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FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Interim Editor-in-Chief, Zama Sishi

For anyone who has been part of MUT's journey over the last ten or more years, there is no denying that the University is a different place these days: a place that has come to think more confidently about itself, to appreciate its unique strengths – including its close relationship with the Umlazi Township community – and to deliberately partner with other institutions to increase its impact. This mindset is rooted in pride in who we are as a University, coupled with a belief that we can play a constructive role in building a strong future for ourselves and our province, nation and world.

Engagement and collaboration are two of the key drivers of this growth. Not surprisingly, our new Vice-Chancellor, Professor Nokuthula Sibiya, has singled out engagement with staff and students as a key priority for MUT this year. In this issue we share numerous stories of engagements with various stakeholders which have brought MUT and its management closer to the needs of its stakeholders, enabling us to be more relevant and responsive. There are also numerous examples of collaboration – active two-way engagements around a common cause, whether it be entrepreneurship education or international partnerships.

One only has to look at the story of Wilbur and Orville Wright, the pioneers of aviation, to appreciate the importance of collaboration for success. The Wright Brothers did not achieve their groundbreaking success alone. Unlike many of their competitors who worked in isolation or kept their knowledge to themselves, the brothers actively collaborated with each other and the broader scientific community. They studied the work of earlier aviation pioneers, exchanged ideas with engineers and even used insights from bicycle mechanics to improve their designs. By working together and incorporating diverse perspectives, they ultimately made the first successful powered flight in 1903. Without their deep commitment to teamwork and collaboration, we could have taken much longer to reach the skies! The same principle applies to us at MUT, as we seek to collectively advance teaching and learning, research and community engagement at MUT.

On that note, it is fitting that we acknowledge the contribution of those respected individuals who went before us. The MUT of today, as much as it has matured and grown, remains a university anchored in its community and passionate about bringing transformation. Our first Council Chairperson, Reverend Bekizipho Khulekani "BK" Dlodla, played a key role in this continuity and we honour his legacy in the wake of his recent passing. We are blessed indeed to have been led by him.

May we continue to strive together for a future worthy of our great mission as MUT.

VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVE



Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor Nokuthula Sibiyi

Greetings and a happy new year to all our readers. As we enter 2025, I am thrilled to share my vision for the year ahead. This year promises to be a transformative period for our University, as we enter the last stretch of what we set out to achieve in our MUT Strategy 2020–2025. This is not only a time to reflect on the last five years, but also an opportunity to build on the lessons learnt as we craft a new strategic plan for 2026–2030. Sourcing stakeholder support is key to the success of our new strategy. In our strategy development calendar, we have set aside July to December 2025 for strategy advocacy, and we will be running several campaigns and roadshows with our

stakeholders to share the details of MUT's direction for the next five years.

One of our key priorities this year is to enhance student and staff engagement. I am committed to making time for meaningful interactions with our internal stakeholders. I believe that to build a strong MUT, I need to start from the inside, making sure that the voices of staff and students are heard. From 13 to 15 March, I had a leadership workshop with the Students' Representative Council (SRC). I plan to host a series of engagements like this at least once per quarter to ascertain the needs of our students, so that as management our decisions and priorities are aligned with their most pressing challenges. I hosted my first imbizo with staff and students, titled "VC in Conversation", on 26 March. Through these conversations, I am providing a platform for open dialogue and collective decision-making.

In addition to meeting with staff and students, I also had the pleasure of meeting with the parents of first-year students on 8 February. This meeting reinforced MUT management's commitment to providing a holistic university experience for our students.

Looking ahead, we have exciting projects and initiatives lined up. We will work towards expanding our academic programmes, enhancing our facilities and strengthening our partnerships with industry and other institutions. Your involvement and support are crucial in achieving these goals, and I am confident that together we can make 2025 a remarkable year for our University.

As we embark on this new year, I encourage our staff and students to actively participate in university events, engage with peers and colleagues, and contribute to the vibrant campus life and positive culture at MUT.



MUT HEADLINES

A reflection from Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, Professor Marcus Ramogale



Professor Marcus Ramogale

As the new academic year begins, we can be proud of the success of our first semester registration process for 2025. Meticulous planning and collaborative efforts ensured a smooth and efficient registration experience for all students, particularly the incoming first-year cohort.

The University received an overwhelming 103 483 applications from prospective students eager to join the MUT community in 2025. This high level of interest underscores MUT's growing reputation for academic excellence and innovation. To manage the large volume of applications and ensure a seamless registration process, MUT implemented several key measures. The University's registration team, which included 44 trained volunteers from the SRC, played a

crucial role in assisting students throughout the registration period. This collaborative approach proved to be a recipe for success, allowing queries to be addressed swiftly and efficiently.

Understanding the challenges that come with transitioning from high school to university, MUT set aside the period from 27 January to 7 February for online registration. This period allowed students to complete their registration at their own pace, ensuring a stress-free experience. Our efforts paid off, with 13 355 students successfully registered by 14 March, including 3 538 first-year students.

Thanks to the well-managed registration process, lectures commenced on schedule on 10 February and there was no need to extend the registration period beyond the normal timeframe. For students who faced difficulties completing their registration, MUT provided a week of amnesty from 3 to 7 March, ensuring that everyone had the opportunity to finalise their enrolment.

The collaborative efforts and dedication of staff, volunteers and students have set the stage for a productive and inspiring 2025. With the registration process successfully concluded, MUT is now fully focused on the academic year ahead. A key priority for MUT is to provide a supportive environment for students, and a range of services is in place to ensure their success. From academic support through tutoring and mentoring programmes, to personal and career counselling, these services address both the educational and psycho-social needs of students. The University's health services promote physical well-being, while financial aid options – including bursaries and financial aid through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) – help alleviate financial pressures. Additionally, MUT fosters a vibrant campus life, with a key event being the first-year orientation which encourages student engagement and personal growth. Through these comprehensive services, MUT aims to empower students to achieve their full potential in their academic and personal endeavours.

MUT Management pays tribute to former Council Chairperson



Reverend Bekizipho Khulekani "BK" Dlodla

MUT mourns the passing of Reverend Bekizipho Khulekani "BK" Dlodla, inaugural Chairperson of the MUT Council and a long-standing friend of the University. Reverend Dlodla departed this life in the early hours of 8 March 2025, at the respected age of 99.

Reverend Dlodla's contributions to the University and the broader community are invaluable. His ordination as a minister in 1955 exemplified his lifelong dedication to the service of humanity, and he played an instrumental role in the formation of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) in 1967. As the Chairperson of the MUT Council, a position he held until 2000, Reverend Dlodla demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the advancement of education and the development of our institution.

During his tenure as Council Chairperson, Reverend Dlodla steered the University through its formative years. His visionary leadership and steadfast dedication were pivotal in establishing the

foundational policies and frameworks that have shaped MUT's growth. He was a close confidant of the University's founder, Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who passed away in 2023.

Beyond his contributions to education, Reverend Dlodla played a significant role in nation building. He was a stalwart of faith, justice and moral regeneration, advocating for social justice and racial unity throughout his life. During apartheid, he provided shelter to political activists and demanded the release of Nelson Mandela. His commitment to uplifting the vulnerable extended to education, where he personally funded the schooling of underprivileged children. His legacy of service, compassion and leadership will be eternally cherished and remembered by all who knew him.

