



## Cementing a Unique partnership between the University of Venda and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment



On Friday, 14 April 2023, the University of Venda (UNIVEN) led by the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Bernard Nthambeleni hosted a high-powered delegation from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) led by Ms Flora Mokgohloa, the Deputy Director-General for Biodiversity and Conservation. The purpose of the DFFE visit was to formalise a partnership designed to jointly champion sustainable development. This entailed signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) that encompasses all the more than seven branches and four entities of DFFE. This was a groundbreaking event because it's the first time that such a comprehensive partnership was concluded between a University and DFFE. The signing of this MoU was held at the University of Venda's Research Conference Centre.



Following the opening address were messages of support that DFFE Public Entities delivered. First, the CEO of the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), Mr Shonisani Munzhedzi, revealed how his organisation has continued to introduce initiatives that have helped several students from UNIVEN and other institutions to develop solid careers. He went on to reveal some of the SANBI plans to set up state-of-the-art laboratories across the country. "We are committed to touching and changing lives through this MoU", said Mr Munzhedzi.



The Chief Director of Biodiversity Economy and Sustainable Use at the DFFE, Mr Khorommbi Matibe, delivered a message of support from the CEO of Isimangaliso Wetland Park, another public entity of DFFE that supported the signing of MoU. He revealed that students at UNIVEN are welcome to do their practicals and/or internships at Isimangaliso.



Welcoming guests and key stakeholders, the Director Community Engagement, Prof Vhonani Netshandama said the University was proud to be associated with the DFFE. She highlighted the significance of the MoU with respect to relevance and impact of the University, spelling out why it was important for UNIVEN and its stakeholders to make sure that implementation of the MoU sees the light of day.



Mr Oscar Mthimkhulu, the Managing Executive of the Kruger National Park (SANParks) said the MoU with UNIVEN bore components that "resonated well with what we do in terms of nature conservation and biodiversity. It gives us an opportunity to improve where it is needed and we support this MoU that will bring change in this area".



Ms Flora Mokgohloa, Deputy Director-General responsible for Biodiversity and Conservation delivered a well-received address on behalf of the Director General of the Department, Ms Nomfundo Tshabalala. Ms Mokgohloa went at length to express how fascinated she was by the richness of the Venda culture and biodiversity of Vhembe District in particular. She said signing the MoU was a historic development because its implementation would address several

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The two institutions cementing the relationship

aspects of biodiversity. For her, "UNIVEN is well placed to drive a programme that educates communities on biodiversity and conservation. We are on a mission of expanding our conservation work". Amongst others, she pointed out that the MoU covered the production of indigenous foods and research on nature conservation. She extended her gratitude to the team that Prof Joseph Francis and Mr Khorommbi Matibe led and crafted the MoU. Continuing with her speech, Ms Mokgohloa emphasised the need for protecting indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) at all costs. She concluded that she looked forward to the development of the implementation plan and its effective execution.



In his Address, the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of UNIVEN, Dr Bernard Nthambeleni revealed that he saw the signing ceremony as a momentous step forward in the University's strategic intent to become "a University leading in engaged scholarship, whilst producing graduates that are locally relevant and globally competitive". He highlighted UNIVEN's four strategic thrusts, namely student-centredness and engaged scholarship, entrepreneurial university, governance for outstanding scholarship, and partnerships, linkages and internationalisation.

Dr Nthambeleni said the signing of the MoU with the DFFE was highly significant because of its alignment with the University's strategic objectives and reinforces commitment to engaged scholarship, research, innovation, and collaboration for sustainable development". "The Memorandum of Understanding we are signing today has far-reaching implications for our university because it accords us an opportunity to strengthen our teaching, research, and community engagement acumen", the Vice-Chancellor and Principal emphasised.

He pointed out that it was gratifying to note that the nature of the university's collaboration in the MoU was clearly outlined as joint research initiatives, staff and student exchange programmes, student supervision, workshops, seminars, conferences and guest lectureships involving DFFE staff. For him, there was no doubt that the MoU would go a long way in enhancing the university's capacity to address the pressing environmental challenges facing the country and contribute to the sustainable development of grassroots communities.

The Vice-Chancellor and Principal pointed to the audience that the MoU that the two institutions were signing, was a testament to the fact that it was possible to collaborate. A team led by Prof Joseph Francis from UNIVEN

and Mr Khorommbi Matibe, Chief Director at DFFE had already shown the way when they led joint working teams that put together the MoU. In this regard, he said "They have already shown us that it is possible to collaborate. Ours is simply to inflate the wings of those who will be at the forefront of implementing the dreams well captured in the MoU. Their collaboration serves as a solid example of how-to co-design, co-implement, co-generate knowledge, and hopefully and co-disseminate outcomes, which is the hallmark of our vision of engaged scholarship".

Dr Nthambeleni mentioned that signing the MoU confirmed further UNIVEN's commitment to working with our partners in government, industry, civil society, and academia to address the complex challenges facing our society.

In his conclusion, the Vice-Chancellor and Principal stated that UNIVEN was on an upward trajectory, "with all our forces rallying in one direction". He shared that recently the University jointly launched with Thulamela Local Municipality and the Vhembe TVET College an initiative coined "Cleaning Citizen Mindsets to Trigger Responsible Action", which has the potential so huge that he believed if effectively resourced and implemented would create a new socioeconomic ecosystem in which cleaner/improved citizen mindsets, in terms of attitudes, behavior and every day action would help yield an ever-clean environment in both physical and metaphorical terms or sense in the country.



After the address by the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, key partners delivered messages of support and commitment to collaborate in ensuring the MoU is implemented. First was the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism represented by Ms Maphidi.



Tonderai Makoni, a Director of the Vhembe Biosphere Reserve (VBR) highlighted the fact that the VBR signed a MoU with UNIVEN in 2022, which made it easier to actively participate in the implementation of the MoU. Apart from this, the VBR was part of the team that co-crafted the MoU.



Prof Joseph Francis (left) signing the MoU as a witness



A message of support from the Vhembe TVET College was delivered by the Deputy Principal, Ms Muvhulawa Boo. She revealed how her institution would participate in the implementation of the MoU, including the benefits she already foresaw would accrue to staff and students.



