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Finding solutions for Africa



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UL cements its place among SA's research powerhouses at 2026 NRF awards

Prof Grace Manyelo and Dr Edwin Makhado recognised for research excellence

By Johannes Selepe – Mosela.selepe@ul.ac.za



Prof Grace Manyelo (second from left) and Dr Edwin Makhado (fourth from left) are congratulated on their NRF awards by Dr Theminkosi Mabila (left), Director for Research Administration and Development at UL, and Prof Tebogo Mothiba (third from left), holder of the DSTI/NRF Decadal Plan-Aligned Research Chair at UL.

The University of Limpopo (UL) achieved notable institutional recognition at the 2026 National Research Foundation (NRF) Research Excellence Awards, securing two accolades for its researchers in the agricultural and physical sciences

Prof Grace Manyelo, Head of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Animal Production, alongside Dr Edwin Makhado, Senior Lecturer in the School of Physical and Mineral Sciences, received the NRF Research Excellence Award for Early Career/Emerging Researchers. The ceremony took place in Gqeberha, Eastern Cape, on Thursday, 3 September 2026.



A proud moment for Prof Grace Manyelo (middle) as she receives the 2026 NRF Research Excellence Award for Early Career/Emerging Researchers in recognition of her contribution to agricultural research.

Prof Manyelo's scholarly portfolio focuses on poultry production, animal nutrition, alternative feed additives and livestock management.

Complementing her academic work, she recently completed an international research fellowship at the University of Georgia in the United States through Phase 2, Cohort 3 of the Future Professors Programme. This appointment facilitated advanced training, where she gained practical experience in molecular techniques used in poultry research.

Her investigations included DNA and RNA analysis, PCR, gene-expression analysis, high-throughput data analysis, gene-network construction and application of molecular markers in poultry breeding.

"This award is not only about what I am doing; it also contributes to the scientific community at large and helps bring solutions to challenges that people face in their daily lives," Prof Manyelo remarked.

Throughout her career, Prof Manyelo has published more than 50 research articles and three book chapters, and

has presented 25 posters and oral presentations based on her research at national and international levels. She is the sub-editor of the South African Journal of Animal Sciences (SAJAS) and has peer-reviewed articles for both international and local journals.

"This award is not only about what I am doing; it also contributes to the scientific community at large and helps bring solutions to challenges that people face in their daily lives."



Dr Edwin Makhado (middle) receives the 2026 NRF Research Excellence Award for Early Career/Emerging Researchers for his innovative research in polymeric materials and hydrogels, with potential applications in healthcare and wastewater treatment.

For Dr Makhado, the recognition comes after years of research focused on polymeric materials, with a primary emphasis on hydrogels, and their potential applications in wastewater treatment and healthcare.

His research scope extends across drug delivery systems, wound healing, tissue engineering, regenerative medicine, electrochemical hydrogen sensors and nanomedicine. Notably one of his recent developments is a method of preparing hydrogels without external energy, with potential applications in biomedical research.

Dr Makhado has authored more than 50 peer-reviewed journal articles, 10 book chapters and three conference proceedings. His work has attracted more than 2,100 citations, alongside three registered patent filings.

Beyond his publication record, he demonstrates a strong commitment to academic mentorship, having successfully supervised 10 honours, four master's and a doctoral graduate, while currently co-supervising two honours, nine master's and three doctoral students. According to Dr Makhado, research should not stop with publications but should reach communities and produce solutions that people can see and use.

"We tend to focus only on publishing and forget about other aspects of research. We should also bring out something tangible that people can see," he said.

He said community engagement was important in inspiring young people to consider careers in science.

Dr Theminkosi Mabila, Director for Research Administration and Development at UL, congratulated the researchers, saying their achievements reflected the hard work being done across the University.

"I think there is much more potential at the university than what we see here," said Dr Mabila.

He encouraged more researchers to participate in national research awards, saying the recognition reflected the work researchers had been doing.

"We tend to focus only on publishing and forget about other aspects of research. We should also bring out something tangible that people can see."

