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SARChI Research Chair targets food security, rural livelihoods

Prof Kingsley Ayisi's research programme focuses on practical responses to climate change, poverty and declining agricultural productivity

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



Photos
Malatji Monyelegwete

Prof Kingsley Ayisi, holder of the NRF Tier 2 SARChI Research Chair in Agroecosystems, Innovation and Society Nexus.

As climate change places growing pressure on the agricultural sector and rural communities face increasing economic challenges, the University of Limpopo (UL) has secured a new research chair tasked with addressing a critical question: How can farming systems produce more food, create jobs and withstand environmental pressures?

Prof Kingsley Ayisi, the newly appointed South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) Chair in Agroecosystems, Innovation and Society Nexus (AISn), believes the answer lies in bringing together scientific research, community knowledge and public policy.

As Director of the Centre for Global Change at UL, Prof Ayisi will lead a research programme focused on identifying practical and scalable interventions aimed at improving agricultural productivity while protecting natural resources and supporting rural livelihoods.

South Africa's agricultural sector continues to face challenges linked to drought, land degradation, biodiversity loss and widening socio-economic inequalities. These pressures are particularly severe in rural communities, where many households depend on small-scale farming for food and income.

Prof Ayisi said these challenges are often treated as separate issues, despite being closely linked.

"The chair will focus on research, postgraduate training and community engagement. It will promote practical technologies that improve food and nutrition security, support income generation and strengthen livelihoods, particularly in rural communities."

A key focus of the programme is the identification of evidence-based solutions. Researchers will investigate climate-smart agriculture, sustainable land management practices and community-led innovations that can be adapted and applied in different regions.

The initiative places communities at the centre of the research process. Farmers, local organisations and government stakeholders will work alongside researchers to test approaches that combine indigenous knowledge with modern technologies.

The economic significance of the programme is substantial. Agriculture remains a major source of employment in many rural areas, yet climate variability and environmental degradation continue to affect productivity and household incomes. By strengthening resilience and promoting sustainable production systems, the research could contribute to economic growth, improved food security and expanded opportunities for rural communities. Prof Ayisi said the chair will also focus on addressing barriers faced by women, young people and smallholder farmers.

"Research will explore ways to improve access to resources, markets and knowledge in order to create more inclusive agricultural value chains," he said.

"We want to generate evidence that can be used by policymakers, practitioners and development partners to make informed decisions," said Prof Ayisi.

"The chair will focus on research, postgraduate training and community engagement. It will promote practical technologies that improve food and nutrition security, support income generation and strengthen livelihoods, particularly in rural communities."



Prof Kingsley Ayisi and his research team will investigate climate-smart agriculture, sustainable land management practices and community-led innovations that can be adapted and applied across different regions.

SARCHi Research Chair zooms into the integrated global network

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



Photos
Frans Nkhapele

Prof Mthulisi Velempini, holder of the NRF Tier 2 SARCHi Research Chair at the helm of ICT-Wireless Systems.

According to Prof Velempini, The New SARCHi Research Chair in ICT-Wireless Systems the main objective of 6G is the establishment of a seamless integrated global network where all networks are converged into one network

The envisioned network will integrate terrestrial, non-terrestrial and underwater networks into a single intelligent global system.

Prof Mthulisi Velempini, a Full Professor in the University of Limpopo's School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences, said the envisioned network will integrate terrestrial, non-terrestrial and underwater networks into a single intelligent global system. He added that artificial intelligence, including machine learning and deep learning, will optimise network performance, improve resource allocation, reduce complexity and minimise latency. AI assistants will also be used to enhance the user experience.

Prof Velempini stated that the need for AI enhanced user experience will be more pronounced in High-density Internet of Things (IoT). He said AI will be able to render personalised services, user tailor made recommendations and content. However, the futuristic AI enabled global and integrated networks have several limitations which relate to the key enabler, the AI.

"The current AI algorithms are not optimised to provide high speed data and to process data from multiple sources", he explained, adding that there is a need to optimise AI algorithms for real time processing of data to ensure that real time decisions are made while taking into consideration the 6 Vs of dig data such as the Volume, Velocity and Variety of data.