Cllr M. Machaba, pledged Thulamela Local Municipality's full support of the signing of the MoU. He indicated that there existed strong working relationships between his Municipality and the University.



UNIVEN's Director of Legal Services, Adv Eric Nemukula, facilitated the signing of the MoU together with Mrs More who represented the DFFE Legal Department.



Dr Bernard Nthambeleni (3rd from left) poses for a photo after handing over gifts to the delegation from DFFE led by Ms Flora Mokgohloa (4th from left)

In a post-MoU signing interview the Champion of the MoU at UNIVEN, Prof Joseph Francis, Director of the Institute for Rural Development appreciated colleagues who participated in the event, saying "I hope that the spirit of togetherness and support for each other we displayed during the MoU formulation and signing event will help yield more success as we continue trotting on the path towards creating sustainable hope at UNIVEN and in society in general".



University Registrar, Adv Edward Lambani gave the vote of thanks to the different stakeholders who came to witness the birth of the new historic relationship. He said the MoU should bear the expected fruits and benefit the surrounding communities and the country at large. Adv Lambani further thanked the DFFE for identifying UNIVEN as a relevant partner. "These kinds of collaborations will assist us to preserve our nature and indigenous food and knowledge", he added.



Ms Flora Mokgohloa and Dr Bernard Nthambeleni



Dr Takalani Dzaga facilitating the MoU signing ceremony programme

# Female researchers empower each other through FIRE Network Conference



The University of Venda (UNIVEN) and Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University (German: Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg (DHBW)), co-hosted a three-day Female International Research (FIRE) Network Conference that took place from 24 – 27 April 2023 at Kruger National Park, Skukuza Lodge.

FIRE is a Female International Research Network that aims to strengthen industry academia cooperation, generate research results for societal needs, and increase the visibility of female research contributions. The conference was sponsored by the Baden-Wuerttemberg Foundation (Baden-Württemberg Stiftung) and DHBW Stiftung.

The objective of FIRE is to develop a German-African network of female researchers from early stages to masters until professorship. It also involves dual partner organisations in international, cooperative research; it aims to establish structures for joint research projects; knowledge transfer of research results to society and to make international research cooperation between German and African female partners (gender equality) at the DHBW and the African partner University.

During this conference, various women from different countries across the globe discussed various topics on how to uplift upcoming researchers until they become researchers.

Amongst others, the FIRE conference discussed the following key topics based on carefully considered preferences of FIRE members: EU grants proposal writing and available opportunities; ChatGPT; Business information and Technology; Mentorship and coaching; Intercultural communications and Leadership.

The conference also looked at Interdisciplinary approaches to Dual-cooperative education strategies and methods; Social entrepreneurship and innovation; Climate justice and advocacy; Sexual Gender Based Violence and Femicide (SGBV) as well as Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS).

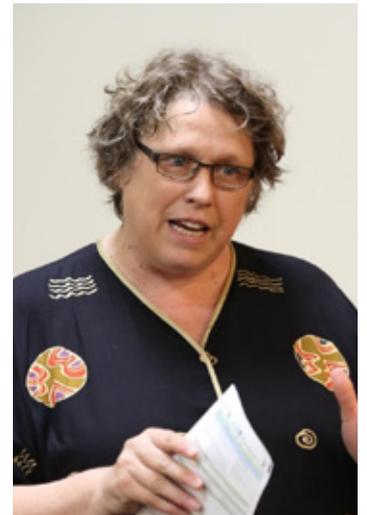
**The objective of FIRE is to develop a German-African network of female researchers from early stages to masters until professorship.**



In her opening and welcome message, Director Community Engagement, Prof Vhonani Netshandama indicated that UNIVEN as a historically underprivileged University is thankful for the opportunity to host this FIRE Network Conference. She appreciated the 20 UNIVEN junior women researcher-delegates for responding to the call-in numbers and encouraged them to actively participate throughout the conference.



University of Venda Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) Research and Postgraduate Studies Prof Nosisi Feza encouraged attendees not to limit themselves but to aim at breaking boundaries in research. Also strive to make change in people's lives. "The power invested in you is needed and make use of it," she said.



Professor Sabine Möbs, a Professor of Business Information Technology at DHBW, and Co - founder of FIRE introduced the conference to South African attendees and mentioned that this network is a platform for women to discuss their challenges and assist each other on how to overcome those challenges. Professor Möbs is an adjunct Professor at the University of Venda, from Duale DHBW)



## Female researchers empower each other through FIRE Network Conference cont...



Delegates of the FIRE Conference

*Below are some of the reflections from delegates who attended the conference:*

"This conference was a point of a turnaround for me. I got to see that it is possible to be a seasoned researcher as a woman. I am glad I was able to attend and participate. As a junior researcher now, I know that there are many opportunities available for junior researchers and I can make an impact in the world. I got to interact with seasoned female researchers from both UNIVEN and FIRE Network and realise that there are collaborations, fundings and support available for women in research."

"My experience was truly inspiring and empowering. It was incredible to see so many successful and influential women from different parts of the world come together to share their knowledge and expertise in their respective fields."



UNIVEN Female group

"I was impressed by the different research topics covered throughout the conference. It was evident that these women were passionate about their work and were using their skills and knowledge to make a positive impact in their communities and beyond."

"Being part of FIRE was a life changing experience. Women in academia turn to relax and claim to have a lot of responsibilities. But this week, I have learnt that we can be mothers, wives, and students and still excel in our academic careers."

"The thought-provoking ideas and knowledge that was shared, made us want to make a difference and add value to the body of knowledge. We were inspired to thrive for innovative research ventures that will bring about sustainable advancement to our communities. We can't wait to represent UNIVEN further as we part take in the upcoming junior fire team!."



Professor Verdiana Masanja, Professor Emeritus of Mathematics attached to the Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology (NM-AIST), spoke about EU funding opportunities. Funding opportunities discussed at great length included Erasmus and DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst- German Academic exchange services).

The conference further discussed Research Training, Multidisciplinary Research Networking and Research Proposal Writing.

