



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*



Department of Postgraduate Studies  
and Postdoctoral Fellowships

# NEWSLETTER

Volume 1, issue 1



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1. The Director's dispatch: A message from Prof. Karabo Shale
2. Postgraduate Funding Fair strengthens research and student support across Eastern Cape
3. Grateful and Growing: DVC-RPI Bursary recipients' stories
4. Tomorrow's Professors, Today's Postdocs
5. Conferencing at Vaal University of Technology: My Research, My Voice, My Growth
6. From Lecture Hall to Ann Bryant Art Gallery: My Art Exhibition Story
7. Voices of Victory: Groundbreaking Journeys from our PhD Graduates
8. Postgrad Orientation Day Moments Captured
9. 2024 Class of Distinction: Masters Graduates who Slayed with Cum Laude
10. Postgrad Students' Workshops and Writing Retreats in Action
11. New Postdocs Up Close
12. Meet the Department of Postgraduate Studies and Postdoctoral Fellowships Support Team

# The Director's dispatch: A message from Prof. Karabo Shale

---



*Pictured: Prof. Karabo Shale*

**G**reetings to our esteemed readers. I want to take a moment to acknowledge our vibrant community of postgraduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and staff members at large. It is a privilege to reach out to you through this newsletter. I am Karabo Shale, and I joined the University of Fort Hare in March 2025. It is an honor to be part of this historically significant institution, and I am filled with excitement about the journey ahead.

During my first few months at the university, I have been profoundly impressed by the interactions I had and the spirit of collaboration that permeates our community. The induction day with the Vice Chancellor highlighted the university's rich history, unique strengths and resilience, even in the face of challenges. The warmth and dedication I have observed truly stands out.

While I refrain from direct comparisons, I recognize the immense potential of our university. Drawing inspiration from my previous experiences, I see a wealth of resilience and talent among our students and staff, which can guide us toward a thriving future in line with a call toward a decade of renewal. As a result, I am committed to enhancing the experience of our postgraduate students, postdoctoral fellows and emerging researchers. My vision includes both short-term goals such as improving support services and funding opportunities and long-term initiatives to foster a nurturing academic environment that attracts and retains talent.

To achieve these goals, I encourage open communication and collaboration among all of us. Your ideas and efforts are vital as we seek to source more funding for our students. I urge supervisors, departments, and faculties to actively pursue opportunities that will benefit our postgraduate and postdoctoral fellows' community.

As I look to the future, I am filled with hope and excitement for what we can achieve together in this decade of renewal. Let us motivate each other and strive for excellence in our academic pursuits.

*By Prof Karabo Shale  
Director of Postgraduate Studies and Postdoctoral Fellowships*



Eastern Cape universities' postgraduate students at various funding exhibition stalls at the Funding Fair

## Postgraduate Funding Fair strengthens research and student support across Eastern Cape

The 2025 Eastern Cape Postgraduate Funding Fair, held on 16 May at Nelson Mandela University, brought together funding institutions, university leaders, and postgraduate students under one roof to strengthen research and improve student livelihoods. With a strong focus on addressing postgraduate funding challenges, the Fair has quickly evolved into a major annual event hosted in rotation by the province's four universities: Rhodes University, Nelson Mandela University, University of Fort Hare, and Walter Sisulu University.

This year, 65 postgraduate students from the University of Fort Hare participated in the event, accompanied by representatives from the Department of Postgraduate Studies and Postdoctoral Fellowships: Prof. Karabo Shale, Dr. Nomzamo Dube, Mr. Mfizeko Noxhaka, and Mr. Lindokuhle Mokuena. Speaking at the event, Professor Karabo Shale, the Director of Postgraduate Studies and Postdoctoral Fellowships at UFH, emphasised the urgency of placing students' needs at the center of funding conversations. He said that, at a meeting he held with postgraduate students' representatives and the SRC, one of student leaders said, 'all the training efforts are futile when students are hungry and faced with accommodation challenges', therefore the wellbeing of our postgraduate students should be our priority. He commended both the funders present and the significance of the initiative. His presentation offered insights into postgraduate funding efforts at UFH and called for continued collaboration between universities and funding bodies. Prof. Shale mentioned that the University of Fort Hare is considering hosting the funding fair in 2027.

