol of resilience and possibility. She has transformed disappointment into purpose, uncertainty into confidence, and setbacks into opportunities for growth.

She believes that every setback she experienced

was ultimately part of a greater purpose and that every opportunity she received was made possible through God's grace.

As she continues her journey, Dembe Mutshinyalo stands as a powerful example of what can happen when courage meets opportunity. From aspiring doctor to award-winning public speaker, from uncertain student to respected leader, from dreamer to Boss Lady, her story is proof that success is not defined by the path we originally choose, but by the purpose we discover along the way.

Her journey is far from over. In many ways, it is only just beginning. And if her achievements so far are anything to go by, there is little doubt that Dembe Mutshinyalo will continue to inspire, lead, and make a lasting impact wherever her future takes her. Indeed, UNIVEN motto stands out through her success, "Creating future leaders that are locally relevant and globally competitive."

From Ubuntu to Innovation: UNIVEN Inspires Global Collaboration at SRI2026 Networking Session

The University of Venda (UNIVEN) reaffirmed its growing stature as a globally engaged institution by hosting a memorable Networking Session at the Sustainability Research and Innovation (SRI) 2026 Africa Regional Conference in Cape Town on 25 June 2026.



Some of the attendees of the Networking session

Bringing together leading researchers, policymakers, development practitioners, funding agencies, and sustainability experts from across Africa and beyond, the evening celebrated not only the progress made during the conference but also the partnerships that will shape Africa's sustainable future.

Held at the Southern Sun Cape Sun Hotel, the Networking session embodied the spirit of collaboration, Ubuntu, and African excellence that defined the conference, which UNIVEN co-hosted alongside the National Research Foundation (NRF), the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI), Future Earth Africa Hub and other strategic partners.



Welcoming delegates, Prof Vhonani Netshandama, Director of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation and Commercialisation at UNIVEN, reflected on the University's remarkable journey as an institution that continues to make a significant contribution to global sustainability research through co-creation and co-designing solutions with partners. She extended her appreciation to the partners, stating that collegiality had been exceptional throughout the planning and execution of the project.

She described the occasion as a historic milestone for the University, highlighting UNIVEN's strategic location in the Limpopo province which is South Africa's gateway to

the African continent and its commitment to co-creating knowledge with communities, traditional leaders and international partners.

"Every great achievement begins with a first step," she remarked, adding that the University's participation in co-hosting the continental conference demonstrates that institutions rooted in rural communities can successfully contribute to global scientific dialogue.

Prof Netshandama further emphasised that UNIVEN's approach to research extends beyond academia by integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems, community participation and intergenerational collaboration to address societal challenges.



Presenting the University's global profile, Dr Segun Obadire, Director of International Relations and Partnerships, challenged delegates to rethink conventional perceptions of rural universities.

He described UNIVEN as an institution that has transformed its rural location into a strategic advantage, positioning itself as a globally competitive university whose research directly addresses societal needs.

"Our rural landscape is not a limitation; it is our competitive advantage," he said.

He highlighted the University's strengths in biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation, food security, health innovation and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, noting that its research philosophy is anchored in

engaged scholarship that delivers practical solutions to community challenges.

Dr Obadire also showcased several flagship initiatives, including the Vuwani Science Resource Centre, entrepreneurship programmes that prepare graduates to become job creators, and the University's new green innovation campus under development in Makhado.

He invited delegates to view UNIVEN as a model of how a rural African university can simultaneously uplift local communities while earning international recognition through impactful research and innovation.



Delivering remarks on behalf of the National Research Foundation, Deputy CEO, Prof Gugu Moche reflected on the key lessons emerging from the conference.

She noted that Africa is increasingly taking leadership in global sustainability conversations rather than merely participating in them. She further stressed that addressing complex sustainability challenges requires transdisciplinary collaboration, stronger partnerships between science and society, and greater investment in early-career researchers. Prof Moche reaffirmed the NRF's commitment to strengthening Africa's research and innovation ecosystem, expanding international partnerships, and ensuring that research delivers measurable benefits for society.



Representing the Future Earth Africa Hub, Prof Marwa Fahmy applauded the organisers for creating a platform that united delegates from different countries around common sustainability challenges.

She observed that although participants came from diverse backgrounds and continents, they shared many of the same development challenges. She encouraged continued collaboration beyond the conference, describing the partnerships formed during the week as the beginning of a long-term journey towards shared African solutions.



Concluding the Networking session, Prof Joseph Francis, Director of UNIVEN's Institute

for Rural Development, encouraged delegates to fully embrace the purpose of the networking evening by building new professional relationships rather than remaining within familiar circles.

He reminded participants that meaningful innovation thrives on new conversations, fresh perspectives and collaborative partnerships. He also expressed appreciation to the conference organisers, speakers, volunteers, hospitality staff and delegates whose collective efforts contributed to the success of both the Networking session and the conference.

Throughout the evening, delegates strengthened existing collaborations, forged new partnerships and exchanged ideas that will continue advancing sustainability research

across Africa and beyond.

The Networking session served as more than a social gathering. It reflected UNIVEN's commitment to internationalisation, research excellence, inclusive innovation and partnership-building. By bringing together diverse voices from academia, government, industry and communities, the University once again demonstrated its leadership in advancing African-led solutions to global sustainability challenges.

As SRI2026 continued, the evening left delegates with a shared sense of purpose: that through collaboration, mutual respect and collective action, Africa is well positioned to lead the transformation towards a more sustainable and resilient future.

Meet the New Faces at UNIVEN – July 2026



L-R: Mr Themba Marvin Makhubela, Lecturer - Department of English, Media studies and linguistics; Mr Thulani Zakhele Dhlamini, Lecturer - Department of Professional and Curriculum Studies; Mr Khutso Solomon Kgopene Mphahlele, Lecturer - Department of African Languages; Dr John Mamokhere, Output Support Officer - Research and Innovation Directorate; and Dr Mbulaheni Lordwin Mavhungu, Lecturer - Department of Business Management