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International scholars to explore traditional knowledge, food systems and human rights during UL visit

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The University of Limpopo (UL), in collaboration with the University of Essex in the United Kingdom and the University of Manitoba in Canada, will host an international delegation of researchers for a programme focused on traditional knowledge, food systems, climate change, human rights and sustainable development.

The delegation will visit South Africa from **31 August to 10 September 2026**, with engagements at UL and various community, research, government and human rights institutions in Limpopo and Gauteng.

The visit forms part of the **Reimagining Food Systems for Climate Change Adaptation, Mitigation and Social Justice (RFS)** project, a collaborative research initiative involving researchers from UL, the University of Essex and the University of Manitoba. The UL project is led by **Prof Ashwell Ndhlela**, an established researcher in indigenous knowledge. It examines how food systems and indigenous knowledge can contribute to climate change adaptation, mitigation, social justice and sustainable livelihoods.

A key engagement during the visit will be a public lecture on **International Law around Traditional Knowledge, Food Systems and Human Rights Protection**, scheduled for **2 September 2026** at the R40 Conference Hall at UL.

The lecture will bring together researchers and academics examining the role of indigenous and traditional knowledge in addressing food insecurity, climate change, biodiversity loss, public health and social inequality. Particular attention will be given to **Indigenous Leafy Vegetables (ILVs)** and their potential contribution to human rights, community wellbeing and sustainable livelihoods in Limpopo.

The international keynote speakers will be **Judith Bueno de Mesquita**, Senior Lecturer in International Human Rights Law at the University of Essex, and **Professor Karen Hulme**, Professor of Law at the University of Essex.

Their presentation will examine how international legal frameworks are evolving to recognise and protect traditional knowledge systems, particularly in relation to food, health, biodiversity conservation and human rights.

Providing a South African perspective, **Professor Duduzile Grace Mbajiorgu**, Associate Professor in the Department of Public and Environmental Law at UL, will respond to the keynote presentations. Her contribution will consider constitutional rights, food security, food sovereignty and the protection of traditional knowledge within the South African legal and policy context.

The project places communities and traditional knowledge holders at the centre of its work. Researchers are examining how indigenous knowledge systems can be protected while ensuring that communities benefit from innovation and commercial opportunities linked to indigenous food systems.

The research also considers challenges including access to indigenous seeds, biodiversity conservation, market access, biopiracy, intellectual property rights and the exclusion of local communities from decision-making processes.

From research to communities

Beyond the public lecture, the delegation will take part in a programme of stakeholder engagements involving academics, community organisations, agricultural innovators and human rights institutions.

Crucial community engagements:

DATE	PLACE	ORGANISATION
3 September 2026	Ga-Matlala	Jwale Aquaponic Farms
3 September 2026	Haenertsburg	Thusanang Trust
4 September 2026	Bochum, Ga-Manthata	Baswa Climate Grow Cooperative
5 September 2026	Makhado	Manamela Homestead
7 September 2026	Polokwane	Sable Creeks Aquaponics

The programme will later move to Pretoria and Johannesburg, including a guided tour of the **Apartheid Museum on 8 September**, followed by engagements with the **Department of Science and Innovation and Technology** and the **South African Human Rights Commission** on 9 September.

These engagements are aimed at strengthening partnerships and contributing to recommendations for sustainable food systems and social justice.

The visit will also provide an opportunity for students, researchers, policymakers, traditional knowledge holders and members of the public to engage with international experts on the links between food systems, climate resilience, human rights and indigenous knowledge.

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