



The Acting Public Protector, Advocate Kholeka Gcaleka visits UNIVEN

On Tuesday, 16 March 2021, the Acting Public Protector, Advocate Kholeka Gcaleka visited the University of Venda (UNIVEN) to engage with various stakeholders about a strategy that her office is working on to address some of the challenges at higher education institutions. Participants in the meeting were the University management, student leadership, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and the South African Human Rights Commission. This meeting took place at UNIVEN Research Conference Centre.



Advocate Gcaleka said in 2020, the Public Protector's Office received NSFAS related complaints, which include inadequate allowances for study material and non-payment of living allowances.

Advocate Gcaleka highlighted that, without education, we will never preserve the future of this country. "We need to be visionaries as the leaders of today. We need to avoid a situation where every year, the children of this country are being chased by the police trying to fight for access to education."

She advised UNIVEN SRC to speak about all their challenges, so that they could be resolved harmoniously.



In his response, the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Bernard Nthambeleni highlighted several challenges facing the University.

Among other matters, Dr Nthambeleni presented analysis of the University's status; background and context; how to position UNIVEN for impact; UNIVEN revenue sources; UNIVEN Student Funding issues; Challenges with NSFAS and UNIVEN management's actions to resolve NSFAS and other financial issues.

He said, government grants remain the key source of revenue for UNIVEN. "Over 11 879 which is 78% of our students are funded by NSFAS and other government departments. About 3 459 students are in the 'missing middle category'. These are students whose family household income exceeds the maximum amount required to qualify for NSFAS but are still unable to fund university studies." Dr Nthambeleni further highlighted that, these missing middle students currently owe the University about R92 million rand and the debt is increasing every year. He said that the UNIVEN overall historical student debt balances at the end of 31 December 2020 was R441 million.

When talking about the issue of gadgets that are meant to assist students with online learning, Dr Nthambeleni said that the University started allocating tablets to all registered students' way back in 2015. However, the University no longer provide tablets to students, "we are now giving them laptops".

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UNIVEN SRC President, Mr Gifto Chauke highlighted the issues that students come across every year. He explained that, UNIVEN students are struggling a lot financially because it seems like NSFAS does not take them serious like students from other universities. "All we need is fair treatment from NSFAS". Other issues that Mr Chauke has highlighted were challenges of students who stay in villages where there is limited internet access or no network coverage at all. He said online learning is not possible for those students.

He further stressed the issue of funding for postgraduate students and student safety on and off campus. "On campus we do not have challenges as such, however we experience problems with students who get robbed or raped at off campus non-accredited residences. We also need to assist students who are staying at these residences with funds to access accredited residences."

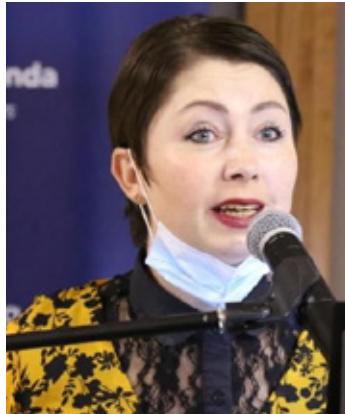
When talking about the issue of national shutdown at tertiary institutions, Mr Chauke said that, UNIVEN situation is different from other universities, hence we allowed our students to finish the 2020 academic year before they could talk about the national shutdown. "It is not like we did not want to participate in the total shutdown. These challenges also affect us, but we also need to be in the same academic year with students from other universities," he said.



In her response, NSFAS COO, Ms Nthuse Mphahlele said in the past three years, NSFAS has experienced a very high expenditure growth due to the demand of prospective students who need financial support for their studies. She said NSFAS make sure that all students are appropriately funded. NSFAS also need to be sure about where such students are registered and that takes time, which leads to delayed payments.

"NSFAS pays an institution (a University) to administer finances for all students that are funded. However, before the funds could be directed to an institution, we first make sure that institutions have proper administration of these funds." She said it is only at TVET Colleges where NSFAS pays funds directly to students and the tuition fees to the TVET College.

With regards to funding of postgraduate qualifications, Ms Mphahlele stated that a policy was yet to be finalised.



