

MAWAZO IDEAS DIGEST
VOLUME 2

DECEMBER 2024

MAWAZO IDEAS DIGEST



MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

SIT DOWN & DIG IN

"DELVE DEEPER INTO THE REALITIES OF AFRICAN WOMEN IN RESEARCH."



Welcome back to another edition of the Mawazo Ideas Digest- our storytelling vehicle that takes us into the lives and ideas of the women researchers in our network as well as the team at the Mawazo Institute. The second volume of the Ideas Digest dives deeper into the realities of African women in research, spotlights members of the Mawazo team that makes our work possible, and shares our thoughts on the leadership Africa—and the world—deserves.

We kick off Volume 2 ruminating on the idea of leading with care and radical optimism. From the Leadership Desk, we present our feature article, exploring empathy-driven leadership as the key ingredient in building sustainable strategies and solutions for individuals and communities. We follow this up with a policy brief on promoting Somali women's progress in higher education from one of our Alumni, **Sahra Ahmed Koshin**.

Additionally, our 2023 Mawazo Fellows share stories from the field and their journeys as African women scholars. **Adedoyin Tinuade Adebayo** discusses how her environmental research is uplifting communities in rural southwest Nigeria. **Johra Said Ali** reflects on her PhD journey across Kenya and South Africa, highlighting resilience and growth as she balances multiple roles. Finally, **Firehiwot Girma Dires** talks about her own currents of ingenuity and determination as she engineers against all odds in Ethiopia.

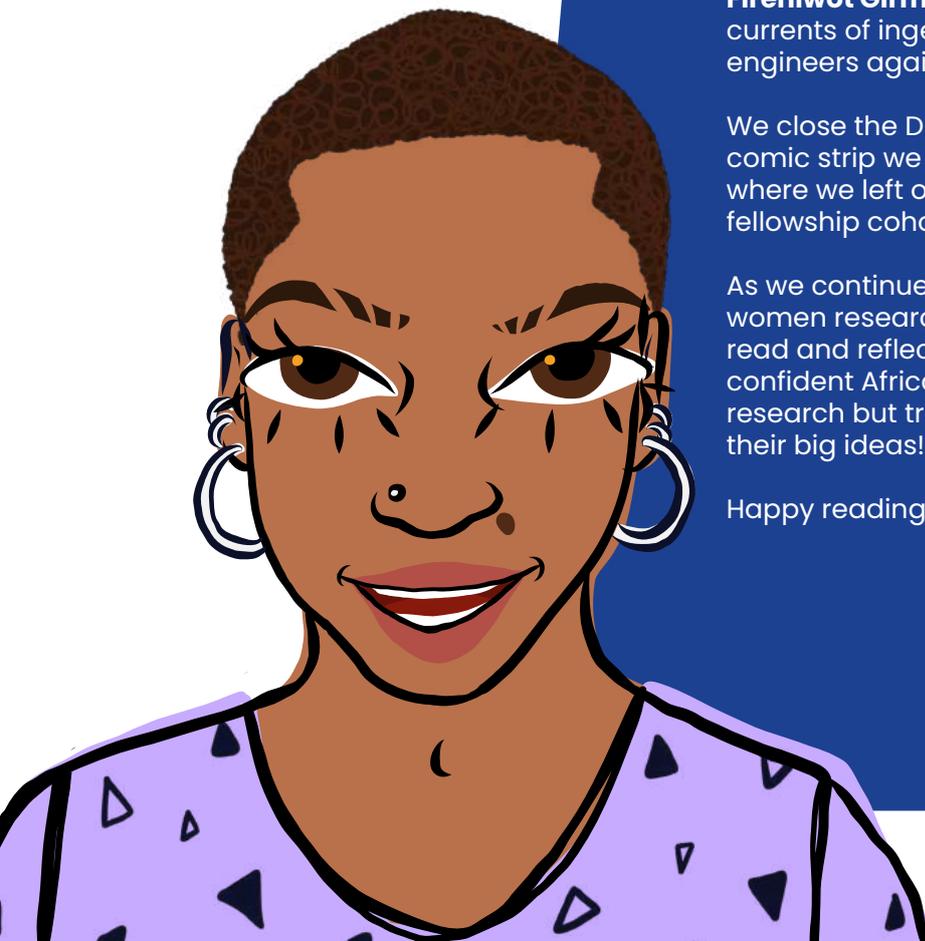
We close the Digest with a continuation of the comic strip we began in Volume 1. We pick up where we left off, exploring the story of the first fellowship cohort.

As we continue to tell the stories of Africa's women researchers in our Digest, we invite you to read and reflect on a future where skilled and confident African women are not only leading in research but transforming the continent through their big ideas!

Happy reading!

DR. FIONA MOEJES

Chief Executive Officer



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LEADERSHIP DESK



LEADING WITH CARE AND RADICAL OPTIMISM: NAVIGATING SHIFTING SANDS IN A WORLD OF CRISIS AND CHANGE

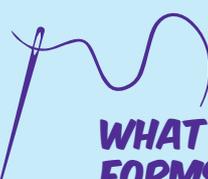
In May 2024, Mawazo took part in the annual On Think Tanks Conference held in Barcelona, Spain, where the focus was the role of think tanks in their communities. Consensus emerged during the conference that current models of leadership are steeped in ethno-fascist and white supremacy capitalist ideals and are no longer tenable, especially in a world faced with what a 2023 Ipsos study referred to as a “polycrisis”: severe challenges, ranging from failing economies, rising costs of living, climate crisis (and the food crisis in its wake), health crisis, and a general decline in our ability to extend empathy.

Even before October 2023, we have watched as humanitarian horrors unfolded in Gaza, the Sudan, the Congo, and in Haiti. We have seen political crises in West Africa characterised by a series of coups, and as recently as June and July, protests in Kenya and Bangladesh, decrying poor leadership. These crises desperately needed to be met by strong, reliable leadership at international and local levels. Sadly, current models of leadership have failed to rise to the occasion.

Experiences from these ongoing crises are sparking critical conversations around leadership. What are some of the alternative forms of leadership that we must aspire to, or reflect upon, to help us begin to move the needle towards transformative change? And in what practical ways can we practise these alternative models of leadership without turning them into toxic neo-patterns that only continue to perpetuate oppression, especially for those that remain on the sidelines of power, including poor, unclassed, displaced, non-binary, impaired, and Black women—in both their singularities and multiplicities?

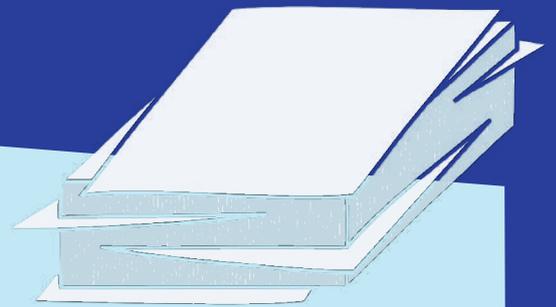
For us at the Mawazo Institute, where we are both women-led and women-centred, working to support African women researchers in higher education across these intersectionalities, the answer is a model for leadership hinged on empathy and care.

But what exactly is empathy, a term that has been used quite liberally in recent times? What is care? And just how do we practise them in present-day realities?



**WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ALTERNATIVE
FORMS OF LEADERSHIP THAT WE MUST
ASPIRE TO, OR REFLECT UPON, TO
HELP US BEGIN TO MOVE THE NEEDLE
TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE?**





(RE)DEFINING EMPATHY AT THE WORKPLACE

Empathy, according to the University of Berkeley's Greater Good Magazine, is defined as "the ability to sense other people's emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling." On a deeper level, the vast literature around empathetic leadership classifies empathy into three distinct typologies that various leaders can embody.

