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Creating future leaders

## A Resounding Success: The University of Venda and Bulawayo Polytechnic Co-Host Inaugural International Research Conference



The University of Venda (UNIVEN) and Bulawayo Polytechnic (BYOPOLY) co-hosted their inaugural Joint International Research Conference, officially opened by Prof Norman Takaidza on behalf of Prof Fanuel Tagwira, the Permanent Secretary in Zimbabwe's Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development. The landmark event took place on 6-7 March 2025, at the prestigious iconic Victoria Falls Safari Lodge in Zimbabwe. Themed "The Role of Higher Education in Promoting Innovation and Entrepreneurship for Industrialisation," the conference attracted diverse stakeholders, including academia, industry professionals, policymakers, entrepreneurs, students, and innovators. Together, they explored the transformative potential of higher education in fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and industrialisation at both local and global levels.

The conference covered an array of sub-themes that reflected the crucial intersections between higher education, innovation, and economic development: Innovation and Technology Transfer in Higher Education; The Role of Higher Education in Industrialisation; Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and Economic Development; Quintuple Public-Private Partnerships for Economic Growth; and Higher Education for Sustainable Development.

The central goal of the BYOPOLY-UNIVEN 2025 International Research Conference was to examine how higher education institutions

can drive industrialisation through innovation and entrepreneurship. The conference aimed to foster research-driven collaborations that yield substantial, impactful outcomes for both local and global economies.



In his keynote address as he officially opened the conference, Prof Takaidza highlighted the significance of the conference and the fruitful collaboration between the University of Venda and Bulawayo Polytechnic. He noted the importance of the partnership, especially the Trans-Limpopo Initiative and the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two institutions.

He emphasised the conference theme's alignment with Zimbabwe's national vision for accelerated industrialisation, pointing out that innovation and entrepreneurship are fundamental drivers of industrial growth and economic development. In referencing Zimbabwe's President, Dr Emmerson Mnangagwa, Prof Takaidza stressed the need to adapt educational systems to close technological gaps and ensure global competitiveness. He also highlighted the country's Heritage-Based Education 5.0 Policy, which promotes science, technology, and innovation to support industrialisation.

The policy advocates the creation of innovation hubs and agro-industrial parks within higher education institutions, reinforcing the Ministry's focus on Education 5.0. This policy integrates teaching, research, community engagement, innovation, and industrialisation to drive economic transformation. Prof Takaidza encouraged institutions to adopt cutting-edge innovations such as artificial intelligence, robotics, biotechnology, and renewable energy while exploring innovative financing models to support regional industrialisation using domestic resources.

Closing his address, Prof Takaidza emphasised the importance of collaboration between universities and polytechnics, with universities focusing on knowledge generation and polytechnics applying that knowledge in industries. He concluded by urging participants to prioritise practical solutions to industrialisation, focusing on adding value to local resources.

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# A Resounding Success: The University of Venda and Bulawayo Polytechnic Co-Host Inaugural International Research Conference continued...



Eng. Chiedza Masanganise, Principal of Bulawayo Polytechnic, welcomed the delegates to the inaugural conference. She highlighted the theme's focus on higher education as a catalyst for economic growth through innovation. Eng. Masanganise acknowledged the successful partnership between Bulawayo Polytechnic and the University of Venda and the importance of regional collaboration through the Trans-Limpopo Initiative.

She encouraged participants to engage in meaningful discussions, build networks, and establish collaborations that would drive industrialisation and economic prosperity in the region.



This was followed by Prof Bernard Nthambeleni, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Venda, who also addressed the attendees. He underscored the importance of the ongoing collaboration between the two institutions and the conference's objective to explore how higher education can accelerate economic transformation through innovation and entrepreneurship.

Prof Nthambeleni highlighted key topics such as technology transfer, curriculum redesign, and policies for innovation-driven economies. He stressed the significance of Africa's youthful population and the pivotal role of education in addressing the continent's development challenges. He reaffirmed the University of Venda's commitment to offering programmes that meet regional needs and promote sustainable growth.

Eng. Dingani Mhlanga, Vice-Principal of Training and Coordination at Bulawayo Polytechnic and Chair of the Joint International Research Conference Committee, emphasised the historic nature of the collaboration between Bulawayo Polytechnic and the University of Venda. He stressed the need to break down traditional institutional barriers to benefit communities and nations, especially within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) context. In his opening remarks, Eng. Mhlanga reaffirmed the theme of the conference and the crucial role of higher education in driving innovation and entrepreneurship to support industrialisation. He also highlighted the

significance of cross-border partnerships in fostering regional self-reliance and creating job opportunities.

Prof Marius Hedimbi, Vice-Chancellor of Welwitschia University, Namibia, expressed a message of support, emphasising the urgent need for practical solutions and collective action to unlock Africa's economic potential.

Additionally, Mr Kholisani Moyo, City Economic Development Officer for the City of Bulawayo, and Ms. Dorah Maraba, Chief Director of International Relations and African Peer Review Mechanism in the Limpopo Provincial Government, respectively spoke about the Trans-Limpopo Spatial Development Initiative, furthering regional cooperation.



