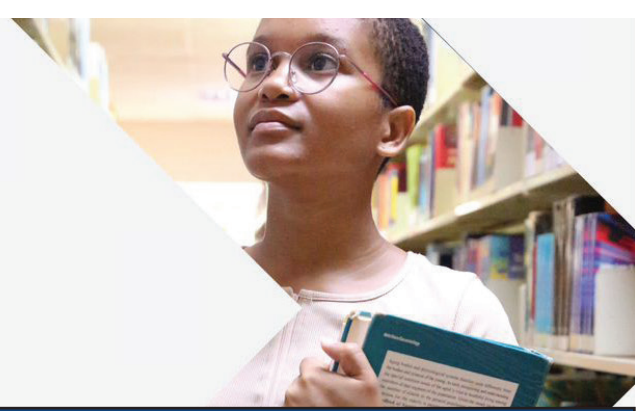




University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

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Building Bridges for Sustainable Rural Community Development: University of Venda's Vision for Collaborative Growth



On the photo Front row L-R: Prof J. Francis, Hosi G. Bungeni, Thovhele Mphephu and Thovhele Mulima; Back row L-R: Ms M.S. Mafokwane, Mrs D. Mutobvu and Dr M.A. Mathaulula

The 18th of March 2025 will be remembered for a long time as that day when the University of Venda (UNIVEN) took bold steps towards becoming an indeed engaged institution, connecting academia and critical community leaders, namely traditional authority. A pivotal meeting was held in the Faculty of Health Sciences Boardroom, bringing together the Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Postgraduate Studies, Prof Joseph Francis, and the Vhembe Local House of Traditional and Khoi-San leaders led by Hosi Bungeni, who is the Chairperson. This meeting marked a significant step towards integrating the voices of traditional leaders into the university's core business.

Accompanying Hosi Bungeni were two other members of the Executive Committee of the Vhembe Local House of Traditional Leaders, namely Thovhele Mulima and Thovhele Mphephu.

In his opening remarks and purpose of the meeting, Prof Francis stressed that the university recognised its responsibility to extend beyond the confines of academia and yield societal impact. He highlighted that the numerous challenges affecting the areas that UNIVEN served included land disputes, health crises, poverty, apathy towards development, poor leadership, apathy, dependency syndrome and environmental issues. "We are engaging you as our leaders so that we jointly define how to work together to achieve lasting societal progress," said Prof Francis.

Continuing with his welcome remarks, Prof Francis revealed that the university was reviewing its 2021-2025 Strategic Plan and simultaneously developing the 2026-2030 core focus. Student-centredness; entrepreneurial university; people, health and the environment; and internationalisation and partnerships are the priority strategic thrusts that will anchor the 2026-2030 strategic plan. In this regard, he implored the Executive of the Vhembe Local House

of Traditional and Khoisan Leaders to mobilise its membership and grassroots communities to actively participate in refining and recrafting the university's strategic direction. In that way, the strategic plan would be truly an inclusive societal agenda and stakeholder-owned.

Continuing with his address, Prof Francis contended that traditional leadership provided a form of continuity and stability that makes it a key strategic partner for the university. Apart from this, he emphasised the importance of inclusivity. Rather than dictating the terms of engagement, he stressed that the university sought to collaborate with other community leaders beyond traditional authorities. The goal was to ensure most stakeholders' voices shaped the university's strategic plan.

The meeting also covered emerging opportunities for collaboration between the university and local traditional and Khoi-San leaders. Modalities of ensuring that traditional leaders were part of the process towards establishing the Makhado and Nkuna Kraal campuses were discussed and agreed upon. The Executive of the Vhembe Local House of Traditional and Khoisan Leaders greatly appreciated the rare creation of such a platform to deliberate on matters of mutual importance.



Chairperson of Vhembe Local House of Traditional and Khoi-San leaders, Hosi G. Bungeni

Hosi Bungeni revealed that he was elated that his Executive was valued and recognised so highly that a platform of this nature could be created to discuss matters on an equal footing. In his own words, "This is the first time that a platform had been created for us as traditional leaders to contribute ideas that might shape

the strategic direction of the university and other structures of significant importance in the District. This gives us a lot of hope for a better future as we work with our university." Hosi Bungeni also indicated that the planned introduction of the Nkuna Kraal and Makhado campuses was long overdue. He went on to point out that should there be any need for land for the Nkuna Kraal campus, the university should feel free to approach his Traditional Council. Supporting the new emerging partnership, Thovhele Mulima pleaded for the development of a cocktail of courses specifically meant to make traditional leaders perform better, a position that Thovhele Mphephu endorsed. Hosi Bungeni added that "Most of us as hereditary leaders are simply chosen but it does not mean we know how to lead, which makes it critical to offer such skills development programmes."

