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NEWS RELEASE

Appointment of Professor Maano Ramutsindela as the UP-UCT Future Africa Research Chair in Sustainability Transformations



From left to right: Dr Heide Hackmann, Professor Maano Ramutsindela and Professor Sunil Maharaj at the entrance of UP's Future Africa campus

The University of Pretoria (UP) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) proudly announce the appointment of Professor Maano Ramutsindela as the Future Africa Research Chair in Sustainability Transformations, effective from 1 April 2024. Professor Ramutsindela, currently serving as Professor of Human Geography in UCT's Department of Environmental and Geographical Science, will also hold the position of Extraordinary Professor in the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences at UP.

This appointment signifies a historic collaboration between UP and UCT, both top-ranking research-intensive South African universities committed to advancing academic excellence and supporting social change and equitable sustainable development. Recognising the potential of African sciences in addressing global sustainability challenges, both institutions understand the importance of fostering pan-African research collaboration and capacity development.

In the current global context, where there is an urgent need for research that can foster a better understanding of societal transformations and profound systems change, transdisciplinary research becomes paramount. Future Africa, a pan-African platform for collaborative and transformative research located at UP, provides the ideal vehicle to achieve these mutual interests and ambitions.

"Our collaboration with UCT to advance Future Africa's work in the challenge domain of sustainability transformations holds immense potential and benefits for both universities," says Professor Sunil Maharaj, Vice-Principal: Research, Innovation, and Postgraduate Education at UP. "This collaboration not only serves the needs of South African and African universities but also establishes a powerful model for realising the potential of Future Africa."

Future Africa research chairs are academics of high standing, who play a crucial role in advancing transformative research and having an impact at the science-policy-practice interface. The chairs work at a pan-African level and collaborate with global partners to set African agendas, build African capacities, create African networks of expertise and influence, and co-design and deliver high-impact transformative research in and for Africa.

"Professor Ramutsindela's extensive experience and commitment to socio-ecological relations and the political ecology of peace parks make him the ideal candidate to lead Future Africa's efforts in sustainability transformations," notes Dr Heide Hackmann, Director of Future Africa. "His appointment is an exciting milestone for the platform and represents a significant step forward in our collective pursuit of global sustainability."

As part of his role in leading and further developing activities in Future Africa's Sustainability Transformations domain, Professor Ramutsindela will assume the role of co-director for the ARUA-GUILD Cluster of Research Excellence on the Politics of Sustainability. This cluster, co-led by the University of Pretoria and the University of Oslo, engages in collaborative research to address critical issues related to sustainability.

UCT's acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Internationalisation, Professor Jeff Murugan, describes this appointment as a significant milestone that underscores both institutions' unwavering commitment to advancing knowledge and innovation. "As we strive towards realising our Vision 2030, this collaboration with UP reinforces our dedication to fostering interdisciplinary research and driving positive change that transcends borders and empowers future generations. We are confident that Professor Ramutsindela will serve as a beacon of excellence, driving impactful research and innovation that addresses the complex challenges facing Africa and the world," says Murugan.

"I am truly humbled and honoured to be appointed as the UP-UCT Future Africa Research Chair in Sustainability Transformations and excited about the opportunity to harness the transformative potential of African sciences in addressing sustainability challenges and working collaboratively towards a sustainable future for Africa and a just society, says Professor Ramutsindela."

Professor Ramutsindela holds a PhD in Geography from Royal Holloway College, University of London, and a master's degree in Geography from the University of the North (Turfloop). He is the immediate past Dean of the Faculty of Science at UCT and has received numerous accolades both nationally and internationally for his outstanding contributions to academia. He is a recipient of numerous awards and fellowships, including the National Research Foundation (NRF) President's Award, the NRF Award for the Transformation of the Science Cohort, and the Fellow of the Society of South African Geographers.

This joint appointment showcases the power of collaboration, innovation, and pan-African research to drive sustainable development and global transformation.

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ABOUT FUTURE AFRICA

Future Africa is a platform that acts as an incubator for transdisciplinary research projects; as a connector for scholars and teams working on similar problems; and as a physical and intellectual space for catalysing needed change in African and global science systems.

Future Africa focuses on the future of Africa in a global context.

In light of the pressing global challenges we face today, it's evident that the scientific community needs to adopt new and innovative ways of operating. This necessitates the convergence of multiple approaches, including the integration of knowledge from various scientific fields such as life sciences, physical sciences, social sciences, and engineering. Additionally, knowledge from outside the conventional scientific spectrum must also be incorporated to develop effective methods.

Our platform is designed to cultivate transdisciplinary research leadership in Africa. We aim to empower the next generation of science leaders and create a bridge for them to connect with research networks across the continent and the globe. By bringing together scientists from diverse fields, we facilitate collaboration, idea-sharing, and the development of research projects focused on tackling the challenges hindering Africa's transformation towards a prosperous, equitable, and sustainable future for both the continent and the world.