



**MTAWA MEETING OF THE
MEMBERSHIP**

**OCTOBER 23, 2021
ALL VIRTUAL**

THEME: CAREER PATHWAYS

MEETING REPORT

**MENTORING NETWORK FOR AFRICAN
WOMEN IN ACADEMIA**



EVENT SCHEDULE

9:00 am – 9:05 am : Welcome and Introduction

9:05 am – 9:15 am : Opening Remarks

Prof. Margaret Gitau

9:15 am – 9:30 am : Keynote Address

Speaker: Dr. Anastasia Nyalita

Chief Executive Officer, Kenya Healthcare Federation

9:30 am – 9:35 am : Break

9:35 am – 10:05 am : Breakout Sessions (A) and (B)

(Prof. Clare Muhoro, Abigail E/Prof. Margaret Gitau, Wairimu

N/Amina N)

10:05: am – 10:20 am : Mentee's Café

(Speed Mentoring - Prof. Margaret Gitau)

10:20 am – 10:35 am : Considering a Career in Industry

Speaker: Dr. Pauline (Paula) Welikhe

Research Scientist, Phospholutions, Inc.

10:35 am – 10:50 am : Open Discussion

(Dr. Margaret Okomo-Adhiambo)

10:50 am – 11:00 am : Closing Remarks



OVERVIEW

The president, Prof. Margaret Gitau, opened the meeting with a welcome speech highlighting the mission and achievements of MTAWA since its inception five years ago. She acknowledged members who have volunteered their time and resources and awardees of the MTAWA's outstanding Graduate students award. Prof. Gitau also discussed current mentoring models and urged participants to get involved.

Following the opening speech was the keynote address on "Experiences from the C-Suite" by Dr. Anastasia Nyalita, Chief Executive Officer, Kenya Healthcare Federation. Dr. Nyalita noted that people in academia served as think tanks to industry and are often called upon to inform and influence policy. She noted the importance of building connections, especially connections with industry, and the important role networks played. She noted that visibility was important and urged participants to look for opportunities to be visible, for example by volunteering, participating, and engaging. On challenges as a woman in a male dominated setting, she noted the importance of cross-gender and cross-generational networking. She encouraged participants to not look at themselves as a gender or allow societal perspectives to be roadblocks. On overcoming barriers, she urged participants to seek to understand in addition to being understood, to steer clear of office politics, and to develop their emotional intelligence. She encouraged participants to be the best they could, noting that it takes deliberate effort. Learning from mistakes and having facts and figures at hand were also key.

After the keynote address, participants were placed in two breakout rooms. Breakout session A discussed career management and development and was moderated by Prof. Clare Muhoro, Towson University with Ms. Abigail Ekeigwe, Purdue University as rapporteur. The key take-away from breakout session A's discussion was the need to regularly reflect on ones' career path and find the sweet spot where our profession, mission, passion, and vocation meet.



OVERVIEW

Breakout session B discussed deciding on graduate school, moderated by Prof. Margaret Gitau, Purdue University with Ms. Wairimu Nzoka, Daystar University as rapporteur assisted by Ms. Amina Naliaka, Southern Illinois University. The key take-away from breakout session B's discussion was the factors to consider when choosing a mentor including how well respected they are, publications, as well as their relationships with previous and current students. The discussion also included the importance of considering the expectations of graduate school. Additionally, life and work balance was also underscored.

After the breakout sessions Dr. Pauline Welikhe shared her perspectives on pursuing a career in industry versus a career in academia in terms of what determines the research direction, project timelines, and additional skills needed in industry.

This was followed by an open discussion led by Dr. Margaret Okomo-Adhiambo and closing remarks by Prof. Gitau. In her closing remarks, Prof. Gitau noted that there were opportunities to contribute further and encouraged participants to join the Business Meeting that followed.



BREAKOUT SESSION A

REFLECTION POINTS

1. Aspirational career goal - think about what you like, what you are good at, and what you can get paid to do
2. Immediate next steps to attaining career goals

DISCUSSION

01

Life-long learning was encouraged, it is never too late to learn new skills.

02

Networking and collaboration is very important - learn to reach out if you need help.

03

An extensive discussion on the Japanese concept "Ikagai" - meaning "a reason for being." Everyone was encouraged to find that sweet spot where passion, mission, profession, and vocation meet.



BREAKOUT SESSION B

REFLECTION POINTS

1. Where do I want to be in five years?
2. How will going to graduate school set me on my course to achieve my career goals?
3. What are my strengths?
4. In which areas do I need to improve?

DISCUSSION

HOW TO CHOOSE A GOOD MENTOR

01

- Look for mentor with common interests. Research on your mentors. Go for the best in your field.
- Choose a person with whom you can relate.
- Choose a mentor by expertise, Does the person have skills in the area in which you want to grow?
- Identify the type of leadership style the person has. i.e. Hands on / Hands off person.