Adding a personal touch to the day, Mr. Mongi Tshaka, a PhD student at UFH, inspired attendees with a heartfelt talk about his own academic journey, highlighting both local and international funding opportunities he received as a student. His message was clear: funding is out there, but students must be proactive and informed in seeking it.

Various funders and institutions present included the Swiss Embassy, National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS), National Research Foundation (NRF), Africa Earth Observatory Network (AEON), DSTI-Mandela Nonmedicine Platform, Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), BANKSETA, Department of Science Technology and Innovation, Rhodes Scholarship for Southern Africa, South African Cultural Observatory (SACO), Allan Gray Scholarship, DAAD South Africa, Canon Collins Trust, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Department of Higher Education and Training, South African International Maritime Institute (SAIMI), South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity (SAIAB) and the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA). Students had the opportunity to engage directly with funders, ask questions, and gather resources.

The idea for this funding fair, as shared by Dr. Mzilikazi (DVC: Research, Innovation and Strategic Partnerships at Rhodes University), was originally sparked by a casual suggestion from a student. That small conversation has since blossomed into a province-wide initiative, now in its second year after launching in 2024 at Rhodes University. Its aim is to empower students, expand funding access, and grow postgraduate research in the Eastern Cape. As



From left to right: Mr. Mongi Tshaka (PhD student, UFH), Prof. Karabo Shale (Director of Postgraduate Studies and Postdoctoral Fellowships, UFH), Dr. Priscilla Mensah (Director of Research Development, NMU), Dr. Nomakwezi Mzilikazi (DVC: Research, Innovation and Strategic Partnerships, RU), Dr. Asabonga Mngeni (Director: Postgraduate Studies, WSU), Mr. Lusanda Gwebele (Manager: Postgraduate Studies, WSU).

the Fair concluded with vibrant discussions at exhibitor stands, it was clear that this event is more than just an information session, it is a growing movement toward equitable access to academic success. The Department of Postgraduate Studies and Postdoctoral Fellowships

encourages all students to follow up by visiting the websites of the funders mentioned and to look out for upcoming calls and opportunities.

By Nomzamo Dube

# Grateful and Growing: DVC-RPI Bursary recipients' stories



**Pictured: Ncumisa Nezisa Gwintsa**

The journey toward a PhD can be quite difficult, especially for women juggling multiple roles like me. As a mother of three, pursuing a PhD in Communication has been one of the most rewarding yet demanding experiences of my life. The demands of motherhood and academic expectations require complex balancing, with both fulfilling and draining emotions.

In the year 2024, I was awarded the DVC - RPI Bursary which has not only reduced my financial load but has become a source of encouragement. Receiving a bursary designated for female-only students is itself empowering, affirming and validates my womanhood in ways I could never imagine. I feel that it is okay to be a mother and a student at the same time, it is not a taboo. I feel heard and recognised. The bursary is more than financial aid, it is a confidence booster, it allows me to shift my focus from survival mode to growth, it has given me the freedom to dive deep into my field, refine my research, challenge myself intellectually, think more critically without the persistent shadow of my financial woes. I truly feel that the DVC has placed her trust in my potential, and I am fully committed to completing my degree within the expected timeframe. I am determined not to let her down.

My dream extends beyond earning the doctoral title, I aim to teach, mentor, and contribute meaningfully to my field of study. This bursary is therefore taking me a step closer to that dream in ways I could never imagine. Beyond my research, the bursary has given me a sense of validation, there are voices consistently whispering, "we believe in you" and these whispers affirm me in moments of doubts and in moments of fatigue.

I am beyond grateful for this incredible support and will forever be indebted to this huge opportunity. Imagine waking up in the middle of the night and thinking, "Wow, I'm a DVC - RPI Bursary recipient!" It's honestly a sweet feeling, it's giving "I'm the chosen one".