AFFECTIVE EMPATHY refers to the sensations and feelings we get in response to others' emotions, fears, or anxieties. This is also referred to as heart empathy, where there is a shared experience of emotion, leading to emotional connections. These are integral in the workplace, especially since many of us spend more of our waking hours at places of work, and where colleagues become friends.

Here in Kenya, we have stories of teachers, from the days of our mothers, working together, raising their children together, and forming *chamas* (savings groups) where they saved up funds that eventually led them to buy tracts of land where they built homes and lived as lifelong neighbours. These long-term relationships came from a workplace in which they initially formed deep emotional connections borne of affective empathy. Interestingly, top students in each annual exam across the country tended to come from schools where teachers had such deep friendships, showing the great value to be found in workplaces where empathy is a core tenet of leadership practice. Studies continue to show a tangible link between workers being friends, employee engagement, and worker retention.

COGNITIVE EMPATHY is our ability to identify and understand other people's emotions and responses to situations. It is also referred to as head empathy, where you perfectly understand someone's feelings without necessarily feeling them yourself. Cognitive empathy is very important as it offers a clear language that reaches the other person, allowing a listener to speak in the language of the other. This type of empathy can also be turned inward: the best leaders are self-aware, continuously self-reflexive, and have the language to explain their feelings, motivations, and thoughts.

Many revolutionary groups—and here, we refer to 'revolution' as moments such as the ones we are seeing across the continent, of people expressing dissatisfaction with their present forms of government and forming critical masses of protest with a view to creating better worlds and realities—form and exist around cognitive empathy. Members of such groups form deep intellectual bonds that can last for decades, even when their personal viewpoints may not always be in tandem and their belief systems may be diametrically opposed. The same can be said of public intellectuals who have shaped our thinking around critical issues in society.

COMPASSIONATE EMPATHY is a mix between the above two domains of empathy. It is understanding what someone is going through at a particular time, but also taking steps to support them. These steps are not just on paper, rather, they are actions that are clear and concrete. They are also not irresponsible, hasty, or too slow, as that would beat the purpose. Many people, especially leaders at the workplace, find themselves struggling with a good, practical, and consistent balance of compassionate empathy, especially in a world where established ways of existence are backed up by patriarchal norms.



EMBODYING CARE FOR BROADER IMPACT

CARE IS GENERALLY DEFINED AS THE ACT OF SHOWING CONCERN, KINDNESS, AND ATTENTION TOWARD THE WELL-BEING OF OTHERS, ONESELF, OR THE ENVIRONMENT. AT MAWAZO, CARE IS INTEGRAL TO THE WORK WE DO.

Care for each other. Care for the women we serve. Care for the organisation that we are a part of. For us to deliver on our vision, a world in which the voices and big ideas of African women researchers shape the future of the continent and the world, we need to deeply care for

everything we do. **HERE'S WHY: WE ARE AN AFRICAN WOMEN-LED AND WOMEN-CENTRED ORGANISATION REPRESENTING AFRICAN WOMEN ACROSS THE CONTINENT,** and on a global

platform. There is fragility in this. African women, from our mama mbogas to our boss ladies, are under immense pressure to hold together and support our families, to keep entire communities united, and to always be strong. We do this within systems that are not built for us.

As an organisation, for example, we are led by a woman of colour (and who, according to some multilaterals, is also technically a "youth") which makes crucial tasks such as fund-raising all that more difficult. To attend to the precarity African women face daily, we must move with care as practice. And care requires patience and precision. It requires intentionality. This is the type of leadership Africa, and the world, deserves.





THE LEADER AS MAESTRO: THE SYMPHONY OF WORK

Many leaders have grappled with post-COVID return-to-the-office decisions, especially for organisations that thrive on community and creativity to effectively deliver on their mandates, even while recognising the benefits of flexi-work for employees. These benefits have included less time spent on stressful work commutes, more time with children and family, and working with one's circadian rhythm. Remote working has also made it possible for those excluded from work to find work, especially those with disabilities who may struggle to be ambulatory and present themselves physically at the workplace.

However, remote working has itself shifted the ways in which teams navigate empathy and care. An article penned in early 2024 opines that "...remote work can lessen the trust employees have in a distant management [team], with even mundane decisions being interpreted in a much worse light for it." It echoes similar sentiments about how remote working creates a definite distance between teams, akin to a 'long distance relationship,' where the distance tends to amplify simple and mundane things and turn them into conflict, or promote a lack of trust and understanding. Pete Srodosky, author of the book 'Lead with Empathy,' states in a LinkedIn piece, "We've all been there, scratching our heads over a poorly worded email or misinterpreting a message on Slack or in a text. Such misunderstandings can lead to conflicts and hinder collaboration."

Further, remote working blurs the boundaries between the official and the private, with some mothers, for example, decrying late-evening meetings or work sessions when they should essentially be taking care of their families. Since the COVID pandemic, children with parents who work remotely have had to contend with present-yet-absent parents who are physically present in the home, but for the most part hunched over their computers, working or attending meetings.

While return-to-work-fully has been seen by some as the panacea to the challenges of remote working, the realities of workplace bullying by both managers and colleagues is still a big issue, especially in Africa. Kenya is currently grappling with the tragic case of a young intern doctor having taken her life from excruciating work conditions, including thirty-six hour long back-to-back shifts, and a supervisor that bullied her incessantly through constant haranguing and verbal assaults. Unfortunately, these old ways of leading through fear still linger in many of our workplaces, with deadly results.

Leading with empathy is therefore a necessity, especially in the new post-pandemic era of more flexible working conditions, more awareness amongst workers in general on their rights, privileges and work contexts, and a growing expectation for inclusivity in workplaces. In this context, inclusivity should be the standard, and many workers now exist outside traditional norms of race, gender, identity, and ability.





HOW THEN, DO LEADERS NAVIGATE THESE WORK SPACES WITH EMPATHY AND CARE, WHEN TEAMS ARE REMOTE, AND ARE WORKING WITH LESSENERD TRUST AND HEIGHTENED MISUNDERSTANDING?

How can leaders lead with empathy in equally shifting sands and trends in the workplace, where inclusivity also means understanding that people are different, with different capacities and capabilities?

Admittedly, this takes a lot of trial and error. Shifting paradigms from what we know, especially when the old ways—such as autocratic leadership—have long ceased to work, is challenging, both in theory and practice. And it takes leaders with empathy to course-correct and make adjustments, knowing that the greatest leaders are those who learn as they lead, having the humility to admit they do not, and cannot, know everything all at once.

It also takes understanding of different personalities at the workplace, and getting these differences to work together as diverse instruments in an orchestra. A piece of music can be made up of both drums and piccolos; some personalities are as large as elephants in the workplace, while some are like piccolos, and others in between. None can be faulted for who they are, and indeed, both will bring unique gifts to the work table. Rather, it is about the leader employing different forms of empathy and care as needed, and within context.

TRIAL, ERROR, AND GROWTH

Empathy, care, and leadership are continuous-present tenses. There is no particular 'destination' of empathy or care, as it is a continuous process of trying different ways of centering understanding and curiosity at the workplace even while many workers, especially those that have been at the workplace longer, also face a paradigm shift from the old ways. The more experienced worker may cling to old ways of being, as the newer workers (or those tagged as 'GenZ') enter the workplace armed with modern lingo and practices yet to be accepted, or may face resistance from work places that still have to deliver their pound of flesh to the capitalist system in which we exist.

Bills, rents, taxes have to be paid, and all stakeholders or shareholders must get their return on investment. **THE NEEDS OF THE FORMER MAY OFTEN CLASH WITH THE NEEDS OF THE LATTER, AND LEADERS WILL NEED TO RISE TO THE CHALLENGE(S) OF BALANCING BETWEEN THE POUND OF FLESH, AND THE WELL-BEING OF THEIR TEAMS.** This means that leading with empathy requires a certain dexterity, flexibility, reflexivity, and curiosity to try (even with the risk of failing) new things, or old things with a new context or perspective. This is the only way to grow, retain good workers, and maintain community and well-being amongst all stakeholders at the place of work. This, perhaps, is the challenge of leadership today.