However, he believed AI is expected to make quick and accurate decisions in real time. Furthermore, AI may be trained to be responsive to network changes such as user behaviour and network conditions or traffic. "It is envisioned that the future optimised AI algorithms will quickly adapt to such network conditions and changes. Unfortunately, the AI tools require further attention in this regard."

Prof Velempini pointed out that in a seamless connected integrated dense global network, security and privacy issues are of concern. "The current security techniques are not adequate, however, he mentioned that quantum communication can be employed to harden the security of such futuristic networks. The quantum particles or photons can be used to encode data in quantum state to ensure that data cannot be hacked or cloned. Unfortunately, quantum computing technology is still under development." He mentioned Blockchain as another promising security related technology which still requires improvements for it to provide adequate security protection in 6G.

Due to advancement in Quantum computing and communication, Prof Velempini indicated that the real time breaking of the exchange of encryption keys will be possible in 6G. "Such confidentiality attacks render

the current security tools ineffective which prompt a need to develop quantum computing or blockchain based security tools. A quantum cryptographic system can detect a man in the middle attack or a third party. Unfortunately, the technology is still under development." He further specified that it is envisioned that rigorous 6G security will be provided by the advanced quantum computing and quantum communication technologies.

Prof Velempini emphasised that the high density of IoTs is also a challenge. "A large volume of network traffic is generated which degrades the quality of service. This is one of the key aspects of 6G congestion control and scheduling techniques which are optimized to address the degradation of high density IoTs."



Prof Mthulisi Velempini, Full Professor in the University of Limpopo's School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences.

Judge Ngobeni's clothing donation boosts confidence of future legal professionals

University of Limpopo alumna provides formal attire to law students participating in the mediation programme

By Rinae Manenzhe – ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Judge Jane Ngobeni (third from left) hands over formal clothing to support University of Limpopo law students participating in the mediation programme.

Photos
Dimpho Boshomane

In a gesture of support, Judge Jane Ngobeni of the Limpopo Provincial Division of the High Court has donated a collection of formal clothing to Bachelor of Laws (LLB) students at the University of Limpopo (UL)

The donation supports students participating in the court mediation programme. It helps them maintain a professional appearance during mediation activities, which form part of their practical legal training, while building confidence for professional engagements.

An alumna of UL, Judge Ngobeni obtained both her LLB and Master's degrees from the institution. This contribution reaffirmed her long standing commitment to the development of students within the School of Law.

Speaking during the handover ceremony, Judge Ngobeni noted that the initiative was prompted by the recognition that some students face genuine challenges in accessing appropriate professional clothing.

"When I learned that students involved in the mediation programme were required to wear formal attire, I understood that obtaining professional clothing could be difficult for some students," she stated.

To address the need, Judge Ngobeni proactively mobilised colleagues within the legal profession encouraging them to donate workwear suitable for courtrooms, mediation sessions and other professional environments.

"We collected these items because we wanted students to feel confident and comfortable in professional spaces," she explained.

"We are giving from the bottom of our hearts. We recognise that some students may not always have access to certain opportunities and resources, and this is one way we can offer tangible support," she noted.

She expressed a strong desire and hope for the initiative to be continuous in order to benefit more students.

The initiative has been warmly welcomed by the university. Head of the Department of Private Law, Adv Themba Mathebula, expressed his gratitude, appreciating Judge Ngobeni for her continued support of students and the mediation programme.

"We really appreciate the contributions and gifts that Judge Ngobeni has brought to our students. It will cheer them up, especially as we enter the winter season," he said.

Adv Mathebula added that the donation would make a meaningful difference to students from diverse backgrounds as they prepare for examinations and practical legal activities.

Adv Mafanywa Mangammbi, Head of the Department of Mercantile and Labour Law, also welcomed the gesture, encouraging broader participation across the School of Law. He suggested that male lecturers follow suit by donating formal clothing to support male students, noting that most of the donated items predominantly catered for female beneficiaries.