*By Ncumisa Nezisa Gwintsa  
(PhD student - Communication)*

I am Agreement Khoza, a proud second-year PhD candidate in the department of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Agribusiness under the Faculty of Science and Agriculture. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the DVC-RPI doctoral bursary for it granted me an opportunity to continue with my studies without having to worry about paying tuition fees. It granted me an opportunity to pursue my passion of becoming a Doctor in Agricultural Economics. Moreover, the bursary offer restored my confidence and enthusiasm and reminded me why I started this journey in the first place. In addition to providing financial support, the bursary also promotes professional development through workshops and encourages recipients to publish research articles.

The bursary application process was refreshingly straightforward, with clear and transparent communication (Trust me, when you are a stressed PhD student, that makes all the difference). Today, I study with a full heart and clear mind, knowing that my academic expenses are fully paid for. Initially, I took a chance and registered without a bursary, and as time progressed, I lost hope and motivation due to my constant worry about tuition fees and other educational expenses. Thankfully, the DVC-RPI doctoral bursary came through and eased all the financial burden off my shoulders and that of my family. The bursary covers all my academic expenses; hence, I now have nothing to worry about. Honestly, the DVC-RPI Doctoral Bursary is not just funding my degree, it has smoothed my future.



**Pictured: Agreement Khoza**

To the team behind this opportunity, thank you for believing in me and other recipients, you re-ignited dormant dreams and boosted our confidence.

*By Agreement Khoza  
(PhD student - Agricultural Economics)*



**Pictured: Londiwe Xaba**

My name is Londiwe Xaba, a second year PhD candidate in Philosophy under the supervision of Dr. Chris Allsobrook. I'm beyond grateful for the support I've received through the DVC-RPI Doctoral Bursary, it has been a true game changer. As a black woman and the first in my family to earn a degree, this opportunity has opened doors I once only dreamed of. The bursary has allowed me to dive deep into my research, chase my academic dreams, and contribute meaningfully to my field without the constant stress of financial strain. A big thank you to the office of Postgraduate Studies and Postdoctoral Fellowships for cheering on students like me every step of the way. I'm so proud to share my journey and, hopefully, spark a little inspiration in others who are just getting started.

*By Londiwe Xaba  
(PhD student - Philosophy)*



## Tomorrow's Professors, Today's Postdocs

At the heart of academic excellence and innovation lies a group of scholars who are often overlooked, yet are critical to the future of higher education, the postdoctoral fellows (postdocs). At the University of Fort Hare, a historically rich and resilient institution, these emerging academics are quietly shaping the trajectory of research, knowledge production, and transformation.

Postdoctoral fellows are commonly referred to as the “missing middle” in the South African higher education landscape. An article by Prof. Mlamuli Nkosindiphile Hlatshwayo published by the University World News, titled *Postdocs are the ‘ice boys’ and ‘ice girls’ of the HE Sector* explores the often-overlooked roles of postdoctoral fellows within the Higher Education sector. The metaphor of “ice boys” and “ice girls” suggests peripheral treatment and the undervaluing of postdoctoral fellows. They exist in a grey area of neither being recognised as students nor fully recognised as staff despite their qualifications and research contributions.

The Department of Postgraduate Studies and Postdoctoral Fellowships humanises postdoctoral fellows and offers them a place called home. As a department, we recognise postdocs as key drivers of innovation, research and academia in general. The University of Fort Hare is an institution rooted in transformation and currently championing a *Decade of Renewal*, therefore,

we call for university staff, students and stakeholders to rethink how postdocs are perceived and supported. This renewal of the mindset should begin at the departmental level, where hosts and academic support personnel must ensure that all postdocs are provided with appropriate office space, stationery, and access to services afforded to other staff members.

As a department, we are committed to “humanising” the postdoc experience by working closely with them to ensure their visibility, support, and facilitate their career development. From hosting roundtable discussions and research capacity workshops, to facilitating interactions with key academic stakeholders, we are laying the foundation for postdoctoral fellows to thrive academically and professionally. By investing in postdoctoral development today, we are investing in tomorrow's professors, deans, and research leaders. The transformation of our Higher Education Institutions depends on how well we currently support our postdocs.