The conference had breakaway sessions where various key research topics were addressed, based on what the women wanted. Amongst others, Professor Muthoni Masinde presented about ChatGBT and about what reviewers look for in a funding proposal.

The highlights of the conference entailed amongst others, the participation of 20



Some of the international delegates

UNIVEN -FIRE junior members on an intentional mentorship strategy; a call to action-oriented research, and transboundary engaged teaching and learning- focusing on methods more than content; including impact and succession planning activities.

Delegates were coming from institutions such as UNIVEN, Botho University, Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences, South African College of Applied Psychology, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Central University of Technology- Free State and University of Tanzania, Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology (NM-AIST), University of Pretoria (UP) as well as Duale Hochschule BadenWuerttemberg amongst others.

"I have learned that there are no boundaries in achieving our goals as women. As FIRE members we have started a working relationship that could inspire other colleagues in making the UNIVEN students to be locally relevant and globally competitive. We were introduced to augmented reality and machine learning platforms like ChatGPT."



UNIVEN team demonstrating how Vhavenda women welcome distinguished visitors

# UNIVEN alumnus Prof Vhahangwele Masindi honoured with the prestigious national order



Prof Vhahangwele Masindi

The President of the Republic of South Africa, Dr Cyril Ramaphosa has honoured a UNIVEN alumnus, Prof Vhahangwele Masindi with the Order of Mapungubwe in Bronze during an investiture ceremony that took place on 28 April 2023. This Order of Mapungubwe was bestowed in Bronze to Prof Masindi for his contribution in the environmental sciences focusing on water. His work seeks to find much-needed solutions to the challenges of water scarcity in South Africa.

The Order of Mapungubwe recognises South Africans who have accomplished excellence and exceptional achievement to the benefit of South Africa and beyond.

Prof Masindi is an internationally known and NRF rated researcher with grounded expertise and experience in sustainability and water resource management. He holds a PhD in Environmental Sciences from the University of Venda. Prof Masindi is also a registered Professional Natural Scientist with South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP) in the field of Environmental Sciences. He is currently working as the Research and Development Manager at Magalies Water, Visiting Principal Research Scientist at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Professor Extraordinaire at Tshwane University of Technology, and Professor Extraordinaire at

the University of South Africa. He is also an Editor for the Water SA journal and a Guest Editor for Minerals journal. He was a Research Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, UK. He also serves as an Industry Advisory Panel Member and Committee member for CSIR, Water Centre and DSI, UNESCO, Natural Science thematic, respectively.

His finer research focus is grossly underpinned on water and wastewater treatment, ecological sustainability, water security, and mineral resources recovery from wastewater along with their valorisation and beneficiation. To date, he has published more than 200 peer reviewed papers, conference proceedings, and book chapters including five PCT patents, with an H index of 30 and over 3200 citations. Prof Masindi has graduated MSc and PhD students in various institutions. He is also the recipient of numerous awards such as the Emerging Researcher and innovation awards from different institutions. Specifically, the emerging Researcher awards from the CSIR in 2017 (x2), Innovation Award (DSI) (2019), Emerging Researcher from the National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF) (2019), SAYAS (2020), UNISA R&I Awards (x3) - External Fellow Awards [2021 (organizational), 2021 (divisional), 2022 (divisional), and 2022 (organizational)], and

TWAS-SAREP Regional Young Scientists Award-Scientific and Technological Achievement in Engineering Sciences (in 2022). Nominee for NSTF awards in 2023 for Magalies Water under the WRC award. Also, he is on the list of the SCI World Ranking of Top 2% Scientists from 2021 to date.

National Orders are the highest awards that South Africa bestows on its citizens and eminent foreign nationals who have contributed towards the advancement of democracy and have made a significant impact on improving the lives of South Africans.

The National Orders also recognise the contributions made by individuals towards building a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic, and prosperous South Africa as envisaged in the Constitution.

In his congratulatory message, the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Bernard Nthambeleni expressed that the University of Venda has produced researchers of high caliber and they represent the university at national and international level. He congratulated Prof Masindi and mentioned that UNIVEN don't only lead in research output but has also produced researchers who continue to provide relevant solutions that contribute to South Africa's development priorities.

## UNIVEN alumnus Talifhani Tshitwamulomoni is the first person in the Vhembe District to be recognised by Forbes



Mr Talifhani Tshitwamulomoni

Former UNIVEN student, Mr Talifhani Tshitwamulomoni has been recently selected and included in the sustainability portfolio of Forbes Africa's 30under30 list, making him the first person in the Vhembe District to be recognised by Forbes.

This means that Forbes magazine has acknowledged him as one of the leading top 30 under the age of 30 in Africa in terms of influence and contribution as a result of his work. This occurs at a time when the world is more concerned about the effects of climate change and the growing population, which raises worries about sustainable development.

Forbes magazine's acknowledgment of Talifhani Tshitwamulomoni is a tremendous boost to his career and confirmation that he is Africa's foremost sustainability expert. As Africa's foremost authority on matters pertaining to the environment, social cohesion, and economic inclusion, he is now regarded as an authoritative voice.

Forbes had organised a global Under 30 Summit in Botswana from April 23 to April 26, 2023. All notable individuals under the age of

30 have convened at this summit in Botswana to celebrate their accomplishments and exchange perspectives on pressing issues. Talifhani has attend this event as one of South Africa's representatives to receive his prize and meet with other outstanding achievers from around the world.

Currently, he heads the Green Development Foundation, a sister organisation of the Universal Greening Organisation. From the time he was a student to the present, his work has earned him global accolades from institutions such as the Saemaul Undong Academy in South Korea and most recently Forbes Magazine. The journal is the leading financial publication in the world, with an emphasis on various classifications of individuals. They provide annual lists of the world's wealthiest, most influential, and other categories.

Born and nurtured in Vondo village under the Tshivhase dynasty. He went to Tshanowa Primary School in the same village, then to Luphai Secondary School, where he matriculated before enrolling as an Environmental Sciences undergraduate student at the University of Venda.

During his tenure as a student at UNIVEN, he founded the Universal Greening Organization (UGO) and oversaw a number of student movements. UGO is a student-led environmental organization whose purpose is to overcome the unemployment gap by empowering students through community participation and business-driven conferences. They have helped numerous communities with environmental education and awareness, clean-ups, and tree planting.

