



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)

**12 February 2025**

## **UCT's Chibale honoured by two internationally acclaimed universities**

*The Queen's College, University of Cambridge and Leiden University give Chibale the nod*

Professor Kelly Chibale, the founder and director of the University of Cape Town's (UCT) [Holistic Drug Discovery and Development \(H3D\) Centre](#), has been honoured by two internationally renowned universities for his sterling work in drug discovery.

Shortly after being conferred an honorary fellowship by The Queen's College, University of Cambridge, in recognition of his outstanding leadership, research and innovation in the field of drug discovery, the Leiden University in the Netherlands also conferred him an honorary doctorate in recognition of his pioneering work on the development of novel medicines to fight African endemic diseases through both the H3D Centre and H3D Foundation.

Chibale completed his PhD in synthetic organic chemistry at The Queen's College in 1992. This fellowship stands out among his myriad accomplishments because it is the highest honour that a Cambridge college can give to an individual.

"The fellowship was given to me for my accomplishments to this point. It's a rare honour, and it was very special to receive it from The Queen's College in particular, because this is my alma mater that's recognising all my personal and professional achievements," he said.

The Leiden University ceremony takes place on the occasion of the university's 450th anniversary. It will be attended by King Willem-Alexander and Queen Máxima of the Royal House of the Netherlands. The last African scholar to receive a doctorate in this context was former president Nelson Mandela in 1999.

Chibale's plentiful and impressive achievements may be attributed to his passion for his field of study.

"At secondary school in Zambia, we would do these simple experiments, like titrations, where we would mix chemicals and, suddenly, the colour of the mixture would change. It was like magic and it just fascinated me," he recalled.

"When I got to the University of Zambia (UNZA), I fell in love with organic chemistry and the logic behind it. How you can take a molecule and transform its chemical structure and, with those modifications, create a completely new molecule with properties that have a range of applications and benefits."

While at the Scripps Research Institute, Chibale had the privilege of working with and coming across internationally renowned scientists, including some Nobel Prize laureates.

"Many of the problems that exist in Africa can be linked to unemployment. Even when we educate scientists, they go to more developed nations because there are no jobs for them in Africa. So, I wanted to help to create an absorptive capacity, where we can develop, nurture and retain talent."

Another important outcome of establishing scientific entrepreneurship in Africa was combatting Afro-pessimism, whether on the continent itself or further afield.

"Afro-pessimism is not just the negative perceptions of those outside of Africa, it's also the lack of belief of Africans that we can be scientifically innovative. It's not entirely difficult to understand given the image of Africa in the media, but I wanted to find a way to change that narrative and those perceptions," he said.

Since the founding of the H3D Centre in 2010, the centre's work has attracted millions of dollars in funding, led to the creation of 75 jobs and established vital infrastructure that has put Africa on the map as a significant contributor to drug discovery. It is this legacy that Chibale is most proud of and hopes that future generations of African scientists can build on to create a better world for all.

"I hope that people can look at my path and see that it doesn't matter who you are or where you come from, but that you seize every opportunity that comes your way; that if you make the most of what you're given, you make it count and you are consistent, that you can be successful," he said.

"God has given us all unique talents and gifts, so you must recognise that and put it to good use. Nobody has the monopoly on success and all things are possible if you build the right partnerships and you stand on the shoulders of giants."

Chibale goes further to express his appreciation for UCT, where he has done most of the groundbreaking work with his team.

"We must be careful to protect the brand of UCT that has given us so much. It is the best academic institution on the African continent. We must not only be grateful for it, we must also take on the responsibility of preserving what those who have come before us have achieved."



Professor Kelly Chibale

Photo: Lerato Maduna

***Ends***

***Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department***

**Thami Nkwanyane**

**Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer**  
Communication and Marketing Department  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch  
Tel: (021) 650 5672  
Cell: (072) 563 9500  
Email: [thami.nkwanyane@uct.ac.za](mailto:thami.nkwanyane@uct.ac.za)  
Website: [www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)