The MUT Vice-Chancellor, management, staff and students extend their deepest condolences to the Dlodla family and friends during this time of bereavement. May Reverend Dlodla's soul rest in eternal peace.

COLLABORATING FOR CHANGE

MOA with University Incubator Consortium marks new era of collaboration



Left to right, Professor Nokuthula Sibiyi, Professor Thoko Mayekiso and Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele signing a MOA with the University Incubator Consortium (UNIIC)

On 12 February 2025, MUT marked a significant milestone as our Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Nokuthula Sibiyi, signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the University Incubator Consortium (UNIIC). This consortium includes a diverse international group of universities and institutions committed to fostering collaboration, innovation and entrepreneurship.

The signing ceremony took place at the University of Mpumalanga in Mbombela, where Professor Sibiyi joined representatives from universities in Malaysia (Asia Pacific University), Indonesia (Universitas Trisakti, Universitas Telkom and Universitas Multimedia Nusantara), Philippines (Palawan State University, Western Philippines University, Mindoro State University, Occidental Mindoro State College, Adamson University, and the Department of Science and Technology for the MIMAROPA Region), Taiwan (National University of Kaohsiung), Rwanda

(University of Rwanda) and South Africa (University of Mpumalanga, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, Tshwane University of Technology and MUT).

The MOA outlines the scope and objectives of the collaboration, which include promoting knowledge and technology sharing, academic mobility, joint research and publications and entrepreneurship activities. The agreement aims to enhance the educational experience for students and staff by providing opportunities for mutual visits, ideation bootcamps, advisory services for start-up companies and joint conferences.

Professor Sibiyi expressed her enthusiasm for the partnership, stating: "This agreement represents a significant step forward for MUT. The consortium's goals align with my dedication to entrepreneurship development at MUT. By joining forces with these

esteemed institutions, we are creating a platform for innovation and collaboration that will benefit our students, staff and the broader community."

The UNIC Consortium is dedicated to supporting start-up and spin-off companies, providing guidance on regulatory requirements, and facilitating access to venture capital and funding opportunities. The collaborative efforts will also focus on joint research projects, sharing curriculum and teaching materials, and organising conferences to build research capabilities. The MOA marks a new era of collaboration and growth for MUT as it seeks to expand its international presence.

Vice-Chancellor advocates for stronger research ties at Namibian ceremony



Professor Nokuthula Sibiya, right, with NUST Vice-Chancellor, Professor Eroid Namoab, during former's visit to NUST

MUT Vice-Chancellor, Professor Nokuthula Sibiya, had the honour of addressing leadership and academic staff at the annual opening ceremony of the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) on 6 February 2025. The event, themed "Creating a research and development culture in a teaching-intensive university", featured a keynote address by Professor Sibiya.

A key highlight of the ceremony was the emphasis on the significant partnership between MUT and NUST. This collaboration, formalised through a memorandum of understanding (MOU), aims to strengthen ties between the two institutions and promote joint research initiatives, staff and student exchanges, and the

development of innovative academic programmes. Professor Sibiya expressed her gratitude to NUST Vice-Chancellor, Professor Eroid Naomab, for his commitment to the partnership. She noted that the collaboration would not only enhance the research capabilities of both universities but also contribute to the broader goal of advancing higher education and technological innovation in the region.

In her address, Professor Sibiya emphasised the transformative power of education and the critical role of universities in shaping world economies. She highlighted the necessity of integrating a robust research and development culture within teaching-intensive universities to enhance academic excellence and drive social progress.

"Universities are called not only to impart knowledge but also to generate new knowledge through research and development," Professor Sibiya said. She underscored the importance of creating an environment where innovation thrives and where students, staff and researchers are empowered to make meaningful contributions to the world.

"Universities of technology, like NUST and MUT, play a crucial role in fostering applied research and developing solutions that can be directly implemented in industry and society. By fostering a culture that values and supports research, we can ensure that our universities remain at the forefront of knowledge creation and dissemination," added Professor Sibiya.

She concluded her address by encouraging collaboration among academics, researchers, students, administrators and industry partners to create an environment where research and teaching complement each other.

MUT takes a giant step to promote student entrepreneurship



Professor Michael Twum-Darko, sixth from left, front row, with MUT staff and students

The University has taken a giant step forward in its efforts to instil a culture of entrepreneurship among its students. Dr Mandla Hlongwane, Deputy Director: Intellectual Property, said the University has partnered with the Technological Higher Education Network South Africa (THENSA) and Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) to launch a groundbreaking Entrepreneurship Mentorship-in-Residence (MiR) programme to empower students who aspire to be entrepreneurs.

The MiR programme is part of the South Africa Entrepreneurship Venture Builder (SAEVB) initiative driven by Professor Michael Twum-Darko from CPUT. He visited MUT to promote the SAEVB on 6 March 2025.

From 25 to 27 February 2025, three MUT students who had already reached the Minimum Viable Product (MVP) stage of their start-ups, attended the “MiR Mentorship and Coaching Workshop for Mentees with MVP or Scalable Start-ups” at CPUT. They made presentations on their business ideas, namely, “plant-based hair extensions” “Ethekwini agri-outreach” and Sane Nutri Chips”

Dr Hlongwane, who is the Commercialisation Mentor for the MiR, said that while MUT currently does not have a specific academic entrepreneurship programme, there is a growing focus on fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. The University’s broader mission includes empowering students to think creatively,

solve problems and contribute to socio-economic development. MUT recognises the importance of nurturing entrepreneurial skills, especially in the context of a rapidly changing world.

Dr Hlongwane said the MiR programme offers much for students. “The students will benefit from expert mentorship. They will receive personalised guidance from experienced professionals in technology transfer, innovation and entrepreneurship. Their business ideas will receive a boost from being a prototype to (going to) market. Their business journeys will be accelerated from MVP to commercialisation,” said Dr Hlongwane.

The cultivation of a business philosophy at MUT is here to stay. The University has plans to build an Entrepreneurship Centre that will be dedicated to fostering an entrepreneurial spirit and providing structures to support students who explore business ventures. Dr Hlongwane said the proposed centre will include a training and education wing, which will offer courses and workshops on entrepreneurship, business management and innovation. This will be complemented by incubation programmes to support students to develop their business ideas, including mentoring, access to facilities, and funding. The centre will also offer networking opportunities to students. There will be a hub where students can connect with entrepreneurs, investors and industry experts. Lastly, the centre will have an area dedicated to research and development, where students and staff can work on innovative solutions that can solve real-world challenges.

ENGAGING WITH OUR STAKEHOLDERS

MUT reaches out to an important stakeholder group – parents



Professor Nokuthula Sibiya addressing parents at the meeting. Seated behind her are some Executive Management Committee members

There will always be problems when the cogs in a wheel are not fully connected to each other. The connections will be weak, and the wheel will be unstable. MUT is part of a system in which the University and its management are connected to the Department of Higher Education and Training, parents and students, among others. The better the connections between them, the better the system functions. Students are at the centre of this system, with the rest forming a triangle that looks after students' needs. This the main reason why MUT's Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Nokuthula Sibiya, called a parents' meeting on 8 February 2025.