Researchers warn Ga-Mathabatha residents about hidden killer they lived with for years

The research found that nearly half of surveyed residents are unaware of locations with high asbestos concentrations

By Johannes Selepe - mosela.selepe@ul.ac.za



Asbestos-bearing rocks and soil observed in the Tongwane River and along its banks near Success village, Ga-Mathabatha, Limpopo Capricorn.

For years, residents of Ga-Mathabatha in Limpopo's Capricorn District have lived with asbestos in their midst, often unaware of where the hazardous mineral is concentrated or the risks it poses

As part of efforts to assist communities, University of Limpopo researchers have mapped areas with high asbestos concentrations, finding that almost half of the residents surveyed were unaware of where the danger lay.

The recent study, published in Minerals, was conducted by UL academics affiliated with the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, and the Department of Geology and Mining namely: Manuel Thobejane, Clodean Mothapo, Hector Chikoore and Prof Phatuwani Sengani, who led the research. (Minerals is an international, peer-reviewed, open access journal of natural mineral systems, mineral resources, mining, and mineral processing, and is published monthly online by MDPI.)

Prof Sengani said the study was prompted by the need to better understand the distribution of asbestos and the level of awareness among communities living in affected areas.

"The primary aim of the research was to establish where asbestos-bearing materials are concentrated and understand how much residents know about the potential risks associated with exposure," said Sengani.

The researchers used satellite imagery, remote sensing, geographical information systems (GIS) and field observations to examine the distribution of asbestos while the assessment of residents' awareness of potential asbestos risks was done through community surveys.

The study identified areas with high concentrations of chrysotile asbestos in the eastern part of the study area and tremolite asbestos in the south. Field observations also confirmed asbestos-bearing material along riverbanks and in surrounding villages.

A survey of 250 residents found that 45.6% were unaware of areas with high asbestos concentrations in Ga-Mathabatha.

Prof Sengani said the findings showed the need for communities to have better information about asbestos in their surroundings so that they can take necessary precautions to avoid exposure.

"The level of awareness is a concern, particularly where people's daily activities may bring them into contact with asbestos-bearing materials," he said.

The study examined possible exposure through activities involving livestock, former mining areas and water sources.

Researchers identified asbestos-bearing material at several sites, including Makapeng, Moleke, Maseleseleng, Success, Masioneng, the Olifants River, Mphogodima River and Tongwane River.

According to Prof Sengani, the findings further point to the importance of combining scientific mapping with information from communities.

"While mapping these areas gives us a clearer picture of where asbestos is concentrated, it is equally important to raise community awareness so that people understand the risks associated with these areas," he said. The researchers recommend targeted education and awareness programmes for communities living near asbestos deposits, particularly for people whose daily activities may increase their contact with asbestos-bearing material.

Prof Sengani said the research should help strengthen conversations between researchers, communities and authorities about managing areas affected by asbestos.

"The findings can assist communities and authorities in identifying areas of concern and considering measures to reduce potential exposure," he said.

Ga-Mathabatha has a history of asbestos mining, and the study highlights continuing environmental concerns associated with areas where asbestos deposits remain.



Prof Phatuwani Sengani from the Department of Geology and Mining at UL, who led the research. Photos: Lesley Raphiri. Ga-Mathabatha, Limpopo Capricorn.

"The level of awareness is a concern, particularly where people's daily activities may bring them into contact with asbestos-bearing materials."

Deputy Chief Justice urges researchers to turn findings into real change

Faculty of Management and Law Research Day challenges academics and students to turn evidence into action and tackle real-world problems

By Johannes Selepe & Lesego Maaba – Mosela.selepe@ul.ac.za



Deputy Chief Justice of South Africa, Justice Dunstan Mlambo.

Research should not end when findings are published but should lead to changes in policy, institutions and communities, Deputy Chief Justice Dunstan Mlambo has told researchers and students at the University of Limpopo (UL)

Justice Mlambo was speaking as a keynote speaker at the Faculty of Management and Law's 11th Research Day. The annual event brings together students to present their research, while academics and emerging researchers provide constructive feedback, engage with the research findings and support students in strengthening the quality and relevance of their work.

The UL alumnus, who graduated with a law degree from the university during its turbulent years, challenged student researchers to take their findings beyond the academic environment and consider the impact of their work.