Echoing these sentiments, School of Law Council Chairperson, Natasha Mokgala emphasised that the donation aligns perfectly with one of the council's priorities for the 2025/2026 term.

"For many students, having proper formal attire is not only about appearance. It is about dignity, confidence and a sense of belonging," she remarked



Judge Jane Ngobeni of the Limpopo Provincial Division of the High Court emphasises the importance of formal attire in the legal profession during the handover of clothing to University of Limpopo law students.

"We recognise that some students may not always have access to certain opportunities and resources, and this is one way we can offer tangible support."



UL PhD candidate helps South Africa achieve historic BRICS victory

Lucius Mokwena contributes to Team Zambezi's winning performance at a global innovation and technology championship in Russia

By Lesego Maaba – ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Lucius Mokwena (third from left) celebrates with her teammates after emerging as overall winners in the BRICS Young Professionals League during the International Engineering Championship CASE-IN in Russia.

A University of Limpopo (UL) PhD candidate has helped secure South Africa's first victory in a major international innovation competition, underscoring the growing contribution of the country's young researchers to global debates on sustainability, technology and development

"When Team Zambezi was announced as the winner, it felt like a dream. I was overwhelmed with joy and gratitude. We made history for South Africa."

Lucius Mokwena, a PhD candidate in Agronomy at UL's Centre for Global Change, served as an expert member of Team Zambezi, contributing technical guidance that helped the team claim top honours in the BRICS Young Professionals League at the 14th International Engineering Championship CASE-IN in Russia, Moscow. Her participation in the competition was facilitated through the university's International Affairs Office.

The competition, regarded as one of the largest platforms for emerging researchers and young professionals, challenges participants to develop practical responses to complex economic, environmental and technological challenges.

Team Zambezi outperformed competitors from Brazil, Russia, India, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia and other partner countries, earning South Africa its first victory in the competition.

Beyond the trophy, the achievement highlights the growing presence of South African researchers in global discussions on innovation, sustainability and development. It also reflects the role universities such as UL are playing in producing graduates capable of competing at the highest level.

For Mokwena, who comes from Moletji Ga-Hlahla outside Polokwane, the moment carried both personal and national significance.

"When Team Zambezi was announced as the winner, it felt like a dream. I was overwhelmed with joy and gratitude. We made history for South Africa," she said.

Held annually, the championship brings together young researchers and professionals from BRICS countries and partner nations to analyse industry-based case studies and develop solutions within tight timeframes.

As a member of Team Zambezi, Mokwena contributed her research knowledge and problem-solving skills to a winning solution centred on sustainability, the circular economy and emerging technologies.

She said one of the most valuable aspects of the experience was working with young professionals from different countries and disciplines.

"The most rewarding part was learning from people with different perspectives and experiences. We shared ideas on food security, sustainability, energy and technology while building relationships that will continue long after the competition," she said.



Lucius Mokwena, a PhD candidate in Agronomy at the University of Limpopo, helped South Africa secure its first-ever victory in the BRICS Young Professionals League competition.

The connections established during the programme have already opened opportunities for future collaboration, including a proposed nutrition project with Indonesian partners and participation in joint BRICS research initiatives.

Mokwena is pursuing her PhD under the supervision of Prof Kingsley Ayisi at the Centre for Global Change. Her research focuses on developing sustainable agricultural solutions that improve productivity while promoting responsible resource management. She believes research should contribute directly to addressing societal challenges.

"Academics are not only about obtaining qualifications; through research, we are providing solutions for society and contributing to global development," she said.

This is not the first time Mokwena has represented South Africa internationally. In 2025, she was selected to participate in the BRICS Summer School in Russia, where she joined 25 young leaders from around the world to explore sustainable development and global cooperation.

She encouraged students to pursue academic excellence and take advantage of opportunities that allow them to contribute their knowledge and skills on international platforms.