Professor Sibiya said at the meeting that she wanted to establish a relationship with the parents, and that she

hoped that such a relationship would last beyond their children's stay at MUT. Such an approach is largely aimed at mitigating problems with students that crop up during the year. In line with the belief that raising a child is the whole village's business, Professor Sibiya said she wanted to have "eye-to-eye" contact with the parents of the first-year students right from the beginning.

Uttering every word with zeal and purpose, Professor Sibiya – fresh from an international visit – said she had been determined to meet with parents even if only three arrived. A few days before the meeting, there had been negative messages on social media, mocking the University for calling a parents' meeting. It was clear that the people that had posted those messages were not aware of how important the connection is between the



A question from the floor by a parent

University and all its stakeholders, and its desire for communication on key issues. This is what Professor Sibiyi wanted to take care of.

In her address to the more than 600 parents that arrived that day, Professor Sibiyi said that it was necessary for them to play their part in the education of their children. They could do so effectively if they had the right knowledge (from MUT management) and took the right approach when seeking clarification on issues regarding their children's studies. "

We thank you for entrusting us with your children. I called the meeting to create an opportunity for you to hear the required information from the University's departments and divisions so that there will be proper alignment to everything that is needed in the relationship between all stakeholders involved in the education of the students," said Professor Sibiyi. She assured the parents that she took their views seriously and that she was ready to work with them with the best interests of their children in mind. At the meeting the University's management also promised to stand behind the Vice-Chancellor in her efforts to achieve the desired outcomes of the students' stay at MUT.

Professor Marcus Ramogale, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, said to the parents that his job was to give leadership in the area of teaching and

learning. Assuring the parents that their children were in good hands, Professor Ramogale told them that he is a teacher by profession. He said there are two purposes of education – transferring knowledge to the students and building their character. Responding to a question about some lecturers not attending lectures, Professor Ramogale advised the parents of the different avenues available to students and parents to report unacceptable conduct by lecturers and any other staff member. He strongly condemned such behaviour and made it clear that his office is ready to take decisive action against anyone impeding students' right to learn.

The SRC President, Mhlangi Ngubo, informed the parents about the role of the SRC in student matters. Ngubo said the 11 SRC portfolios were designed to meet all the students' needs. He also reiterated a point made by Professor Sibiyi about the University not having enough cash flow, and encouraged parents of cash-paying students to honour their obligation to pay for the services they receive. He also alerted parents to the fact that all student support services at the University are free to all registered students, and that students should not use this as an excuse to ask parents for extra cash. The grateful parents asked very constructive questions from the MUT leadership, indicating a desire to work with the University to secure the future of their children.

Small-scale cattle farmers assisted by faculty staff and students



Helen Mapeka, left, showing the insemination tool to students and local cattle farmers

A quiet revolution is happening at MUT. Historically, black people tend to have a negative attitude towards agriculture. After losing their land and wealth, which was mainly cattle, many black people were relegated to being farm labourers. As a result, they tended to view any form of agriculture as a way of enslaving them. In their experience, black people did not have any power to make decisions; only white people could do that. And yet the tide is turning, and MUT is playing a key role.

A hero who is giving a different perspective on agriculture to young South Africans is Helen Mapeka, a lecturer in the Department of Agriculture at MUT. She has impressed upon her students that agriculture is both a way of life where they can practise their science, and also an economic activity worth paying attention to. She is currently conducting a project on the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal, near the Eastern Cape border, titled “Application of Assisted Reproductive Technologies to improve reproductive performance of beef cattle and small stock animals in the smallholder/communal farming sector of KwaZulu-Natal”. For the project, Mapeka leads a group of very eager third-year students who are clear about what they want to know and do in order to improve the local farmers’ knowledge and make an impact in animal farming, particularly cattle farming. The project is funded by the CEAD (Community Engagement and

Development) directorate. Its objective is to address low reproductive rates and introduce superior livestock genetics in the communal farming sector through advanced farming technologies.

Mapeka, one of the few registered female reproductive operators in the country, said that the project was launched in August 2024. “The project began with a two-week knowledge and skills transfer workshop for Rietsdale farmers in Umzimkhulu. The training participants included unemployed youth from Rietsdale and women in agriculture, as well as MUT Agriculture Animal Production students. This is the first project to serve the Rietsdale community, aiming to improve farmers’ overall livestock breeding management practices, enhancing reproduction rates and subsequently increasing production. By adopting and implementing the skills acquired through this project, farmers will be able to contribute to the mainstream red meat industry and improve food security. Additionally, the project aligns with goals 1, 2, 4 and 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG),” said Mapeka.

Mapeka has created a solid relationship with local small-scale cattle farmers. It is very common to hear them calling her from a distance – “Hey Helen!” – to which she responds with a smile. Some of these are folks who are well beyond retirement age. Their positive relationship is based on the fact that they accept that



Some of these cattle are candidates for artificial insemination

Mapeka and her team of students have something the farmers need – scientific knowledge which they believe will improve their cattle farming – and the fact that Mapeka and the students believe they have a duty to contribute to better outcomes for the farmers, and can learn from the farmers' knowledge. It is a real win-win relationship, not the boss-servant relationship that is common in the South African agriculture set-up. Mapeka said that her goal was to streamline the farming systems of the Rietsdale farmers.

The students have much to say about the project. Thandolwethu Gumede hailed the project as “good”, adding that “I believe that after the calves are born, there will be an improvement of genes because the semen of a Boran bull was used”. Borans are a breed of cattle that can withstand extreme weather conditions in the country. Boran heifers reach puberty at just over a year (385 days), their calves have an excellent survival rate, and there are no Boran calving problems. Gumede is appealing to farmers to be “more organised next time” so that all cows can get hormonal injections to improve the success rate of the project and their yield.

Gumede also reflected on the team's interaction with one of the farmers regarding their observation that there was a “freemartin” (sterile cow) in the herd. “When we told the farmer, he couldn't understand how this was the case because the cow was big and

fat. This was incorrect – a breeding cow should not be fat.” Gumede said that being involved in the project highlighted the need for teamwork. “I also learnt that bad weather can't stop the project. We worked in the rain and we were all soaked. They even had to start the fire in the kraal (esibayeni) because we needed boiling water for the temperature of the semen to be 37/38°C.”

Gumede said he chose to get involved in the project because he was “intrigued about the artificial insemination procedure”, among other reasons. He got a chance to ear-tag the cattle, prepare a pistolette, and do other activities required for his in-service training. “I really just wanted to work with a herd of cattle and now I can clearly understand the importance of temperament in a cow,” Gumede said.

Nonkanyiso Zondo also had much to say about her experiences. When asked about her views on the project, she focused on the benefits of artificial insemination (AI). “AI is a reproductive technology which is used to increase the chances of the cow's pregnancy. AI is the safest way of making animals conceive because it reduces diseases that are transmitted through natural mating. AI ensures that every cow gets enough sperm which will be active and swim to the ovum to fertilise it.”