The Director of the Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education at Universities South Africa (USAf), Dr Edwell Gumbo, presented on the topic Reimagining Higher Education as a Catalyst for Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Industrialisation in Africa. Dr Edwell Gumbo's presentation focused on the evolving role of higher education as a catalyst for innovation, entrepreneurship, and industrialisation in Africa. It emphasised the importance of entrepreneurial universities, student entrepreneurship, and embedding innovation in academia to drive economic growth and job creation. The presentation highlighted the role of research in fostering technological advancements, policy development, and societal progress while addressing challenges like infrastructure deficiencies, energy constraints, and economic instability. Key opportunities include leveraging renewable energy, regional trade, tech advancements, and human capital development. It advocates for university-industry collaboration, policy support, and funding mechanisms to transform institutions into innovation hubs and drive Africa's industrialisation.

The conference spanned two days and featured two plenary sessions and three breakout sessions, with a total of 102 delegates in attendance. Among the presentations, 46 were delivered, with 13 coming from UNIVEN. Of the five poster presentations, four were also from UNIVEN. Presenters shared valuable insights into the role of higher education in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship to drive industrialisation.

Two awards were presented to UNIVEN: the Best Emerging Researcher Award, which was given to Ms. Rannzida Hasandi, a Master's student in Social Work in the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education and the Best Poster Award, which was presented to Mr. Rendani Nematswerani from the Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation, and Commercialisation. Other awards included the Best Overall Presenter Award, which was given to Nokukhanya Moyo, a staff member at Bulawayo Polytechnic, and the Best Abstract Award, which was awarded to Martha Masunda from Mutare Polytechnic.

The scientific team will work closely with the presenters to support the publication of selected papers in accredited journals. Furthermore, established Communities of Practice (COP) will continue collaborating, sharing best practices, and exploring opportunities for collaborative funding streams.

The inaugural Joint International Research Conference hosted by Bulawayo Polytechnic and the University of Venda successfully brought together key stakeholders to explore the pivotal role of higher education in driving innovation and entrepreneurship for industrialisation. The event was a significant milestone in regional academic collaboration and a step forward in shaping the future of industrialisation in Southern Africa.

In his concluding remarks and way forward, Prof Bernard Nthambeleni announced that the University of Venda will host the 2nd Joint International Research Conference in March 2026.



Prof Bernard Nthambeleni in an interview with Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC)



Prof Bernard Nthambeleni and Eng. Chiedza Masanganise



In the middle, is the recipient of Best Upcoming Researcher



In the middle is the recipient of the Best Poster award, Mr Rendani Nematswerani



# A total of 816 students and staff received counselling and HIV testing during the recent Sexual and Reproductive Health Awareness Campaign



Newly trained Peer Educators with facilitator Ms Maggie Hlungwani (second row right), and Ms Alvina Muhali (second row left)

Peer education one of the main strategies of promoting general health and wellness of university students to graduate alive. From 06 - 08 February 2024, the UNIVEN HIV Coordinator Ms Maggie Hlungwani and the UNIVEN Health Promoter, Ms Alvina Muhali spearheaded a transformative Peer Education Training Workshop. This training is coordinated at the beginning of every year to equip, develop student's skills and knowledge, enabling them to deliver accurate information and guidance to students who are seeking health and wellness and psychosocial support in a nonjudgemental approach.

During this three-days workshop, young leaders gathered at Student Parliament Hall for an immersive session aimed at empowering them with knowledge to assist other students to graduate alive and healthy.



Ms Maggie Hlungwani facilitating the training

Through dynamic methodologies and engaging activities, participants delved deep into crucial topics such as the Peer education, Roles and qualities of a good peer educator; Basic HIV/AIDS, Sexual and Reproductive Health, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STIs), Tuberculosis (TB), Gender Based Violence (GBV), Mental Health, Post-exposure Prophylaxis (PEP), Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP); Counselling Skills; Communication Skills; Alcohol and Substance abuse Prevention; and Monitoring and Reporting. The total number of 75 students were trained.

Campus Health conducts awareness campaigns quarterly to encourage University students and staff to gain knowledge to avoid HIV and other STI's; unwanted pregnancy; reduce the high drop-out rate; sexual gender-based violence; address mental health issues and promote health.

From 10 - 14 February 2025, Campus Health conducted an STI, Condom and Pregnancy awareness campaign. The campaign was conducted following the National Health Calendar to raise awareness of the importance of the use of condoms to prevent STI and unplanned pregnancy. The week served as a reminder to prioritise sexual health, reduce STI transmission and combat the spread of HIV and AIDS. During the campaign students and staff were screened for blood pressure, blood sugar level, HIV, TB, and STIs to encourage and promote their health. Different health IEC materials regarding TB, Cancer, STIs, GBV, Contraceptives, Mental Health, Alcohol and Substance abuse were distributed. Partners from PAPSWA and Choice Trust (known as Me 1st) were available to render service to the LGBTQI+ community within the campus and giving out PrEP and family planning.