In her response, Senior Legal Officer at Human Rights Commission Limpopo Provincial Office, Dr Eileen Carter said students have the rights to access education and that seems to be a challenge in South Africa because the Human Rights Commission receives a lot of complaints about students who couldn't be registered due to their historical debt owed to institutions. She said there should be a funding mechanism that will make sure that all deserving and qualifying students are catered for to avoid financial exclusions at tertiary institutions.



In his opening and welcoming address, the University Registrar, Advocate Edward Lambani cited that, UNIVEN had already anticipated that this visit would yield positive results that will benefit all stakeholders involved. "Even though we feel like this could have been done earlier but we really appreciate the engagement of all stakeholders under one roof."



The vote of thanks was done by Advocate George Motimolane from the Provincial Office of the Public Protector (above) and the UNIVEN Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, Prof Jan Crafford (below).



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- 1

Before going on public transport
- 2

After touching doors, handrails and money
- 3

After making contact with other people
- 4

Before touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- 5

When you arrive at your destination

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UNIVEN and Bester Technology put heads together to bridge digital divide for local communities

On Monday, 29 March 2021, the University of Venda (UNIVEN) met with a delegation from Bester Technology to discuss matters of bringing internet connectivity to communities of Vhembe District Municipality and, ultimately, UNIVEN students, including those residing at off campus accredited residences. This meeting took place at UNIVEN Council Chambers.



When welcoming the delegation from Bester Technology, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Bernard Nthambeleni clarified that UNIVEN is not a rural University but a University based in a rural area. "We want to become a role player that makes impact in our community, where we are located hence one of our institutional values is that we have accepted our social responsibility and community engagement in serving and contributing to the intellectual,

social and economic well-being of our communities." He said UNIVEN is ready to play an active role in the economy of the area where it is located. Dr Nthambeleni said that the UNIVEN Innovative Growth Company (UIGC) will assist the University in playing a big role to boost the local area economically. UIGC has an important role of linking the University with the communities and what is happening around those communities.

"Times have changed drastically since December 2019. We found ourselves having to change the way we teach our students due to COVID-19 pandemic. We want to make sure that our University thrive towards achieving its goal even amidst this pandemic. We always strive to accommodate our students at secured residences with Wi-Fi connectivity."

He concluded his welcome message by mentioning that for the University to achieve its goal, there is a need to strengthen its partnerships. The Vice-Chancellor showed that partnerships should be key in achieving our core business of teaching and learning. As a University, we must come up with projects that benefit students and communities around us – in other words we want to improve the lives of people by providing solutions to the problems, he added. Dr Nthambeleni said he is looking forward that this partnership will be a game changer in addressing the problems we are faced with. "We are aware that to achieve what we want to achieve, we need to partner with companies and organisations that will assist the University to fulfill its role. We need to give and not expect anything in return."



Chief Executive Officer of Bester Technology, Helen Gao said that, since 2019, Bester Technology has established several companies worldwide. We now have seven (7) design subsidiary companies in China. "We are trying to stretch our performance in the technology industry. We want to become infrastructure owner in South Africa and we want to be the key ICT service provider in this area." She continued to highlight that, one of their goals as Bester Technology is to own the network in rural areas and provide surrounding communities with internet connectivity.



UIGC CEO, Dr John Mudau said the University has started working with the surrounding communities regarding improvements in their area, however, the point of community interaction is municipalities within those communities. Dr Mudau concluded his talk by mentioning that they have started to liaise with Thulamela and Collins Chabane Local Municipalities. "The news of Bester Technology coming on board is exciting to us because they came at the right time."



Eric Chen, Stanley Kachaca, Helen Gao, Dr Bernard Nthambeleni and Dr John Mudau posing for a group photo after the meeting.

Stress has a negative impact on individual's productivity



On Thursday, 25 March 2021, the University of Venda (UNIVEN)'s Employee Health and Wellness Section of Human Resources Directorate, held a Virtual Stress Management Workshop to educate and equip staff members with stress management skills. This workshop was organised for UNIVEN employees as a provision to handle stress. The workshop which was facilitated by Ms Andiswa Lefakane from Careways took place on Microsoft Teams.