FROM MAWAZO TO THE WORLD

For the sake of humanity and nature, we cannot afford to continue leading as we have been, especially with the polycrisis facing our world. By exploring more empathetic and caring ways to lead whilst remaining radically optimistic that positive change for all is possible, we can shift the needle in the right direction.

Empathetic and caring leadership also aligns closely with feminist leadership principles, which emphasise shared power, equity, collaboration, accountability and inclusivity, challenging traditional power dynamics and promoting the inclusion of those that remain on the sidelines of power. **LEADERS THAT LEAN ON EMPATHY, CARE, AND FEMINIST LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES ALSO EMBODY RADICAL OPTIMISM.** They are often visionary leaders that believe in a more equitable and just world, setting ambitious goals that inspire and mobilise others to work toward meaningful change. These leaders can inspire collective action, build resilient institutions, apply homegrown, context-specific solutions, and develop long-term, sustainable strategies to ensure equitable systems change for all.

In the context of Africa, unlike the post-independence era where leadership was reactive and focused on nation-building and self-determination, globalisation has connected us to complex global systems and left us more vulnerable to its 'dark side'—social and economic inequalities, exploitation of labour, loss of cultural and biological diversity, environmental degradation, and more.

We need leadership that is anchored in empathy and care, enabling a thoughtful pause-and-reflect approach inspired by the Swahili proverb, *haraka haraka haina baraka*.^{*} This model of leadership can build long-term, sustainable strategies for individuals and communities across Africa while remaining alive to the continent's rich natural resources.

By balancing pragmatism with radical optimism, empathetic and caring leaders advocate for the inclusion of all voices critical in influencing decision-makers and mobilising communities to forge new pathways for development. Building on the leadership being curated and modelled at Mawazo, we emphatically stand by our belief that empathetic and caring leadership can and will create a legacy of agency, inclusivity, and shared success for all, strengthening resilience and building a brighter future for generations to come.

HASTE HAS NO BLESSING.

BEHIND THE SCENES

@MAWAZO WITH

LIZ NGALA

Director of Finance



CAN YOU BRIEFLY INTRODUCE YOURSELF AND YOUR ROLE AT THE MAWAZO INSTITUTE?

My name is Elizabeth Ngala, Director of Finance at the Mawazo Institute. My responsibilities include overseeing Financial Management from auditing to grants management, as well as implementing financial processes, procedures, controls, and policies.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING AT MAWAZO INSTITUTE, AND WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO JOIN THE ORGANISATION? I

I first joined Mawazo as a consultant in 2017 and transitioned into a full-time role in 2022. The driving force behind my decision to join and continue my tenure with Mawazo has been the organisation's unwavering commitment to innovation.

HOW DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN YOUR CAREER OR FIELD, AND WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT IT?

The shift from the traditional Accountant to Finance and Grants Management was driven by the need to establish a connection between Financial Management practices and their impact. I enjoy the positive outcomes of the exceptional programmes we have at Mawazo. When I reflect on these achievements, particularly in terms of the financial systems, processes, and procedures that support them, I am thrilled to get to work every morning.

WHAT'S YOUR MORNING ROUTINE LIKE BEFORE STARTING YOUR DAY AT WORK?

I wake up at 4.45 AM and engage in a workout session at the gym from 5-6 am, which energises me to start my day on a high! Some of the earliest emails at Mawazo are usually from me as I report to my desk exceptionally early.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL DAY IN YOUR ROLE AT MAWAZO INSTITUTE LOOK LIKE?

My typical day at Mawazo starts with responding to emails that contain requests from the team regarding financial matters that require attention. While we usually hold our weekly finance meetings, we have also implemented a practice of briefly catching up every morning to align on the day's tasks. The Finance Department operates with a high level of structure, focusing heavily on timelines and deadlines. We follow a workflow system that enables us to prioritise the daily tasks effectively. In my supervisory role, I am responsible for approvals and participating in key decisions related to finance and grants.

WHAT IS THE ONE THING THAT STANDS OUT FOR YOU AS A MAWAZO INSTITUTE TEAM MEMBER?

The synergy between the innovative spirit and the dynamic young team at Mawazo creates an ideal environment for growth, where I am constantly expanding my knowledge and learning something new every day.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE YOUR WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND FIND TIME FOR PERSONAL INTERESTS, ESPECIALLY DURING BUSY PERIODS IN YOUR CAREER?

As a mother and wife, I have learned the importance of being fully present in the moment, whether at home or at work. By being intentional about my time and energy, I can focus on each aspect of my life without feeling guilty about neglecting the other. I prioritise my tasks at work so that when I switch to family, I can give them my undivided attention. I also intentionally set aside time to connect with friends.

CAN YOU SHARE A FUN OR INTERESTING FACT ABOUT YOURSELF OR A HOBBY YOU'RE PARTICULARLY PASSIONATE ABOUT?

I have a deep passion for acting which was ignited when I featured in a musical "The Prince of Hera". I desire to get into theatre, which has been a lifelong dream since childhood and I am excited to make it materialise. Taking the first step toward this dream was all I needed to do.

IS THERE A PARTICULAR PROJECT OR ACHIEVEMENT THAT YOU'RE ESPECIALLY PROUD OF?

The setting up of Mawazo's processes and procedures according to the Finance Guidelines represents a significant achievement. Over the years, we have made adjustments to these guidelines, leading to more efficient ways of conducting our operations.

WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE GOALS AT MAWAZO?

I aim to establish a seamless integration of Financial and Grants Management right from the initial proposal stage, to the final reporting on the impact of the programmes. I seek to develop a sustainable way of managing Finances for non-profit organisations.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

Let loose, be myself, live for today, and be the best version of myself with every breath I take.

ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE?

When I hear the name Mawazo, I experience a sense of CONTENTMENT!!

MAWAZO CONNECTS CORNER

POLICY PATHWAYS: PROMOTING SOMALI WOMEN'S PROGRESS IN ACADEMIA

Over the past 30 years, Somalia's education sector has suffered due to the political instability following the fall of the central government in 1991. It has especially adversely affected women's participation in higher education, research, and academia. War and conflict not only destroyed the physical infrastructure but led to death and displacement of communities, migration, and other socio-cultural and socioeconomic outcomes that hurt the sector.

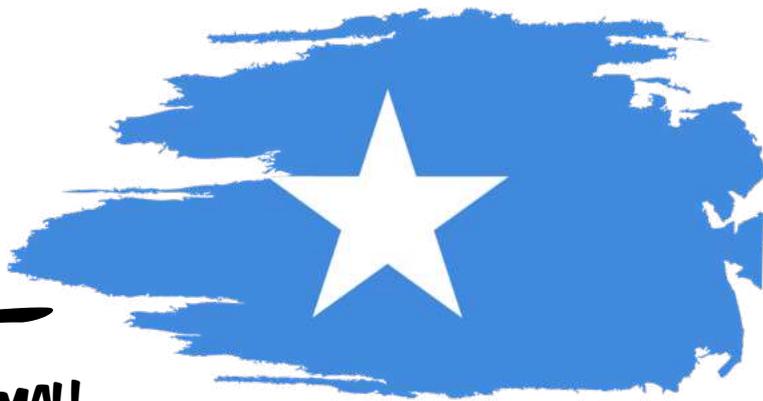
Despite these challenges, Somalia's education system has developed to include close to 100 universities with women remaining disproportionately underrepresented at a paltry 30% enrolment compared to the 70% male enrolment.

It is against this backdrop that Sahra Koshin, Mawazo's inaugural Policy Fellow in 2021, developed a [policy brief](#), found on our website, outlining the barriers that prevent Somali women from effectively participating in the country's higher education system, and provide viable policy recommendations and implications. She unpacks patriarchal dominance, socio-political barriers such as the two-decade civil war, as well as ecological factors like climate and government policy and how they intersect to keep women out of research and higher education. In her brief, Koshin focuses on three pillars of interest in addressing the issue of underrepresentation: society, academia, and government.