"After your research is published, did an institution alter its practice? Did a community acquire useful knowledge? Did the policy improve? If not, what blocked the path from evidence to action?" Justice Mlambo asked.

He said researchers should remain interested in what happens to their ideas after publication.



From left: Deputy Chief Justice of South Africa, Justice Dunstan Mlambo; Executive Dean of the Faculty of Management and Law, Professor Omphemetse Sibanda; and Judge President of the Limpopo Division of the High Court, Judge George Phatudi, listen to research papers presented by students during the Faculty of Management and Law's 11th Research Day.

"As a researcher, you should ask yourself what has changed since you published the research findings," he said.

"As a researcher, you should ask yourself what has changed since you published the research findings."

Justice Mlambo said research played an important role in strengthening governance, innovation and ethical leadership.

"Research gives governance eyes. It gives innovation ideas and ethical leadership the courage to confront challenges," he said.

He also commended the quality of some of the research papers presented during the event, saying they were of a high standard and that some of the ideas would be discussed in Geneva in September during the UN Human Rights Council session.



Prof Tlou Setati, a Research Professor in the Faculty of Management and Law.

Prof Tlou Setati, a Research Professor in the Faculty of Management and Law, said the annual event had become an important platform for developing students and emerging researchers while creating space for the exchange of ideas.

"Research Day is a platform through which we celebrate research and develop our students and emerging researchers, exchange ideas and create opportunities to contribute to the challenges facing our society," Prof Setati said.

He pointed to the growing number of students participating in the event as evidence that research was becoming part of the faculty's culture.

"In 2021, we had 30 students participating, while in 2026 we had 148. This growth tells an important story. It tells a story that Research Day is a culture embedded in our faculty," he said.



Queen Neo Mopeli, a commissioner at the Presidential Climate Commission.

Another keynote speaker, Queen Neo Mopeli, a Commissioner at the Presidential Climate Commission, emphasised that good governance should be measured by the consequences of decisions and their effect on communities. She highlighted how research could assist in providing for informed decisions at a governance level.

She called for leadership that prioritises accountability, justice and the needs of communities, while stressing the importance of inclusive innovation, responsible use of technology and climate action.

Queen Mopeli emphasised that climate-related decisions should consider how they affect workers, communities, young people and women.

"It is through research that inputs from communities can be solicited to inform decisions on sustainable development," she stated.

She also challenged students and researchers to see themselves as leaders of today, emphasising that they should use their research to influence policy, drive institutional reform and develop practical solutions to challenges facing society. "Do not wait for the future. Build it today," Queen Mopeli told the students.

She urged researchers to consider who would use their findings, which decisions their research could improve and whose lives could be changed as a result.



Academic leaders, members of executive management, Deputy Chief Justice, and students meet to discuss governance, innovation and ethical leadership for sustainable development in a changing Africa during the Faculty of Management and Law's Research Day.

Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership at the heart of Africa's climate conversation

Civil society, academics and business leaders examine the gap between climate commitments and action at the University of Limpopo

By Phishego Mohubedu - ulpublications@ul.ac.za.



Photos
Dimpho Boshomane &
Lebogang Mathaba

Panellists discuss climate change governance and sustainable development during the University of Limpopo Global Leadership and Sustainability Symposium.

The gap between climate commitments and action came under scrutiny as academics, government representatives, researchers and students gathered at the University of Limpopo (UL) for the second Global Leadership and Sustainability Symposium

Hosted by UL's Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership (TGSL), the symposium was held under the theme "Innovation for Climate Change Governance and Sustainable Development". The discussions focused on how leadership, research, governance and innovation can help address climate and development challenges.

The gathering brought together representatives from business and civil society, highlighting the need for cooperation beyond academic institutions in responding to climate change.

Welcoming delegates, UL Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele, described the symposium as an important platform

for collaboration on climate change and sustainable development as the participants convened to take stock of what had been committed to, vis-a-vis, the actions on the ground.

"I encourage postgraduate students to engage with established researchers and urge stronger partnerships between the university and government to ensure that research addresses provincial and national priorities," said Dr Mabelebele.