On behalf of staff and students, the University of Venda Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Bernard Nthambeleni congratulated Mr Tshitwamulomoni who has rubbed shoulders with other young think tankers in Botswana during the 2023 Forbes Under 30 Summit Africa. He said that this is a rare opportunity in one's lifetime and "I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity for one of our very own Talifhani Tshitwamulomoni to be part of such a distinguished group of young individuals. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr Tshitwamulomoni for his dedication and commitment. For UNIVEN, this is indeed a dream coming true with its motto of creating future leaders".

# 'Your safety starts with you and ends with you'



Mr Stephen Ngobeni, Gudani Tshamano, Dr Bernard Nthambeleni, Major General Eddie van der Walt, Major General Malthonsi and Mr Ratshilumela Mulaudzi

On Thursday, 13 April 2023, the University of Venda (UNIVEN)'s Departments of Protection Services and Criminal Justice together with the South African Police Services (SAPS) launched Campus Community Safety Forum that will assist to fight crime in both UNIVEN and other key stakeholders such as Vhembe TVET College and the surrounding areas. The launch which was supported by Vhembe TVET College and Limpopo Community Policing Forum took place at the School of Education Lecture Hall 01 of the University of Venda.

During this launch, UNIVEN students and staff members were encouraged to report suspicious behaviour and illegal activities that are happening in the Vhembe region, including on UNIVEN and Vhembe TVET College campuses. Security officers were encouraged to partner with the surrounding communities to patrol during the day and at night. The University is equipped with 24-hour surveillance cameras, and escort services, on campus for students and staff.



When delivering the keynote address, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Bernard Nthambeleni mentioned that UNIVEN is excited to host an important initiative to launch the Campus Community Policing Forum together with the South African Police Service, Campus and School Safety Training Institute, Vhembe TVET College, and Communities surrounding our respective institutions.

He briefly remarked that in September 2019, the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Mr Ronald Lamola visited UNIVEN after officially opening the Sexual Offences Court in Thohoyandou. During his visit, the public was informed that Vhembe District Municipality has recorded the highest number of incidents of gender-based violence of more than 13 000 cases. These reported cases were in the form of murder, domestic violence, sexual violence, rape, and assault cases in the entire Limpopo Province.

He mentioned that this was disturbing news because the University of Venda forms part of this district. "The bad image of the Vhembe community is also a bad reflection on us as a University," He said.

Dr Nthambeleni said UNIVEN is a community that has more than 16 000 students and 994 staff members. He said UNIVEN is not insulated from the problems and challenges that affect our societies. He said, "We are part of these communities and what happens to them has a direct impact on us."

The Vice-Chancellor and Principal said in confronting gender-based violence and femicide, the community must challenge patriarchy which remains deeply entrenched within the fabric of the societies and communities to such an extent that most women in communities consider abuse to be a normal way of life.

He further said there is a need to reject ideas, beliefs, values, norms, and systems that perpetuate violence against women and children. As an institution of higher learning, UNIVEN must lead in this fight of eradicating these cultural beliefs and embrace diversity in our campus and communities.

Dr Nthambeleni continued to mention that UNIVEN in confronting genderbased violence and sexual abuse, the management adopted a zero tolerance approach in dealing with this pandemic. He indicated that the University has reviewed the current sexual harassment policies so that we can decisively deal with perpetrators of gender-based violence and sexual abuse.

The Vice Chancellor strongly denounced that those who are found guilty of such abuse are expelled from the University and are working with other universities in the country to ensure that such offenders are not accommodated elsewhere.

He said UNIVEN prioritises all complaints of sexual violence and has strengthened the Gender Equity Office and capacitated it to investigate all complaints expeditiously as well as increased the support to strengthen our student counselling services to provide more holistic therapeutic, emotional, psychological, and mental health support services.

Dr Nthambeleni said UNIVEN has enhanced security measures in and around campus and residences while completing the project to secure our campus by erecting state of the art Clear View boundary fence and ensuring that the campus is sufficiently illuminated at night and installing surveillance cameras in strategic locations. UNIVEN is also working closely with off campus landlords to demand more security measures for students.



In his opening and welcome remarks, Dr Azwihangwisi Mulaudzi, Head of the Department of Criminal Justice at UNIVEN, referred to Gender Based Violence (GBV) as a sensitive and touching topic that needs urgent solution. He urged attendees to participate in coming up with suggestions on how to deal with GBV.



When talking about the challenges of GBV and how these challenges can be resolved, Dr Josephine Mudau who is the Head of Youth in Development Department at UNIVEN viewed Gender Based Violence as a monster. She described GBV as violence that targets a person because of their gender. She mentioned that GBV is linked to gender inequality which is the abuse of power. Dr Mudau indicated that GBV involves physical, sexual, mental, or economic attacks. She further mentioned that this type of abuse could happen in private or in public spaces.

She elaborated on the fact that GBV focuses mostly on women and girls because they make up the majority of survivors and victims of this form of abuse. She mentioned that men also get abused but most opt not to report these crimes or human rights violations because they are afraid of being judged and labeled as being weak. She encouraged men to also report anyone who abuses them. She urged students to not involve themselves in relationships that will hinder progress in their studies.

Dr Mudau concluded her talk by highlighting that GBV is dominant worldwide and people need to come together to find a way of fighting this scourge.



UNIVEN SRC President, Mr Gudani Tshamano spoke about challenges brought by GBV and Student safety. Mr Tshamano said the purpose of the launch is to solve the problem of GBV as it is a pandemic. He mentioned that there is no amount of justification for laying a hand on a woman. He said men are also being abused and when they report these crimes, they are labelled as cowards. Tshamano advised the police to treat people equally when they report a crime. He made a plea to SAPS to assist in this problem and that whoever is found involved in this GBV activities, must be brought to book. Mr Tshamano indicated that the situation has changed at UNIVEN when it comes to safety and management is doing its best to curb this problem. He further mentioned that the institutions of higher learning have been threatened in terms of safety on campuses.



