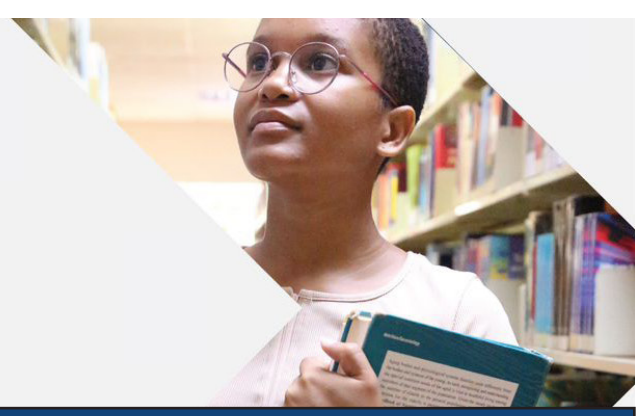




University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

UNIVEN Weekly e-Newsletter



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UNIVEN Vice-Chancellor and Principal Visits Chinese Embassy in South Africa



On April 15, 2025, the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Venda (UNIVEN), Professor Bernard Nthambeleni, led a delegation to the Chinese Embassy in South Africa, where they met with Education Counsellor Mr Li Xudong.

During the meeting, Prof Nthambeleni shared updates on the growing cooperation between UNIVEN and various Chinese universities and relevant educational institutions in China. He outlined the next steps in strengthening these partnerships and highlighted the recent progress of the Green Technology Confucius Institute (GTCI) at UNIVEN. He also presented the Institute's forward-looking work plan and expressed gratitude to the Chinese Embassy for its continued support in advancing UNIVEN's international collaboration efforts.

Counsellor Li commended the achievements UNIVEN has made through its partnerships with Chinese counterparts and extended his appreciation to Prof Nthambeleni for his commitment to the success of GTCI. He emphasised the importance of further leveraging the GTCI platform to benefit the Limpopo province and contribute to South Africa's broader development goals.

Both parties expressed a shared commitment to strengthening bilateral ties and developing GTCI into a model of Sino-South African cooperation and a hub for cultivating international talent.



This meeting was a precursor to UNIVEN's upcoming working visit to China, scheduled for late April 2025 and led by Prof Nthambeleni. The meeting was also attended by Dr Segun Obadire, Director of International Relations and Partnerships; Mr Thabo Dikgale, Manager of International Relations and Partnerships; and the Co-Directors of GTCI, Prof Eric Maluta and Prof Grace Ge.

Millets of the Future: UNIVEN Hosts Empowering Farmers' Day to Promote Finger Millet Cultivation



Attendees of the workshop

The Faculty of Science, Engineering, and Agriculture at the University of Venda held a transformative Finger Millet Farmers' Day on 16 April 2025, bringing together farmers, researchers, students, and government representatives for a day dedicated to knowledge-sharing, agricultural innovation, and sustainable farming.

The event was hosted at the University's C1 Lecture Hall and Experimental Farm, under the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, and served as a platform to introduce farmers to new varieties of finger millet—a resilient, climate-smart crop with vast nutritional and economic potential.



Dr Odeshee Naicker, Head of Department for Plant and Soil Sciences and Acting Deputy Dean of Teaching and Learning

Dr Odeshee Naicker, Head of Department for Plant and Soil Sciences and Acting Deputy Dean of Teaching and Learning, opened the event with a heartfelt address to the attendees: "Farmers, you are the true stewards of our land."

Your hard work nourishes our nation.” Dr Naicker emphasised the day’s focus on finger millet—a crop with exceptional potential for food security and climate resilience. She revealed that the university had identified new, promising varieties through ongoing research funded by the Water Research Commission (WRC) and announced that these would be distributed to farmers for the upcoming planting season. She added that the university would not only provide seeds but also ongoing technical guidance, including a comprehensive finger millet handbook, site visits, and training to ensure farmers receive full support throughout the season. Professor Eastonce Gwata is spearheading the project with a multi-disciplinary team of researchers from UNIVEN, North West University and the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.



Dr Shonisani Ramashia, Head of the Department for Food Science and Technology

Dr Shonisani Ramashia, Head of the Department for Food Science and Technology, delivered an in-depth presentation on the nutritional importance of finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*). Rich in calcium, iron, phosphorus, magnesium, and dietary fiber, as well as vitamins A and B1, B2, and B3, finger millet is gaining traction for its role in reducing chronic illnesses such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension. “Finger millet thrives under harsh conditions and serves as a vital source of nourishment and economic livelihood in many African communities,” she noted. Dr. Ramashia also highlighted the crop’s growing appeal in urban and international markets, especially in the development of value-added products such as mageu, snacks, baby foods, and gluten-free baked goods.

Farmers were given an exclusive opportunity to visit the Experimental Farm, where they deepened their understanding of finger millet cultivation. During this pre-event tour, the farmers engaged in a fruitful discussion, asking key questions about best practices in finger millet production and observing techniques that could be replicated in their fields. The exchange of insights was both lively and informative, setting a strong tone of collaboration ahead of the main gathering.



Adonia Thwala, a Master's student in the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences (Crop Genetics unit), in a finger millet demonstration plot at the Experimental Farm, University of Venda

Ms Adonia Thwala Adonia shared insights from her investigation of biochemical characteristics and agronomic performance of 20 experimental varieties of finger millet. Six high-performing varieties were identified for distribution to farmers. “By next season, we hope to hear back from the farmers on which of these varieties thrive best in their fields,” she said.