Other resolutions of the meeting were:

- 1) The Vhembe Local House of Traditional and Khoisan Leaders would work closely with the university to take the new strategic plan to the people, starting with engagements at Local Municipality level, extending all the way to villages. This aligned closely with the university's vision: A university leading in engaged scholarship.
- 2) The "Cleaning Citizen Mindsets to Trigger Responsible Action" should be introduced in all traditional authorities because it has the potential to create communities where citizens value each other, life and their environment.
- 3) Short courses would be developed through participatory engagement processes that will involve a wide range of community structures and local citizens.
- 4) The full scholarship programme that UNIVEN and the Maela Consortium, through which 200 youth from Southern Africa will pursue undergraduate studies in China, promises to be a life-changing opportunity for them and their respective communities.

5) It is crucial to formalise the collaboration through signing a memorandum of understanding, informed by inputs of the 42 traditional leaders in the district and university aspirations. Accompanying this is the need to formalise relationships with all the Traditional Councils to make it easier for university staff and students to carry out their work in the local communities.

As he closed the fruitful meeting, the Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor was grateful that the engagement had taken place and paved the way for meaningful cooperation with the Vhembe Local House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders.



On the photo: Prof Joseph Francis, Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Postgraduate Studies at the University of Venda

He reiterated that UNIVEN's commitment to working closely with traditional and other community members should not be doubted or taken lightly. "Hopefully, better times are simply lying just ahead," he concluded.

Prof Addmore Shonhai: A Trailblazer in Protein Biochemistry and Academic Mentorship



Prof. Addmore Shonhai, a professor who is based in the Department of Biochemistry and Microbiology, Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture of the University of Venda (UNIVEN) was recently elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of South Africa. He is one of only two people elected to the Royal Society of South Africa from previously disadvantaged institutions in South Africa.

Prof Shonhai is a recognised scientist and educator whose contributions to protein biochemistry and academic mentorship have had a lasting impact. Through his mentorship and commitment, he has nurtured students

who have gone on to become prominent researchers and professionals in top global institutions. Prof Shonhai has played a pivotal role in advancing research in the field of protein biochemistry, which is a specialised field, and has recently extended his research interest to drug discovery. His work focuses on studying proteins implicated in protecting infectious agents against stress. Generally, 90% of drugs currently in use operate by inhibiting protein function.

It is against this background that protein biochemists inherently contribute towards drug discovery efforts. He has managed to establish a research hub that produces high-quality work despite challenges associated with limited resources available to researchers. He has served as a resource expert, sharing his knowledge on solving recombinant protein production challenges with colleagues from around the world.

His expertise in protein biochemistry has also positioned his laboratory as one of the few in Africa specialising in this field. Prof Shonhai has successfully supervised numerous PhD and master's students and many of his students have received competitive grants, postdoctoral fellowships, and invitations to renowned research institutions such as Stanford University, Hampton University (USA) and University of Oulu (Finland). His commitment to excellence has led to his students publishing research papers and receiving awards, even at the early stages of their careers. His influence extends beyond UNIVEN, as he is often invited to audit and advise other institutions on academic development and research strategies. Prof Shonhai's contributions have been recognised through various awards and honours.

Notably, he recently received the Federation of European Biochemical Society (FEBS) journal award for an outstanding presentation at an international conference, a testament to the quality of his research.

His published works, including books and journal articles, are widely referenced in international academic circles, further solidifying his standing as a respected scholar. Prof. Shonhai is a recipient of a prestigious Georg Foster Fellowship awarded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. He previously used this award to conduct research while on sabbatical at Philipps- Marburg University (Germany). In addition, the award supports him to visit Germany to conduct research for a lifetime.

Nedbank Extends a Helping Hand to Thoho Ya Nzie, University of Venda Social Welfare Project



A spirit of generosity and community upliftment filled the University of Venda's Disability Building as Nedbank extended a helping hand to the Thoho Ya Nzie Social Welfare Project through a heartfelt donation ceremony.

The event was facilitated by the Advancement Unit and attended by the university staff members, Student Representative Council (SRC), and Nedbank executives, was a celebration of corporate social responsibility in action.

From the moment guests arrived, the atmosphere was filled with gratitude and hope for a brighter future for the students who would be handed over their parcels, which were made possible and secured by the Advancement Unit.

Opening the proceedings, Dr Gloria Dama set the tone with a warm welcome to key university officials, including the Director of Marketing, Branding, and Communication, Director of the Centre for Higher Education, Teaching and Learning, Head of Student Housing.



