



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](http://www.uct.ac.za)

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## **UCT MBA students win global innovation competition**

**Graduate School of Business students secure first place in the prestigious Geneva Challenge 2024 with an innovative youth empowerment project**

A team of Master of Business Administration (MBA) students from the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB) has claimed victory at the Geneva Challenge 2024, a global competition spotlighting groundbreaking solutions to pressing societal challenges. Competing against 222 teams from 94 countries, the UCT team's project, *Mntase Cares – Mobile Clinics for Youth Empowerment*, emerged as the winning innovation, addressing the critical issue of teenage pregnancy in South Africa.

The Geneva Challenge, now in its 11th year, is hosted by the Geneva Graduate Institute with the support of Ambassador Jenö Staehelin and under the patronage of former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. This year's theme, *The Challenges of Youth Empowerment*, drew over 850 participants, underscoring the global urgency of empowering young people to shape sustainable futures.

### **Global recognition for UCT GSB**

The winning project was presented at a gala in Geneva, Switzerland, where the all-female UCT team – Dr Marisse Venter, Vaylen Kirtley, Noludwe Ntsangani, Dr Genevieve De Ponte, and Lynette Tasaranarwo – received international acclaim. Representing diverse professional backgrounds in healthcare, media and finance, the team epitomises the interdisciplinary excellence of the UCT GSB.

"This remarkable achievement highlights the UCT GSB's commitment to addressing critical global challenges with African-born solutions," said Dr Catherine Duggan, director of the UCT GSB. "Our students continue to demonstrate the power of innovation and collaboration on the world stage."

This accomplishment adds to the UCT GSB's recent recognition in the *Better World MBA* rankings, where its MBA programme ranked 7th globally for sustainability. Dr Caitlin Ferreira, programme director of the Modular MBA at the UCT GSB, said: "Empowering youth

is essential for building sustainable futures – not just for Africa, but for the world. This win showcases the transformative impact of our programmes.”

### **Innovative solutions to complex challenges**

The UCT team’s winning initiative, *Mntase Cares*, proposes deploying mobile clinics equipped with reproductive health services, educational resources and telehealth technology to underserved communities. By integrating healthcare and education, the project aims to combat teenage pregnancy, reduce health risks, minimise educational disruptions and promote gender equality, thereby contributing to South Africa’s socio-economic development.

“This recognition allows us to shine a global spotlight on the crisis of teenage pregnancy and the urgent need for solutions,” said Venter. She elaborated: “Our initiative seeks to empower vulnerable girls, offering them a safe space and the tools they need to build brighter futures. Guided by Ubuntu — *I am because we are* — we aim to break cycles of hardship with the support of leaders, communities and partners.”

The project’s name, *Mntase Cares*, derives from the isiXhosa word for sibling, symbolising a supportive network for young people in need. Inspired by a successful Rwandan programme that significantly increased contraceptive use among young women, the project adapts global best practices to South Africa’s unique challenges.

### **Addressing a global challenge**

South Africa faces one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates globally, with nearly one in four girls becoming pregnant during their teenage years. This often results in school dropouts, gender-based violence and cycles of poverty. The UCT team’s project emphasises prevention through early education, access to healthcare and emotional support, addressing root causes while offering tangible solutions.

“This competition reflects the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in tackling complex challenges,” said Dr Sebastian Kurten, a collaborator on the project. “By prioritising youth empowerment, we can drive meaningful, sustainable change for future generations.”

The Geneva Challenge continues to spotlight innovative ideas that inspire action, and UCT’s achievement underscores the potential of African-led solutions to impact global change.

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**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.bukula@uct.ac.za](mailto:velisile.bukula@uct.ac.za)  
Website: [www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)