One of the keynote speakers, Acting Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Venda, Prof Fulufhelo Netswera, placed leadership at the centre of the discussion, questioning whether technological advancement is always directed towards the public good.

Reflecting on artificial intelligence, climate change and persistent poverty, Prof Netswera said: "Our greatest challenge therefore may not be invention. It is whether we have the intention, the leadership and the political courage to direct innovation towards the public good."

He cautioned against assuming that technology is automatically sustainable, pointing to the energy and water requirements associated with artificial intelligence and data centres.

Prof Thanyani Madzivhandila, Chairperson of TGSL Global Leadership and Sustainability, said the symposium was intended "to promote knowledge exchange and collaboration among stakeholders from different sectors."

The question of how global challenges should be addressed at the local level was also raised by Prof Ricky Mukonza, Deputy Chairperson of the Limpopo Research Forum, tying his commentary to that of UL's VC and Principal. "Global leadership cannot be decoupled from local research and context," stated Prof Mukonza.

Prof Mukonza added that Africa's development requires knowledge systems that respond to local realities while engaging with global challenges.

He described UL as a "historical crucible of intellectual struggle and societal transformation" and called for research produced in Limpopo to translate into meaningful societal impact.

Prof Betty Mubangizi, an NRF Research Chair in Sustainable Rural Livelihoods at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, focused on the challenges of turning climate commitments into results.

Referring to South Africa's Climate Change Act 22 of 2024, she said: "The distance between climate ambitions and commitments, and real-life outcomes is an institutional implementation gap."

Prof Mubangizi identified fiscal limitations, fragmented mandates, weak coordination and structural inequalities as barriers to implementation, particularly in rural communities.

A major part of the symposium was the presentation of scientific papers by scholars from more than 19 universities in South Africa and abroad. The symposium also explored how different sectors can contribute to strengthening climate governance.

Pohotona Moyahabo from the University of South Africa examined taxation as a tool for climate governance in Limpopo's mining sector. His presentation looked at environmental legislation, carbon taxation and accurate accounting as mechanisms for strengthening corporate environmental accountability.

Prof Matshidiso Kanjere, MBA Professor at TGSL, examined sustainable leadership and climate change mitigation in South African organisations, drawing on perspectives from Indalo Inclusive.

Her presentation highlighted the effects of floods, droughts and extreme weather on organisational operations and considered how leadership can support responses to these disruptions.

The discussions returned to a common question: how can research, leadership and governance move climate change from policy commitments to practical action? For the delegates gathered, the answer lies partly in stronger institutions, locally relevant research and partnerships capable of connecting national and global priorities with the realities facing communities.



UL Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele, welcomes delegates to the second Global Leadership and Sustainability Symposium.



Acting Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Venda, Prof Fulufhelo Netswera, highlights the importance of responsible leadership in directing innovation towards the public good.

"Our greatest challenge therefore may not be invention. It is whether we have the intention, the leadership and the political courage to direct innovation towards the public good."

When violence happens next door, do you keep quiet?

UL takes GBV conversation into Ga-Makanye as community members confront the reality of violence against women and children

By Phuti Semanya – ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Photos
Frans Nkhapele

Community members from Ga-Makanye village participate in a GBV awareness campaign organised by the University of Limpopo's (UL) Gender Desk, calling for an end to gender-based violence.

For many communities, gender-based violence is not something that happens elsewhere, it happens behind closed doors, in neighbouring homes and in families where victims are often too afraid to speak

"You can't say it is not my house. When it happens at the neighbour's house, talk about it."

It is this silence that the University of Limpopo's (UL) Gender Desk, in partnership with the RSF Agency for Development, is trying to break.

The two organisations took the conversation on gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) into Ga-Makanye, a village situated just across R71 from UL. They hosted a community engagement dialogue at the ELCSA Ga-Makanye Congregation under the theme, "United Against GBVF, Strengthening Community Partnerships for Safe Communities".

The dialogue brought together community members and stakeholders, including the South African Police Service (SAPS), Community Police Forum (CPF), the traditional council and a prosecutor from the Mankweng Magistrates' Court.