BSc students shine at Global Hackatom on Nuclear Energy Innovation

Undergraduate team claims third place against top South African universities in a gruelling 24-hour nuclear energy and sustainable development challenge

By David Mmatli – ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Organisers of the Global Hackatom competition congratulate undergraduate students from the University of Limpopo's (UL) School of Physical and Mineral Sciences on their third-place finish at the 2026 Global Hackatom competition.

A team of undergraduate students from the University of Limpopo's (UL) School of Physical and Mineral Sciences has flown the institution's flag high after securing an impressive third-place finish at the 2026 Global Hackatom

Hosted recently by the University of Zululand, the competition drew praise from UL's Department of Physics and Chemistry, which warmly welcomed the students back following their standout performance in one of the country's leading innovation competitions focusing on nuclear energy and sustainable development.

This year's competition was held under the theme, "Nuclear Energy Solutions for Sustainable Development of Africa's Coastal Regions". The Global Hackatom challenged participants to develop practical and scalable solutions to energy challenges affecting coastal communities across the continent.

The competition brought together multidisciplinary teams from institutions across South Africa, including Tshwane University of Technology, the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Johannesburg, North-West University, Nelson Mandela University, and the South African Young Nuclear Professionals Society.

Remarkably, UL's five-member team, composed entirely of undergraduate students from the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, stood out as the only team in the competition without postgraduate students. Guided by Computer Science lecturer Tumisho Mokgonayne, the students navigated an intensive, uninterrupted 24-hour development cycle to produce a comprehensive proposal centred on floating nuclear power units (FPUUs).

Their multidisciplinary task required them to investigate modern, cutting-edge nuclear technologies, assess geological and seismic risks along South Africa's coastline, and propose suitable floating nuclear energy systems capable of supplying sustainable energy to coastal and remote communities.

Demonstrating advanced research capabilities, the students also analysed vast amounts of open-source scientific data and evaluated the socio-economic impact these technologies could have on South Africa's future energy landscape.

The UL team consisted of:

- **Keamogetswe Chuene – BSc Mathematical and Computer Sciences**
- **Elphais Baloyi – BSc Mathematical and Computer Sciences**
- **Hlulani Chauke – BSc Mathematical and Computer Sciences**
- **Evidence Serage – BSc Geology**
- **Lovers Mkatshwa – BSc Geology**

Upon their triumphant return, the team was formally welcomed by officials from the school, who commended them for representing the university with distinction.

Reflecting on the achievement, Head of the Department of Physics and Chemistry, Prof Richard Mampa said the students' performance was a direct indicator of the growing quality of science education at UL.

"Competitions such as the Global Hackatom they expose our students to complex real-world scientific challenges and strengthen their ability to work under intense pressure. As a department, our goal is to anchor UL's participation in these elite platforms annually. This is because they prepare students for the future of science, technology and innovation," said Prof Mampa.

Director of the School of Physical and Mineral Sciences, Prof Hasani Chauke, described the achievement as a proud milestone for the entire university.

"Our students demonstrated exceptional resilience, seamless teamwork and academic excellence throughout the competition. This achievement proves that UL students can compete on equal footing with the best in the country and offer viable solutions to the most pressing challenges facing Africa," Prof Chauke remarked.

Echoing this sentiment, team member Evidence Serage emphasised that participating in the competition provided exposure to innovation and problem-solving methodologies within the nuclear and technology sectors.

"Participating in the Global Hackatom 2026 was an incredibly valuable experience. It exposed me to innovation-driven problem-solving within the nuclear and technology sectors, and achieving third position as a team was a proud achievement," said Serage.

"This achievement proves that UL students can compete on equal footing with the best in the country and offer viable solutions to the most pressing challenges facing Africa"



Campaign confronts harassment, gives voice to the silenced

Students and staff unite in to foster safer, more respectful academic spaces

By Jostinah Mamabolo – ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Photos
Reuben Maake

Experts who shared their insights and expertise during the "Building Safe Academic Spaces Together: No Room for Harassment" campaign

Universities are meant to be places of learning, growth and opportunity. Yet for some students and staff members, campus life can be overshadowed by fear, intimidation and silence caused by harassment and abuse

Many victims continue to suffer in silence, often afraid to report incidents because they fear being judged, ignored or unsupported.

