



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

29 July 2025

UCT students fly SA flag high at UN sustainable development forum



Four UCT students at the UN Sustainable Development Forum.

Photo: UNPHOTO/Kiara Worth

In a significant first for the University of Cape Town (UCT), four students represented South Africa at the 2025 United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), held at United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York. Their participation marked the first time in several years that a youth delegation formed part of South Africa's official representation at the forum.

The students – Nico Pampier, Seabelo Mnisi, Zou Rwexwana and Ben Gukelberger – took part through the United Nations Association of South Africa – UCT Chapter (UNASA-UCT). The forum was held from 14-24 July 2025 and focused on "*advancing sustainable, inclusive,*

science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)."

The HLPF brings together ministers, global policymakers, academics and civil society to track global progress on the SDGs. This year's forum included in-depth reviews of five key goals:

- SDG 3: Good health and well-being
- SDG 5: Gender equality
- SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth
- SDG 14: Life below water
- SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals

This milestone affirms UCT's standing as a university producing globally engaged graduates. It also aligns with the university's [Vision 2030](#), which foregrounds engaged citizenship and social responsiveness.

Reflecting on the experience, Mnisi, the SDG education director, said the exposure to multilateral dialogue and international policymaking was profound. "The space for multilateral exchange was eye-opening; witnessing firsthand how different countries are tackling development hurdles, deploying innovative strategies and mobilising resources to advance the 2030 Agenda."

"Global perspectives have sharpened my understanding of international governance and policymaking, while also helping me reflect on how such frameworks can be adapted to serve South Africa's development goals."

Gukelberger, the outreach director, spoke about the responsibility of representing youth from the Global South and using the forum as a platform to amplify their voices.

"Representing Youth and the Global South: Having worked with UNASA and the Valued Citizens Initiative for a few years now I knew that the most important part of my being at this forum was to boisterously echo the voices of the students and youth that we are currently, and will be working with in the future, at every event, interaction and conversation."

The executive chair, Pampier, highlighted the urgency for African countries to act boldly and view young people as drivers of change. "Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063 are a roadmap for African countries to take robust action and to see young people as catalysts for change," added Pampier. "This cannot just be a stocktaking experience. We need to learn from the positives and the challenges, and when we go back to our countries, we must take bold actions."

More than 250 young delegates from around the world attended the forum, highlighting the growing recognition of youth voices in global development.

The UCT delegation's participation was supported by the university's [Department of Student Affairs'](#) "Student Travel Fund", which helped fund three of the four students. The fund directly addresses the long-standing barrier of access for South African youth to international multilateral spaces.

The students return with plans to translate their experience into local impact. These include student-led outreach, policy engagement and awareness campaigns aimed at strengthening

youth participation in development conversations on campus and in their communities. They also underscored the role of universities in supporting national development through research, data and evidence-based solutions.

Their successful participation sets a new benchmark for youth involvement in South Africa's international engagements and reflects UCT's commitment to shaping graduates who are prepared to lead on global challenges.

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Velisile Bukula

Head: Media Liaison
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: 021 650 2149
Cell: 071 642 3495
Email: velisile.bukulai@uct.ac.za
Website: www.uct.ac.za