Koshin further argues that this structural marginalisation means that very few women make it into the academy and other research institutions. Even fewer rise through the ranks of university leadership and far fewer are accorded the privilege to influence policy in general. Drawing on the work of scholars such as Abdishakur Tarah, she argues for a more deliberate and drastic reconfiguration of Somali society, shifting from patriarchal dominance and conflict to placing women at the centre of academia, rather than the margins.

The recommendations found within the policy brief are partly drawn from the findings of Koshin's knowledge exchange conference on *Somali Women in Higher Education, Research and Academia 2023* funded by the Mawazo Connects Fund.

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**SAHRA
KOSHIN**



IN ACADEMIA AND RESEARCH, DESPITE NUMEROUS CHALLENGES, WOMEN ARE CONTINUOUSLY BREAKING BARRIERS AND PAVING THE WAY FORWARD. BELOW, WE PRESENT COMPELLING STORIES OF THREE EXCEPTIONAL MAWAZO FELLOWS WHO EPITOMISE THE FORTITUDE, INNOVATIVENESS AND PERSEVERANCE EXHIBITED BY WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND ACADEMIA. THESE NARRATIVES NOT ONLY SHOWCASE THEIR GROUNDBREAKING CONTRIBUTIONS BUT ALSO SHED LIGHT ON THE PERSONAL AND SYSTEMIC HURDLES THEY HAVE OVERCOME TO PURSUE KNOWLEDGE AND CREATE IMPACT.

FELLOWS' VOICES

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

GRASSROOTS TO GREEN:

HOW ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH IS UPLIFTING COMMUNITIES



"AS RESEARCHERS, WE BEAR THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CONSIDERING IMMEDIATE SOLUTIONS OR RELIEF THAT CAN BENEFIT THESE COMMUNITIES EVEN BEFORE OUR RESEARCH IS COMPLETE."

**ADEDOYIN
TINUADE
ADEBOYE**

My name is Adedoyin Tinuade Adeboye, I am pursuing a PhD in the Cell Biology and Genetics unit within the Department of Zoology at the University of Ibadan. In my academic journey, one particular course that intrigued me during my undergraduate studies in Zoology was Parasitology; the intricate study of parasites' life cycles captivated my interest. However, these parasites also have a devastating impact on individuals, particularly those living in marginalised communities. Parasitic infections, often neglected in these underserved areas, impose a substantial burden due to factors such as poverty, social prejudice, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure. Recognising this harsh reality, I embarked on my postgraduate studies determined to conduct research that would make tangible improvements where they are most urgently needed.

My PhD research is focused on understanding the progression of Urogenital Schistosomiasis (UGS) to bladder cancer, utilising an integrated multi-omics approach. Multi-omics involves applying different "omics" i.e., genomics, epigenomics, transcriptomics, and proteomics to the study of human biology and disease. Recognising the lack of access to advanced diagnostic tools in marginalised rural areas where UGS infections are concentrated,



S. haematobium eggs

my research aims to address this gap by identifying non-invasive biomarkers for early healthcare interventions. The ultimate goal of this research is to facilitate the development of affordable therapeutics and rapid diagnostic tools for monitoring UGS progression and detecting early tumour formation.

With the generous support of the Mawazo Fellows Fund, I worked with two rural communities in southwest Nigeria, areas with high prevalence rates of UGS infection, to conduct sampling and gather data. These field trips underscored the urgent need for improved healthcare access and continuous sensitisation on disease prevention in underserved populations. Communities like these not only face challenges due to inadequate infrastructure but also lack essential knowledge on disease prevention and control, leading to the perpetuation of transmission cycles.

Although travelling for hours on rough roads through dense vegetation and overcoming logistical challenges, such as transporting specialised equipment over difficult terrain, can be demanding, I use a search-and-treat approach in my fieldwork to ensure my research provides maximum benefit to the sampling communities. This includes conducting point-of-care diagnosis for Urogenital Schistosomiasis. However, transporting a microscope, a centrifuge and an ultrasound over several kilometres is a daunting task. During one trip, an unfortunate incident happened when the ultrasound machine I had hired was damaged in transit. Upon arrival at the study site, we realised that there was no mobile network to contact the vendor for a replacement. The next available commercial vehicle from town to the village was not due for arrival until two days later. Consequently, we

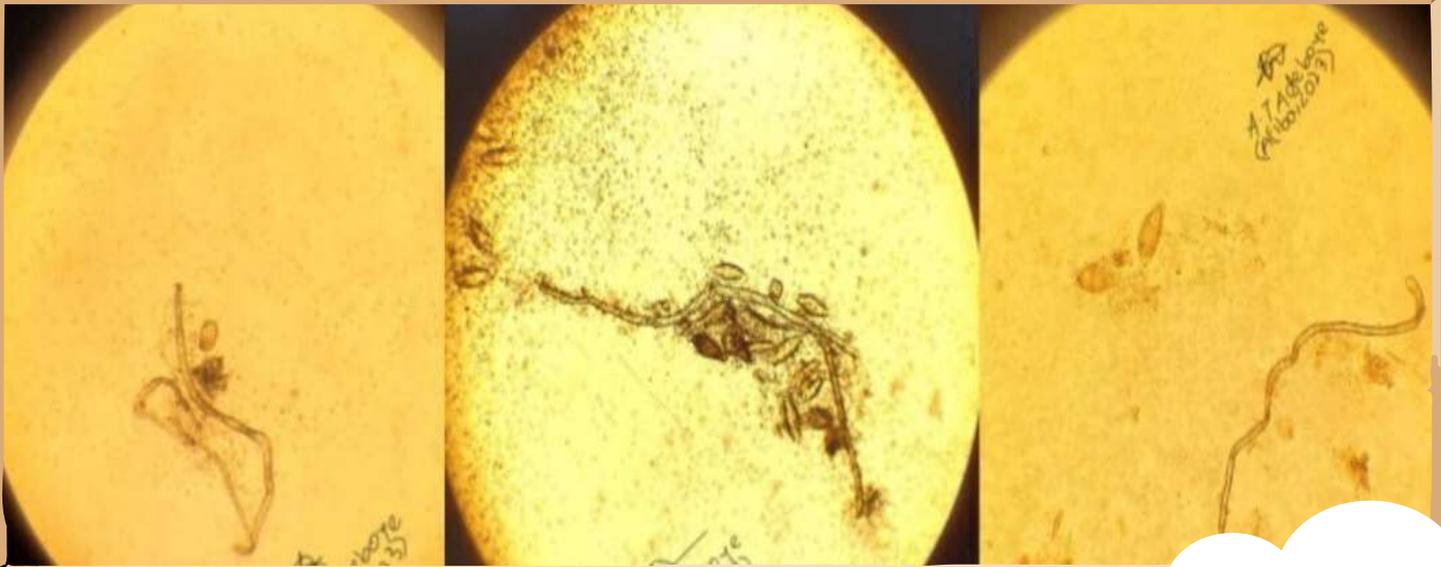


Haematuria in the screened urine samples

continued sampling without the ultrasound, conducting microscopy and urinalysis for UGS detection instead. Although this impediment limited the scope of the trip, it ultimately proved beneficial for the community. The high prevalence of UGS in this study site became apparent and the villagers needed multiple treatment regimens. By scheduling a second trip specifically for ultrasound examinations, we were able to follow up with individuals who had been previously diagnosed with infections.