In an effort to address these challenges, the University of Limpopo's (UL) Faculty of Science and Agriculture, in collaboration with the Gender Desk, recently hosted an awareness campaign under the theme, "Building Safe Academic Spaces Together: No Room for Harassment". The initiative provided a platform for open and honest discussions about the experiences of students and staff within the academic environment.

The campaign went beyond policy compliance by acknowledging the reality that many victims continue to suffer in silence, often afraid to report incidents because they fear being judged, ignored or unsupported.

Speakers emphasised that harassment can take many forms. It includes any unwanted behaviour that makes a person feel unsafe, humiliated, intimidated or uncomfortable. This may involve verbal abuse, offensive comments, bullying, threats, unwanted messages, inappropriate touching, online harassment or the abuse of power.

Participants were reminded that harassment is not always obvious. It can be disguised as harmless behaviour, with perpetrators often dismissing their actions by saying, "I was only joking," while bystanders remain silent. The campaign encouraged members of the university community to challenge harmful behaviour and support those affected.

The programme also explored the different forms of harassment that occur within academic spaces. Discussions highlighted sexual harassment, discrimination based on race, religion, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as harassment involving students, lecturers, supervisors and administrative staff.

Speakers stressed that every member of the university community has the right to study and work in an environment where they feel respected and protected.

A key part of the programme focused on the Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011. Participants learned how the legislation protects individuals from harassment and recognises the emotional, psychological and financial harm such behaviour can cause. The Act also covers harassment through electronic communication, including text messages, emails and social media platforms.

The university's Gender Desk was highlighted as an important support structure. The unit assists students, employees and other stakeholders affected by harassment while promoting equality and preventing gender-based violence.



Staff and students engage in discussions during an awareness campaign promoting dignity, respect, and safety on campus.

One of the most moving moments of the programme came when students pledged that there would be "No Room for Harassment" on campus. The pledge symbolised a shared commitment to dignity, respect and safety.

As the campaign concluded, participants left with a powerful message: silence protects perpetrators, while speaking out helps build a university where everyone can learn, work and thrive without fear.

Local Life Orientation teachers gain skills to identify, address gender-based violence in schools

Workshop empowers Life Orientation teachers with essential strategies for detection, prevention and intervention of GBV

By Phishego Mohubedu- ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Photos
Lebogang Mathaba

Life Orientation educators participate in a University of Limpopo workshop aimed at strengthening their capacity to identify, prevent and respond to gender-based violence in schools.

In response to the ongoing challenge of gender-based violence (GBV) affecting communities across South Africa, the University of Limpopo is strengthening its efforts through education and community engagement

As part of its Community and School Outreach Programme, the Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD), in collaboration with the Gender Desk, recently hosted a Gender-Based Violence Workshop for Life Orientation (LO) educators from the Mogodumo Circuit in the Capricorn South District.

The workshop aimed to equip educators with the knowledge and practical skills needed to identify, prevent and respond to incidents of gender-based violence in schools. It also promoted human rights, respect and equality, helping educators create safer and more supportive learning environments for learners.

The workshop was facilitated by Student Counsellors and Psychologists from the CSCD. Through case studies, presentations, discussions and practical exercises, educators explored the causes, forms and effects of GBV while reflecting on their role in creating safer school environments.

The workshop also provided a platform for educators to share challenges they encounter at their schools and receive guidance on how to address them.

The training emphasised the importance of recognising early warning signs of abuse, understanding reporting procedures

and strengthening support systems for learners affected by violence. Social Workers from the Gender Desk guided participants on reporting procedures and intervention protocols.

Limpopo Department of Education Circuit Manager for the Mogodumo Circuit, Idah Maboja, highlighted the importance of emotional wellbeing among educators.

She encouraged teachers to address personal challenges and seek support when needed to ensure that their emotional difficulties do not negatively affect learners.

"Educators who experience violence or emotional difficulties at home should seek help so that they do not unintentionally project their frustrations onto learners," said Maboja.