The aim was to confront a problem that continues to affect families and communities, and to remind residents that the fight against GBVF cannot be left to the police, courts or government alone.

Rev. Dr Ngwako Rapakwana, Director of the UL Gender Desk, said Ga-Makanye had been identified as a hotspot for GBV in the Mankweng area.

She urged residents to stop treating violence as a private family matter and to speak out when they know someone is being abused.

"As the community of Makanye, let's gather our thoughts and fight GBV. Let's talk about it and raise awareness that GBV is not right," Rev. Dr Rapakwana said.

Rev. Dr Rapakwana said the presence of NGOs, government departments and SAPS at the dialogue was meant to highlight the various organisations from which people can seek help from in the event they become victims of the GBV scourge.

But she warned against waiting until violence becomes fatal before taking action.

"You can't say it is not my house. When it happens at the neighbour's house, talk about it. Are you waiting for the neighbour to die so you can go and cook there?"



Rev. Dr Ngwako Rapakwana, Director of the University of Limpopo's Gender Desk, says fear of victimisation prevents some children from reporting gender-based violence.

She said children who experience or witness violence often remain silent because they are threatened with harm to themselves or their mothers. "But today we are here to talk," she said, adding that everyone has a responsibility to help end GBV.

During the dialogue, residents and stakeholders worked in pairs to discuss causes of GBVF, the challenges faced by women and children, and what could be done to make the community safer.

Excessive alcohol use and difficulties in controlling anger were identified by participants as some of the factors that contribute to violence against women in families.

The discussion also focused on the importance of seeking help, reporting cases and understanding the different forms of abuse.

A community member who did not want to be named said the dialogue was an opportunity to learn more about cases that can be reported and how residents can play a role in fighting GBV.

"I learnt that there are many cases to report, but we are not reporting them. It is my responsibility to play my part in eradicating GBV," said the community member.

Tlou Megale, a prosecutor from the Mankweng Magistrates' Court, explained the legal process to residents, including what happens after a GBV case is reported at a police station.

She took the community through the process from the police station to the magistrates' court and, where appropriate, to trial.

Turkish partnership deepens UL's global impact

Partnership with Yeditepe University is set to unlock joint research, international classrooms and student mobility

By Malatji Monyelegwete – malatji.monyelegwete@ul.ac.za



Photos
Malatji Monyelegwete

Prof Levent Ulsu, Prof Dr Natalya Keterci and Prof Dr Ozge Kilezli of Yeditepe University, Türkiye, during their visit to the University of Limpopo.

The University of Limpopo (UL) is strengthening its international academic partnership with Yeditepe University in Istanbul, Türkiye, in a move that will reinforce UL's drive to produce globally competitive graduates

The partnership focuses on academic collaboration, knowledge exchange and internationalisation. The latest milestone of the partnership was a Postgraduate Research Workshop hosted by UL's Department of Economics, where academics and postgraduate students from both institutions explored emerging trends in Economics and Business Management and identified new areas for collaboration.

Central to the partnership is Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), a teaching model that connects university classrooms across countries through digital technologies, enabling students and academics to learn, teach and conduct research together without travelling.

Head of the Department of Economics and Vice-Chair of Business Administration at Yeditepe University, Prof Levent Ulsu, said the collaboration reflects the growing importance of international partnerships in higher education.

He explained that Yeditepe University participates in the European Union's Erasmus+ programme, which promotes academic collaboration through staff and student mobility, joint teaching and the exchange of best practices.

"The purpose of our visit is to strengthen institutional partnerships, share best practices and explore opportunities for COIL and collaborative research," said Prof Ulsu. "We will begin with shared online courses before expanding into joint research projects, publications, conference participation, and staff and student exchange programmes," he added.

The workshop also examined the role of sustainability in economic development. Presenting on the Ecological Footprint, Director of the Confucius Chinese Studies Research Centre, Prof Dr Natalya Keterci, said humanity's consumption of natural resources is exceeding the Earth's capacity to replenish them.

Director of the School of Economics and Management at UL, Prof Samuel Koma, said the workshop advances UL's Internationalisation Agenda by exposing students and academics to international perspectives while strengthening global research networks.