In the course of my field trips, I have discovered that navigating gender-based traditions and cultural barriers in rural communities requires immense courage. I have encountered resistance from natives for being a woman and have been met with scepticism. Despite these challenges, I remain resilient, emphasising to the communities I encounter that my research aims to provide solutions; I am there to help rather than exploit them for their biological samples. Building trust by establishing rapport and actively involving community leaders from the onset has been instrumental in engaging these communities. I make a conscious

Microscopy images showing both S. haematobium eggs and worms in the screened urine samples



NAVIGATING GENDER-BASED TRADITIONS AND CULTURAL BARRIERS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES REQUIRES IMMENSE COURAGE

effort to build trust by immersing myself in their way of life, adopting local customs, speaking their native language, and genuinely addressing what concerns or needs they may have. Through these efforts, I not only created awareness about UGS prevention and control, but also emphasised the importance of maintaining healthy lifestyle habits. Despite facing challenges with individuals who were initially hesitant to participate in my research, I made sure that all participants had equal access to the benefits available, without discrimination.

One key lesson I've learned is that successfully conducting sampling and point-of-care diagnoses in a rural setting requires a lot of improvisation and prompt problem-solving skills due to

limited resources. For instance, we had to factor in renting a generator to power our equipment since there was no electricity supply in these communities. Additionally, we were only able to find a suitable room to conduct ultrasounds in one location. In most cases, we had to improvise by using mats, sacks, and wrappers to section off private areas for conducting ultrasounds. Fortunately, having team members who are forward-thinking, passionate, and committed proved invaluable during these trips. As a team, we were able to address challenges promptly and devise effective solutions.

Maintaining positive relationships with the community members also proved effective in resolving challenges. During one of our

trips, for example, we spent four nights in one particular community where the village head graciously arranged our accommodation upon arrival. The male members of the team slept on mats in a shed without doors or windows, under the watchful eye of village members. Meanwhile, the female members enjoyed more comfortable accommodation sleeping in the village head wife's hut. Although the conditions were suboptimal, compared to our own homes, they provided us with shelter for the duration of our stay.

Lastly, conducting research at the grassroots requires taking additional precautionary measures to safeguard one's health while attending to the sick. Basic sanitary facilities such as toilets and bathrooms are often

unavailable. This means that my team and I must mentally and physically prepare ourselves for what we may encounter during our fieldwork. Despite our best efforts to mitigate risks, I contracted the flu on my last field trip which escalated into vestibular neuronitis and landed me in the emergency room of a hospital one week later. Yet, in spite of this, the satisfaction derived from our fieldwork brought me immense joy and a profound sense of fulfilment after each successful trip. I am grateful every day to Mawazo for providing the necessary resources that have enabled us to achieve remarkable feats.

Reflecting on my experiences, I strongly advocate for Africans to conduct research in areas that have a significant impact. It is crucial to prioritise grassroots initiatives and amplify their voices through our research.

As researchers, we bear the responsibility of considering immediate solutions or relief that can benefit these communities even before our research is complete.

While many of the innovative ideas and solutions we propose may be future facing and require years to materialise, it is essential to also focus on current needs. For instance, despite decades of research, finding the cure for HIV/AIDS and developing a malaria vaccine remain ongoing challenges. Therefore, alongside seeking long-term solutions, we must prioritise raising awareness, providing point-of-care diagnosis, and ensuring access to treatment for individuals currently affected by these diseases, especially those in marginalised communities. This approach is vital for enhancing the quality of life for those impacted.

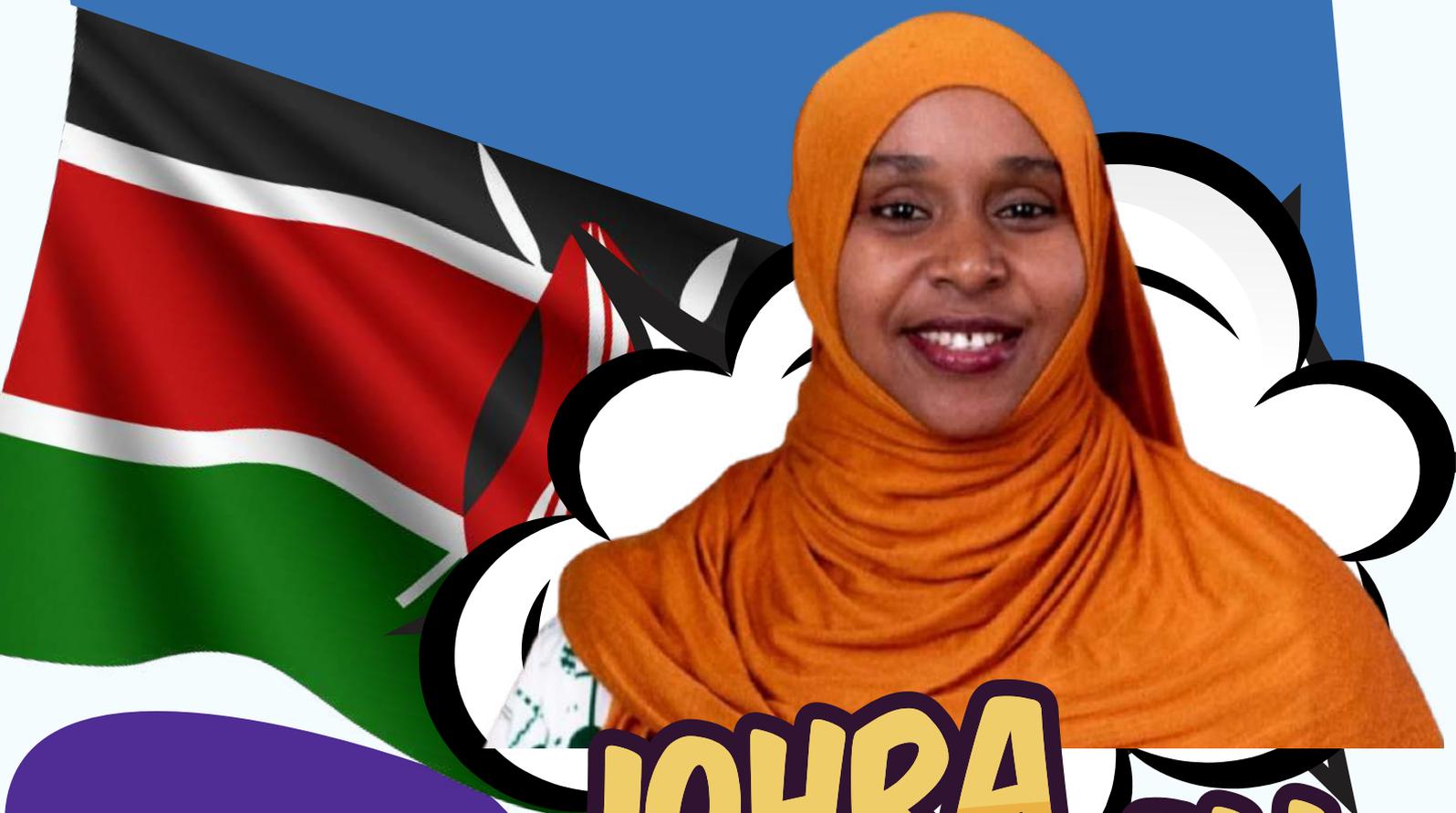
While my primary research objective is to identify biomarkers for the development of affordable diagnostic tools for the progression of UGS and early tumorigenesis, a process that may span several years; the immediate needs of the communities I have visited are access to potable water supply and protective items like rubber boots for individuals involved in fishing and irrigation farming. These measures reduce their exposure to the rivers, which serve as sources for UGS transmission. As my research advances, I plan to engage with policymakers, critical stakeholders, and other relevant parties to meet the urgent needs of these underserved communities.

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RESILIENCE AND GROWTH:

REFLECTIONS ON MY PHD JOURNEY



**JOHRA
ALI**

" I HAVE COME TO SEE THE CHALLENGES INHERENT IN THE PHD JOURNEY AS OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH, LEARNING, AND SELF-DISCOVERY."