Ms Lefakane highlighted that stress has a negative impact on individual's productivity especially for those who are experiencing personal, family, and work-related challenges. She said that the possible results of stress are depression, absenteeism, low morale, and low productivity. It can also cause defensiveness, lack of motivation, difficulty concentrating, accidents and interpersonal conflict.

Stress is a hazard in the workplace. This workshop focused on improving mental and emotional health of UNIVEN employees to cope with the increasing level of stress. UNIVEN employees commended

This workshop focused on improving mental and emotional health of UNIVEN employees to cope with the increasing level of stress.

the University for providing such kind of workshop as they gained knowledge of dealing with the different types of stress and their challenges.

Andiswa concluded by encouraging UNIVEN staff members to use services offered by Careways because Careways is UNIVEN's official Employee Health and Wellness Programme (EHWP) service provider. Ms Nkhangweleni Mudau also encouraged employees to regularly attend this kind of workshops.

UNIVEN collaborates in €1 Million Erasmus + Funded Forest 21 Project



Erasmus+

Five Higher Education Institutions (HEI) offering Forestry education in South Africa have joined three European universities in a project entitled Forest21. This funded Forest21 Project aims to advance the quality of education in the field of Forestry Entrepreneurship through problem-based learning.

The €1 Million project, funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union entitled '21st Century Climate-Smart Forestry Education for Livelihood and Sustainability in South Africa', is a collaborative project that will strengthen the capacity of forestry entrepreneurship in South African higher education.

Through curricula reformation in Forestry Education, students will be equipped with entrepreneurial skills and a deeper understanding of climate-smart approach to Forestry. The University of Venda (UNIVEN) is among the five South African Higher Education Institutions that are participating in the FOREST21 project.

Forestry discipline is strategically positioned to address unemployment, as well as to mitigate global climate change. Young Forestry Entrepreneurs hold enormous potential to address these challenges through the development of products and processing of forestry resources. Through FOREST21 project, Forestry Education will be reformed to meet the needs in the industry, and climate-smart Forestry will be emphasised.

Entrepreneurship education and problem-based learning methods will be developed together with the teaching staff and managerial staff. Students will learn practical skills through solving real-life challenges in Forestry industry.

"FOREST21 provides a unique opportunity for the forestry sector to work closely with all forestry HEIs in South Africa and partner with HEIs in Finland and Norway", says Norman Dlamini, Director of Business Development at Forestry South Africa. "The project supports the key efforts of the country in dealing with the triple ills of unemployment, poverty and inequality. It also improves the country's efforts towards the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. The emphasis on forestry entrepreneurship and climate change is exactly what the country needs right now."

Other South African participating universities are Nelson Mandela University, Stellenbosch University, Fort Cox Agriculture and Forestry Institute and Tshwane University of Technology. Dr Eija Laitinen who is the Project manager and Principal Research Scientist at the Bio Economy Research Unit at Häme University of Applied Sciences in Finland said that the forestry industry in South Africa is strongly committed to this project. "In addition to curricula reformations, collaboration between the industry and education will be strengthened."

FOREST21 is a collaborative project funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union with a budget of approximately one million euros for a period of three years (2021–2024). UNIVEN's Prof Peter Adesoye who is the Head of Forestry Department highlighted that FOREST21 project is timely because UNIVEN's Forestry Department is in a transition phase from BSc Agriculture (Forestry) into BSc Forestry.

For more information, please contact the Head of Forestry Department, Prof Peter Adesoye on 081 065 8270/015 962 8372 or email to peteroluremi.adesoye@univen.ac.za

2021 Agritour ZA Limpopo prepares students to think beyond Covid-19 pandemic

On 04th and 05th March 2021, Mobile Applications Laboratory (Mlab) held Hackaton 2021 Agritour Limpopo innovation platform. This workshop was held at the University of Venda (UNIVEN) ICT 1 Computer Lab. The workshop was attended by students in Computer Science, BIS and in the IT related fields. Attendees were exposed to design thinking, starting and growing business and how technology can be used to bring innovation to the agriculture and tourism sectors. This Agritour ZA Limpopo was facilitated by Provincial Coordinator, Palesa Antony from mLab and AgritourZA Coordinator Choene Makhosa who is also from mLab.



