

# Network Update

## Year in Review

### Our members on the move

2019 was a year of great individual successes for both our mentees and mentors. Our very active student representative, Pauline Welikhe, received Purdue University's Bilsland Dissertation Fellowship, a competitive fellowship awarded to outstanding PhD candidates in their final year of study. Mentee Faith Kibuye, earned her PhD from the Pennsylvania State University and is now Postdoctoral Researcher at the Southern Nevada Water Authority. Mentee Redemptor Mutinda received MTAWA's Outstanding Graduate Student Award. Prof. Clare Muhoro was recently promoted to Full Professor and appointed Director of Competitive Fellowships and Awards at Towson University. Dr. Margaret Okomo-Adhiambo was appointed Director of Outreach for the Association for Women in Science (AWIS)-Georgia Chapter. Dr. Senorpe Asem-Hiablie was recently appointed Assistant Research Professor (Drawdown Initiative Lead) on Project Drawdown at the Pennsylvania State University. Prof. Margaret Gitau was appointed to Purdue University's Graduate Council. It is exciting to see our members on the move and being successful in their career pursuits. And we are sure there are more success out there about which we have not heard. Congratulations to you all! Our vision is to increase the number of African women with advanced degrees and improve their representation in key leadership positions across multiple sectors including but not limited to government, academia, industry, civil society, and international organizations. Therefore, there is great joy for us as we see our members succeed. *We'd love to hear from you. Send us your news at [mtawainc@gmail.com](mailto:mtawainc@gmail.com).*

### Meeting of the Membership

Our Annual Meeting, Research Exchange, and Workshop for women was held on June 7-8, 2019 at Homewood Suites Perimeter, Atlanta, GA, U.S.A. The theme of the meeting was Challenges and Opportunities for African Women in Academia. The meeting comprised a highly engaged group of participants. Key recommendations were made for all mentors and mentees and specifically for early career mentees, capturing challenges and opportunities for work-life balance, cultural integration, mentoring and being mentored, and negotiation. A meeting report and other materials are available at: <https://mtawainc.org/events/>



## Inside

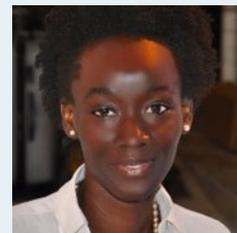
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Ms, Pauline Welikhe



Ms. Redemptor Mutinda



Dr. Senorpe Asem-Hiablie

## Current Trends in (U.S.) Higher Ed: Rethinking the GRE

Many schools in the U.S. are now considering eliminating the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) from the application process. The GRE is a standardized test designed to measure verbal and quantitative reasoning as well as critical thinking and analytical writing skills. Currently, there are concerns that GRE scores are not suitable indicators of student success in graduate school. There are also concerns that test takers could be “coached” on how to pass the test, which then defeats the purpose of the test while also potentially giving advantage to those who can pay for coaching. Hence the move towards eliminating GRE as a criterion for admission to graduate school. In a way this is good news; the test is expensive. Currently the cost for the general (most commonly taken) test is \$205 and additional score reports cost \$27 per recipient. Eliminating the need for these test scores would save applicants a lot of money and would open up opportunities for those that might not have been able to raise the necessary funds. The other side of that coin is that the GRE is, more or less, a universal metric, since the same test is taken around the world and scores are comparable at least among applicants who took the test within a given period. Without the GRE the GPA would become the only metric used to determine an applicant's capability. Why would this be a concern? Well, grading systems differ across countries and even schools, hence the GPA is not universal. Granted, the application has other components—such as personal statements, CV, and references—and these count a great deal. However, the GPA is often used as a cutoff. The discussion around the GRE is not new and literature questioning the validity of the test dates back to at least 1971. The good news is that schools that are considering eliminating the GRE are also considering options for replacement universal measure(s) so as not to either disadvantage or give undue advantage to applicants based on their background. *We'd love to hear from you. Send us your thoughts and/or comments to [mtawainc@gmail.com](mailto:mtawainc@gmail.com).*

## Member Spotlight



In October 2019, Prof. Margaret Gitau gave invited talks on “Managing Water Quality for a Sustainable World” and “Modeling for Hydrology and Water Quality” at Qinghai Normal University in Xining, China. In these talks, she discussed perspectives, current research, and future directions for water quality management, and also highlighted challenges and opportunities for computational modeling as means for decision support and management.