Kamogelo Moagi, a Social Worker and Project Coordinator from the university's Gender Desk, said the workshop was an important step in strengthening educators' ability to identify signs of abuse and intervene appropriately.

"This initiative will help teachers to intervene early when they observe signs of gender-based violence and abuse," said Moagi.

He added that the programme forms part of the University's broader community engagement efforts aimed at addressing social challenges affecting schools and communities.

Heirness Mojalefa, a Student Counsellor and Psychologist from the CSCD, explained that Life Orientation educators were specifically targeted because their curriculum addresses life skills and social issues that affect learners.

She noted that teachers play a critical role in identifying vulnerable learners and creating supportive environments where incidents of abuse can be reported and addressed.

"This workshop will equip teachers with the skills to identify GBV, establish intervention protocols and create school-based support teams to assist learners effectively," she said.

"This workshop will equip teachers with the skills to identify GBV, establish intervention protocols and create school-based support teams to assist learners effectively."



Life Orientation educators from the Mogodumo Circuit in the Capricorn South District with facilitators and experts following a Gender-Based Violence Workshop hosted by the University of Limpopo as part of its Community and School Outreach Programme.

Prof Rafapa bows out after shaping Humanities scholarship at UL

Retiring academic leaves behind a stronger research culture, a generation of mentored scholars and a faculty better equipped to meet the demands of knowledge production

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



Photo
Malatji Monyelegwete

Prof Lesibana (JRL) Rafapa retires after seven years of service as Humanities Faculty Research Professor at the University of Limpopo

When Prof Lesibana (JRL) Rafapa joined the University of Limpopo (UL) in 2019 as Humanities Faculty Research Professor, he returned to an institution that had once expelled him

Seven years later, he leaves not as a student activist shown the door by an apartheid-era administration, but as the academic who helped strengthen research in the university's largest faculty.

Prof Rafapa will retire on 30 June 2026 after leading research development in the Faculty of Humanities, a sprawling academic division comprising 12 departments and three schools. His tenure coincided with increasing pressure on South African universities to improve research output, attract postgraduate students and maintain rigorous quality standards.

Within that environment, he became a central figure in supporting academics and postgraduate researchers, often working behind the scenes to ensure that research projects, publications and institutional submissions met increasingly demanding requirements.

The role came with its share of obstacles. The size of the faculty, coupled with limited staffing in the Research Professor's office, meant that deadlines and quality assurance processes often had to be managed with constrained resources. Colleagues describe him as a steady presence who focused on building systems that would outlast his tenure.

His contribution extended beyond administrative oversight. Prof Rafapa devoted considerable attention to mentoring emerging academics, encouraging staff members to publish their work and guiding postgraduate students through the complexities of academic research.

For him, research has always been linked to society rather than existing solely within university walls.

"Research plays a critical role in addressing socio-economic challenges through the generation of knowledge, innovation and practical solutions that contribute to sustainable development and improved quality of life," he said. That conviction has shaped much of his academic career.

His return to Turfloop carried deep personal significance. As a Student Representative Council leader during the politically turbulent early 1980s, he was expelled alongside fellow student leaders for their involvement in anti-apartheid activism.

"My indulgence during my tenure at UL shifted to mostly servicing students from residential areas in the ambience of my alma mater," he reflected.

Returning to the institution decades later represented both a professional achievement and a form of closure. Yet he says the greatest reward was the opportunity to work with young scholars.

As retirement approaches, he identifies mentoring postgraduate students and early-career academics as the aspect of university life he will miss most.

Prof Rafapa's academic journey began at Mmadikana High School in Mokopane, where he obtained a matric exemption pass in 1979. After completing a BA Honours degree in English and a University Education Diploma at the then University of the North now UL, he went on to earn a Master's degree in General Linguistics and later a doctorate in English from Stellenbosch University.

His career included lecturing at Mokopane College of Education, serving as a director at the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), and holding senior academic positions at the University of Venda and the University of South Africa, where he became Chair of the Department of English Studies.