02

GRADUATE SCHOOL EXPECTATIONS

- Independent thinking: When in graduate school, professors have an expectation of the student to think independently. This was a point to note for students yet to join graduate school.

03

SURVIVAL TACTICS/ ADVISE

- Grow self confidence and research a lot:
- Self - care (don't be too hard on yourself).
- Take part in extracurricular activities to network.

04

CONSIDERING A CAREER IN INDUSTRY

- In academia - Ask the right research questions.
- In industry - Make money for investors.



SPEAKER BIOS



Anastasia Nyalita (Chief Executive Officer, Kenya Healthcare Federation) is a dynamic and competent health specialist and an MBA graduate passionate about sharing her skills and knowledge and contribute to the growth and strategic direction of organizations in the healthcare sector. She has held various senior leadership roles in Policy & Advocacy, business, and technical operations in several health organizations and multinationals in the Pharmaceuticals and Consumer Health Sectors over the last 20 years. She has geographical experience across Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia countries. These roles have allowed Anastasia to garner invaluable skills and experience in leadership, external affairs, business management, project planning and execution as well as, strong organizational skills.

Anastasia is very active in professional activities with a history of numerous leadership positions in professional and trade associations and has exceptional problem-solving and decision-making skills. She is passionate about Leadership and Corporate Governance and has excellent communication skills in English, working knowledge in French. She is a certified Corporate Governance, Board Evaluations and Governance Assessments Trainer.

Pauline Welikhe (Research Scientist, Phospholutions, Inc.) joined Phospholutions, Inc. in July of 2021, where she is a Research Scientist. In this capacity, she coordinates research aimed at developing technology for releasing nutrients based on plant demands and reducing nutrient loss in runoff and leachate. Before joining Phospholutions, Inc. Pauline spent 5 years working on phosphorus management, first by finding innovative solutions for quantifying and monitoring legacy phosphorus movement from agricultural landscapes to tile drains and second by quantifying field-scale phosphorus budgets across 62 cropping systems in the United States and Canada.



Pauline earned her Ph.D. in Agronomy and Soil Science at Purdue University in West Lafayette IN, an MSc in Environmental Science at Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, AL, and a BSc in Biochemistry at Egerton University, Njoro, Kenya. Beyond her work with soil and plant nutrient management, Pauline spends much of her free time mentoring African women interested in pursuing graduate studies, creating interior designs for different spaces, and exploring food and recipes from different cultures across the world.



BUSINESS MEETING

Chair: Dr. Margaret Okomo-Adhiambo

- Welcome and Introductions
 - Dr. Margaret Okomo-Adhiambo welcomed participants. All in attendance introduced themselves.
- MTAWA Network Update (see slides)
- Strategic Objectives Status
 - Board decided to focus on 4 of the 6 strategic objectives to ensure goals could be attained.
 - Expand MTAWA's reach: Grow reach in Europe (tap people on the call who work or are in grad school there).
 - Deepen relationships among members.
 - Raise funds for the Network. Prof. Gitau shared a budget wish list of approximately \$11,000/year.
 - Provide variety of mentoring opportunities - There is a list of topics that mentees wanted more knowledge on e.g. work-life balance. Two board members offered to record short videos on some of the topics. These will be uploaded onto MTAWA platforms and will be available to members. There was also discussion to leverage subject matter experts to do some of the videos.
- New Partnerships
 - Dr. Jacqueline Kariithi spoke about the research center she is starting up in Kitale in Natural and Agricultural Sciences. This is a potential partnership venture. Discussions will continue with the Board after this meeting.
- Strategy for General Meetings.
 - MTAWA is registered as a non-profit in the State of Indiana therefore we are expected to meet annually, we need to identify easy access locations for in-person meetings and also keep the virtual meeting. Potentially have in person meetings at other geographies (outside the US). Decision was made to meet virtually most years so location is not limiting, and have in-person meetings once every 3-4 years.



BUSINESS MEETING

- Action Items
 - Initiate a Mentors Café: Prof. Gitau to call the first convening; A convener will be selected to coordinate the Cafés going forward.
 - Fundraising: Dr. Okomo-Adhiambo will plan a meeting on this.
 - Short Videos: Prof. Gitau (Leadership, December); Dr. Okomo-Adhiambo (Self-advocacy, January/February)
 - LinkedIn profile: we have a profile but it is inactive. Need to get this functional right away based on discussion during the general meeting. Volunteer needed to manage the page (volunteer has been identified).
-



SPECIAL THANKS

Event Committee

Ms. Wairimu Nzoka
Ms. Abigail Ekeigwe
Dr. Pauline Welikhe
Prof. Margaret W. Gitau

Invited Speakers

Dr. Anastasia Nyalita
Dr. Pauline (Paula) Welikhe

Facilitators

Prof. Clare Muhoro
Dr. Margaret Okomo - Adhiambo
Prof. Margaret W. Gitau

Rapporteurs

Ms. Abigail Ekeigwe
Ms. Wairimu Nzoka
Ms. Amina Naliaka

Thank you!