Throughout the week, different activities were conducted, students were empowered with knowledge and resources to make informed choices about STI, HIV, Contraceptives and PrEP by Peer Educator. The campaign was supported by the SRC Minister of Health and Safety Ms Fhulufhelo Ravhandalala. A total number of 3364 students accessed these services through IEC materials. A total of 816 students and staff received counselling and were tested during this campaign. 260 were first entering students.





# DCEEIIC and the Institute for Rural Development successfully host a ground breaking article-writing retreat involving community partners



Researchers and community collaborators during the writing retreat



Researchers presenting their progress to the facilitator, retired Professor Kutame

The Directorate of Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship, Inclusive Innovation, and Commercialisation (DCEEIIC), in collaboration with the Institute for Rural Development (IRD) held an article-writing workshop at Tshipise Forever Resort from 27-31 January 2025. More than forty participants representing UNIVEN senior and junior academic staff, students, Vhembe TVET College, Municipalities, provincial government departments and traditional councils participated in this workshop. This was UNIVEN's first-ever event to involve and induct community partners as active co-authors. This initiative signifies a transformative step towards collaborative, transdisciplinary writing that emphasises mutual benefit and dismantling of academic extractives in research. The retreat was in line with the university's strategic intent of leading in engaged scholarship and strengthening research excellence within its entrepreneurial and open innovation ecosystem.

A significant focus of the retreat was mentoring novice researchers. Each participant led the development of an

article, promoting a spirit of support and co-generation. Six small groups deliberated daily on their progress and challenges encountered. This ensured continuous peer feedback and collective problem-solving, anchored by senior academics' guidance. The retreat emphasised writing practices connected with authors' ways of knowing, being, and doing. The most significant aspect of this was involving community partners as co-authors, and the retreat embraced storytelling and decolonial stances, thereby contributing to the scholarship of community engagement and transformative research. The retreat yielded final drafts of 50 articles, coupled with commitments to further refine and channel to respective journals.

To encapsulate the essence of the retreat, a word cloud was created, highlighting the key concepts in collaborative, transdisciplinary, and societal impact-aligned writing. Co-authoring, co-creation, transdisciplinary, liberation science writing, emancipatory writing, storytelling, decolonial stance, connections with people's ways of knowing, being and doing, scholarship of community engagement, and transformative research

were some concepts included in the word cloud.

The visual below is a reminder of the retreat's core values and the collective commitment to engaged scholarship. UNIVEN looks forward to building on the success of this retreat and continuing to nurture collaborative, impactful research that begins and ends with society. Reflecting on the writing

retreat experience, UNIVEN researchers and community collaborators highlighted that the workshop was informative and educational. Co-authoring was something the aspirant authors, amongst them community partners, never visualised in action. Lessons about constructing transdisciplinary manuscripts were enlightening. The workshop provided deep insights into writing for social impact.



A group photo of article-writing retreat participants



# First-Year Accountancy Students Receive Motivation Ahead of 2025 Academic Year



Accountancy students during their departmental orientation session



Mrs Tshilidzi Nemailli during the opening of the departmental first-year orientation session



Mr Genius Katekwe, during his presentation on ethics

The Department of Accountancy at the University of Venda held a motivating and informative orientation session for its first-year students on Monday, 10 February, at Lecture Hall E1. This session aimed to prepare the new cohort for their academic journey and inspire them for the challenges ahead in the 2025 academic year.

Mr Aluwani Phineas Mudau, an academic trainee in the Department of Accountancy, delivered the keynote address, sharing his personal journey from being a Cum-Laude graduate in the University's Bachelor of Accounting Sciences programme to completing his Postgraduate Diploma in Accounting Sciences (PGDA) at the University of Johannesburg. He also spoke about his current pursuit of becoming a Chartered Accountant (CA(SA)) through his academic articles. His story resonated with students, showing what perseverance and dedication can lead to in accounting.

The session continued with welcome remarks from Prof Freddy Munzhelele, Head of the Department of Accountancy, who emphasised accountants' vital role in South Africa and globally. Prof Munzhelele



Prof Freddy Munzhelele welcomes first-year accountancy students

encouraged students to seek help whenever they face challenges, assuring them that the department's faculty is always ready to assist.

Mr Muhali Ndou, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Accountancy, further encouraged students to take their studies seriously, reminding them that their success is in their own hands.

One of the highlights of the orientation was a session on professional ethics led by Mr Genius Katekwe, which highlighted the importance of ethical conduct in the accounting profession.

Ms Malanga Pandelani, a member of the Association for Black Accountants in Southern Africa (ABASA) Limpopo Chapter, introduced students to the benefits of joining ABASA, an organisation that supports the growth and development of black accountants in South Africa.

The event concluded with a vote of thanks from Mrs Caroline Tshikhovhokhovho, Senior Lecturer and Chartered Accountant (CA(SA)) in the Department of Accountancy, who expressed gratitude to the students for their participation and encouraged them to remain committed to their studies.

This orientation session served as an essential introduction to the programme's academic demands and inspired students to approach their studies with confidence and ambition, with the support of the University of Venda's dedicated Accountancy department.

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