

# VUT strengthens ties with Kenya's Maasai Mara University by signing a memorandum of understanding

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On Thursday, 8 November 2022, the Vaal University of Technology (VUT) and Maasai Mara University (MMARAU) from Kenya strengthened their ties and formalised their longstanding relationship by signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the two universities.



Signed at VUT's Council Chambers by the two institutions' vice-chancellor and principals, Prof. Dan Kgwadi, and his counterpart from MMARAU, Prof. Joseph Chacha, the MoU primarily aims to confirm the collaboration between the two institutions which will result in a number of interdisciplinary projects over the next five years. It further encourages the development of academic, scientific, and cultural exchanges between VUT and MMARAU, as well as providing mutual support for collaborative research activities.

The institutional agreement comes at the height of VUT's ongoing efforts to boost its co-operation and partnerships with its international peers – something which is underpinned by one of its strategic objectives of strengthening international university alliances through engaged scholarships.

According to the seven-page MoU, the two institutions will also seek to pursue staff and student exchanges and collaborative partnerships in the field of governance, science, technology, and research programmes as well as community development programmes. The areas for potential cooperation also include programmes offered at either institution that both institutions deem necessary to contribute to their development.

Before the signing, Prof. Kgwadi welcomed the delegation not only to VUT but to the South African shores, indicating that it is an honour to host them – but more so, to be entering into an institutional agreement with them. On the MoU, he said it is common practice for African universities to prioritise partnerships with their overseas counterparts – which he says there is nothing wrong with – however, he added that there is an even greater need for universities within the continent to strengthen ties amongst themselves.

Prof. Chacha on the other hand described the MoU as “a marriage between the two universities that will last forever”. He added that, as a young university celebrating its 10th year in 2023, MMARAU looks forward to learning as much as possible from VUT, given its rich history spanning over 50 years. He also said one of the outcomes he hopes to see emerging from this MoU, is the possibility of the two universities offering joint degree programmes. These sentiments were echoed by Dr Benson Momanyi, MMARAU Council chairman who also presides over its Academic, Sealing and Honorary Degrees Committee. Dr Momanyi emphasised that the timing of the MoU is befitting as their university is on a mission to strengthen its ties with others, citing that as much as it is expected to be of mutual benefit, they stand to gain more given that they are a young university.

Speaking on the background and the two institutions’ long overdue desire to formalise the relation, VUT’s acting deputy vice-chancellor: research, innovation, commercialisation and internationalisation, Dr Simphiwe Nelana, said the two have been close-associate institutions over the years, with long history of collaboration – and by signing the MoU, the two are merely solidifying the relationship with an expanded scope. He added that the agreement has been many years in the making, with the strong support of Dr Wesley Omwoyo who is the former lecturer at VUT and current link scientist at MMARAU. Dr Nelana cited that previously, 12 students from VUT attended a conference at MMARAU – something which he says was a culmination of even greater things to come between the two universities.

The signing was followed by a presentation from the Research Division of VUT to highlight the institution’s research areas, opportunities, funding models, facilities, and collaborative activities.

Congratulating the two universities, Kenyan High Commission representative Mr Samal Edeke said he was honoured to bear witness to the signing. He added that Kenya and South Africa signed an Agreement of Cooperation in Scientific and Technological Innovation in 2004 – following which, joint calls were launched between the two countries to support researchers and innovators from public universities and research institutes for the mutual benefit of the two countries. “There is a need for institutions of higher learning to strengthen partnerships between the two republics. These partnerships will provide opportunities for learning from each other, sharing knowledge and experience and benchmarking. Additionally, these partnerships will have a huge impact on curriculum development, collaborative teaching programmes and research networks,” he said.

As part of their three-day visit to VUT, the MMARAU delegation will also interact with the executive deans of all four faculties at VUT and be taken on a tour of the Southern Gauteng Science & Technology Park. The MMARAU visit coincides with President Cyril Ramaphosa’s official state visit to Kenya in a bid to strengthen the two country’s bilateral collaborations.

As a token of appreciation, the MMARAU delegation presented each VUT representative in attendance with beautiful kikoi, a traditional cloth mostly worn by the Massai people of Kenya.

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**Vaal University of Technology**

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