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Heritage Celebration: Embracing Our Past, Protecting Our Future



Dr Livhuwani Tshikukuvhe

On Saturday, 20 September 2025, the George Phadagi Hall was alive with the spirit of reflection and celebration as the Vhembe Heritage Celebration took place, honouring the rich and diverse cultural legacy of the region. The highlight of the event was a moving speech by Dr Tshikukuvhe Livhuwani, a Lecturer in the Department of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Heritage, who addressed the audience with profound insight into the intertwined themes of identity, justice, and social responsibility. Her speech focused on two pressing issues: gender-based violence against people with disabilities and elderly individuals, and the complex

relationship between gender and heritage.

Dr Livhuwani Tshikukuvhe began by emphasising that heritage is not simply the echo of the past; it is a living thread that connects the present with the future. This powerful idea set the tone for the gathering, reminding everyone that while it is important to celebrate history, it is equally vital to confront the injustices that threaten the dignity and safety of the community. Heritage is the foundation on which societies build their values, and it must evolve to reflect the commitment to justice and protection for all.

The speech shed light on the often-overlooked plight of people with disabilities and the elderly

who suffer from gender-based violence. These groups face a compounded vulnerability due to systemic barriers related to age and ability, alongside the gender inequality that fuels abuse. Women and girls with disabilities are particularly at risk, being up to three times more likely to experience sexual violence. Similarly, elderly women, especially those dependent on caregivers, endure various forms of abuse that are frequently hidden from public view, including emotional, financial, and physical mistreatment.

The discussion also acknowledged that men with disabilities and elderly men are not exempt from such violence, although societal expectations often prevent them from expressing vulnerability or seeking assistance. Dr Tshikukuvhe posed a powerful question: what kind of heritage is being preserved if it fails to protect the most vulnerable members of society? She called for a transformation of cultural values towards compassion, accountability, and justice, emphasising the need for strengthened legal protections, accessible support services, and thorough training for caregivers.

Turning to the topic of gender and heritage, Dr Tshikukuvhe highlighted how heritage itself is gendered. The stories that are told, the roles assigned, and the rituals maintained often reflect existing power dynamics, where women's contributions and the identities of gender-diverse individuals have been marginalised or erased. Yet, women have long been the custodians of language, tradition, and resilience, from grandmothers who pass down oral histories to young women who challenge norms and redefine leadership. Gender is far from a mere footnote in heritage; it is central to the very fabric of community life. The speech honoured the women who built communities, the men who champion equality, and those who embody gender diversity, affirming that identity is a gift that enriches culture rather than threatening it.



Photo supplied: First Row (L-R) MEC Funani Maseko, Dr Livhuwani Tshikukuvhe, Councillor Maria Mamedzi, and Rofhiwa Manwadu

Throughout the celebration, traditional songs and customs were recalled, carrying timeless lessons for the future. One such song warned against blind trust, while others spoke to culturally defined roles, emphasising activities traditionally associated with men without dismissing the importance of gender equality. The event also celebrated indigenous foods like Tshidzimba, known as hunter's food, alongside Madzhulu, Thongolifha, Nzie, Thophi, and Miroho, all of which have significant health benefits and cultural importance. Traditional dances such as Tshigombela, Malende, Zwibelani, Tshifasi, Tshigubu, and Tshikona were performed, not only as expressions of cultural pride but also as ways to refresh memory and promote physical well-being.

In concluding her address, Dr Tshikukuvhe urged everyone present to become active custodians of heritage, not merely preserving the past but shaping a future where gender-based violence is eradicated, where people with disabilities and elderly individuals are respected and empowered, and where cultural narratives truly reflect the full spectrum of human experience. Heritage, she emphasised, must be a beacon of justice, inclusion, and respect, a space where every voice matters.

The Vhembe Heritage Celebration was a poignant reminder that the past carries lessons essential for building a society rooted in dignity, equality, and respect for all its members. Heritage must be preserved not as a static relic, but as a living, breathing force that inspires positive change for generations to come.

ECOCYCLE Fashion Team from UNIVEN Wins Prestigious SAICA Student Leadership Awards



ECOCYCLE Fashion Team (L-R): Aron Matjie Motlerentje, Onndwela Rathogwa, Ndiene Chris Munyamela, Glen Mathalise, Trudent Kylie Mdhlovu

Five innovative 3rd-year BCom Accounting Sciences students from the University of Venda, Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law, made the institution proud by winning the SAICA Student Leadership Awards and came out in first position to claim the award, which is a prestigious national competition that took place on 18 September 2025. The awards were presented at the Capital Melrose Hotel, and the presentations happened at the SAICA offices in Sandton, Johannesburg.

The competition recognises and rewards student-led projects that offer innovative solutions to real-world challenges while fostering leadership, teamwork, and creativity. Students from Universities offering SAICA-endorsed programmes across the country

formed teams, developed business proposals aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and presented their solutions to a panel of judges. Proposals were evaluated on innovation, feasibility, and potential impact, with the top five teams invited to pitch their ideas live in Johannesburg.

Representing UNIVEN under the team's name ECOCYCLE Fashion, Ndiene Chris Munyamela, Aaron Matjie Motlerentje, Glen Mathalise, Onndwela Rathogwa, and Trudent Kylie Mdhlovu impressed the judges with their groundbreaking solution addressing textile and plastic waste management. Their project promotes eco-friendly fashion practices, aligning with SDG 13: Climate Action and SDG 12: Responsible

Consumption and Production.

Driven by a shared passion for environmental sustainability, the team worked tirelessly despite facing challenges such as limited resources and tight deadlines. Their dedication and innovative thinking earned them top honours, demonstrating exceptional leadership, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

“This achievement is not just a win for us as a team, but for the entire UNIVEN community. It proves that with collaboration, innovation, and determination, we can create meaningful solutions to global challenges,” said team spokesperson Chris Munyamela.