*By Nomzamo Dube*

# Conferencing at Vaal University of Technology: My Research, My Voice, My Growth

I am Awabo Manyaku, and I am currently pursuing a Master of Science in Agriculture, majoring with Horticultural Sciences within the department of Agronomy. Under the supervision of Dr. Witbooi, my research focuses on “*Guanoboost nutrient release pattern, comparative yield, quality and economic performance of organic and conventional production of potatoes (cv. Palace).*”

From 6-9 April, I had the privilege of attending the *2nd International Conference on Futuristic Materials for Sustainable Development Goals (FMSDG)*, hosted by Vaal University of Technology at the Emerald Hotel in Vanderbijlpark. The conference centered around exploring, developing and applying advanced innovative materials to help achieve the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It brought together scientists, researchers, and industry leaders to share ideas and innovations, all through the exciting lens of material sciences.

This opportunity was an exciting opportunity to explore and familiarise myself with modern scientific approaches for sustainable development. I was particularly interested in learning how innovative materials can be applied to the Agriculture Industry, especially in horticulture, to drive future advancements. The conference also offered me an opportunity to learn about multidisciplinary approaches to global sustainability problems, an area I am passionate about.

I had the honor of delivering my first-ever oral presentation at a conference. Although I was initially nervous and unsure of what to expect, the experience turned out to be empowering. As I spoke, I gradually gained confidence, engaged well with the audience, and truly enjoyed sharing my research. I presented findings from the third objective of my MSc project, specifically focusing on yield and quality performance under organic production systems using Guanoboost™ across six farms: Bhalala, Six Trees, Nobadula, Sakhikamva, Drayini, and the UFH farm.

The questions and suggestions from the audience were encouraging and constructive, contributing valuable insights that will strengthen my manuscript. Networking was one of my best highlights, I managed to connect with fellow students and scholars from institutions around the world, which left me feeling motivated and inspired to explore future research collaborations.

Beyond my research, the conference sparked my curiosity about the application of nanotechnology in agriculture, broadening my academic perspective. A particularly memorable moment was receiving support and encouragement from leading professors from India and Europe. I am also grateful to Prof. Pholosi, the conference chairperson, who went out of his way to ensure I felt welcome, and to Dr. Nelana, who took me on a tour of the Postgraduate Science Laboratory at VUT.



*Pictured: Awabo Manyaku*

Another special moment in this journey was being driven to the airport by Prof. Shale, the Director of Postgraduate Studies and Postdoctoral Fellowships. The opportunity gave me a chance to ask important questions about my academic journey and potential future, and the advice I received was insightful and motivating. I also learnt that his area of expertise is also in the STEM field.

In closing, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Department of Postgraduate Studies and Postdoctoral Fellowships for funding my attendance, and to my Faculty and Department of Agronomy for supporting my participation. This experience was a major milestone in my academic journey, and I am excited to continue growing, learning, and making meaningful contributions to the field of agricultural sciences.

*By Awabo Manyaku:  
Master of Science (Agriculture) student*

## From Lecture Hall to Ann Bryant Art Gallery: My Art Exhibition Story

**M**y name is Avuzwa Noko, a Master of Fine Art candidate in the Visual and Performance Art at the University of Fort Hare, currently wrapping up my final year under the supervision of Dr. Siphe Potelwa. On 16 April 2025, I stepped out of the lecture halls and into the spotlight with my debut exhibition, *A Visual Journey Through Forgotten Railways*, hosted at the Ann Bryant Gallery in East London. This exhibition did more than showcase art, it marked history.

I am the first Master of Fine Art student to graduate from the department since its founding in 1976. The department has not seen a single MFA graduate since the 1970s. Standing in that gallery, I was not just an artist, I was a generational curse breaker. I represent a new era at the University of Fort Hare, a living embodiment of the University's Decade of Renewal.

The idea for this body of work was born during a bus ride from Fort Beaufort back to campus. As we passed through Alice, I noticed the abandoned old train station. Its desolate, silent structure whispered a thousand untold stories. I began to ask myself questions: *Why is it forgotten? Who remembers this place? What did it*

*once mean to the community?* These reflections sparked the concept, which I began to explore in writing while I was doing my Honours research, eventually developing it into my Master's project under Dr Potelwa's guidance.