Dorcus Maja, a PhD final year student from North-West University

Ms Dorcus Maja educated the farmers on the agronomic management of finger millet, covering vital topics like planting times (mid-November to mid-December), weeding techniques, harvesting methods, threshing, and post-harvest storage.

Her session was practical and interactive, helping farmers gain deeper clarity on every step of finger millet production.



Representing the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ms. Khathutshelo Magalela

Ms Khathutshelo Agnes Magalela commended the ongoing partnership between the department and the university. She confirmed that the department had sponsored transport for the farmers to attend the event. “The knowledge being shared today is exactly the kind of technical support we strive to bring to our farmers. The collaboration with the University of Venda is strong, and this will not be the last time our farmers benefit from such initiatives,” she affirmed.



Dr Jestinos Mzezewa from the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences

Dr Jestinos Mzezewa, offered closing remarks filled with gratitude and optimism: “We have learned so much from each other today.

I hope this becomes a tradition, repeated every year or even every six months.”

He thanked all farmers, students, researchers, and partner institutions—especially the North-West University and the Water Research Commission (project sponsor)—for contributing to a successful and enriching event. As interest in nutritious and climate-resilient crops continues to grow, events like UNIVEN’s Finger Millet Farmers Day stand as vital touchpoints between science and society.

The knowledge gained and seeds distributed today may well become the cornerstone of a healthier, more sustainable food future for Limpopo and beyond.



Some of the attendees at the Experimental Farm

Enhancing Research Capacity Through Statistical Ecology and R Programming

The University of Venda’s Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture - DSI-NRF South African Research Chair in Biodiversity Value and Change (SARChI), in collaboration with the Centre for Research into Ecological and

Environmental Modelling (CREEM) at the University of St Andrews, recently hosted a six-day workshop series at the Lajuma Research Centre in the Soutpansberg Mountains.



L-R: Prof Lourens Swanepoel (SARChi Chair), Ms Amber Cowans (PhD Candidate; Dept Mathematics; St Andrews), Dr Sanet Hugo (Biological Sciences) Prof Chris Sutherland (Dept of Mathematics; St Andrews)

Led by Prof Lourens Swanepoel (SARChi Chair, UNIVEN), Dr Sanet Hugo (Department of Biological Sciences, UNIVEN), Dr Chris Sutherland (University of St Andrews), and Ms Amber Cowans (University of St Andrews), the workshops aimed to strengthen statistical and programming capabilities among postgraduate students and professionals engaged in ecological research.

This initiative builds on a longstanding collaboration between Prof Swanepoel and Dr Sutherland, which began during their postgraduate studies in 2008. Funding support from the SARChi Chair (NRF), the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture (FSEA), and a NERC travel grant awarded to Ms Cowans allowed the workshops to be offered at no cost to students.

A two-part training series was conducted to support ecological data analysis skills across experience levels:

Introductory R and Statistical Methods (3 Days), aimed at beginners, this workshop covered R programming basics, data visualisation, and foundational statistical techniques, including linear models, GLMs, and model validation.

Advanced Hierarchical Models in Ecology (3 Days), designed for advanced users, this session focused on analysing imperfect ecological data using hierarchical models, including occupancy, abundance, and spatial capture-recapture techniques.

These workshops provided technical skills and fostered collaboration and knowledge exchange between South African and international researchers, reinforcing the value of interdisciplinary and global partnerships in ecological science.



Group photo of students and facilitators at Workshop

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

2025 May Graduation Ceremonies

The Chancellor of the University of Venda (UNIVEN), Adv Mojanku Gumbi invites you to the 2025 May Graduation Ceremonies that will take place at the University Auditorium from 13-16 May 2025 and are scheduled to start at 09h00 am (morning sessions) and 13h30 (afternoon sessions).
 Graduands and Guests should arrive TWO HOURS BEFORE the commencement of each session.
 NB: For more information, kindly contact the Faculty Administrators as reflected in each session.
 Please visit our website: www.univen.ac.za.

SESSIONS	DATE	TIME
SESSION 1	13 MAY 2025	09H00
Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law Management and Commerce	Julius Netshidzivhe	015 962 8961 julius.netshidzivhe@univen.ac.za
SESSION 2	13 MAY 2025	13H30
Faculty of Health Sciences Health Sciences	Aluwani Bugane	015 962 8942 aluwani.bugane@univen.ac.za
Faculty of Management, Commerce and Law Law	Julius Netshidzivhe	015 962 8961 julius.netshidzivhe@univen.ac.za
SESSION 3	14 MAY 2025	09H00
Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture Environmental Sciences	Prince Khakhu	015 962 8221 prince.khakhu@univen.ac.za
Agricultural Sciences	Maxwell Maboho	015 962 8880 maxwell.maboho@univen.ac.za
SESSION 4	14 MAY 2025	13H30
Faculty of Science, Engineering and Agriculture Maths and Natural Sciences	Mukondeleli Masia	015 962 8086 mukondeleli.masia@univen.ac.za
SESSION 5	15 MAY 2025	09H00
Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education Human and Social Sciences	Mashudu Mainganye	015 962 8969 mashudu.mainganye@univen.ac.za
SESSION 6	15 MAY 2025	13H30
Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education Education [BEDFET, BEDTEF and PGCE]	Gumani Tshimange	015 962 8888 gumani.tshimange@univen.ac.za
SESSION 7	16 MAY 2025	09H00
Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education All Postgraduate Programmes in the Faculty Honours, Masters and Doctoral	Mashudu Mainganye Gumani Tshimange	015 962 8969 mashudu.mainganye@univen.ac.za 015 962 8888 gumani.tshimange@univen.ac.za