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International scholars converge at UNIZULU for water and environmental sustainability conference

NALEDI HLEFANE

SCHOLARS in the water and environmental disciplines gathered recently for the 5th International Conference on Water and Environmental Sustainability (ICWES), hosted by the University of Zululand (UNIZULU).

ICWES is the culmination of an eight-year partnership between UNIZULU and Chang'an University in China.

Professor Peiyue Li, who is one of the two conference co-ordinators, explained that the international partnership was born out of an initial collaborative project between UNIZULU and his institution that was supported by both the South African and Chinese governments.

"Since then, we have collaborated on a lot of research projects in the areas of water and the environment," Prof Li said. He thereafter emphasised the essence of research collaboration in an effort to tackle global water and environmental issues. To this end, he has co-published more than 15 papers with Professor Vetrimurugan Elumalai, head of UNIZULU's Department of Hydrology.

Through ICWES, the partner universities seek to foster collaboration among scholars in the water and environmental disciplines in order to find practical solutions to prevalent water and environmental challenges across the globe. The conference also serves as a key platform for knowledge sharing and development for both emerging and seasoned researchers.

Prof Elumalai, conference co-ordinator with Prof Li, was particularly excited to see the conference attracting more than 200 scholars from Australia, USA, Ghana and Kenya, among other countries. The attendees presented under a

variety of themes, including hydrological systems and processes, climate change and extreme events, soil conservation and management, and wetland ecological studies.

Among the highlights of the gathering was the attendance of UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor Xoliswa Mtsoe, who delivered the opening remarks. The conference was also graced by UNIZULU alumnus and Deputy Minister of Water and Sanitation David Mahlobo, who gave a keynote address.

During her opening, Prof Mtsoe first stressed that the topic of water and environmental sustainability was of immense relevance to South Africa. She subsequently lauded the event organisers for establishing a vital platform for knowledge exchange that will potentially resolve some of the world's pressing issues.

"The conference is being held at a defining period in the history of humankind and academia. It has come at a time when the world is grappling with myriad interconnected issues that have been elaborated within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – the SDGs. Since their adoption in 2015, implementation of the SDGs has generated much research and debate. As a framework, the goals have become a running template of focus – galvanising national and global development," said Prof Mtsoe.

"Research and innovation constitute some of the key drivers for sustainability in development endeavours. There also appears to be a considerable amount of shared understanding that sustainability entails interdependence among the so-called triple bottom line dimensions – meaning the social, economic and envi-



From left: Professor Peiyue Li, Vice Dean in the School of Water and Environment in Chang'an University; David Mahlobo, Water and Sanitation Deputy Minister; Professor Xoliswa Mtsoe, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor and Principal; Professor Vetrimurugan Elumalai, head of UNIZULU's Department of Hydrology; and Professor Khoboso Lehloeny, Dean of the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering. Picture: Xolani Ncube

ronmental aspects of life."

In connection with the latter, Prof Mtsoe highlighted the critical role that has been assumed by UNIZULU and Chang'an University in collaborating to

create knowledge aimed at addressing the triple bottom line aspects depicted in the SDG framework.

Mahlobo, who shared the same sentiments as Prof Mtsoe, stressed that "cli-

mate change has an impact on water supply and delivery, and it can't be ignored". He therefore challenged scholars to play an active role in helping devise climate resilience strategies.

To further contribute to the body of knowledge, some of the ICWES presentations will be published in a special edition journal that will be guest-edited by Prof Elumalai and Prof Li.

CSIR and UNIZULU sign memorandum of understanding



From left: Prof Pragasen Mudali, Deputy Dean: Teaching and Learning in the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering (FSAE); Prof Khoboso Lehloeny, FSAE Dean; Prof Vuyokazi Nomlomo, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning; and Jabulani Ndlovu, FSAE Faculty Manager. Picture: Xolani Ncube



From left: Dr Ncedo Khala, Executive Director: Infrastructure; Prof Nokuthula Kunene, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC): Research and Innovation; Prof Xoliswa Mtsoe, Vice-Chancellor and Principal; and Prof Prince Jaca, DVC: Institutional Support. Picture: Samkele Sokhela

NOMVELO XULU, NALEDI HLEFANE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) – marking the commencement of a significant partnership in the areas of capacity development and training, advancing research, fostering innovation, technology transfer and promoting sustainable research development.