The exhibition's purpose was to evoke thoughts, initiate social dialogue, and advocate for the refurbishment of Eastern Cape's forgotten train stations. My creative process was deeply rooted in visual storytelling. I travelled across the province, photographing decaying and overlooked train stations, capturing their neglect while imagining their potential. My photographs are intentionally edited with a clear blue sky contrasted by a darkened foreground, a visual metaphor for hope amidst abandonment.

To strengthen the immersive experience, I introduced a small installation of railway tracks and the raw sound of passing trains, drawing visitors into the rhythm and memory of once-busy platforms now left behind. My work is greatly inspired by Sammy Baloji, and I apply Visual Rhetoric theory to provoke critical reflection on infrastructure, neglect, and memory.

My academic research and artistic practice are deeply intertwined. Through photography, I question systems of development and public memory, urging us to reconsider the value of forgotten spaces. My work pushes the boundaries of traditional research by using fine art as a voice, a tool to challenge, remind, and inspire. The exhibition's standout moment was watching the audience engage with the work, some were emotional, some nostalgic, and many were curious. A few attendees, particularly those from the Eastern Cape, asked whether the stations would be restored or if jobs would return with railway revitalization. This community response validated the purpose of my work. It was never just about trains, it was about memory, access, and dignity. For me, it was overwhelming, I thought about the years of struggle, the feeling of isolation as a postgraduate student navigating both academic and the art world, and the power of being the first in decades. The exhibition reminded me that my work is bigger than me, it speaks for communities, histories, and futures.

Looking ahead, I am preparing to apply for a PhD in Art. My next research focus will investigate the ritual use of clay among Xhosa and Sotho people, and I plan to incorporate photography and painting using different types of traditional clay. I also aim to continue curating exhibitions that speak to transformation and social memory. To fellow postgraduate students pursuing creative research paths, Your work matters. Do not be afraid to break new ground. Be bold in your ideas, trust your voice, and let your creativity be a form of scholarship. Sometimes, being the first means carrying the weight, but it also means you're opening doors. In my journey, I learned that art doesn't just reflect society, it can shape it. And in doing so, it can rewrite history.

Avuzwa Noko  
Master of Fine Art student



Pictured: Avuzwa Noko

# Voices of Victory:

## Groundbreaking Journeys from our PhD Graduates

As a critical care nurse working in the intensive care unit, I always had a deep passion for mentoring students from various institutions during their clinical placements. I actively sought out teaching moments and took great satisfaction in orienting students to the complexities of critical care. This practice not only reinforced my own knowledge but also inspired me to further my studies. My dedication to teaching eventually led me to secure a position as a university lecturer, fulfilling my long-standing goal of contributing to the training and development of future nurses. My desire to bridge the gap between clinical practice and academic education inspired me to pursue a PhD, driven by the belief that well-prepared educators significantly influence the quality of nursing care.

My experiences as a nurse, educator, and university lecturer fueled a growing curiosity about how to improve my teaching strategies, and evidence-based practice. I wanted to not only teach but also contribute to the advancement of nursing education through research. I responded to call from the Santrust Project in 2014 that was developed to equip nurse educators with the skills to conduct meaningful research and influence nursing education and practice on a broader scale.

Starting the PhD came with its own challenges. While finding a supervisor was relatively easy, identifying a clear research focus was difficult. On the first day at Santrust, I was required to present a problem statement and explain the significance of my proposed study. From the outset, the facilitators consistently posed a critical question that stayed with me: What is new or unique that your research will contribute? This question pushed me to think deeply and refine my ideas. While the application and admission process itself was straightforward, I struggled internally with impostor syndrome throughout. However, each time I received positive feedback, whether from peers, supervisors and mentors, I felt encouraged, excited, and more motivated to continue pursuing my PhD journey.

Learning the ropes was far from easy. From mastering

new technologies to navigating literature searches and synthesising complex information, every step presented its own set of challenges. However, through intrinsic motivation and unwavering commitment, I gradually gained the skills and confidence needed to develop and successfully present my research proposal.