Dr Gloria Dama, Student Counsellor

She also acknowledged the presence of the SRC President and Secretary General, Student Counselling Unit, and representatives from Nedbank. Dr Dama encouraged participants of this exclusive event to raise their hands for recognition, fostering an interactive atmosphere. She concluded by appreciating everyone for their role in the event.



Mr Vusi Mokoena, Student Representative Council President

Mr Vusi Mokoena, the SRC President, who extended his heartfelt gratitude to Nedbank for their continued support to the student community. "Your generosity and commitment mean a great deal to us, and we deeply appreciate your efforts in making a tangible

impact on students' lives." said Mokoena. He expressed that he sincerely hopes that this is not the end but rather the beginning of an ongoing partnership. He said leadership is about creating meaningful change, and true impact is measured by the ability to assist those in need and Nedbank, in collaboration with the university, is doing exactly that, making a real difference. "On behalf of the SRC, we acknowledge and appreciate your contributions." Concluded Mokoena.



Dr Takalani Dzaga, Director of Marketing, Branding, and Communication

Dr Takalani Dzaga, Director of Marketing, Branding, and Communication, expressed that the university deeply values its long-standing partnership with Nedbank, which has significantly contributed to student success and community impact over the years. Your continued support, including last year's R6.6 million contribution and ongoing initiatives, is instrumental in advancing our mission. He expressed that the university is developing a strategic plan and recognises the vital role of partners like Nedbank in fostering research, leadership, and opportunities for the students. "We extend our sincere gratitude for your generosity and look forward to further collaboration in creating meaningful change." said Dr Dzaga as he concluded his remarks.

Adding to the chorus of gratitude, Prof Lindiwe Mulaudzi, Director of Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning (CHETL), reinforced and said she sincerely appreciated Nedbank's continued support in enhancing student success.



Prof Lindiwe Mulaudzi, Director of Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning (CHETL)

She expressed that the project would help address food insecurity, a key challenge affecting student well-being. CHETL remains committed to providing mentorship, e-learning resources, and counselling, and we recognise the importance of partnerships like this in making a lasting impact. She thanked Nedbank for their generosity and commitment to students' future at UNIVEN.



Ms Tenda Madzena, Nedbank Limpopo-North Business Banking Area Client Manager

Nedbank representative Ms Tenda Madzena delivered a heartfelt message reaffirming Nedbank's commitment to supporting students, particularly through the Thoho Ya Nzie Project, and emphasised the importance of long-term partnerships with the University of Venda. She highlighted the personal connection Nedbank shares with the university and the need to address student challenges, including food insecurity. She assured that Nedbank will continue expanding its sponsorships, involving more divisions and stakeholders.

Ms Madzena also stressed the importance of sustainability, urging a shift from short-term donations to lasting solutions. In closing, she encouraged stronger collaboration between Nedbank and the university to enhance student success and leadership.



Ms Tshilidzi Ramulondi, Director Revenue and Financial Aid

Ms Tshilidzi Ramulondi, Director Revenue and Financial Aid, thanked Nedbank for its continued support, emphasising the university's financial challenges, particularly for over 3,000 unfunded students, including late NSFAS applicants. She highlighted the urgent need for food and accommodation assistance, urging Nedbank to stay committed to student well-being. She concluded by appreciating the bank's role in providing hope and relief to struggling students.

The highlight of the day was the official handing over of donations by Ms Boitumelo Nkoana, Mr Madimetja Ledwaba, and Ms Sarita Botha. The moment was met with beaming smiles and heartfelt appreciation from the Thoho Ya Nzie Social Welfare Project representatives, who shared stories of how these contributions would directly transform lives.



Dr Refilwe Pila-Nemutandani, Student Counsellor

As the event ended, Dr Refilwe Pila-Nemutandani delivered a vote of thanks, expressing sincere appreciation to all stakeholders involved. In a fitting conclusion, this inspired and left everyone inspired, reminded that acts of kindness, big or small, hold the power to shape a better tomorrow, especially at UNIVEN.

Through this initiative, Nedbank has not only reaffirmed its commitment to social impact but has also strengthened its bond with the University of Venda and the broader community. The Thoho Ya Nzie Social Welfare Project now stands better equipped to continue its mission of uplifting lives, proving that when businesses and communities join forces, real change happens, as we see with this initiative.



Some of the donated items

If you spot anything out of the ordinary on campus - contact the University Hotline by calling toll free number 0800 212 755 or email: univenhotline@tip-offs.com

Improper conduct includes the following...

- 1. Financial misconduct,**
- 2. Misuse or misappropriation of University assets,**
- 3. Health and safety risks,**
- 4. Plagiarism,**
- 5. Fraud and corruption.**