Throughout that journey, he drew inspiration from academic leaders such as the late Prof Potinus Carl Matsiri Mokgokong and former UL English Department Head Prof Charles Muller, whom he credits for demonstrating that leadership is rooted in integrity, competence and scholarly excellence.

As he prepares to leave office, Prof Rafapa's legacy is likely to be measured not only through publications and research outputs, but through the academics and postgraduate researchers whose careers he helped shape. In a sector where research capacity remains one of higher education's most valuable assets, that contribution may prove his most enduring achievement.

Prof Rafapa devoted considerable attention to mentoring emerging academics, encouraging staff members to publish their work and guiding postgraduate students through the complexities of academic research.

UL athletes target Comrades success

Experienced campaigners and first-time runners set to tackle the 2026 Comrades Marathon Up Run from Durban to Pietermaritzburg

Johannes Selepe & Thabiseng Ngobeni - mosela.selepe@ul.ac.za



Photos
Frans Nkhapele

2012 Comrades Marathon champion Ludwick Mamabolo (first from left) leads the University of Limpopo Athletics Club's 2026 Comrades Marathon team.

On 14 June 2026, 20 athletes from the University of Limpopo (UL) Athletics Club will join thousands of runners in the Comrades Marathon

This year's race features the demanding 89km Up Run from Durban to Pietermaritzburg. Widely regarded as one of the toughest tests in road running, the event will once again attract some of the country's top endurance athletes.

The UL team heads to KwaZulu-Natal after months of preparation, with athletes spending long hours on the road to prepare for the challenge. The squad includes experienced Comrades runners chasing personal bests and first-time participants eager to test themselves on one of the world's most recognised ultramarathon stages.



UL Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele, wishes the University of Limpopo Athletics Club well ahead of the 2026 Comrades Marathon, where 20 athletes will represent the institution in the iconic ultramarathon.

UL Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele, congratulated the athletes and wished them well ahead of the race.

"The Comrades Marathon is more than a race; it is a test of character, resilience and determination. We are proud of our athletes for the dedication they have shown in preparing for this challenge. They carry not only the UL flag but also the hopes and aspirations of many young people," said Dr Mabelebele.

He added that the athletes reflect the values of hard work, discipline and perseverance that the university seeks to instill in its students and staff.

"The university community will be cheering them on every step of the way. Regardless of the outcome, they have already made us proud through their commitment and willingness to push beyond their limits," he said.

The team is led by coach and 2012 Comrades Marathon champion, Ludwick Mamabolo, who is confident that the athletes are ready for race day. "The athletes have trained hard and remained disciplined throughout the preparations. We are pleased with the work that has been done and believe they are ready for the race," said Mamabolo.

Acting Director of Sport and Recreation, Sonica Fritz, praised Mamabolo for building a competitive club and attracting talented athletes from both the university and surrounding communities.

She said the club continues to grow and welcomed the increasing number of students joining its ranks.

Athletics Coordinator Itumeleng Moagi said the training programme was designed specifically for the demands of the Up Run.

"Our athletes have been training on the challenging Magoebaskloof route near Tzaneen to prepare for the climbs between Durban and Pietermaritzburg. The preparations have gone well, and we are ready for race day," he said.

Among the runners is Pholoshlo Phaladi from the UL Transport Section, who will be running his fifth Comrades Marathon. "Every Comrades Marathon presents a different challenge. My focus is on running a smart race and achieving my target time," he said.

Tisetso Chuene, a pharmacist at the UL Health and Wellness Centre, will also be making his fifth appearance in the race. "The preparation has gone well, and I am looking forward to race day. The goal is to improve on my previous performances and finish strongly," he said.

The team also includes 27-year-old Shaun Mkhawana from Tzaneen, who will be making her Comrades Marathon debut. "What I love most about running is the challenge. When the race gets tough and you find the strength to keep going, that is when you learn who you really are," she said.

The university will be looking to build on its strong 2025 performance, when all 22 UL athletes completed the race within the 12-hour cut-off. The team earned nine silver medals and finished 12th in the club standings.

"When the race gets tough and you find the strength to keep going, that is when you learn who you really are."





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