The data collection phase was one of the most demanding parts of my PhD journey. For nearly six months to a year, I traveled extensively to gather the necessary data, a physically and mentally exhausting endeavor. Along the way, I faced numerous challenges: failed attempts, dead ends, and unexpected results that often left me feeling disheartened. During this difficult period, I came across a book in the library titled *“How Do I Succeed in Getting My PhD?”* Reading it from cover to cover gave me invaluable guidance on how to navigate failure, embrace setbacks, and interpret unexpected outcomes with resilience rather than discouragement.

In the midst of data analysis, life threw me another curveball. The COVID-19 pandemic hit, and my husband became seriously ill, requiring hospitalisation. During that time, I completely paused my research to focus on my family and my own well-being. In 2021, I faced academic exclusion due to the delays, but my appeal was successful, on condition that I submit my thesis by November 2022. As I approached the final stages, another hurdle arose, one of my examiners withdrew. Finding a replacement took time, and once secured, the examination process had to go through the university committees, whose sessional schedule meant additional delays. While these logistical challenges were frustrating, they were also necessary to ensure the quality and integrity of the examination process.

Despite the challenges, my supervisors provided unwavering support throughout the journey, always calm and reassuring. My colleagues in the department were equally encouraging, consistently checking in on me, especially during my low moments, with the familiar and motivating question: “How far are you now?” Their support reminded me that I was not alone, and it helped



***Pictured: Dr. Tobeka Dondashe - Mtise***

keep me moving forward. I was finally overwhelmed with emotion when I received my results, and to date, it still feels surreal to have earned the title. While the joy is immense, I now find myself facing a new question filled with uncertainty: “What comes next?”

The PhD journey was not just an academic pursuit; it became a deeply personal journey of professional growth, resilience, and self-discovery. Intellectually, the PhD fundamentally reshaped how I think and responded to problems. My ability to conduct independent research improved dramatically, I transitioned from consuming knowledge to creating it. Over time, I also became more confident in presenting and defending my ideas and writing academically. I learnt to cope with uncertainty, failure, and isolation. I developed patience

and perseverance, especially during periods when progress felt slow or invisible. The experience taught me time management, self-motivation, and how to balance competing demands. I also discovered the value of community, whether through peers, mentors, or support networks, and how essential it is to ask for help when needed. Most importantly, I came to understand myself better: my values, my interests, and what drives me. In the end, the PhD did not just give me a title, it gave me a new way of seeing the world and my place in it.

*By Dr. Tobeka Dondashe - Mtise*



**Pictured: Dr. Thompho Tshivhase**

Pursuing a PhD while serving as an academic staff member in the Department of Criminology has been both challenging and deeply transformative. As an NGAP scholar who joined the institution as an Honours graduate, my journey has been defined by growth, resilience, and a steadfast commitment to scholarship. Balancing my doctoral studies with full academic duties demanded long hours and continuous self-discipline, but it also revealed my capacity to lead, particularly when I was entrusted with the role of Head of Department for the 2023/2024 academic years.

A true highlight of this journey is that I graduated on the same day as two of my Honours students, who graduated cum laude. It is a moment that speaks not only to personal achievement but also to the rewards of mentorship.

Beyond the institution, I've had the privilege of presenting my PhD research internationally, in Australia, Great Britain (Scotland), and soon in Spain as part of a teaching exchange programme hosted by the University of Alcalá. These opportunities have broadened my academic perspective and strengthened my global scholarly networks. In 2024, I also published my first book chapter, a milestone that affirmed my contribution to the field. Completing my PhD is not simply a personal victory; it is a celebration of perseverance, purpose, and the collaborative spirit of academia.

*By Dr. Thompho Tshivhase*

My PhD journey was both a challenging and rewarding experience. I encountered several obstacles such as balancing my studies with raising two children, navigating financial exclusion and lack of funding, fulfilling my responsibilities as a full-time staff member, and coping with health setbacks. Emotionally, I struggled with limited family support and moments of deep uncertainty about whether I was on the right path or not. The demands of managing work, research, and personal responsibilities often felt overwhelming.