Zondo said that it is guaranteed that a good number of cows will conceive via AI, compared to natural mating which depends on a bull. “You won't know whether the bull did the job or not. If it didn't, that's a loss. A cow must give you one calf per year. AI ensures that that happens. That means for you as a farmer that the production increases, the profit increases, and hunger is reduced. Using AI allows you to have any type of breed you want – even the gender of the calf can be chosen. And that means you can breed with the bull that will suit your needs. Small-scale farmers need cattle that are adaptive to harsh weather conditions and can convert non-nutritious feed. You can also produce cattle with good temperaments, as cows with bad temperaments can kill people,” she explained.

However, Zondo said the drawback is that AI is expensive. “Even if they can buy the equipment that is needed, they lack knowledge on how to use it,” Zondo said.

That's why the project is so important – to improve education and exposure not just for the small-scale farmers but for the students themselves as they shape the future of agriculture.

Celebrating World Intellectual Property Day at MUT



Dr Mandla Hlongwane

Through its Research Directorate, MUT will be hosting the regional World Intellectual Property (IP) Day on 25 April 2025. The University will organise the event in collaboration with the National Intellectual Property Management Office (NIPMO), the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC), the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), Technology Innovation Agency (TIA) and the Durban Film Office (DFO).

World Intellectual Property Day, typically observed on 26 April every year, was established by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) in 2000 to raise awareness of how intellectual property like patents, copyrights, trademarks and designs impact on daily life. The day was also initiated to celebrate creativity and the contribution made by innovators to the development of economies and societies. The date coincides with the date on which the Convention that established WIPO entered into force in 1970. MUT's Deputy Director: Intellectual Property, Dr Mandla

Hlongwane, said the event aims to celebrate the role of intellectual property in fostering innovation and creativity across various sectors.

The theme for 2025 is "IP and Music: Feel the Beat of IP". This is one of the reasons why the organisers of the event have included musical artists and many other kinds of artists in the lineup. Dr Hlongwane said the theme will highlight how IP rights empower artists, protect their creations and contribute to cultural and economic development.

As part of the World IP Day celebrations, the Research Directorate is organising a series of events aimed at raising awareness and engaging the public, professionals and thought leaders in meaningful discussions around IP rights. On 16 April 2025, there will be a media launch at the University's Student Centre, followed by a roadshow on 24 April 2025 at Durban's Botanic Gardens – the same venue where World IP Day will be celebrated the following day.

MUT Radio celebrates World Radio Day with the rest of the world



Awethu Kelese, MUT Radio Programmes Manager, second from right, with Sineziwe Majola, co-host of Vukubangene breakfast show, second from left, with Umlazi high school learners who took part in the morning show

On 13 February 2025, the University's radio station, MUT Radio, joined the rest of the world and celebrated the annual World Radio Day. The day was designated by UNESCO in 2011 to celebrate radio broadcasts, improve international cooperation among radio broadcasters and encourage decision-makers to create and provide access to information through radio, including community radio stations. The 2025 World Radio Day theme is: "A century informing, entertaining and educating". For its part in the celebrations, MUT Radio lined up a fantastic programme, with all its shows incorporating elements of climate change education and awareness.

The Vuk'ubangene Breakfast Show, which runs from 7am to 10am, aired from Umlazi Senior Secondary School in V-section. Before the start of the show, Awethu Kelese, MUT Radio Programmes Manager and Head of News, addressed the learners of the school, telling them about the importance of radio. The show was co-hosted by some learners who are doing drama studies and geography, and the drama students gave some climate-related performances. One was a poem on climate change, the effects of mining on the climate, and how all that put together, affects people.

Several Grade 12 learners took part in the show: Lwandile Mbatha did the traffic report and Nomcebo Ngcobo reported the weather. Kelese said both

learners did very well: "It was amazing. Their vocals were on point. They came prepared". Eshile Zuma, a Grade 11 pupil, and Sandiswa Maphumulo, in Grade 12, talked about climate change – its causes and its effects on the economy and the environment, and what people can do to mitigate it.

Ayanda Jwara, dramatic arts teacher and organiser of the visit, appreciated the University's efforts. "I thank MUT Radio for giving our learners a chance to talk on radio. The theme inspired my drama learners who did a performance." The Hlanganani Midday Show, from 10am to 1pm, featured Dr Thobile Poswa, Head of the Department of Environmental Health, who talked about climate change. The show's host, Spha Mhlongo, collaborated with MFM, a Stellenbosch University radio station, and Rhodes Music Radio, a Rhodes University radio station, as part of the World Radio Day celebrations.

The Hangout, from 1pm to 4pm, was broadcast at the MUT Students' Centre, where the whole radio team celebrated with the students. The show featured Nokuthula 'Nkuleh' Malunga, a popular student entrepreneur who was studying towards an Advanced Diploma in Agricultural Extension and Community Development last year. Nkuleh shared what she does for a living using natural resources, and the effect of climate change on her products.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF MUT

Newly refurbished Biomedical Sciences labs elevate MUT



From left, Dr Nhlahlhla Nsele, Head of the Department; Nonhlanhla Ndlovu, Laboratory Assistant; Phelelani Khomo, Acting Control Industrial Technician; and Sithembile Luthuli, Medical Laboratory Assistant, in one the newly refurbished laboratories

The Department of Biomedical Sciences is well on its way to being one of the best in the country. A few years ago, the department introduced a degree and did away with a diploma. Now the department boasts four state-of-the-art laboratories to support its new degree, the Bachelor of Health Sciences in Medical Laboratory Sciences. Not only were the four laboratories refurbished, but a new tearoom was provided, and one ablution facility was added. Describing the difference between the old labs and the refurbished ones, the departmental head, Dr Nhlahlhla Nsele, said the latter have new work bench tops, emergency exit doors, a new sliding door between two laboratories, tinted windows to protect equipment from direct sunlight, reworked floors, and a new air conditioning system.

Dr Nsele said the refurbished laboratories will have a positive impact on teaching and learning. “The refurbished Biomedical Training Laboratories will

provide students with access to modern equipment and technology like VITEK equipment, enhancing the students’ learning experience and preparing them for real-world medical scenarios. There will also be an improvement in the academic programmes. The refurbished laboratory will facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration among students, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of medical concepts and practices,” he explained. He also said the new laboratories will provide a conducive environment for research, enabling students and staff to conduct studies and projects that contribute to the advancement of medical knowledge and practice.

A large part of the biomedical sciences field is practical and hands-on. According to Dr Nsele, the newly refurbished labs will give students a better chance to apply the practical part of the programme, and to make proper observations. The combination of the two will enable them to acquire the necessary practical skills



Dr Nhlanhla Nsele, Head of the Department

required for professional practice – including critical thinking, problem-solving and better communication. Providing students with a safe and controlled environment to practise their skills will also reduce the risk of practical errors and improve laboratory safety.

The MUT Biomedical Sciences programme is strictly controlled by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), an external body that gives it accreditation, among other things. The new laboratories will enable MUT to comply with the HPCSA's accreditation standards. They will also have a long-term benefit for the University by making the programme more attractive to students, which will also boost the profile of the department and MUT. There will also be job opportunities for laboratory technicians and other support staff, Dr Nsele said.

The newly redone labs will also be used by students and academics from other institutions for teaching and research. This will be a feather in the institution's cap as it will be contributing directly to the national and international education agenda of teaching and learning and generating new knowledge.