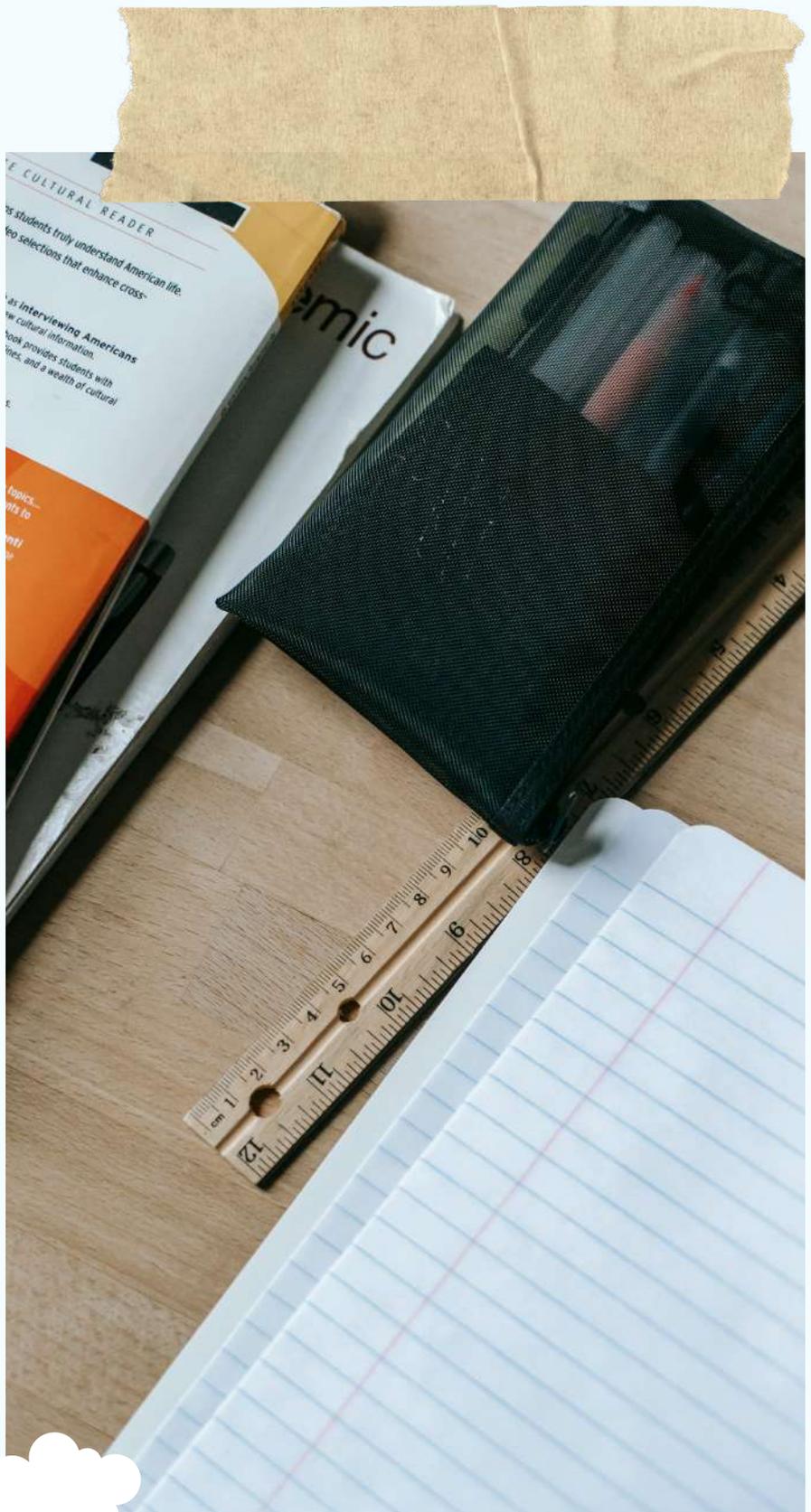
Conflict is an inevitable aspect of life, and it manifests in various forms throughout the journey of pursuing a PhD. From internal struggles like imposter syndrome, to external challenges such as disagreements with supervisors or peers, conflict can both hinder and propel our academic pursuits. In my own PhD experience, I've encountered various forms of conflict that tested my resilience, shaped my personal growth, and ultimately enriched my academic journey.

Internal conflict, particularly the battle with imposter syndrome has been a significant challenge. As a doctoral student, it is common to grapple with feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy, especially when surrounded by highly accomplished peers and mentors.

I often found myself questioning my abilities, second-guessing my ideas, and fearing that I did not belong in certain academic spaces.

These struggles led to missed opportunities and substantial delays in completing my work. However, over time, and through interactions with fellow students, I have come to recognise these feelings as common challenges faced by many researchers. Consequently, I have developed strategies to cope with and overcome them. Notably, joining the Mawazo Institute as a 2023 Mawazo Fellow provided a significant confidence boost. Engaging with other Fellows had a profoundly positive impact on my self-esteem.

Another significant source of conflict in my PhD journey has been navigating interpersonal dynamics, both within my research team and with my supervisors. Collaborative research environments can foster creative ideas and productive partnerships, but they can also



I OFTEN FOUND MYSELF QUESTIONING MY ABILITIES, SECOND-GUESSING MY IDEAS, AND FEARING THAT I DID NOT BELONG IN CERTAIN ACADEMIC SPACES.

give rise to misunderstandings, disagreements, and power struggles. Studying in South Africa, where my research team comprises students from various countries, has exposed me to diversity in so many aspects. Consequently, I have developed effective communication skills, and learned how to advocate for my ideas, and manage conflicts constructively while upholding professional relationships and mutual respect.

External factors, such as funding challenges, research setbacks, and unforeseen life events have also introduced layers of complexity to my doctoral journey.

Balancing the demands of academic work with personal responsibilities and external pressures demands adaptability, resilience, and a proactive approach to problem-solving in the face of adversity.

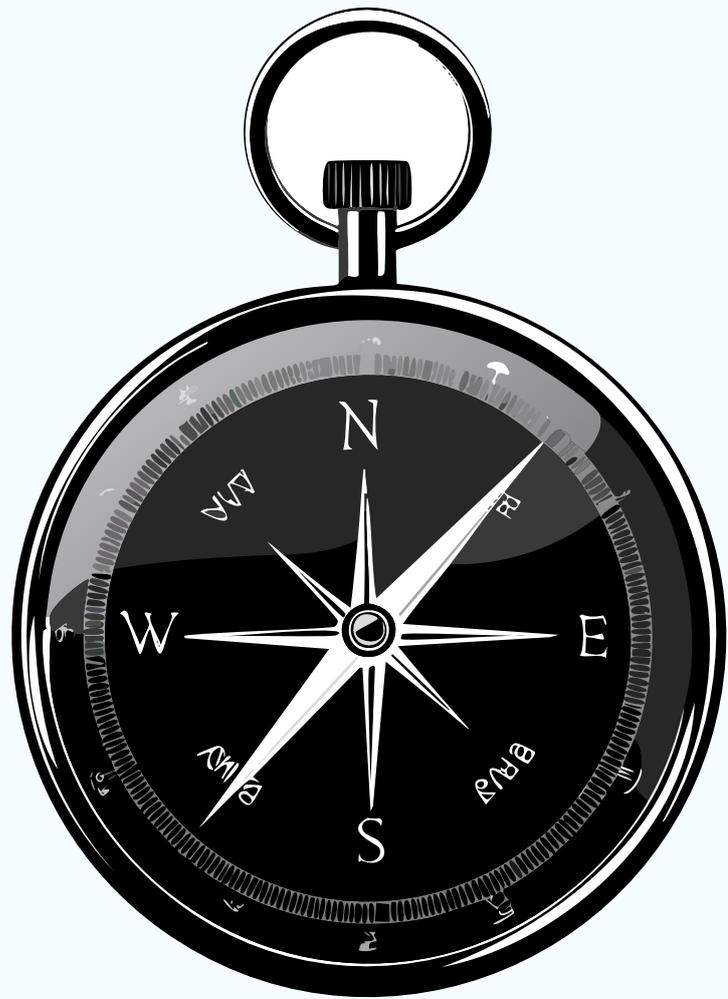
I am not only a wife, but a mother to a nine year-old son, and deeply grateful to my husband and mother for their unwavering support and strength throughout my academic journey. Regardless of the financial challenges, I made it a priority to travel home annually to spend time with them.