"We intend to formalise our partnership with Yeditepe University through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This will strengthen collaboration through joint research projects in Economics and Business Management, co-hosted conferences, seminars and webinars, joint publications, and collaborative lectures that expose our students to comparative international perspectives," he said.

Acting Director for Resource Mobilisation, Dr Bonginkosi Dladlama, said the two institutions are already working together through the Erasmus+ KA171 project, which promotes staff and student mobility and cultural exchange.

"The partnership is also expanding into new areas of mutual interest, including research on the economics of electric vehicles," he shared.

"The purpose of our visit is to strengthen institutional partnerships, share best practices and explore opportunities for COIL and collaborative research."



Economics and Business Management academics and postgraduate students from the University of Limpopo and Yeditepe University, Türkiye, during an international research workshop hosted at UL.

Limpopo Gambling Board and partners powering potential of students with disabilities

Three of the province's six top-performing learners, now students at the University of Limpopo, receive devices with assistive software to support their studies

By Phishego Mohubedu - ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Limpopo Gambling Board and provincial partners present laptops equipped with assistive software to top-performing students with disabilities.

Three students with disabilities at the University of Limpopo (UL) have received laptops through an initiative led by the Limpopo Gambling Board (LGB), in partnership with the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism and the Limpopo Department of Education

The donation follows a pledge to provide six laptops to top-performing learners with disabilities in Limpopo, identified by the Limpopo Department of Education during the 2025 and 2026 National Senior Certificate awards announcements. The initiative forms part of the LGB's corporate social responsibility programme, which aims to promote educational development, digital inclusion and equal access to opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The three UL students, who receive support through the university's Reakgona Disability Centre (RDC), were given laptops equipped with assistive reading software. The software is intended to improve their access to digital learning materials and support their studies.

Speaking on behalf of the RDC, Blind and Low Vision Supporter Marisane Moruthanyana thanked the organisations involved and encouraged the students to use the laptops responsibly.

"This is a rare opportunity that comes occasionally, and not everyone is fortunate enough to receive it. Use these laptops for their intended purpose and make the most of this opportunity."

Moruthanyana also stressed the importance of providing the right support to students with disabilities. "We are not disabled; we are able when we are supported," he expressed.

Representing the Limpopo Department of Education, Selaelo Nkube said previous beneficiaries of similar initiatives had performed well and were making progress towards completing their studies.

"The provision of these devices has proven to be a meaningful and productive investment because it contributes directly to academic success."

Motau Nthuse, from the Department of Education's Capricorn South District, said the initiative showed what could be achieved through inter-governmental cooperation. He said the programme not only supported the beneficiaries but also encouraged other learners to work towards academic excellence, knowing that their efforts could be recognised.

First-year LLB student Kgetho Mmakola, one of the beneficiaries at UL, said the laptop would make it easier for her to access learning materials.

"I would like to thank the Limpopo Gambling Board for this initiative and for making sure that they continue encouraging us to do well in our academics. This laptop will really help me with my studies and give me better access to learning materials."

Fellow first-year LLB student Mpho Njakata said the donation had motivated her to continue working hard and hoped the initiative would benefit more students in future.

"It was nice of them to do this for us. We hope they can continue with this initiative so that it can encourage other students to study hard, knowing that there is a reward for working hard."

Second-year LLB student Given Malaka also expressed his appreciation for the support. "I'm grateful and appreciative of this laptop. It encourages me to do better in my studies and work even harder."

"We are not disabled; we are able when we are supported."

UL alumnus at the top of SA's brewing industry

A Biochemistry degree from Turfloop opened doors to Victor Mpholo's 30-year journey in the brewing industry

By Reuben Maake - reuben.maake@ul.ac.za



Photo
Reuben Maake

UL Alumnus Victor Mpholo sits down with Inside UL to discuss the importance of linking programme qualification with industry as key to producing employable graduates.

Victor Mpholo, a University of Limpopo (UL) alumnus, says his success did not come overnight. It began at Turfloop in the early 1990s, when he was a young student at the then University of the North, now UL, finding his feet in a demanding academic environment

Today, Mpholo is a senior professional in South Africa's brewing industry, with more than three decades of experience at South African Breweries (SAB).