Attendees of 2021 Agritour ZA Limpopo innovation platform during one of their sessions



When welcoming attendees and facilitators of the programme, UNIVEN Director ICT, Mr Sam Khoza encouraged participating UNIVEN students to do their best to design and develop applications (Apps) that will be competitive, and not just competitive but Apps that will also solve problems faced by those in the agriculture or tourism sector. He encouraged them to put UNIVEN at the forefront of this initiative. Khoza further said that UNIVEN is proud to be producing students who will be part of community development.

The Mobile Applications Laboratory NPC was successfully awarded a Regional Innovation Support Programme (RISP) grant by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research's (CSIR) Technology Localisation Implementation Unit to establish an AgriTech and TravelTech regional innovation network in the Limpopo Province.

The project aims to build a network of researchers, designers, innovators and entrepreneurs to establish a vibrant agriculture and tourism technology ecosystem in Limpopo. Polokwane is the ideal city from which to start building the network and will serve as the hub from which

to expand the network to more remote parts of the Limpopo Province.

On Friday, 05 March 2020, five teams of UNIVEN students competed where all teams presented their prototypes and the team with best prototype was selected by a panel of adjudicators comprising of UNIVEN lecturers and representatives from mLab. The UNIVEN winning team will join the provincial competition to compete for seed funding worth R125 000.00. They will compete against 19 provincial groups in April.

The project aims to build a network of researchers, designers, innovators and entrepreneurs to establish a vibrant agriculture and tourism technology ecosystem in Limpopo.



Winners of the day for presenting the best application (App)
Leonard Mamba, Thato Kekana, Ngwaneni Matshusa and Nduvho Madzivhandila



mLab Limpopo Provincial Coordinator, Palesa Antony, facilitating the 2021 Agritour Limpopo innovation platform