Vhembe District SAPS Commissioner, Major General Eddie Van Der Walt presented challenges of contact crime in the Vhembe District. He gave crime stats in the Vhembe region which is so disturbing. He mentioned how insightful and beneficial it is for the police to be part of crime awareness campaigns happening in the communities. Major General van Der Walt indicated that in this kind of platform, they get to know about what community members are going through on daily basis. He mentioned that Vhembe District has the highest number of contact crimes in the Province. He requested the community to work with the police and implement safety programmes such as neighborhood watch.

# 'Your safety starts with you and ends with you' continued...



Ms Thilingiwi Ramovha who is a Social Worker at the Department of Justice and Correctional Services also delivered a message of support. Ms Ramovha mentioned that her office is the last resort in the criminal justice and their mandate is to detain sentenced offenders. Ms Ramovha said the initiatives such as the launch of a Campus Community Safety Forum are appreciated by the Department of Justice and Correctional Services because they help to eradicate GBV and other cases that might lead to the arrest of offenders. She mentioned that the prison facilities are full to maximum capacity and urged attendees to stay away from criminal activities. She made a commitment to support this initiative.



In his message of support, Limpopo Chairperson of Community Policing Forum, Mr Frans Kgasakgo outlined the challenges that the district is facing in terms of GBV. He encouraged community members to join CPF in their respective areas because this forum has proved to be instrumental in reducing crime in most areas. Mr Kgasakgo showed that GBV is happening where we are staying. It is therefore our responsibility to blow the whistle and urged members to make sure that a case is opened and the perpetrator is arrested. He mentioned that the abuse of alcohol is one of the main contributing factors of GBV.



SRC President, Mr Gudani Tshamano (right) and Mr Stephen Ngobeni (left) shaking hands during the Campus Community Safety Forum launching moment



Mr Ratshilumela Mulaudzi delivering a vote of thanks message



Some of the attendees during the Launch



Group photo of some of the members who participated on the programme



Major General Eddie van der Walt, Dr Bernard Nihambeleni, Gudani Tshamano, Mr Stephen Ngobeni and Major General Mathonsi

# Ambassador Enrique Orta Gonzales of Cuba and Ambassador Mairin Josephina Moreno-Merida of Venezuela deliver a joint public lecture at UNIVEN



Ambassador Enrique Orta Gonzales of Cuba and Ambassador Mairin Josephina MorenoMerida of Venezuela visited the University of Venda (UNIVEN) and jointly delivered a public lecture titled "The Legacy of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez and the Role of the Global South in the Struggle Against Imperialism and International Solidarity." The Public Lecture took place on Thursday, 20 April 2023 at the University's Research Conference Centre.



When introducing the guests, Dr Segun Obadire said this public lecture is important to South Africa, Venezuela, and Cuba. The aim was to educate the current generations on the history of relations that South Africa has with Cuba and Venezuela. He encouraged students to take that advantage in order to obtain knowledge from the two Ambassadors.



In his official opening and welcome message, the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Bernard Nthambeleni said it is not common for two ambassadors to be at one university at the same time. Dr Nthambeleni expressed that UNIVEN considers itself as being blessed to host two ambassadors from two different countries at the same time. It is equally important to know that one of the roles of the University is to serve as a conduit for connecting local communities to the global world. Dr Nthambeleni alluded that the visit of both Ambassadors will give us a deeper understanding of international relations between South Africa and these two sister countries.

He said the public lecture will also open possible opportunities for research collaboration for societal impact, scholarship opportunities for deserving students.

The Vice-Chancellor and Principal told the guests and students that the government of Cuba has continued a long-lasting relationship with the government of South Africa right from the time of the apartheid regime when they openly condemned the apartheid government and demanded the release of Nelson Mandela and other leaders of our liberation struggle. He also applauded the role played by Cuba during COVID-19 by deploying medical doctors to South Africa. "The government of Cuba has been involved in the training of our medical students and other medical practitioners over the past years," added Dr Nthambeleni.

Dr Nthambeleni indicated that South Africa has also played a very huge role as she continued to rally behind the international community on the need to put an end to the US economic blockade against Cuba, and a resolution calling for the lifting of the sanctions.

In the same vein, South Africa stands in solidarity with Venezuela despite being a beautiful country full of mineral resources including oil much bigger than that of Saudi Arabia, yet the political crisis has grown to a very alarming magnitude causing a devastating humanitarian crisis in the country for more than a decade.

Dr Nthambeleni indicated to the audience and the two ambassadors that as a university and everyone else, would like to see the end to war, conflicts, poverty, unemployment, and occupation in every part of the world.



Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Postgraduate Studies, Prof Nosisi Feza shared internationalisation and possible collaboration opportunities with UNIVEN. In her presentation, Prof Feza spoke about Biodiversity and research chairs and bragged about UNIVEN being one of the two universities in the world that are based in UNESCO designated Biosphere Reserve. She spoke about some of the University's achievements where she mentioned that the University is fast growing. "We are also excellent Intellectual Property creators. We have patents that are internationally registered."



In his address, the Cuban Ambassador, HE Enrique Orta Gonzales, Cuban Ambassador to South Africa gave a brief history of Cuba where he mentioned that like South Africa, Cuba was once also colonised. The island of Cuba was inhabited by various Amerindian cultures prior to the arrival of the Genoese explorer Christopher Columbus in 1492. After the arrival on a Spanish expedition, Spain conquered Cuba and appointed Spanish governors to rule over Havana. The administrators in Cuba were subject to the Viceroy of New Spain and the local authorities in Hispaniola.

In 1762-63, Havana was briefly occupied by Britain, before being returned to Spain in exchange for Florida. A series of rebellions between 1868 and 1898, led by General Máximo Gómez, failed to end Spanish rule, and claimed the lives of 49,000 Cuban guerrillas and 126,000 Spanish soldiers. However, the Spanish American War resulted in a Spanish withdrawal from the island in 1898. Following three-and-a-half years of subsequent US military rule, Cuba gained formal independence in 1902.

He encouraged attendees to come in solidarity to protect humanity. "Let us keep the spirit of Fidel Castro and Nelson Mandela alive." His Excellency Gonzales concluded his talk by mentioning that the real solidarity is Ubuntu, "we all need to realise that we need each other, and we need to treat each other like human beings. Government should work for the people and those in power should not see it as an opportunity to enrich themselves," he said.