Born in Atteridgeville, Pretoria, Mpholo matriculated at Phirikolobe Secondary School before enrolling at UL. He completed a BSc Honours degree in Biochemistry in 1992, a qualification that opened the first door to his career in the brewing industry.

"I chose subjects that were relevant to what South African Breweries required, so when I completed my studies, I was a good fit," he says.

Soon after graduating, Mpholo joined SAB as a Brewing Trainee. The three-year training programme became the foundation of a career in which he held several positions, including Brewhouse Manager, Ferment Manager and Maltings Manager.

He now works as a consultant in supply and packaging, where he deals with suppliers and ensures that materials used in the brewing process meet the required standards.

His work includes dealing with suppliers of malt, glass, labels and crowns, as well as conducting quality checks and audits.

"We conduct audits to identify gaps and then work on closing those gaps. This is important because we need to preserve the quality of the beers that we produce," he said.

Mpholo's time at Turfloop came with its challenges. The University had about 14 000 students during the dark period of apartheid in South Africa, therefore serving as an important institution for black students who had limited access to other universities.

"Most of us were limited in terms of our choices. Turfloop became our only choice because you could not enrol at universities such as Stellenbosch," he said.

Like many first-year students, he found the transition from school to university difficult.

"Most of us failed most subjects in our first year," he said with a chuckle. The experience, however, taught him to adapt and develop the discipline needed to succeed. He continued with his studies during a turbulent period marked by student protests, demonstrations and political unrest.

Mpholo said that the education he received at Turfloop gave him a strong foundation for the world of work.

"There was a perception that Turfloop was an inferior university, but the qualifications were on par with those from international universities," he said.

Of all his university memories, graduation remains one of the most important.

For Mpholo, receiving his qualification was more than completing his studies. It represented the end of a journey filled with uncertainty and challenges.

"Most of the time you would study without the certainty of whether you are going to reach the end goal. Graduation was therefore a very special moment for me," he said.

Despite his professional success, Mpholo remains connected to where his journey began.

He is passionate about supporting young graduates and developing entrepreneurs in the brewing sector. He also believes UL alumni have a responsibility to support students who are following in their footsteps.

"Alumni are very important in terms of ploughing back and supporting those who come after us. In that way, we can develop the next generation," he encouraged.

For Mpholo, giving back is part of the responsibility that comes with benefiting from education and being given an opportunity to build a career. His journey from Turfloop to a senior role in South Africa's brewing industry shows the value of education, determination and making the most of every opportunity.

"Alumni are very important in terms of ploughing back and supporting those who come after us. In that way, we can develop the next generation."



KEY MILESTONES IN PROF MAHLO MOKGALONG'S TENURE

Professor Mahlo Mokgalong was born in 1954 at Ga-Masemola, a village in Limpopo Province, South Africa. He attended Hwiti High School before enrolling at the then University of the North (now the University of Limpopo), where he obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Biological Sciences. He later completed BSc Honours, Master's and PhD degrees in Parasitology at the same institution.



1977

Joined the University as a Research Assistant and was later appointed as a Lecturer while pursuing his doctoral studies in Parasitology.



1990s

Appointed Deputy Dean of Sciences, later Acting Dean, and subsequently Executive Dean of the Faculty of Sciences, Health and Agriculture.



2000

Announcement of the merger between the University of the North (Turfloop) and the Medical University of Southern Africa (Medunsa).



2003–2004

Appointed Acting Vice-Chancellor and Principal, guiding the University through significant administrative and institutional challenges during the merger process.



2005

The newly established University of Limpopo began its journey. Prof Mokgalong's path to leading UL culminated in his substantive appointment as Vice-Chancellor and Principal.



August 2006

Appointed substantive Vice-Chancellor and Principal. At the time, UL had an enrolment of fewer than 10,000 students and faced significant instability and financial challenges.



2010s - early 2020s

Led institutional stability, academic growth and infrastructure development. He strengthened the University and expanded teaching, research and community engagement. Student enrolment also increased to more than 24,000.