According to Professor Khoboso Lehloeny, the dean of the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering, the MOU signing signified a crucial step towards putting UNIZULU and CSIR's shared values into action. She also mentioned that it was directly linked to UNIZULU's research and development priorities, which are strategically aligned to the institution's Vision 2027 strategic plan. As part of the priorities, the institution strives to establish networks with

African and global institutions on collaborative research, increase industry-related research and innovation, as well as help drive the commercialisation of products stemming from this. Also crucial is broadening UNIZULU's local, national and international footprint through strategic and high-impact partnerships.

"This is giving us the power to drive research in the university – driving innovation and capacity development in the faculty. By joining forces with research institutions and organisations, we can pool our resources and tackle complex challenges more effectively. This MOU also paves the way for joint funding applications, research projects, sharing of expertise and research facilities, and capacity-building initiatives that will develop institutions as well as South African society at large," Prof Lehloeny said.

From CSIR, Dr Thulani Dlamini emphasised the importance of collabora-

tion in driving innovation and progress. He noted that the partnership between CSIR and UNIZULU would foster a culture of research excellence and address pressing societal challenges.

Dr Sandile Malinga, who also represented CSIR, presented an overview of the organisation's priorities, highlighting its commitment to advancing scientific research and technological innovation. He underscored the significance of partnerships like the one with UNIZULU in achieving these goals.

In her closing remarks, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor and Principal Prof Xoliswa Mtsoe also acknowledged how significant the partnership was. "Today, we embark on a journey that will propel our institutions to new heights. This collaboration is a testament to our commitment to excellence and our desire to make a meaningful impact in the world," she said.

Collaborative effort towards a secure learning environment



UNIZULU's Faculty of Education recently initiated an essential dialogue between the KZN Department of Education and King Cetshwayo District during which the issue of safety in schools was discussed at length. Picture: Xolani Ncube

NOMVELO XULU

THE University of Zululand's (UNIZULU) Faculty of Education, in conjunction with the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Department of Education and King Cetshwayo District, recently hosted a pivotal School Safety Conference at Brackenham Primary School in Richards Bay.

The dialogue addressed the pressing issue of school safety. It brought together representatives from teachers' unions CTU, NATU and SADTU; school principals; SGB members; and experts from DD Security Advisory Services as well as representatives from the University of South Africa (Unisa).

Dr Ngogi Mahaye, Acting Chief Director in the office of the MEC for Education at the KZN Department of Education, officially opened the conference and emphasised the importance of collective responsibility in ensuring school safety. He said a safe

learning environment is the foundation on which our children's futures are built, and "we must work together to protect and nurture this space".

Professor Sithabile Ntombela, Dean of UNIZULU's Faculty of Education, provided a comprehensive conference overview, highlighting the need for a multidisciplinary approach.

"School safety is a complex issue that requires collaboration and expertise from various stakeholders. Today, we gather to share knowledge, experiences and strategies to create a safer tomorrow for our schools," she said.

The conference featured insightful presentations that focused on, among other issues, support and resources required by teachers in their quest to maintain a safe learning environment, and a comprehensive security plan which detailed strategies for schools to implement robust measures. The KZN Department of Education highlighted the current

initiatives and policies in place to ensure school safety, which sparked a lively discussion on the efficacy of these measures.

In addition, UNIZULU researchers presented startling statistics and trends on school safety in the province based on research conducted by postgraduate students at UNIZULU. Unisa researchers also presented findings of a project focused on violence on women leaders in KwaZulu-Natal. Union representatives expressed concerns about and commitment to school safety.

A question and answer session followed each presentation; allowing attendees to engage on the topics, share their concerns and propose solutions. The venue buzzed with energy as teachers, principals and experts exchanged ideas and experiences.

The conference marked a significant step towards fostering a secure and supportive learning environment in KZN schools.

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