

Network Update

CADFP Fellows



Professors Clare Muhoro and Margaret Gitau have been selected Carnegie African Diaspora Fellows in the prestigious Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program (CADFP). Profs. Muhoro and Gitau will work in collaboration with the University of South Africa (UNISA) on graduate student teaching and mentoring in



the environmental sciences. In partnership with Dr. Lindani Ncube (Host, UNISA), Ms. Phyllis Kalele (GenderInSITE), and Dr. Nomali Ngobese (University of Johannesburg), Profs. Muhoro and Gitau will provide professional development for historically disadvantaged women graduate students and emerging scholars in South Africa.

Mentoring Models

As promised, we have considered the very valuable feedback that we obtained from attendees at our Summer 2020 gathering. For 2021, we will be rolling out some new mentoring initiatives led by our Mentoring Coordinator (Dr. Paula Welikhe) and her newly formed team of volunteer peer mentors (Abigail Ekeigwe, Amina Naliaka, and Redempter Mutinda). We have also established a dedicated email address—mentoring@mtawainc.org—to handle communications specific to mentoring. Of course, you can still reach us at our general email address: mtawainc@gmail.com. Look out for further communications from Paula in the coming months.



2020 Outstanding Graduate Student Awardee



Mercy Okezue is a PhD student in Biotechnology Innovation and Regulatory Science (BIRS) at Purdue University. She also works as a regulatory officer with Nigeria's food and drugs regulatory authority. **Congratulations Mercy!**

In Brief

Dear Members and Friends,



I hope this newsletter finds you well and in good health. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a lot of change and uncertainty. Despite the situation, we continue to look forward. We remain committed to our mission and vision to empower African women to succeed in graduate and professional programs and improve their representation in key leadership positions across multiple sectors. I am excited to note that: 5 of our mentees have recently completed their graduate programs (2 PhD, 3 masters); and, Profs. Muhoro and Gitau were selected Carnegie African Diaspora Fellows. I trust that others in the group find inspiration from these achievements. The move to online learning (and the reduced skepticism towards online education) is opening up more opportunities for distance students, as schools start to think of new models for their graduate programs. On our part, we will leverage this increased online capacity through new mentoring models which we will be rolling out in 2021. We still, it would seem, have a long road ahead of us and there really is no going back to “the way things were” before the pandemic, but we can focus on what is working now and keep looking ahead.

My very best wishes for 2021!

Margaret Gitau
President

Tips for Finding Opportunities to Fund Graduate School

Graduate school is generally expensive. More so if you choose to study in the U.S. or Europe. An important step before starting graduate school is figuring out how to fund your graduate education. Fortunately, there are opportunities. Through personal experience, I learned that the process of applying for funding is not a checklist that one can follow step by step and expect an outcome at the end; it is highly dependent on one's ability to take personal initiative and be persistent in the search. Starting the search early and finding a mentor to guide me through the process are two ways I found helpful throughout the process. I was fortunate to find a mentor who saw my potential and was willing to invest time in nurturing my career growth. My mentor was a constant source of encouragement and reviewed my applications with me to make sure I did not leave out important documents or miss important deadlines. Starting the process of application early allowed me ample time to review my applications and make sure the process did not wear me out. I was accepted into several graduate programs but none of these schools offered me full funding. So, I took a corporate job while I searched relentlessly for funding. Working in a corporate environment helped me establish a professional network and develop soft skills that are unlikely to be taught in a classroom. It also strengthened my CV, making me more competitive for funding. Some funding opportunities are only advertised within networks. As with many funding organizations, potential sponsors receive many unsolicited emails and a follow up call or email can be the difference between successful and unsuccessful applicants. However, there is a thin line between being assertive and being a nuisance. An email/a call every month is a good balance, unless you are asked to follow up sooner. Having my admission letter in hand helped me distinguish myself from many other applicants for funding opportunities. I attribute a significant part of my success with funding to mentorship and a strong professional network.

Key takeaways:

1. Start very early (in the third or fourth year of your undergraduate);
2. Find a mentor and be willing to go the extra mile;
3. Build a professional network and join a professional body; and,
4. Practice patience and resilience. Rejections happen—even when you thought that was your best shot. Keep an open mind and allow yourself to fail, but do not be afraid to keep trying.

Caroline K. Marete is a doctoral student at the Purdue University School of Aviation and Transportation Technology. She is a recipient of Purdue Graduate School Ross Fellowship and the Fulbright Foreign Student Scholarship Award.

This article has been modified from its [original version](#) due to space limitations.

Member Spotlight



Dr. Mary Opiyo is an Aquaculture Research Scientist at Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute – Sagana Centre, Kenya. Her every day work involves working in sustainable aquaculture projects dealing with broodstock development, seed production (Monosex tilapia and African Catfish), fish health management and fish nutrition. She has 10 years of research experience, and project coordination in freshwater aquaculture. She recently final-

ized her PhD in Fisheries Science from Kenyatta University. Her thesis focused on the use of dietary probiotics in enhancing growth and immunity of Nile tilapia cultured in low input ponds. [Read More.](#)

Members on the Move

Graduations

Pauline (Paula) Welikhe: PhD in Ecological Sciences and Engineering from Purdue University

Mary Opiyo: PhD in Fisheries Science from Kenyatta University.

Caroline Marete: MS in Aviation and Transportation Technology from Purdue University.

Redempter Mutinda: MS in Agri-Enterprise Development, Egerton University

Sharon Kinyngu: MS in Botany and Plant Pathology from Purdue University

Awards and Recognitions

Mercy Okezue: 2020 MTAWA Outstanding Graduate Student Award. (April)

Clare Muhoro: Featured in [Yale and the World](#). (April)

Pauline (Paula) Welikhe: Ohlrogge Award for Innovation in Agronomic Research (May)

Margaret Gitau: Fellow, Kenya Society of Environmental, Biological and Agricultural Engineers (August)

Clare Muhoro: Fellow, Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program (November)

Margaret Gitau: Fellow, Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program (November)

Margaret Gitau: 2020 Seeds of Success Excellence in Research Award, Purdue University (November)

Our 2020 Volunteers

Abigail Ekeigwe

Caroline Marete

Christine Adhiambo

Clare Muhoro

Esther Mosase

Margaret Gitau

Margaret Okomo-Adhiambo

Pauline Welikhe

Senorpe Asem-Hiablie

Wairimu Magua

Wairimu Nzoka

Many thanks for your support!

Welcome New Members

Alaika Kassim, University of Kwazulu Natal, South Africa

Dorcas Ndunge, University of Nairobi, Kenya

Gugulethu (Gugu) Khumalo, University of Johannesburg, South Africa and Griffith University, Australia

Kuthadzo Mugodo, University of Kwazulu Natal, South Africa

Nadine Odwori, African Leadership University, Mauritius

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.

Send us your news. Accomplishments, awards, graduations, promotions, etc.

Review student award applications and provide feedback. Indicate interest by emailing mtawainc@gmail.com. Reviews are conducted in April.

Name a student award e.g. in honor of a parent, special someone, or even after yourself. Other forms of naming are welcome.

Volunteer to mentor through different MTAWA mentoring models Look out for email requests from (or email) mentoring@mtawainc.org.

Assist with strategic functions including communications, fundraising, member engagement, and mentoring.

For more information, email us at mtawainc@gmail.com.

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



Best Wishes for 2021!