The victory opens doors for ECOCYCLE Fashion to further develop and implement its project. The team plans to use their prize to refine their solution, expand its reach, and inspire other young people to contribute to sustainable development.

UNIVEN deeply congratulates and extends its heartfelt congratulations to these students and the ECOCYCLE Fashion team for their remarkable achievement, as their success reflects the university's commitment to nurturing innovative thinkers who drive positive change in society. Their commitment to sustainability, innovative thinking, and perseverance is an inspiration to other students and is a proud reflection of UNIVEN's values. UNIVEN community looks forward to seeing their project grow and create real change in communities across South Africa and beyond.

The SAICA Student Leadership Awards once again proved to be a powerful platform for developing the next generation of leaders who are ready to tackle pressing social and environmental issues, and ECOCYCLE Fashion's success is a shining example of that mission in action. UNIVEN stands tall and proud of this remarkable moment.

From Campus to Community: UNIVEN Strengthens Business Support in Makhado

On 12 September 2025, the University of Venda's Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Bernard Nthambeleni, visited the University's Community Business Advisory Centre (UCBAC) at Makhado Crossing Mall, reaffirming UNIVEN's commitment to driving societal impact through entrepreneurship and innovation. The fully equipped centre, offering workstations and internet access, serves as a hub where community members receive mentorship, training, and advisory support to build and scale sustainable businesses.

During his engagement with the centre's staff, Prof Nthambeleni commended the leadership of Professor Vhonani Netshandama for seamlessly integrating the initiative into UNIVEN's broader ecosystem, strengthening collaborations with internal and external partners. He emphasised the Centre's growing role in boosting UNIVEN's visibility in Makhado



In the picture: From which direction Ms Muvhali Mapula, UCBAC Intern, Vice-Chancellor and Principal Prof Bernard Nthambeleni and Ms Rathokolo Mukondi, UCBAC Coordinator

and revealed plans to expand similar hubs across Vhembe and beyond. Calling the Centre a blueprint for future flagship initiatives, including the envisioned UNIVEN Business School, Prof Nthambeleni urged the team to broaden their reach and amplify their impact.

Professor Sylvester Mpandeli receives a global award from the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage

On Saturday, 13 September 2025, the University of Venda (UNIVEN)'s Professor Sylvester Mpandeli received a global award during the 75th International Executive Council Meeting that took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. He was honoured with an award by the ICID for his contributions of addressing global changes. Prof Mpandeli is the first youngest Vice President Honorare from the African continent since the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID) was established in 1950. Prof Mpandeli is an Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture at the University of Venda.



Prof Sylvester Mpandeli at the 4th World Irrigation Forum in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

He is the first black South African to be elected as Vice-President of ICID since ICID was established 75 years ago. Prof Mpandeli was elected as the Vice-President of the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID) at the 72th IEC meeting held at Adelaide, Australia in September 2022. In 2014, Prof Mpandeli was elected as the Chairperson of the African Regional Working Group (AFRWG). He has served as the Chairperson of the AFRWG until 2017. In 2018, he was requested by the ICID leadership to assist Dr Mohammed Wabha from Egypt as the Deputy Chairman of the AFRWG. During his tenure as the Chairman of the AFRWG, Prof Mpandeli initiated several activities on the African continent.

These activities include the development of capacity building strategy for Africa; a workshop in Cairo, Egypt in 2016; he established the African Young Professionals together with Dr Wabha from Egypt. During his tenure as the Vice-President, Prof Mpandeli worked with 24 Working Groups (WGs) focusing on issues such as Climate change, Food security, Agricultural Water Management, Water - Energy - Food Nexus and other organisations.

Prof Mpandeli chairs several strategic advisory committees in the ICID, and these include Chairperson of the International Research Programme on Irrigation and Drainage (IRPID), Chairperson of the Permanent Committee of Technical Activities (PCTA), this is the biggest committee in the ICID which determines the themes of the Congress, World Irrigation Forums, Regional Conferences and Symposiums. Prof Sylvester Mpandeli also sits in the Management Board of the ICID by virtue of being the Vice-President of ICID. Prof Mpandeli has now joined other elite colleagues as one of the Vice-Presidents Honorare.



President of the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID) handing over the Vice-President Recognition Award during the 75th International Executive Council meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Prof Mpandeli is the first black South African to be elected as the Vice-President of ICID. UNIVEN Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Bernard Nthambeleni congratulated Prof Mpandeli and expressed that he is happy to see people who are associated with UNIVEN putting the name of this University on an international map.

INVITATION

ANNUAL JUSTICE MOSENEKE LECTURE

HOST: DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC LAW, SCHOOL OF LAW



GUEST SPEAKER:
PROF. THULI MADONSELA



TIME: 10:00

VENUE: SENATE CHAMBERS

BIOGRAPHY

Professor Thuli Madonsela is the Law Trust Chair in Social Justice and Director of the Centre for Social Justice at Stellenbosch University's Faculty of Law. A respected legal scholar and advocate of the High Court of South Africa, she teaches Constitutional Law, Social Justice, Administrative Law, and Ethical Leadership. She holds two law degrees, eight honorary doctorates, and a Harvard Advanced Leadership Certificate. Notably, she was one of the 11 experts who helped draft South Africa's Constitution and contributed to several landmark laws, including the Equality Act and the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act.

Her academic work spans decades of research, writing, and teaching on constitutional governance and human rights. She has authored books on gender mainstreaming and co-developed resources for Equality Courts. Professor Madonsela also helped draft international human rights instruments at UN, AU, and SADC levels. In recognition of her legal impact, she has received numerous awards and honorary appointments, cementing her status as a leading figure in social justice and constitutional law.

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