What kept me going was the belief in the value of my work and the potential to make a meaningful contribution to my field. I was inspired by the possibility of impacting others through my research. Among the most memorable moments were conducting research that led to new insights, collaborating with esteemed mentors and colleagues, and pushing through episodes of self-doubt.

Now that I have completed my PhD in Criminology, I look forward to applying my knowledge and expertise in the field. I am eager to continue researching, publishing, and mentoring students, and I hope to contribute meaningfully to my discipline through service and leadership.

To others embarking on a similar journey, I offer this advice: stay focused and motivated, seek support from mentors and peers, and most importantly, be patient and persistent. The road may be tough, but the reward is truly worth it.

In the end, I made it and I am filled with gratitude and joy. God's timing is perfect. Hard work truly pays off.

*By Dr. Nyameka Daniel*



**Pictured: Dr. Nyameka Daniel**

Who would have thought? Just a village girl from the small town called Engcobo in the Eastern Cape, now rocking with a PhD in Criminology. I had never imagined this when I was young.

Let's rewind to 2018 when I had just earned my Master's degree and ready to start my PhD journey. I had no funding, owed the university and couldn't register as I could not meet the university threshold to register. But you know what? Purpose always finds its way. Determined to not give up, I sent emails to different funding institutions, hoping for a miracle. A miracle indeed happened, a kind soul referred me to a Wits University grant call for students researching gender issues or human development matters. I applied and successfully got the funding which cleared my debt and that marked the beginning of my PhD journey in 2019.

My study explored factors influencing the high rate of gender-based violence towards developing a multi-stakeholder framework as a mechanism to curb the scourge of gender-based violence. I had partial philosophies about the world view prior to my PhD journey, I used to think that solving problems was about quick fixes, but my perspectives changed after my data collection stage. I realised how many people suffer in silence, and how the system fails them. This realisation fueled me like never before.

While I was still cruising nicely, 2020 happened, the COVID pandemic hit and everything froze at a time when I was supposed to start my field work. My research was on hold for almost a year as a result of the pandemic restrictions. Out of all life tests, this was the major nightmare that brought discomfort and hopeless thoughts that perhaps the PhD was just a dream.

At that time, I could see my dream going down the drain, I could not see beyond the COVID-19 pandemic since many people close to my heart including my biological sister lost their lives in 2020. While still trying to heal from the trauma of losing my sister, my supervisor left the university, I could not imagine being supervised by anyone else, and consequently, I opted for long distance supervision, which was challenging, since he was also supervising other students in his new institution. Just when I thought I had many problems, in April 2021, I lost my grandmother, my biggest cheerleader who encouraged education. Against all odds, I had to pull myself together, think about the motive behind my registration.

All these insurmountable challenges shaped and molded me to be a strong, resilient and persevering person I am today. I am now able to stand before crowds and tell my story to motivate, inspire and give hope to the hopeless.



**Pictured: Dr. Zizo Jobela**

My advice to current postgraduate students is 'never give up, delayed dream is not a denied dream, keep holding your vision in every challenge you encounter, do not compare yourself to others, you are unique and so are your dreams. Keep reaching out for help when you need it and no one is an island'.

Today I am confident to be one of the University of Fort Hare's products ready to fly high the name of this iconic university. Today I am proud to say the journey was not easy, but a walkable one. Today I am proud to say it was not easy but worth it... My PhD is PHINISHED y'all.