The department has enrolled 45 students for the 2025 academic year for its Bachelor of Health Sciences in Medical Laboratory Sciences. Overall, it has 168 students, mentored by 14 staff members. In a nutshell, the refurbishment of the Biomedical Training Laboratory at MUT is expected to have a significant and positive impact on the university's academic programmes, students, staff and the broader community.

Massive infrastructure development at MUT in 2025



Director: Infrastructure Development, Lubabalo Ngcaweni, seated, and his infrastructure team

Year 2025 is going to be a very busy time for the Operations Directorate at MUT. While the directorate can look back with great pride at the infrastructure projects it has completed (one of which is the magnificent Senate Chamber), the directorate can hardly rest on its laurels. There is a mammoth task ahead for the whole year and beyond. The directorate has 17 projects for 2025 and although these projects vary in size and scope, all are equally important. A quick overview of them creates a clear picture of the University's priorities in the coming year.

Having completed repairs to the roofs of the entire University in January 2025, the team – under the leadership of Senior Director: Operations, Dr Buhlebakhe Msomi, and Director: Infrastructure Development, Lubabalo Ngcaweni – is currently focusing on the construction of a water storage tank and pump rooms, which started in July 2024. The project is expected to finish in July 2025, if there are no delays in the delivery of the requirements. The main objective is to improve the availability of water at the University, which has been a constant challenge due to burst pipes in the municipal network that supplies it and some parts of Umlazi Township.

The refurbishment of the University's two libraries, at the Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences and

the main campus respectively, is also getting under way. Ngcaweni said the refurbishment of the former was expected to end in August 2025, and the latter in December 2025. According to him, the Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences' library needs improvement in functionality, while the main campus library requires upgrading and universal access.

In parallel, the team is also continuing with the Bulk Sewer and Stormwater Upgrade project that started in August 2024 and is expected to be completed in April 2025. From April to November 2025, the team will then focus on two projects. The first is the construction of the new Block E TV Room and Study area to provide comfortable and convenient space for students to study, relax and socialise. The second is the installation of upgraded air conditioning in the Block L lecture venues to maintain a comfortable and healthy environment for both students and lecturers.

Between January 2025 and June 2027, the team will also address the provision of better residential space for students on its main campus and in a leased student residence a few kilometres away (the Executive Hotel). Ngcaweni said MUT has to provide students with accommodation that complies with the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) norms and standards and also address the health and safety concerns that resulted in the residences being closed.

From June 2025, the team will begin the construction of a new 65-bed student residence on the main campus. This is part of the University's plan to reduce the number of residences that it hires. The project is expected to be completed a year later. At the same time, the team will begin repairs and renovations at Block A Student Residence on the main campus. This project is expected to be completed in June 2027. Repairs and renovations at the Executive Hotel began in January and are expected to finish in December 2025.

From March to December 2025, the team will also provide additional office space for academic staff utilising the D Labs. According to Ngcaweni, they will provide a "lightweight structure" for these staff members.

Yes, you can study a Diploma in Agricultural Extension and Sustainable Food Systems at MUT



The qualification includes the study of agricultural production and some socio-economic activities, the skills that students are expected to transfer to communities

In response to the evolving needs of agriculture and the food industry, the Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences has renamed and modified its Diploma in Community Extension to create a Diploma in Agricultural Extension and Sustainable Food Systems. According to Dr Eric Mthembu, the Head of the Department of Community Extension, “the new name will be aligned to the curriculum of the programme and is following the needs of the industry”. The name change will also address the concerns of the Industry Advisory Committee, MUT Alumni, and current students, who believe that the name “Community Extension” – and the names of the modules in the programme – do not reflect the depth of what is actually being offered.

He explained that “the Agricultural Science modules in the existing curriculum were in fact hidden and embedded in modules called ‘Agriculture for Extension’ which do not exist in other agricultural programmes offered in South African universities and internationally. A benchmarking exercise with other institutions revealed that Agricultural Science modules such as Agronomy, Soil Classification, Agricultural Economics, Livestock Production, Fruit and Vegetable Production, Crop Production, Agri Business,

etc. are taught as standalone modules”. This was an opportunity for MUT to align with best practice.

The modification of the programme is of great benefit to those that are interested in the study fields of Agriculture, Food Systems and Agricultural Extension. “This gives clarity from the beginning as the students gather information that influences their choices about what they decide to study,” said Dr Mthembu.

He added that the purpose of the programme is to provide learners with knowledge and skills within the agricultural field in product production, processing, extension and marketing so that the learners will be competent in the fields of agriculture, food and nutrition, and sustainable community development.

The programme has gone through the Industry Advisory Committee, a professional body which is part of the national and provincial departments of agriculture. In addition, it has gone through all the University governance structures. The national Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development has ensured that the programme is in accordance with the national priorities of the country, conforms to the norms and standards for Extension and Advisory Services in Agriculture, and is aligned to key national strategies and policies.

During the curriculum review workshop on the amendments to the existing curriculum structure, the Industry Advisory Committee, together with the Department of Community Extension, had comprehensive discussions in March 2023. The committee finally approved the proposed amendments to the existing curriculum structure on 30 March 2023 and the MUT Senate approved the amendments in November 2024.

The renamed and reinforced programme will still be at NQF level 6 and have 382 credits. It will be the initial qualification that will articulate to the Advanced Diploma (NQF Level 7), Post Graduate Diploma (NQF Level 8), and then the Master's degree.



FORMER STUDENTS SHOW THE WAY

HR graduate takes on a leading role at a USA mine



Mxolisi Ngwenya at the mining site, with the operations visible in the background

“In the mining industry, this role is the highest HR management position before reporting to a General Manager or HR Director”– Mxolisi Ngwenya

The success of the University’s current students and its graduates is a common topic of discussion, and a key reason why many learners enrol with MUT. The following story will inspire not only learners, but parents as well, to continue sending their children to MUT –and encourage our academics to continue the excellent work they do.

This is a story about Mxolisi Ngwenya, a very quiet but articulate man who was once part of a student organisation called SIFE, now called Enactus, when he was a Human Resources and Management (HR&M) student at MUT.

Ngwenya graduated from the University in 2014 with a National Diploma in Human Resource Management. While working at MUT’s Student Affairs office, he enrolled for a BTech in HR&M, which he completed in 2016. He later enrolled at Wits University, where he earned a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration in 2023.

In 2017, while working in Student Affairs, he was approached by a global mining company, Rio Tinto, for a potential role in their HR Graduate Programme at Richards Bay Minerals (RBM), one of the company’s South African operations. RBM, located in northern KwaZulu-Natal, specialises in the extraction and processing of heavy mineral sands. It primarily produces titanium dioxide slag, rutile and zircon – key materials used in industries such as aerospace, automotive and consumer goods.

The mine employs advanced dredge mining and smelting technologies to convert mineral-rich sands into high-value products. As a major player in the local economy, RBM provides employment opportunities, supports community development and prioritises sustainable mining practices.

Ngwenya said that after a series of interviews with RBM, he was offered the position, and joined RBM in October 2017. “Just six months into my role,” he continued, “I had the opportunity to travel to Montreal, Canada, for Rio Tinto’s Global Graduate Summit, where I engaged with leaders from across the company. This summit reinforced the organisation’s commitment to developing young talent for future leadership roles.”