I also work as a tutorial fellow at one of Kenya's public universities where I was granted an annual study leave with 80% of my regular salary paid during this period. This money helped sustain my stay in South Africa and enabled me to purchase essential materials for my experimental work. Unfortunately, during my second year of study, the university unexpectedly terminated my study leave and I was compelled to return to work immediately, which disrupted my PhD progress. Currently, my studies are on hold as I fully resume my lecturing role.

However, I plan to return to my research during the university's long holiday and travel back to South Africa to complete the remaining experimental work. Balancing work, family commitments, and thesis writing while at home has presented a significant challenge for me. Despite these difficulties, I continue making progress on my thesis whenever possible. Over time, I have come to see the challenges inherent in the PhD journey as opportunities for growth, learning, and self-discovery. They say when life gives you lemons, make lemonade. These conflicts pushed

me beyond my comfort zone. It was through this experience that I applied to the Mawazo Fellowship Programme and I am still reaping the benefits of being part of it. Additionally, amid the challenges of my PhD journey, I decided to apply for a position to be a Board of Director of Nakuru city and successfully secured the role.

Each conflict, whether internal or external, has compelled me to confront my limitations, challenge my assumptions, and develop new skills and perspectives. I have realised the importance of resilience, perseverance, and



BALANCING THE DEMANDS OF ACADEMIC WORK WITH PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES DEMANDS ADAPTABILITY, RESILIENCE, AND A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO PROBLEM-SOLVING IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY.

self-advocacy in overcoming obstacles and attaining academic success. Moreover, these conflicts have imparted valuable lessons on collaboration, communication, and teamwork. By approaching conflicts with empathy, open-mindedness, and a focus on constructive solutions, I have been able to strengthen relationships, build trust, and foster a supportive and inclusive research environment.

In conclusion, conflict is an inherent and inevitable aspect of the PhD journey. However, it also catalyses personal growth, resilience, and transformation. By embracing and overcoming conflicts with courage, curiosity, and willingness to learn, we can transform challenges into opportunities and emerge from our PhD journeys stronger, wiser, and more resilient than ever before.

CURRENTS OF INGENUITY:

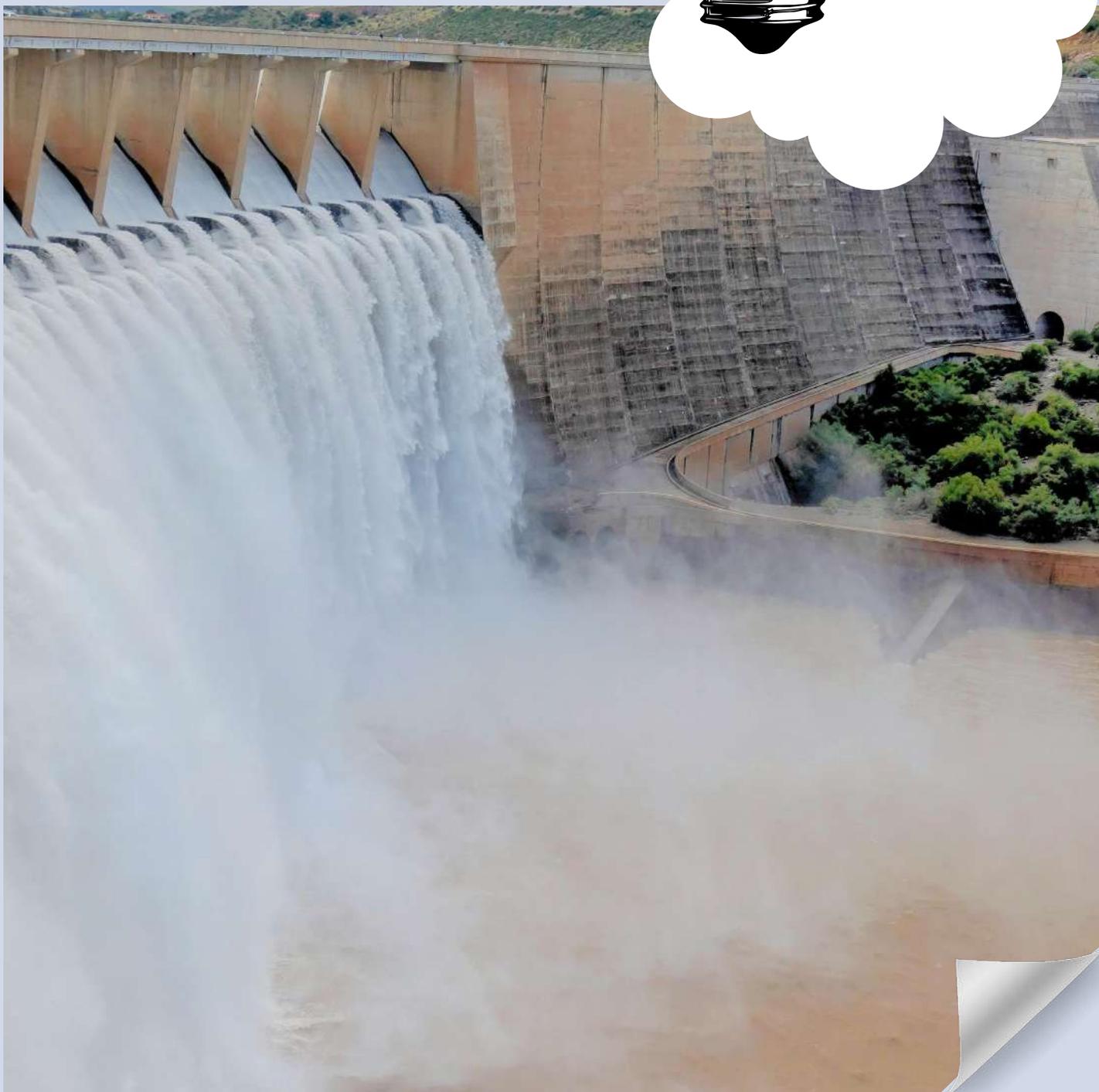
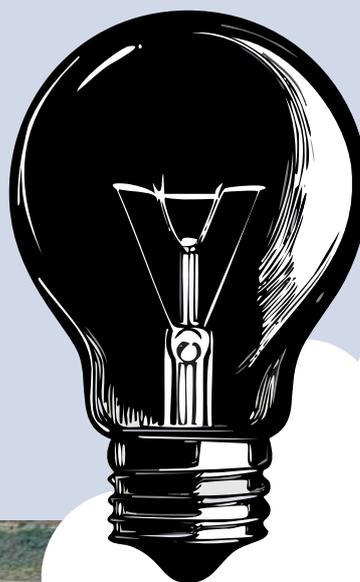
ENGINEERING AGAINST THE ODDS



**DR. FIREHINWOT
DIRES GIRMA**

"THE CONTINENT, WITH ITS VAST UNTAPPED RENEWABLE RESOURCES, HOLDS THE POTENTIAL TO ILLUMINATE THE LIVES OF MILLIONS CURRENTLY LIVING WITHOUT ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY."