In her address, Venezuelan Ambassador to South Africa, HE Mairin Josephina MorenoMerinda said she is very happy to have been deployed to South Africa and South Africa is her second home. She said before the revolution in their countries, it was very difficult to get access to university education. Her Excellency Moreno-Merinda said Cuba and Venezuela are like brothers and sister because they do always assist each other. She gave a history of Latin American people and how they were surviving in the post years of coloniality till to date. She also spoke about Former President of the Republic of Venezuela, President Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías and his achievement during his leadership era. President Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías led Venezuela from 1999 until his death in 2013.



SRC President, Mr Gudani Tshamano rendering a vote of thanks



Attendees of the Public Lecture

# Mashudu Francina Foundation donates one million rands to UNIVEN SRC



On Monday, 27 March 2023, the University of Venda (UNIVEN)'s Student Governance Unit together with the Student Representative Council (SRC) held a ceremony to receive One million rands worth donation from Mashudu Francinah Foundation. This ceremony took place at the Student Parliament in the Student Center building.

Mutavhatsindi in his keynote speech indicated that he is the son of Mashudu Francinah Mutavhatsindi. He mentioned that his mother has worked for this University for many years. "My mother started working for UNIVEN in 1992 until she passed away late last year (2022)". He said that she was very passionate about Education, and she has natured and guided many people who are now making an impact in various communities.

"My mother used to encourage us to study hard because she took academic issues seriously. She used to come home with students who did not have accommodation here at the University. We used to sleep with people whom we do not know at all, but we shared a bed with them. During her funeral, I made a commitment in front of people that I will continue assisting students from UNIVEN who are financially struggling in honour of her memory. After communicating with

Student Leadership, I saw a need for us as the Foundation to assist where possible."

He said the Foundation has taken a decision to donate One million rands to the SRC to assist financially needy students. "The funds should be used for its purpose, and we are reassuring that this is not a once-off donation; the Foundation will continue to assist the University."



SRC President, Mr Gudani Tshamano expressed his appreciation to the Mashudu Francina Foundation for dedicating One Million Rands donation to UNIVEN students. Mr Tshamano mentioned that the University has many students who are financially struggling and need this kind of assistance. He said other students have graduated but they do not have certificates because they have loans outstanding to the University. This donated money will be used to address such challenges, even though it will not cover everyone.

"We appreciate what you have done, especially because you are not expecting anything in return from the University," said the SRC President.



Adv Edward Lambani

In his response, the University Registrar, Adv Edward Lambani expressed his gratitude to the Chairperson of Mashudu Francinah Foundation. He mentioned that it is rare to find this event happening where an University employee's legacy is celebrated by her kids in this manner. He thanked the Foundation for choosing UNIVEN by putting this University on its priorities list.

Adv Lambani further said that this event will be recorded in the books of the University and God shall bless the Foundation and shower it with more blessings.



In his welcome message, Director Student Affairs, Mr Azwidowi Mukheli thanked the Foundation chairperson for identifying UNIVEN as their institution of choice regarding the donation.



When outlining the purpose of the event, Bishop George Muhali appreciated the Mashudu Francinah Foundation Chairperson for extending a hand to help those in need. He said the purpose of the event was to give to those who are in need, and he said God always blesses those who give to the poor and those who are in need.



Attendees of the ceremony



When delivering the vote of thanks message, Mr Andisani Mathelemusa encouraged student leaders not to forget the challenges that they are facing. He said even after leaving the University it is still our collective responsibility to come and assist other students who are in need. Mr Mathelemusa thanked the leadership of the Foundation together with the family of the late Mashudu Francinah who attended this ceremony.



The Chairperson and the founder of Mashudu Francinah Foundation, Mr Livhuwani



A group photo of some of the attendees of the ceremony

# Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance (IPQA) successfully held a visibility workshop



## Background

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are increasingly operating in competitive environments and many institutions are currently heavily affected by the economic recession, social consequences and cuts in public expenditure. Yet at the same time universities are having to deal with an increasingly diverse student population with different needs, more demands to deliver excellence in teaching and learning, research, community engagement, and to demonstrate their contribution to society. In this context, improving university performance and strategic profiling are crucial to demonstrate institutional accountability for the use of public funding, quality of education and research, and contribution to economic growth through an effective integrated system for planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting.

The University of Venda (UNIVEN) Directorate of Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance (IPQA) established in 2007, is one of the steering departments within Corporate Services Division under the leadership of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Dr Robert Martin. The Directorate steers and facilitates Institutional Planning, Quality Assurance and Management Information Systems processes and procedures that drive decisions and actions aimed at achieving sustainable levels of effectiveness in teaching and learning, research and community engagement. These focus areas conform to current global practices where university-wide planning and quality assurance activities are integrated. It is through the intended integration of these processes that the UNIVEN academic project derives a careful quality driven support from the IPQA to ensure that the Univen offers academic programmes that are of high standards with a well-designed curriculum that conforms to relevant legislative and regulatory controls.

The significance of IPQA cannot be over-emphasised, considering the increasingly complex planning and quality control challenges that confront higher education institutions throughout the world.

## Objectives of the IPQA Directorate

The IPQA plays a critical role in the realization of the vision and mission of UNIVEN. Much of the work of the IPQA happens at a departmental level with the collaboration amongst the units.



Mr Lufuno Netshifhehe, IPQA Head Quality Assurance

The Quality Assurance (QA) Unit is headed by Mr. Lufuno Netshifhehe. The Unit is responsible for advising the academic staff in the development of new academic programmes, changes to the existing programmes, submission of academic programmes to the statutory bodies (Department on Higher Education and Training [DHET] for PQM clearance, the Council on Higher Education [CHE] for accreditation and for registration purposes to the South African Qualification Authority [SAQA]). The Unit is also the custodian of the University Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) and ensures that all academic programmes offered at UNIVEN are approved, accredited and registered. The Unit is also responsible for ensuring quality culture in the core business of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement in the university is realised, adhered and practised.