By mid-2018, Ngwenya was promoted to an HR Officer role, supporting a team of metallurgists. A metallurgist is a material scientist that works with metals and their properties. A few months later, in January 2019, Ngwenya was again promoted to HR Advisor for Mining Operations. This role allowed him to deepen his expertise and take on greater responsibilities within the organisation.

A significant milestone in Ngwenya’s career came when he was seconded to the USA under Rio Tinto’s Kennecott Utah Copper mine, which primarily extracts copper, gold and silver in Salt Lake City, Utah. “I spent six months in the USA, gaining international experience before returning to South Africa in January 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortly after my return, I stepped into an acting HR Business Partner role, a senior management position which became a permanent appointment in June 2021,” he said. He explained that the HR Business Partner role is highly strategic, ensuring that people are at the centre of business success. The position involves organisational design, talent management and leadership development in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world. In the mining industry, this role is the highest HR management position before reporting to a General Manager or HR Director.

Since 2021, Ngwenya has continued to grow within Rio Tinto. He was recently appointed as a Global HR Business Partner in the USA at Kennecott Utah Copper, where he had previously trained. *“The scope of my current role is similar to my South African experience, but on a larger scale. In South Africa, I supported general managers and operational teams comprising over 1300 employees,”* he said. In the US he oversees HR for the Surface Mine Operations, one

of the largest man-made open-pit mines in the world, supporting a workforce of nearly 2 000 permanent employees.

Ngwenya leads a team of four HR Advisors and two HR Officers who provide generalist HR support to their operational teams. His appointment in the USA was a result of Rio Tinto’s recognition of his contributions as a top global talent within the company. “When Kennecott faced challenges in finding an HR Business Partner who understood the Rio Tinto culture, the global talent team identified me based on my leadership at RBM, where I had helped shape a high-performing HR culture,” he said. Ngwenya’s next step would be moving into a General Manager HR role. “However, at this point, I am enjoying being close to frontline operations and driving change within the business,” he added.

One of the unique aspects of working at Kennecott is the diverse international leadership team, with professionals from South Africa, Australia, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and many other countries. This fosters a supportive environment as the team navigates the nuances of leadership within the American cultural landscape.

Ngwenya relocated to the USA in August 2024 on an L1 visa, which is granted to management professionals with specialised skills. His employment is now under Rio Tinto’s USA office, and his visa is renewable for up to seven years.

Ngwenya also talked about his personal life, revealing his maturity and clear goals for the future. He is planning to get married in South Africa this year and is currently finalising plans to bring his fiancée and children to the USA so they can build their lives together. Living in the USA has been a great experience so far for him. He has visited several states, “with Las Vegas being the most fun. I spent time there during the Christmas holidays with my partner” Ngwenya is planning a trip home in the coming weeks to visit his family and enjoy the traditional meats – “inhloko and uphuthu that I have been craving for the last six months”. Ngwenya has some advice for students: “Research the programmes you choose to study carefully. When you find an opportunity in this tough job market, grab it with both hands and never take it for granted. I firmly believe that when you are genuinely passionate about what you do, and give it your best, the universe will respond, and success will follow.”

Agricultural graduate struggles to cope with demand for her produce



Sphindile Xulu is serious about farming

"I use social media platforms for promoting my produce and many people place orders and that also creates more demand" – Sphindile Xulu

Despite limited space and water shortages, an MUT graduate has already achieved a lot in her farming mission, and she is destined for even greater things. Sphindile Nelisiwe Xulu, who graduated with a Diploma in Community Extension in 2021, and an Advanced Diploma in Agricultural Extension and Community Development in 2022, says she is currently not coping with the demand for her vegetables from her neighbours in eNgonyameni, where she lives with her family. eNgonyameni is a tribal area bordering Umlazi Township near Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.

Xulu plants spinach, green peppers, sweet peppers, onions, amadumbe (yams), chillies, carrots and two varieties of cabbage. This variety allows her to plant

throughout the year. Spinach is the most popular vegetable.

Xulu comes from a farming background; her grandparents were farmers. "Growing up in that kind of environment made me develop a love for farming. When I was at Zwelibanzi High School in Umlazi Township, I took agriculture as a subject. After high school I knew I wanted nothing else than to study agriculture at university," said Xulu.

Xulu said the realities she observed around her, such as high unemployment and food insecurity, inspired her to start farming. She chose vegetable farming because vegetables are an easy way to start a business without high costs, and vegetables are a basic need for every household. Some vegetables take about three months to grow and mature, then they are ready for harvest. Spinach is one of them. Xulu supplies not only her

local community, but Umlazi Township, her clients in the Durban CBD, and a butchery in Prospecton, south of Durban. The name of her business initiative is Msiliveni Developments, and it has a project called AGRI GLAM, which is 25 months old. AGRI GLAM has various programmes such as the planting of vegetables, crop production training, agro-processing, and an initiative called One School One Garden.

Xulu described water limitations as a “huge challenge” when farming. When crops are young they require more water. She requires about 11 900 litres of water

a month, but she gets less than this amount. Xulu has a 2 500-litre tank which is filled up by a water tanker, and she has some small containers she uses to catch rainwater. She decided to introduce amadumbe and maize because these crops can survive on summer rainwater. Her long-term goal is to have a borehole to ensure a constant water supply that will allow her to plant more and improve her yield. Her other long-term goal is to fence a bigger plot next to the one she is using, to increase the area under cultivation. May her business keep ‘growing’ from strength to strength!



Sphindile Xulu, left, with her sister, Ntokozi Xulu, in the field

Entrepreneurship lessons from the horse’s mouth

People are emphatic when they say they heard a message “from the horse’s mouth”, and everyone tends to believe such a message to be true. On 6 March 2025, MUT’s Information Communication and Technology (ICT) students had a rare opportunity to listen to a vital message straight from the lips of a former student who is doing well in business. The occasion was an entrepreneurship seminar at the University’s North Campus, organised by Sli Luthuli, a lecturer in the Department of Information Communication and Technology.

Nhlanhla Khambule, the owner of Canaan College, a private high school in Umlazi Township, gave the students a first-hand account of the rocky road to success. Delivering what he called a “master class” talk, Khambule stressed the need for entrepreneurship and pointed out that MUT management was trying to inculcate a business mindset in students, no matter what their field of study.

Khambule painted a very bleak picture of the South



Nhlanhla Khambule, standing, giving valuable guidance to some of the ICT students

African economic situation. He said a large percentage of South Africans between the ages of 18 and 35 are unemployed. Creating entrepreneurship is the answer, said Khambule, “but you need to have the right knowledge and take the correct decisions”. Khambule, who started his first business at 20 years of age and has been in this game for 29 years, said that one does not need to be tied down with big decisions if one wants to create one’s own business. He said, “You do not need an office, as long as you have a laptop, or a smart phone. You do not need staff when you can do everything yourself. You do not need a car when public transport is available. You do not need government support when you can do without it. You do not need a business plan. But you need to be on good terms with the government; allow yourself to be taxed so you can earn tenders and other benefits....You may need some of these essentials later.”

