

CTHB TEAM VISITS UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

A team from the DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB) visited the University of Venda (UniVen) in Thohoyandou, Limpopo province, from 11 to 12 October. The group included CTHB Director Prof Emma Steenkamp, core team members Dr Martin Coetzee and Prof Bernard Slippers (who is also FABI Director).

This visit was linked to the strong collaboration that has developed between the University of Venda and the University of Pretoria via the CTHB. The interaction includes the funding of the bursaries of the students, part of their running cost and sharing of supervision responsibility. Research projects are linked to the communities and research areas to which UniVen has unique access, and that overlap with CTHB objectives and research strength. Students complete much of their laboratory work as well as receive additional training in FABI. Seven MSc and two PhD students are currently completing their degrees through this programme.



The visit was organised by Prof Ednah Kunjeku, who is a member of the Advisory Committee of the CTHB and a key anchor for the CTHB-UniVen interaction. Prof Kunjeku is a co-supervisor of all UniVen students who receive funding from the CTHB and are co-supervised by CTHB team members. Prof Kunjeku supports the recruitment and selection of the students, the field-work and logistics around this, and supports the management of their projects and their academic supervision.

The CTHB team engaged with UniVen Vice-chancellor Prof Jan Crafford, Acting Dean in the School of Agriculture Prof Moses Marenya as well as CTHB team member and Head of Department in Plant Production Prof Eastonce Gwata.

The team concluded the visit with a discussion with undergraduate students and a lunch with researchers and students in the CTHB-UniVen partnership. The discussion included a number of undergraduate students who might proceed to postgraduate studies in the CTHB-UniVen partnership and was followed by lunch with researchers and students in the partnership.

This was a fruitful visit that reinforced the strong commitment from the CTHB and UniVen leadership, the researchers involved and the students whose lives were transformed in the process, to build on the strong foundation that has been laid. We hope to see more students trained, excellent science produced and published and more impact in the communities linked to UniVen.

The team thanked Prof Kunjeku and Dr Coetzee for the many years of passion and energy they injected into building the CTHB-UniVen bridge as well as all the team members for their support and the students for their hard work and enthusiasm.