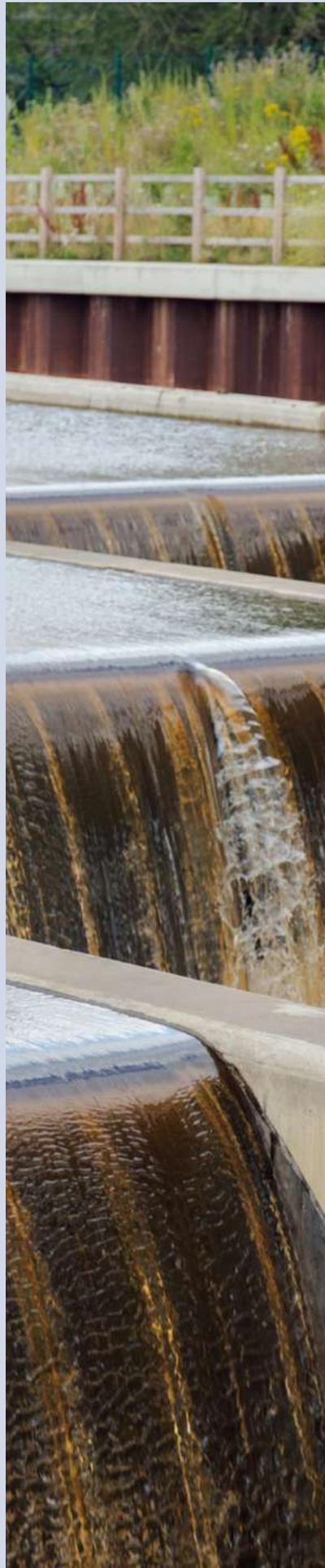
Growing up in Adisu Gebeya, on the outskirts of Addis Ababa, I had a business-minded father and a housewife mother with a big heart who allowed me to focus on my academic pursuits, unlike my older sisters, who were responsible for house chores. As the smartest child in both my family and school, I developed a deep love for learning and an unyielding determination to excel academically.



I had an early affinity for mathematics and physics, and initially envisioned myself becoming a doctor. It was not until I began my college education at Bahir Dar University that I recognised the true extent of my abilities in engineering. This realisation marked the beginning of an exciting new journey as I embraced the challenges and opportunities within the electrical engineering department. I completed my Master of Science degree in Electrical Power Engineering at Addis Ababa Institute of Technology (AAIT), where I conducted research for my thesis focused on green power in the Bole Lemi Industrial Zone. This research project played a pivotal role in contributing to the successful establishment of the Reppie waste-to-energy plant in Addis Ababa, which treats waste from the city.

The experience garnered from this project not only enhanced my visibility but also broadened my perspective on the potential contributions I could make towards my country beyond the realm of electromechanical engineering. It was during this time that I began contemplating pursuing a PhD, and engaging in research initiatives aimed at addressing the critical challenges faced by the power sector in the country.

My Ph.D. journey started in January 2019 when I received an invitation from Dr. Getachew Bekele, a member of the ad-hoc team, who recognised my potential in the Reppie project. Dr. Bekele encouraged me to apply for a PhD position through a collaborative programme between AAIT and Sweden's KTH Royal Institute of Technology, supported by SIDA under a sandwich model. I successfully secured the doctoral candidate position with a focus on "Hydropower Generation and Operation Planning for Ethiopia." I picked this topic due to the



significant contribution of hydropower, which supplies 90% of Ethiopia's power grid. Despite having adequate total generation capacity to meet demand, Ethiopia still suffers from frequent power cuts and load-shedding issues attributed to a lack of proper planning.

My research was driven by a clear objective: to develop a long-term hydropower generation and operation planning tool. This innovative tool has the potential to revolutionise the scheduling of hydropower plants, ensuring optimal utilisation of water reserves from the rainy season throughout the dry season, and ultimately reducing or eliminating load shedding. The model I developed during my PhD journey holds significant promise of improving hydropower operation planning in Ethiopia and other developing countries facing similar challenges, provided it is properly calibrated using actual data.

I embarked on my PhD journey, not only just a diligent student, but also a devoted mother of two children.

A year into my studies, I welcomed my third child into the world. Balancing the demands of motherhood and academia became even more challenging as I had to spend half of my study time away from my family in Sweden. However, with the unwavering support of my husband and the encouragement from those in my circle, I successfully navigated these obstacles and completed my studies within the designated time frame. My successful defence of my PhD thesis on April 26, 2024, serves as a testament to my unwavering resilience and unyielding determination.

During my time at KTH in Sweden, I gained valuable insights into the

strong collaborative potential between academia and industry. At KTH, research initiatives were focused on addressing real-world problems with funding from various industries. One notable aspect was the integration of the Nordic Power Pool, showcasing a practical application of research outcomes. Researchers at KTH had privileged access to the necessary data for their work, facilitating in-depth analysis and innovation. In Ethiopia, one of the biggest challenges I encountered was the difficulty in accessing organised data for my research. Despite these obstacles, I successfully published one conference paper: Deterministic Hydropower Simulation Model for Ethiopia and two journal papers: Inflow Scenario Generation for the Ethiopian Hydropower System and Long-Term Hydropower Planning for Ethiopia: A Rolling Horizon Stochastic Programming Approach with Uncertain Inflow.

These publications are a testament to my academic achievements and contribution to both the academic and professional communities. They offer valuable insights and solutions to the challenges faced in the power sector. With the completion of my PhD, I am enthusiastic about applying my research expertise to the power sector to contribute to my country.

My dream is to contribute to the establishment of an African power pool, enhancing hydropower planning practices,

I EMBARKED ON MY PHD JOURNEY, NOT ONLY JUST A DILIGENT STUDENT, BUT ALSO A DEVOTED MOTHER OF TWO CHILDREN.

and promoting the integration of renewable energy solutions across Africa. The continent, with its vast untapped renewable resources, holds the potential to illuminate the lives of millions currently living without access to electricity. I view this as a collective responsibility that I am deeply committed to contributing to. Throughout my PhD journey, I have come to realise that perseverance and dedication are key ingredients for achieving remarkable outcomes.

MY DREAM IS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AFRICAN POWER POOL



THE STORIES OF THESE THREE MAWAZO FELLOWS SHED LIGHT ON THE DIVERSE CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL OF WOMEN IN RESEARCH. THEIR JOURNEYS OF RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION SERVE AS POWERFUL REMINDERS OF THE INDISPENSABLE ROLES WOMEN FILL IN ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE AND ADDRESSING GLOBAL ISSUES. AS WE CELEBRATE THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS, IT IS IMPERATIVE WE CONTINUE SUPPORTING AND EMPOWERING WOMEN RESEARCHERS TO ENSURE A MORE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE FUTURE IN ACADEMIA AND BEYOND.



The Mawazo Institute, based in Nairobi, is a women-led research institution focused on supporting African women doctoral candidates.



The 2018 fellows initially felt a mix of excitement and nervousness but were ultimately honoured to be part of the program.



They received mentorship, support, and resources that helped them achieve success in their research fields, with eight of the ten fellows graduating with PhDs.

The fellows benefited from a discretionary grant ("lipstick cash") that provided freedom to cover various needs, including university fees and travel expenses for conferences.



This financial support was crucial in enabling them to focus on their research without financial stress.

The fellowship provided extensive training in budgeting, academic writing, storytelling, policy writing, and leadership.



These skills were critical for the fellows' success during their PhD programs and in their subsequent careers.

The fellows were paired with experienced mentors and had access to experts from various fields.



This support emphasised the importance of collaboration, expert advice, and the contributions of women researchers to society.

Several fellows shared key moments of inspiration during their fellowship, including giving talks, being featured in documentaries, and receiving research grants.



These experiences were pivotal in their academic and professional development.

The fellows reflected on their journey with gratitude, acknowledging the significant role the Mawazo Institute played in their success.



Many continue to engage with the institute as alumni, providing mentorship to junior fellows.

The diverse research fields presented challenges in collaboration, but the institute facilitated sessions to encourage discussions and identify synergies.



The fellows advise incoming cohorts to focus on their research, take full advantage of the support system, and use grants strategically.



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