Sounding a serious warning to the students, Khambule said he learnt the hard way from his mistakes. He said he bought a car with his first big cash and drove around to impress women. This was a big mistake, he said, adding that the wise decision is to invest the money into the business, and only buy what you need to survive. He said in some cases it takes a long time to make profit out of your business. Sometimes you even make a loss.

Khambule also impressed upon the students the need to be “creditworthy” in order to be able to borrow

cash from the bank. “But you need to be clear about what you need the cash for,” he said.

Khambule said that when starting a business, a few very important decisions are needed. First, find out where the gap is. It could be in the digital environment, green economy or in tech and innovation. “What does the society need? When you are sure about that, then make your business unique, whether you provide hard products or a service. Your business must have a brand that will make it stand out,” he said, quoting a very successful local business that does not have a brand, and thus lacks something vitally important. He also said there was a need to cultivate a customer base, and this should come from understanding the customers’ needs and cultures. “Also, your business must have growth potential and should be a long-term investment, ” he said. “Save what you have; do not eat out every week,” he added.

Amahle Mncwango, who attended the seminar, was impressed by what Khambule said. Mncwango described Khambule’s presentation as “powerful”, and said it made him realise that getting into business was “really possible”, even while he is still a student. “I was amazed about how he started his presentation by saying that to start a business one does not even need staff, offices, systems, government support or even a business plan; it is only needed later when building a strong business. All you need is your business idea, and consistent implementation,” said Mncwango.



STAFF ACCOLADES

Dr Cyprian Ncobela becomes a Y-rated researcher



Dr Cyprian Ndumiso Ncobela

Dr Cyprian Ndumiso Ncobela, an academic from the Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences, has been awarded a prestigious Y2 rating by the National Research Foundation (NRF). Dr Anette Mienie, Director: Research at MUT, recently received a letter from the NRF's Lizzy Ledwaba, to inform Dr Ncobela of the good news. The rating is a feather in MUT's cap, since an NRF Y rating is given to promising young researchers recognised as having the potential to become leaders in their field.

Responding to the award, Dr Ncobela, a lecturer in the Department of Agriculture, said he was grateful for the assistance he received from Dr Mienie. "I am truly honoured and grateful for the recognition, and I deeply appreciate the support and encouragement from the Research Directorate," he said. Dr Ncobela, who specialises in Pig and Poultry Science, said the achievement reflects not only "my efforts but also the collaborative and supportive environment at MUT, which

inspires me to strive for excellence"

Dr Ncobela has published 23 scientific papers in DHET-accredited journals and has contributed three book chapters. He said his research interests have evolved, based on the challenges within the agricultural sector. "Presently, I am fascinated by understanding the drivers of pork consumption patterns in South Africa," he said. Before joining MUT, Dr Ncobela worked as a researcher at the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) for three years. Dr Ncobela recently completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Technology from the University of Cape Town, funded by MUT's Teaching and Learning Development Centre (TLDC). "I also supervised a PhD student from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), who completed the degree. This is my first PhD student to supervise to completion," he said. Dr Ncobela said he aspires to mentor more postgraduate students and to develop innovative strategies to enhance online learning for students.

Dr Thobile Poswa joins national effort to combat foodborne illnesses



Dr Thobile Tobius Poswa, left, with Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi

On 4 December 2024, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, Minister of Health, penned a letter to the head of MUT's Department of Environmental Health, Dr Thobile Tobius Poswa. In the letter he confirmed Dr Poswa's appointment to a special Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC). The MAC is key to the Department of Health's response to the foodborne illness outbreak that started in October 2024.

Dr Poswa is part of a 15-member team. The Department of Health spokesperson, Sello Lediga, said the committee is composed of distinguished doctors, scientists and academics. Dr Poswa has confirmed that they have held two meetings with the minister, in December 2024 and January 2025, to develop a plan of action. It is also envisaged that the MAC will inform the government of any need for policy refinement, development and advice on the practicality and effectiveness of food safety interventions in the country to address the needs of communities. The period of appointment is undefined.

Dr Poswa said his appointment to the committee was

“a great assignment that will require multi-disciplinary players to provide expert information on the disease. The committee plays a role in law enforcement and surveillance in food safety and ensures safeguarding of public health”. Dr Poswa is an environment health practitioner, a member of the inter-provincial Environmental Health Forum, and co-ordinator of all environmental health training institutions in South Africa.

Some other members of the committee are Professor Leslie London (Chairperson), Head of Public Medicine in the School of Public Health and Family Medicine at the University of Cape Town; Dr Thakadu Mamashela, Head of Clinical Department – Limpopo Forensic Pathology; Kagiso Tsatsi, Head of Forensic Chemistry Laboratory at the National Health Laboratory Services; Professor Ziyaad Dangor, Research Director at Wits Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Analytics (VIDA); Professor Cindy Stephen, Director of Poisons Information Centre at the Red Cross Children's Hospital; and Professor Sithembiso Velapi, Head of Paediatrics and Child Health at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital.

Trevor Govender takes on a new role in Biodiversity Management



From left: Robbie Ramkumar (KZN Wildlife NDHO Chair), Trevor Govender, Terry Goulding (KZN Wildlife NDHO Vice Chair)

Trevor Govender, a lecturer from the Department of Nature Conservation in the Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences, has been officially appointed as an Honorary Officer at Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. Govender is the first MUT staff member to be appointed to such a position and will head Biodiversity Management for the North Durban Region. Honorary officers form an integral part of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife's activities as they work voluntarily to ensure that the conservation efforts of the province are met. These individuals come with various skills and professional qualifications to support the organisation in executing its function of preserving natural resources.

Govender has a BSc and a Master's degree in Nature Conservation and is currently a PhD candidate. His interests lie in Nature Conservation and biotechnology, with a special focus on carbon sequestration and sustainable mitigation of climate change and global warming. Govender is enthusiastic about bridging the gap between academia and industry, ensuring that MUT students graduate with relevant knowledge and are equipped to handle the demands of the industry. "Being a conservation honorary officer, I am also an asset to the conservation of the natural resources of our country. The bilateral learning is a fabulous experience," said Govender.

His official association with KZN Wildlife is expected to

facilitate the opening of many doors for MUT Nature Conservation students and graduates, providing them with access to internships, research projects, and hands-on training at Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. This partnership will enhance their academic learning and professional development, preparing them for successful careers in conservation and environmental management.

Govender's expertise in Nature Conservation and biotechnology will contribute significantly to the conservation initiatives in the North Durban Region. His focus on carbon sequestration and sustainable climate change mitigation will help develop innovative strategies to combat global warming. As an Honorary Officer, Govender will engage with local communities to raise awareness about conservation issues and promote sustainable practices, fostering a sense of responsibility and stewardship towards natural resources. His leadership in biodiversity management will drive innovative approaches to conservation, contributing to the development of effective strategies for preserving biodiversity and protecting endangered species in the region. Professor Alfred Msomi, Dean of the Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences, and Professor Akash Anandraj, Head of the Department of Nature Conservation, welcomed this development in the faculty, highlighting the strengthened collaboration between MUT and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

Nature Conservation lecturer attends prestigious AI workshop in Italy



Dr Karishma Singh, right, with Dr Dinesh Gupta

While on a mission to develop herself as a scientist, Dr Karishma Singh says that the Faculty of Applied and Natural Sciences will also benefit from her journey. Between 10 and 14 March 2025, this lecturer from the Department of Nature Conservation participated in the ICGEB Practical Course on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Data Science and Bioinformatics in Trieste, Italy. The workshop was attended by delegates from Pakistan, the Netherlands, South Africa and India, all of whom share an interest in the rapidly evolving world of AI.