Dr. Margaret Okomo-Adhiambo was elected to the executive board and appointed Director of Outreach for the Association for Women in Science (AWIS)-Georgia Chapter. Dr. Okomo Adhiambo is a Health Scientist and Bioinformatics Lead at the Office of Informatics, NCIRD, CDC. She holds a doctorate in Veterinary Medicine from the University of Nairobi, a PhD in Cell and Molecular Biology from the University of Nevada-Reno, and a Master of Public Health (Applied Epidemiology) from Emory University.



## Our 2019 Volunteers

Abigail Ekeigwe  
Caroline Marete  
Christine Adhiambo  
Clare Muhoro  
Margaret Gitau  
Margaret Okomo-Adhiambo  
Maryann Mugo  
Mercy Ngunjiri  
Mercy A. Okezue  
Nomali Ngobese  
Pauline Welikhe  
Senorpe Asem-Hiablie  
Zara Nikiema,

*Many thanks for your support!*

## Mentoring Circles

Two mentoring circles gathered in December: one in D.C. led by Prof. Clare Muhoro, the other in West Lafayette led by Prof. Margaret Gitau. The two groups linked up via Skype for a remarkable “power mentoring” session with topics and action items including: Linking mentees with industry programs for those considering going into industry; Immigration issues affecting mentees and how to keep up with changing rules and requirements; and opportunities to write opinion pieces and/or subject matter blogs or articles.

## Opinion

### African Women Can Compete on Competence

By Abigail A. Ekeigwe, B.Pharm, M.Pharm, FPCPharm, MSc.(Purdue), ASQ Certified QIA

Competence, in my understanding, opinion and words, means the aggregation of knowledge and skills, some hard, some soft, that make one capable of effective performance that achieves desired outcome while having a balanced life. For example, if you are a pharmacist with a college degree, you need to synergize the knowledge from your college education with experience from “deliberate practice” of pharmacy. You also need to add soft skills like emotional intelligence that help you coordinate your family, work environment, and customer interests to deliver desired outcomes. My native African experience is that women are often raised to believe that their gender predisposed them to be less competent. But I have come to learn that this is untrue, for example, as shown by the three characters in the book *Hidden Figures*, “the phenomenal true story of the exceptionally talented black female mathematicians at NASA whose calculations helped fuel some of America’s greatest achievements in space.” (Shetterly, 2017). It is an inspiring book for all African career women to read. Competence is important because it is one of the key fundamentals of the capitalist society in which we work. For this reason, it is not within our control to choose whether or not to become competent, it is imposed. Capitalism is competence-driven, efficiency-driven, profit-driven and, therefore, gender-agnostic. Ideally, if you are the best the market will hire you, driven by its gender-agnostic profit motive. But note that being the best includes being courageous to say, “yes I can,” the inspiring Barack Obama slogan, even at the risk of being labelled “proud”. It is part of the creative personality profile that fired you up to competence in the first place and consistent with research findings of Csikszentmihalyi, who reported that “creative individuals have a great deal of energy, ... often quiet and at rest ... are also remarkably humble and proud at the same time.” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). We now know that “being too modest likely won’t serve you well.” (Nasher, 2019). Therefore, do not be demur; it would be professionally counterproductive for your career if you skittishly demur to the realities of your competence. The converse is true if you do what the market wants, namely, obey market rules, with evident demonstration of competence, and deliver that efficient resonant performance for which you have prepared. The society is replete with contemporary evidence in this respect. A 2018 Pew Research survey shows that the American society is now more agreeable to the idea of women being in leadership positions in both business and politics. (Horowitz, Igielnik, & Parker, 2018). Entrenched barriers are gradually crumbling and becoming morally unpopular. But there is yet more work to be done. To my fellow African women, I say, be strong and courageous, and watch the genius in you emerge to become visible to the market. These thoughts are from my daily introspections as I intently build my career capital to be compelling and resilient, and I wanted to humbly share them here hoping that someone would benefit from it. *For more information, please visit: <https://mtawainc.org/2019/09/21/african-women-can-compete-on-competence/>*