*By Dr. Zizo Jobela*



# Postgrad Orientation Day Moments Captured



# 2024 Class of Distinction: Masters Graduates who Slayed with Cum Laude

1. Noluvuyo Mngcutsha  
(Master of Science in Chemistry)
2. Anathi Dambuza  
(Master of Science in Chemistry)
3. Olayanju Oluwatosin Elegbede  
(Master of Science in Computer Science)
4. Zolisanani Mpanyaro  
(Master of Science in Geography)
5. Yolanda Blessings Mnikina-Cibi  
(Master of Science in Microbiology)
6. Oswald Roberts  
(Master of Science in Physics)
7. Sandisile Vandala  
(Master of Science in Geology)
8. Ndamulelo Mudau  
(Master of Science in Geology)
9. Nobathembu Tyhutyhani  
(Master of Science in Geology)
10. Siyamtanda Hoza  
(Master of Science in Geology)
11. Zimi Mphana  
(MSc Agriculture: Agricultural Economics)
12. Sibulele Matshetsheni  
(MSc Agriculture: Animal Science)
13. Isabel Beautiful Mpofo  
(MSc Agriculture: Animal Science)
14. Ziyanda Goli  
(MSc Agriculture: Animal Science)
15. Shayne Cossy Nonxuba  
(MSc Agriculture: Soil Science)
16. Khumbuzile Amos Vikilahle  
(Master of Arts in African Languages)
17. Memory Gwiza  
(Master of Social Work)
18. Mandlakazi Nkunjana  
(Master of Social Science: Communication)



**Postgrad Students' Workshops and Writing Retreats in Action**



# New Postdocs Up Close



*Pictured: Dr. Sinethemba Hopewell Yakobi*

**D**r. Sinethemba Hopewell Yakobi completed his PhD in Biochemistry from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), South Africa. He is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Biochemistry and Microbiology at the University of Fort Hare (UFH). His research tackles pressing global health threats, focusing on antimicrobial resistance, biofilm biology, bioactive compound discovery, and the use of bioinformatics in studying microbial genomics and map drug-target interactions. His ongoing work integrates transcriptomics, molecular docking, and resistance gene profiling to understand how pathogens persist, evolve, and survive under antimicrobial pressure.

Dr. Yakobi chose UFH for its rising stature in microbiological research, its mission-driven focus on addressing health challenges in Africa, and its collaborative research ecosystem. Dr. Yakobi aspires to become one of the leading scientists in translational microbiology, mentoring the next generation of scientists, building cross-disciplinary research networks and contributing to the development of novel diagnostics and therapeutics. Beyond the lab, he's a man of faith, a dedicated father, an unapologetic lover and fan of Kaizer Chiefs.

*By Dr. Sinethemba Hopewell Yakobi*



*Pictured: Dr. Lokuthula Msimanga*

**D**r. Lokuthula Msimanga is a dedicated researcher in climate science who completed her PhD in Environmental Geography at the University of the Free State. Now affiliated with the Geography and Environmental Science Department, hosted by Dr. S. Mazinyo, Dr. Msimanga focuses on nature-based solutions for climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, resilience, and public health impacts linked to extreme climate events. Dr. Msimanga is passionate about mitigating the effects of floods, climate variability, and socio-ecological disruptions and her research explores innovative strategies for strengthening community resilience, particularly in vulnerable environments. Msimanga integrates Geographic Information Systems (GIS) into multidisciplinary environmental research to develop evidence-based solutions.

Choosing to do her postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Fort Hare was a strategic step toward advancing impactful research that benefits communities most affected by climate change. With a vision centred on sustainability, adaptation, and equitable climate action, Dr. Msimanga aims to contribute practical solutions to strengthen resilience against unprecedented climatic and extreme weather events. Dr. Msimanga is a Mountain Climate Research Group (MCRG) member, an active network dedicated to advancing climate studies in mountainous regions. This involvement reflects a deep passion for high-altitude environments, their unique ecosystems, the challenges faced by communities living in these landscapes, and opportunities for development that can be explored. Through research-driven advocacy, policy recommendations, and local engagement, Dr. Msimanga is committed to creating lasting change in climate-affected regions while fostering scientific innovation at the intersection of environmental conservation and public health.

*Dr. Lokuthula Msimanga*

# Meet the Department of Postgraduate Studies and Postdoctoral Fellowships Support Team



*From left: Babalwa Solani, Uviwe Mantantana, Prof. Karabo Shale, Bulumko Mapukata, Zikhona Mandela, Dr. Nomzamo Dube, Wanzi Maxhobi, Lindokuhle Mokuena, Mfizeko Noxhaka and Zikhona Jacobs*



University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

## NEWSLETTER TEAM

Dr Nomzamo Dube

Mr Bulumko Mapukata

Ms Uviwe Mantantana

---