The Management Information Systems (MIS) Unit led by Mr Tebello Mofokeng provides data information for processes to all structures within the university for various purposes such as; for statutory performance, enrolment planning (providing data for enrolment trends, scenarios, budgeting, infrastructure, institutional resources, research, management information, and ad hoc requests from staff and university Executive Management. The Unit maintains the Higher Education Data Management (HEDA) environment, coordinates and submit the Higher Education Management Information Systems (HEMIS) data information to DHET on a regular basis to enable University to claim its state subsidy. By updating and checking the academic structure of the University, the Unit keeps a close eye on all approval documentation and compliance with the University's PQM.

## IPQA visibility Workshop

The IPQA had a 3-day workshop from 29 – 31 March 2023. The main purpose was to ensure that the University community understands better the roles and responsibilities of the Directorate, and to enhance IPQA collaboration between the academic and support departments.

The workshop attendance was composed of representatives from various academic departments (Heads of Departments and the Faculty Managers of Health Sciences and Science, Engineering and Agriculture), Directors and Heads of Departments from Support Services (Library Services, CHETL, Human Resources, Protection Services, Finance, Internal Audit & Risk, Institution for Rural Development, Legal Services, Strategy & Monitoring).

The QA Unit gave a presentation "Quality at a Glance." In his presentation, the Head of

QA Unit, Mr Lufuno Netshifhehe highlighted that quality at UNIVEN is both centralised and decentralised. Each unit or department either academic or nonacademic should be responsible for assuring quality in all their day-to-day activities. Mr Netshifhehe indicated that quality should be maintained not only because of the existence of statutory bodies like the CHE (mandated by the DHET to oversee quality in all higher education institutions), but quality should be a day-to-day focus on whatever we are doing in support of our core business and in line with UNIVEN 2021 – 2025 Strategic Plan. The presentation also touched on the Self-Evaluation process as a means to reflect, and to ensure that indeed departments review themselves by offering quality services to the stakeholders. Mr Netshifhehe indicated that quality reviews are a system recommended by the CHE and adopted by higher education institutions both in public and private sectors including internationally. The quality cycle should guide all departments within the university to review what was planned and improve their quality. The 'PlanDoCheckAct' (PDCA cycle, indicated by diagram below) was given as an example to illustrate the (a) existence of the 2021 – 2025 Strategic Plan (plan part), (b) we implement (DO part), (c) monitor (check part), if indeed we are doing what we said we shall do, and (d) if not, how can we improve (Act part). Mr. Netshifhehe indicated that a method of self-review is recommended and the IPQA through its QA unit will be embarking on the quality review processes.



In his conclusion, Mr Netshifhehe highlighted that if all members of the university community work together and not in silos, UNIVEN can achieve more and continue being a university of choice.

## Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance (IPQA) successfully held a visibility workshop continued...

The MIS Unit gave a presentation "MIS at a Glance." The Head of MIS, Mr Tebello Mofokeng highlighted the need for the University community to understand the role of the MIS unit and how the data at the entry point level becomes critical for planning and reporting imperatives. He further indicated that the uptake of Business Intelligence (BI) within the University needs a paradigm shift, the need for newly appointed employees to be presented with the data available for both strategic and operational purposes, in this regard the data is packaged for the three layers of management being Strategic, Tactical and Operational. Mr Mofokeng presented the BI Framework concepts during the workshop and re-emphasised the need to look into the Framework holistically and regard this as a tool to improve data-driven decisionmaking and the intended institutional reporting. He further presented the proposed plans in terms of how the institution can improve its reporting and the processes therein. The BI framework presented followed this structure as illustrated in **Figure 1**:

The MIS Unit alluded to being open to having engagements with all departments in their quest to improve reporting and data-driving decision-making. Mr Mofokeng concluded by emphasising that institutional data is the critical asset of the University, and pivotal to have quality data at the entry point, also it is the responsibility of the University community to contribute to UNIVEN desired state of data-driven culture in ways of operation and reporting.



In her conclusive remarks, the Director IPQA, Dr Sannah Patience Mativandela thanked the IPQA team, participants and emphasised that UNIVEN's ultimate goal is to contribute towards improving the lives and livelihoods of all its people, both internal and external. The University consistently strives towards excellence and greatness in teaching, learning, in research-innovation and community engagement which has been recognized recently when in 2022, The Times Higher Education's World University Rankings placed UNIVEN among the best 15 universities in South Africa. This does not stop UNIVEN to pursue innovative niche areas for socio-economic development and its impact on society. The University support departments such as the IPQA need to benchmark themselves with international HEIs in order to align with the international standards, be competitive and adapt to strategies applicable in the context of a comprehensive university especially introducing work integrated learning (WIL) initiatives into the academic project.



The IPQA Department with Directors and Heads of Support Services



The IPQA Department with Risk Officer, Directors and Heads of Support Services



Mr Esrom Phungo, Human Resources Head Organisational Development and Training

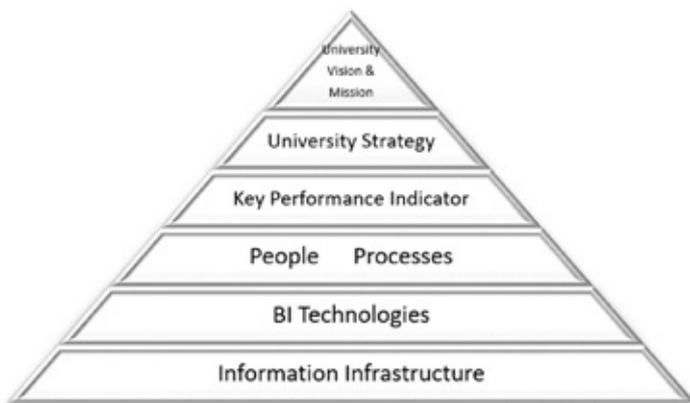


Figure 1: This is how the BI should look, with the relevant stakeholders involved and the uptake of technology aimed at improved efficiency of day-to-day university activities.

## Dr. Mbusi Sibanda is the new Head of Information Communication Technology Governance and Compliance



The University of Venda is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Mbusi Sibanda as the new Head ICT Governance and Compliance, effective 01 April 2023.