### On Work-Life Balance: My Choice, My family, My Career.

By: Mercy A. Okezie, B.Pharm, FPCPharm, MSc.(Purdue), NAFDAC certified GMP lead inspector for Pharmaceutical products

My career, my family’, or ‘my family, my career’; which one takes preeminence over the other? This forms the question with which many professional women in the African and indeed many other societies battle. Battle? Yes, indeed, I describe it a battle and I am positive that stories abound of gender bias experienced by women trying to raise a family alongside building their careers either in academia or other professions. From life experiences, I have known women who chose career over family needs and vice versa. Some expressed profound regrets at their choices years after those decision pathways, while others recorded resounding success. My thinking is that everyone reading this write up has examples of some positive and negative outcomes from choices made by women in different phases of their lives. In assessing “why women still can’t have it all”, Lachover (2014) documented different scenarios where women in top leadership positions had to sacrifice some important career privileges to be able to spend more time with their families. Those professionals, very much like their African counterparts, were faced with the choice of prioritizing either the family or career demands at some points in the prime of their lifetime. The choices made could be somewhat likened to a risk:benefit analysis. My opinion is that the family-workplace conflict will not only affect the women ‘in the line of fire’, but the society at large will also be impacted. I recently read a book authored by a female which described different strategies for resolving work-family frictions employed by womenfolk in different parts of Africa; alternatives included the role of household helps and recommendations for government measures such as welfare packages. Additionally, a quest for family-friendly policies such as men’s greater participation in family life as well as gender equality, all aimed at ameliorating the situation faced by the working woman within the region (Mokomane 2014). Another perspective suggests that women respond to work-life challenges in a variety of ways: choose not to have partners or children, turn in to “super humans”, take leave of absences, or choose to work part-time (Bielby & Bielby, 1988). Finding a balance between career and family demands would provide a desirable endpoint. In making choices, it is important to not compare one’s life circumstances with those of other peoples, rather endeavor to evaluate each situation and find what works best based on personality, environmental settings, and personal value systems. In any event, whichever turn a woman chooses to take at those critical decision points should be respected; her choice, her family, her career! *For more information, please visit: <https://mtawainc.org/2019/12/07/on-work-life-balance-my-choice-my-family-my-career/>*

## Our 2019 Donors

Senorpe Asem-Hiablie

Margaret Gitau

Njeri Githire

Elizabeth Kabeu

Wairimu Magua

Margaret Okomo-Adhiambo

*Many thanks for your support!*

## Get Involved

**We'd love to hear from you.** We are now accepting opinion pieces (articles) related to our mission and vision for publication on our website and in our newsletters. Submit articles up to 500 words to [mtawainc@gmail.com](mailto:mtawainc@gmail.com).

**Report on your mentoring engagement and progress.** Information on how to do this will be sent out shortly.

**Name a student award** (\$100 or more) e.g. in honor of a parent, special someone, or even after yourself.

**Provide mentee support** for regional, national, or international travel; GRE and TOEFL Exams; Application fees. Donate now through PayPal (<https://www.PayPal.Me/mtawainc> or search for [mtawainc@gmail.com](mailto:mtawainc@gmail.com)) or via GoFundMe (we will circulate the notice shortly), or send us a check payable to MTAWA (send to: 4315 Commerce Dr. Ste 440-250, Lafayette, IN. 47905). If you would like your donations to be designated for a particular item, please let us know and we will ensure it is used as such. All donations are tax-deductible. In-kind donations are also accepted.

*“Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.” Kofi Annan*

## About MTAWA

The Mentoring neTwork for African Women in Academia (MTAWA) is an organization that establishes and builds networks for African women in academia in support of their academic and professional growth and success. By convening groups of African women professionals, scholars, and students we provide much needed information, mentoring, and support.

### For more information:

Visit: <https://mtawainc.org/>

Contact Us: [mtawainc@gmail.com](mailto:mtawainc@gmail.com)



***Not Yet a Member?*** Join Today at <https://mtawainc.org/page/>  
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*Best Wishes for 2020!*