2011

The University received SAICA accreditation to offer the Bachelor of Accountancy degree independently, in an effort to produce Black chartered accountants, especially from rural communities.



2016

Launched the University of Limpopo Medical School, the first new medical school established at a South African university in the post-democracy era.



2023 - 2025

Under his leadership, UL achieved consecutive unqualified audit outcomes, reflecting improved financial management and governance.



December 2025

Concluded his term as Vice-Chancellor and Principal, leaving a legacy of scholarship, leadership and service.



TURFLOOP HONOURS SERVANT LEADER WHO REDEFINED ITS FUTURE

What a 23-year-legacy looks like

Colleagues, friends, students and leaders reflect on the remarkable 23-year leadership of Prof Mahlo Mokgalong, whose vision, humility and unwavering commitment transformed the University of Limpopo and the lives of thousands of students.



DR NKOSAZANA DLAMINI-ZUMA
Chancellor: University of Limpopo

"Prof Mokgalong is a visionary academic, accomplished administrator, mentor and father figure whose leadership helped strengthen the University of Limpopo.

His greatest legacy is not the buildings or institutional achievements, but the thousands of students whose lives he changed through education."



DR JEFFREY MABELEBELE
Vice-Chancellor and Principal:
University of Limpopo

"During the university's most difficult times – financial challenges, MBChB accreditation restoration and #FeesMustFall – Prof Mokgalong steered us through uncertainty with resilience, stakeholder engagement and inclusive leadership.

Thank you for being a true servant of the University of Limpopo and making its development your lifetime commitment."



ADVOCATE BONGANI BONGO
President Emeritus of UL's Alumni
and Convocation Association

"Prof Mokgalong restored institutional pride and supported disadvantaged students. I propose that one of the university's major buildings be named in his honour."



DONALD SELAMOLELA
President: UL Alumni and Convocation Association

"Prof Mokgalong's integrity, discipline, humility, precision and commitment to excellence are unmatched. His years of service were a 'glorious race' that left a lasting impact on higher education, our university community and society."



PROF MAHLO MOKGALONG

Long-Serving Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Limpopo (Retired)

"The two weeks became two years. The two years became 12, then 20, then 22, and eventually 23 years."

Reflecting on a journey of service that was never planned but became a lifelong commitment to inclusion and student success.



SAMUEL TLADI
Former SRC President (2015/2016)

"Through his leadership we managed to come up with a concept called 'the missing middle' whereby students' parents who work in the government but could not afford to pay school fees and did not qualify for NSFAS were assisted. It was through Prof Mokgalong's leadership that we were able to identify and help them to complete their studies."

PROF MALEGAPURU MAKGOBA
Former VC: UKZN and friend

"My relationship with Mahlo started in 1958, he was five and I was six, our family was very close. We attended primary school together in Schoonord. We also came back to attend high school at Hwiti.

We have been friends for more than 68 years, so I know Mahlo more than his siblings, except his elder sister.

As former Vice-Chancellors, in our tenure, we faced various challenges and kept talking."



HON BUTI MANAMELA
Minister of Higher Education and Training

"Universities must rise above the noise of society by listening carefully, examining evidence, preserving historical memory and providing intellectual leadership.

Academic freedom is not simply a privilege but a public responsibility to challenge government, business, political movements and institutions when necessary.

May future generations draw on your leadership and continue to advance education."



PROF NAFTALI MOLLEL
Former UL Academic

"I joined the University in 1996. I remember him as a person who groomed me, he is a good leader, someone who takes decisions without fear.

It was very difficult during turbulent periods to run the university, especially historically disadvantaged black university, but he did."



MAKGABELA CHUENE
Former Executive Director of Libraries at UL

"Working with Prof Mokgalong was very fruitful. We were able to establish library commons. We were applying for the extension of the library, which is now open.

With Prof Mokgalong, you can discuss anything, he is very accessible. I regard him as my brother. I attended high school and university with him."



PROF PETER FRANKS
Former DVC, UL

"Together we achieved a lot of things. Mahlo and I worked very closely for 10 to 15 years.

There were lots of troubles and challenges but we succeeded."





Finding solutions for Africa



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