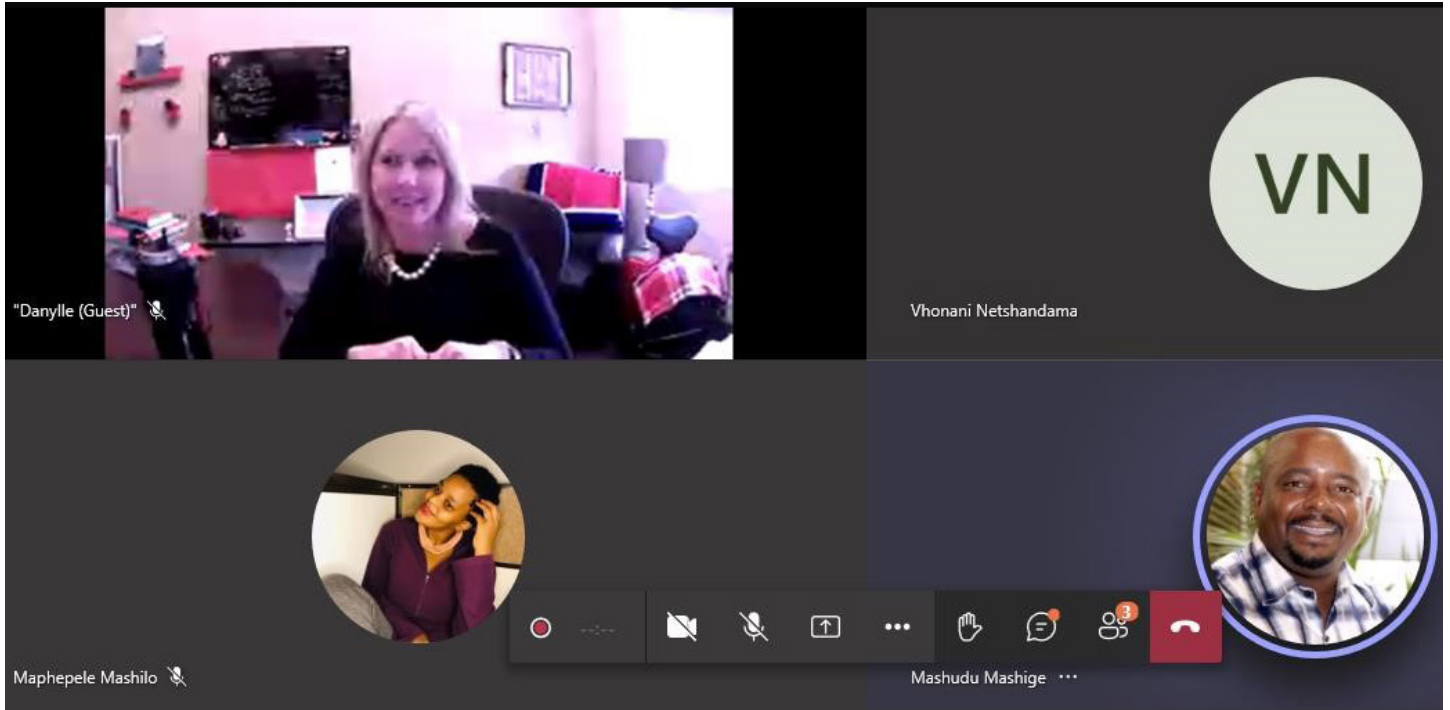


Facilitators and coordinators of the 2021 Agritour ZA Limpopo Innovation platform posing for a photo with Mr Sam Khoza



In his vote of thanks message, UNIVEN Head of Support Services Mr Nkhumbuleni Ratshitanga thanked mLab for contributing towards the success of UNIVEN students. Mr Ratshitanga encouraged students to take initiatives like this serious because they are meant to empower them.

Community Engagement Directorate organises a successful virtual Social Entrepreneurship Workshop



On Wednesday, 24 March 2021, the Community Engagement Directorate held a virtual Social Entrepreneurship Workshop under the theme, 'Introduction to Social Enterprise: Rethinking Business'. The major purpose of the workshop was to expose students and staff to the concept of social entrepreneurship and show how social entrepreneurs are transforming society to deliver social impact in their home communities and abroad. Dr Danylle Kunkel, Associate Professor at Radford University College of Business and Economics in Virginia, USA facilitated the workshop via Microsoft teams. More than 80 people drawn from the UNIVEN campus and notably, the Limpopo Chamber of Commerce and Industry participated in this workshop.

Prof Kunkel clarified that Social entrepreneurship focused on creation of social impact through developing and implementing a sustainable business model which draws on innovative solutions that

benefit the disadvantaged and, ultimately, society at large. She highlighted the leveraging innovations results towards the creation of positive social impact within grassroots communities. "Social enterprises are distinctive because their purpose is central to what they do," she said. Prof Kunkel encouraged emerging entrepreneurs to never give up if they want to succeed.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Corporate Services, Dr Robert Martin welcomed attendees to the workshop and encouraged them to contribute, explore and learn as much as they could. He argued that this was important because social entrepreneurship will play a major role in the implementation of the University of Venda's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan.

In his vote of thanks message, Director Institute for Rural Development, Prof Joseph Francis said unique platforms such as the workshop are encouraging

because they taught students, staff, and external stakeholders such as provincial entrepreneurs to unlock their potential and assets to help them flourish in the business world. He concluded his remarks by mentioning that this workshop was relevant especially with respect to the operationalisation of the University's Strategic Thrust 2. The workshop was facilitated by Prof Mashudu Mashige, a Research Professor in the School of Human and Social Sciences of the University of Venda.

Overall, the workshop revealed that social enterprise was a rapidly developing field and that through its application, entrepreneurs and social innovators use business methods to help solve economic, social, and environmental challenges. These are matters that, otherwise, are ignored by commercial businesses and often difficult to financially sustain in the nonprofit sector.

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2. Misuse or misappropriation of University assets,
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4. Plagiarism,
5. Fraud and corruption.

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THE CRUCIAL COMPONENT TO FINANCIAL SECURITY



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Be aware of these common microaggressions:



'IS THAT YOUR REAL HAIR?'

What to do instead: Mind your own business. A person should never have to explain their hair, whether it's natural or not, unless they volunteer the information.

'YOUR NAME IS HARD TO PRONOUNCE'

What to do instead: Ask them how to pronounce it. This shows your willingness to avoid offending them.

'ARE YOU AN INTERN? YOU LOOK SO YOUNG!'

What to do instead: Say nothing. There's no reason for you to comment on anyone's appearance.

'I THINK YOU'RE IN THE WRONG PLACE'

What to do instead: Don't assume people don't belong without context. Why not just say a friendly hello, and if they need assistance they'll tell you?

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