Dr. Sibanda has a wealth of experience and an extensive background in technical IT, IT assurance, and cyber-security spanning over 22 years. His IT governance, risk, and control expertise has been obtained through senior roles at Ngubane and Co., the SA Bank of Athens, Alexander Forbes, and most recently, at eThekwin Municipality.

His academic qualifications include a Ph.D. in IT Governance from Nelson Mandela University, an MCom in Computer Auditing from the University of Johannesburg, and a BSc (Hons) in Computer Science from the National University of Science and Technology. He also holds IT industry

certifications that include Corporate Governance in Enterprise IT, Certified Information Systems Auditor, Certified Ethical Hacker, Computer Hacking Forensic Investigator, Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer, and the IT Infrastructure Library Foundation.

His key responsibilities at UNIVEN will be to manage IT governance and risks and ensure that activities relating to information and technology are aligned with the university's business goals.

The University of Venda Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Mr. Kraziya Botwe, said, "Dr. Sibanda's remarkable skills and talents will be a great addition to our ICT team and the entire University. I am thrilled to welcome him to the University of Venda. We are confident he will deliver results, grow, excel, and make us all proud."

# The Department of Physics educates high school female learners and undergraduate female physics students on the importance of women in science



Vuwani Science Resource Centre staff during the science show

The Department of Physics, with support from Women in Physics in South Africa (WiPISA) under the South African Institute of Physics (SAIP), hosted a successful educational event to continue motivating young girls and women to take careers in Physics. This event recently took place at Vuwani Science Resource Centre. This was to encourage them to see opportunities in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) careers. There has been a global concern about the perpetual declining number of students at institutions of higher learning who enrol for STEM qualifications. South Africa, among many other countries, experiences the underrepresentation of women in physics in all institutions. This includes the participation of women in academia, research and development, government institutions, and industries. About 47 female learners and 15 second-year female Physics students attended this event to alleviate this global concern. The engagement was also aimed at motivating and mentoring participants to take their heights as they proceed with their studies while the high school learners were educated on the possibilities and opportunities for females in STEM careers.

Students and learners were welcomed by the Vuwani Science Resource Centre's staff members who conducted science experiments.



Dr Mukhobwane encouraging learners to choose STEM subjects

Dr Rosinah Mukhobwane, a Lecturer in the Department of Mathematical and Computer Sciences, presented the importance of female learners and women in science and further encouraged them to enrol in STEM subjects at schools while the university students were encouraged to reach their heights.



Ms Azwinndini Maphiri, a lecturer in the Department of Mathematical and Computer Sciences

Ms Azwinndini Maphiri shared with learners and students various careers in the sciences and how they can pursue them. She emphasised Technology careers whose prerequisites are Physical Sciences and Mathematics.



Dr Shonisani Tshidino, a senior lecturer in the Department of Biochemistry and Microbiology

Students and learners were further motivated by Dr Shonisani Tshidino. She emphasised her talk on discipline, time management, choice of friends, and challenging work as key to success in the science stream.



Dr Mpelegeng Bvumbi, a senior lecturer in the Department of Chemistry

Women in Physics are underrepresented, so Dr Mpelegeng Bvumbi addressed these young female learners and students about academic challenges and the strategies to resolve them. Among those were peer group influence and lack of mentoring.



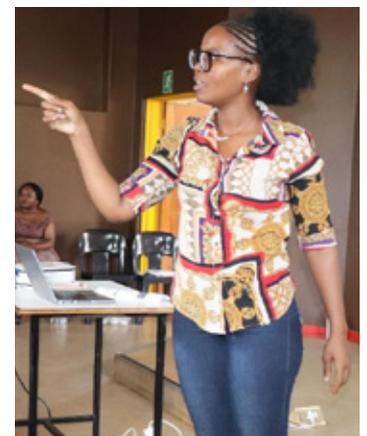
Ms Rebecca Letsoalo, Physics Masters student in the Department of Physics

As a role model to the young scientists, Rebecca shared her educational path and experiences as a STEM girl. She indicated that for her to succeed, it was not easy, she has put a lot of effort and time into her studies.

Takalani was overwhelmed when she shared her life experience and academic journey with the learners. She explained how she struggled in Mathematics and Physical Sciences subjects during her high school years but never opted to give up. She further advised learners to form study groups and constantly seek assistance from their educators and mentors. "The amount of work you put in will determine your outcome, so use your time wisely and avoid wasting time on things that won't bring positive results."



Dr Sophie Mulaudzi: WiPISA event organiser in action.



An active programme director of the event: Ms. Ronel Randela



Ms Takalani Nethavhanani, a UNIVEN PhD candidate in Physics

The Department of Physics educates high school female learners and undergraduate female physics students on the importance of women in science continued...



Gwamasenga Secondary School learner (right) and UNIVEN student (left) reflecting on what they have learned during the WIPiSA event



Learners during one of the event activities



WIPiSA Facilitators



UNIVEN Team and Gwamasenga Secondary School Learners

# Students attend Financial Education Summit in numbers



On Wednesday, 05 April 2023, the University of Venda (UNIVEN) students assembled at UNIVEN Student Parliament Hall to attend the Financial Education Summit in numbers. The purpose of the summit was to teach UNIVEN students to take control of their finances. This was also to teach them how to budget and tips on how to pay off accounts and manage debts.

STANLIB facilitator, Ms Khensani Mathebula presented on the topic of financial education where she equipped students with a lot of knowledge on how to be financially wise and avoid unnecessary financial stresses. She reminded students to understand their needs and wants. "Do not confuse your wants with your needs." She further discouraged students from buying takeaway food every day instead of cooking. In her conclusion, she encouraged students to start to save from the little allowances that they are receiving from their sponsors and to also start small businesses that will be generating more income.

It is the objective of Stop the Spot to see all students living a debt free life that is free from pressure. Stop the Spot encourages students to follow financial empowerment tips in order to enjoy their varsity lives and visit their office at the University's Student Centre, Office no F107, for more guidelines.



Stop the Spot executives

**"Do not confuse your wants with your needs."**

**We would like to hear from you!**

Nendila is your communication channel.

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Some of the students who were awarded attendance certificates

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