The workshop, which Dr Singh described as “a prestigious engagement”, aimed to equip participants, particularly those from developing countries, with practical skills for applying AI techniques in the biological field – including for data analysis, pattern detection and experimental design. She said that participants gained knowledge on a variety of topics, from setting up local AI models to using AI models for structural biology and drug discovery, metagenomics, signal

processing, image processing, and classification in data science. With more than 10 years’ experience in phytomedicine research, Dr Singh said she is “continuously looking to enhance my research techniques aligning with current global trends. My research focus using molecular docking and molecular dynamic simulations towards sustainable drug discovery will greatly benefit from the implementation of AI tools into my data analysis”.

She said that the workshop afforded her the opportunity to network with experts and form collaborative partnerships on a global scale. “I also got to meet in person with Dr Dinesh Gupta, CGEB Project leader from Delhi, India. Dr Gupta and I formed a collaborative research project in August 2024.

Attending this course will not only enhance my career as a young female scientist, but will also add value to the type of research undertaken in the Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences.”



SPORTS SPOTLIGHT

African Boxing Federation welcomes Siyabulela Mkwalo as Vice-President



MUT's Deputy Director of Sport, Siyabulela Mkwalo

Siyabulela Mkwalo, MUT's Deputy Director: Sport, was elected Vice-President of the African Boxing Confederation, AFBC, during the Confederation's meeting on 18 January 2025. Mkwalo, who replaces General Luyoyo Ferdinand, will be responsible for assisting the president of AFBC and its Board of Directors in managing the Confederation and supporting its goals, which include building unity and promoting boxing development in Africa. As Vice-President he must also ensure that the boxers are respected and that they benefit from their efforts in the ring. Mkwalo's appointment is expected to strengthen AFBC's leadership and reinforce its mission to promote the sport of boxing across the African continent.

The AFBC's Board of Directors was motivated by Mkwalo's commitment to boxing. He has an

extensive background in boxing and sports administration, which makes him an ideal candidate for this position. Mkwalo holds a Master of Sport Science from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where his research focused on the role of government in the provision and delivery of sports. His other academic qualifications include a Bachelor of Sport Science and numerous certifications in leadership, conflict management and strategic planning.

Having more than 20 years of experience in the sports sector, Mkwalo has held prominent roles including his current position as the President of the South African National Boxing Organisation. Mkwalo has also served as a team manager for the South African national boxing team during international competitions, including the World Youth Championships in Bulgaria. He has played a

pivotal role in developing boxing structures across South Africa, introducing women into the sport, and decentralising boxing into 11 districts in KwaZulu-Natal.

Mkwalo's appointment as Vice-President of AFBC is expected to bring several benefits to the Confederation and the sport of boxing in Africa. His extensive experience and leadership skills will contribute to the development of effective strategies for promoting boxing and supporting boxers across the continent. Mkwalo's focus on unity and boxing development will help build stronger relationships between different boxing organisations in Africa, fostering collaboration and mutual support.

Additionally, Mkwalo's commitment to ensuring that boxers are respected and benefit from their efforts in the ring will lead to improved conditions for athletes, including better training facilities, healthcare and financial support. His efforts to introduce women into

the sport and decentralise boxing structures in South Africa demonstrate his dedication to inclusivity and accessibility, which will be valuable in promoting boxing in diverse communities across Africa.

Mkwalo's academic background and research on the role of government in sports provision will also be beneficial in advocating for policies and initiatives that support the growth of boxing. His ability to navigate both the sports sector and government institutions will help secure funding and resources for boxing development projects.

Overall, Mkwalo's appointment is a significant step forward for AFBC, and his leadership is expected to drive positive changes in the sport of boxing across the African continent. The Board of Directors and the boxing community are optimistic about the future under Mkwalo's vice-presidency, anticipating growth, unity and excellence in African boxing.

HR student aims for the stars in athletics

A Human Resources and Management senior student is poised to become a big name in athletics. While Mpumelelo Cele (22) wants a better position on the podium, the lad from Durban's Inanda is not rushing things. He has a plan for getting to the top, and that involves competing with himself. According to Cele, his current goals include breaking his present records, and taking to the podium five times this year. His best performance so far was the 10km run in Durban, where he placed fifth out of 926 participants.

Cele was introduced to athletics by his father, Cyril Mbo Ndlovu, a professional runner whose career was cut short by an injury that caused him to miss out on a green Comrades Marathon number. Cele Senior has nine Comrades Marathon races under his belt.

As a student, Cele had to choose between athletics and rugby. He was a flyhalf for the MUT rugby team, and was one of its fastest players. When he realised that his strength was speed, he chose to focus on athletics and joined the MUT athletics team in 2022.



Very focused! Mpumelelo Cele running one of his races



Mpumelelo Cele, left, on the podium with other athletes after a race

That was when he really started to take the profession seriously.

Cele's personal best races are the 10km, which he ran in a time of 31:25, and the 5km (5000m), which he ran in 14:55. He wants to improve both of these times in 2025. He also intends to run his first half-marathon, the Sanlam Cape Town Marathon, in October 2025. He has run this distance unofficially before, in a time of 1:10:21, and his main goal is to break his own record in an official race. "I will also do 10km, and bring down the time run in that race," he said, adding that he wants to be among the first three athletes to cross the line. But that is a long way away.

The key ingredients in Cele's success will be his attitude towards the profession, his plans for improvement, and the support of his family and his coach, Mduduzi Khumalo – whom Cele regards as a father figure. Khumalo provides his athletes with transport and other essentials, and is also Chair of the Phantane Athletic Club that Mpumelelo joined in 2024.

At present Cele is focusing on track and field. "I am focusing on the 5 000m. I also want to do the KZN Championships from 21-23 March 2025, in Msunduzi, Pietermaritzburg. This is where I will strive to qualify for KwaZulu-Natal

colours. Having provincial colours will give me a chance to qualify for the South African Championships that will happen from 24-27 April 2025 at North West University."

Cele classifies himself as a semi-professional athlete. He is a sub-elite runner for now. He knows that as much as there are people that give him professional advice, it is up to him to put it into practice. He is careful about a few very important things that will contribute to his success. These include having the right attitude, listening to the right advice, watching his diet and getting enough rest. "I sleep every time possible to recover and freshen up," he said. He added that he also does cold bathing – staying in water full of ice, so that he can recover quickly. Ice baths help in healing serious injuries, and most sports people use them, he said.

Cele is adjusting to being a professional, and his fitness level is getting better. "I was overweight before joining Phantane. I have now lost the rugby body. I have improved the way I train. I now see the importance of being consistent. I make sure that I eat properly," he said. With an attitude like that, there are sure to be many podium finishes for Cele in the future



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