

UNIVEN's newly appointed Junior Lecturer completes the Mandela Washington Fellowship

Ms Tsakani Emmarencia Nyoni, a newly appointed Junior Lecturer in the Department of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Heritage Studies spent six



weeks (June 22nd – August 4th, 2023) in the United States of America completing the Mandela Washington Fellowship. Ms Nyoni holds a Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (Cum Laude) and Master of Arts in African Studies from the University of Venda. Beyond her passion for indigenous knowledge, Ms Nyoni has always been passionate about achieving social impact through entrepreneurship and this was what inspired her to apply for the Fellowship. The Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young

African Leaders is a flagship programme of the United States (US) Government's Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI).

The programme brings 700 young leaders from Sub-Saharan Africa annually to the United States. While in the US, the fellows develop skills that will enable them to continuously lead and innovatively address challenges in their local communities upon their return. Since its inception in 2014, the programme has now brought 6500 Young African Leaders to the United States. With over 50 000 applications received for participating in the programme in the year 2022, Ms

Nyoni is proud to have been one of South Africa's 40 fellows participating in the programme for the year 2023. During the fellowship, Ms Nyoni was placed in the Leadership in Business track and was hosted by the University of IOWA. As she describes it, "Being one of the 25 fellows at the University of IOWA was a life-changing experience". The University of IOWA hosts Venture School for the first three weeks of the fellowship. Through Venture School, fellows are given the support to bring their business ideas to life or scale their current businesses.

The reason why Ms Nyoni describes her experience as "life-changing" is because



Venture School gave her an opportunity to focus on her growth and her project. On a normal day, daily responsibilities can become overwhelming, and it becomes hard to not only think about but focus on one project. Through Venture School, you wake up daily and the only thing you focus on is your idea. The programme itself is hectic and inspires one to want to do better than yesterday, and the best thing about it is that the skills acquired can be applied/transferred to any project

one would like to work on. This was also an opportunity to receive great feedback from fellows from 20 different African countries and strengthen networks within those countries beyond the fellowship.

Venture School included classes on elevator pitching, customer discovery, value proposition, value chain, public speaking, revenue models, ethics in

entrepreneurship, identifying a market size, risk management and building a customer archetype. At the end of the Venture School, fellows participated in community service and were introduced to experts and potential mentors in the fellow's field of interest. Ms Nyoni reflected on how privileged she was for the networks she has built during this time and is excited to see how these will help her grow as she builds a career in *Indigenous Knowledge: Afrocentric ethics and community engagement, and social impact*.

As a part of the fellowship, fellows were required to take an assessment to identify their strengths, and a weekly class is organised with a coach who helps fellows nurture their dominant and non-dominant strengths and how they can use these towards achieving their goals. Ms Nyoni shared that working on her strengths helped her realise the importance of building a diverse team. At the end of the Fellowship, fellows spent a week attending a summit in Washington D.C. Ms Nyoni feels that this was an exciting way to end the fellowship as she learnt about different opportunities for funding and potential partnerships in her field. Beyond this, Mr Anthony Blinken - The US Secretary of State gave an address.

Through the Secretary of State's address, Ms Nyoni was reminded that every step we take daily gets us closer to achieving our goals and that it is important to reflect on how far we have come and most importantly to cherish the journey. At the end of the summit, Ms Nyoni was honoured to receive a "Thank-You" letter from the Vice President of the United States - Ms Kamala Harris.

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