

# Network Update

## 2022 MTAWA Meeting of the Membership

### MENTORING AFRICAN WOMEN IN THE DIASPORA

Experiences, Challenges, and Opportunities in Europe  
Saturday, July 9, 2022, 11:00 am–2:00 pm UTC

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<b>Keynote Address</b>	<b>Breakout Sessions</b>	<b>Mentoring Café</b>
Mentoring African Women in Academia	Building Resilience, The Future of Work, and more.	Live group mentoring session
Look out for registration link and other details <a href="https://mtawainc.org/events/">here</a> (https://mtawainc.org/events/)		

## Meet Our Newest Mentor

*Mercy Amaka Okezue (Ph.D., MS, FPCPharm., & MPSN)*



I started my undergraduate journey in mechanical engineering at a university in south-eastern Nigeria. Due to security concerns, after one year of academic experience, my mother strongly advised me to change both my course of study and institution. To please her, I agreed to switch to the College of Pharmacy at another university in the south-southern part of the country. Looking back, I think that was one of the best decisions I ever made! Several years down the line, I have worked as a pharmacist at various levels including serving my country as a national medicines regulatory officer.

During those years, I had one guiding principle: *“seek to improve your community by improving yourself academically”*. I always sought knowledge even at the expense of some expedient life luxuries. For example, I self-sponsored most of my professional development programs before my graduate-level education.

Some respite came my way when I received tuition sponsorship to attend a course on Industrial Pharmacy Advanced Training (IPAT) at an institution in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. This rolled into an MS the PhD from Purdue University Biotechnology Innovation and Regulatory Sciences (BIRS) program in the school of Agricultural and Biological Engineering. Okay! did I go back to my first love (Engineering)? Not quite! The BIRS program is multidisciplinary and covers research in academia, regulatory, and pharmaceutical manufacturing. My dissertation provides resources to improve processes in quality control laboratories. I also synthesized new salts of bedaquiline that can be used for treating multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis. The most satisfying experience is the number of people I have mentored throughout my academic career. God has helped me show that women can have a work-life balance, keeping both the home front and their academic pursuits. **Congratulations Mercy!**

## In Brief

Dear Members and Friends,



I hope this newsletter finds you well and in good health.

As we move out of the pandemic and establish our new normal, some key topics come to mind: how do we build resilience to help cope with and recover from the unexpected? how do we prepare ourselves for the Future of Work? what are the challenges, opportunities, experiences specific to African women in academia, particularly those in the diaspora? These and other topics will form part of our upcoming [Meeting of the Membership](#). I am excited about the progress we are making including awards, graduations, promotions, new initiatives, and other recognitions, some of which are highlighted in this newsletter. This year, we have introduced a new award—the [MTAWA Travel Award](#)— to support African women graduate/post-graduate students presenting their research at a professional meeting. We are grateful for the generous support we have received that has made this award possible. Indeed, we are making great strides in fulfilling our mission and realizing our vision. Even as we move up and congratulate ourselves on successes, I urge everyone: remember your own journey and please be sure to *not pull the ladder up behind you*. Mentoring remains our most powerful tool in ensuring the academic and professional growth and success of African women and, for this, we need all hands on deck.

Margaret Gitau, President.

## Tips for Graduate School Success

*Abigail Ekeigwe (PhD Candidate, Biotechnology Innovation and Regulatory Sciences, Purdue University)*

Graduate school is challenging and rewarding. It takes grit, learning to unlearn and learn, and a growth mindset to reap the rewards of graduate school. Here are a few tips for preparing and excelling in graduate school.



### Preparing for graduate school

**Get assistance** from mentoring groups such as MTAWA. MTAWA will assist you in understanding the graduate school application process and requirements for application documents. Utilize this platform to save yourself valuable time, avoid mistakes, receive timely feedback on your application documents and create a robust application package.

**Invest time** researching institutions and programs that fit your interest and preparing your application documents. Your passion should align with your graduate program, keeping you motivated when facing challenges.

### Keys for success in graduate school (\*SCANS)

**Self-care:** Care for your physical and mental well-being; health is your greatest asset for success. Have a support system, e.g. family, religious group, or friends.

**Career goals in focus:** Go through graduate school with your career goals (e.g. academia or industry) in mind; this will guide your choice of internships and research collaborations.

**Ask questions** and seek assistance: Many institutional resources help graduate students in academics, research, and life. Actively seek information.

**Network:** Make thriving connections. I recommend vertical (with faculty, postdoc, staff, senior and junior graduate students) and horizontal networking (with peers). Do not underestimate the value of your network. Your network is your professional asset and wealth.

**Seek opportunities:** to voluntarily serve and develop leadership skills, to present your research, for professional development, and grants, fellowships, awards, and scholarships.

Remember, *“Challenges are what make life interesting, and overcoming them makes life meaningful.”* – Joshua J. Marine.

## Members on the Move

**Awarded:** Mercy Gloria Ashepet, 2022 MTAWA Outstanding Graduate Student Award.

**Awarded:** Abigail Ekeigwe, Outstanding PhD Student, ABE, Purdue University.

**Awarded:** Mercy Okezue, Outstanding Service Award, ABE/CoE, Purdue University.

**Established:** Jackie Kariithi, El-Koony Center, a home-grown research center in Kenya.

**Graduated:** Mercy Okezue, Ph.D. Biotechnology Innovation and Regulatory Sciences, Purdue University.

**Interning:** Amina Naliaka, American Association of Geographers.

*Congratulations to all!*



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## Our 2022 Volunteers

Abigail Ekeigwe

Amina Naliaka

Christine Adhiambo

Clare Muhoro

Margaret Gitau

Margaret Okomo-Adhiambo

Mercy Okezue

Pauline Welikhe

Senorpe Hiablie

Wairimu Nzoka

Wangari Wambui

*Many thanks for your support!*

## Welcome New Members

Chantal Mokoko, Communication Pour el Développement.

Mercy Gloria Ashepet, Africa Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium.

## 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)

## Board Transitions

Christine Adhiambo. Dr. Adhiambo will remain involved in strategic planning efforts.

Clare Muhoro. Dr. Muhoro will remain involved as an ex-officio member of the Board.

*Many thanks Clare and Christine for all your contributions to MTAWA!*



## Get Involved

**Member Directory Updates:** *Update Your Info.* We are continually working to improve our operations to meet our mission and achieve our vision. To enhance engagement among members, we are currently updating our member directory. Many thanks if you have already sent your information. If you have not, please use this link ([MTAWA Member Directory](#)) to send your information through google forms. We will not sell, rent, or lease directory information to third parties.

**Slack Account:** *Get Access to Member Only Content.* We have established an account on Slack with several channels to enhance member engagement. Once we have your directory information, you will receive an invite from Amina Brenda Naliaka to join the group on Slack.

**LinkedIn:** *Follow Us.* Our [LinkedIn](#) page is now actively managed. We welcome everyone to engage, follow, like, comment, etc.

**Mentors Café:** *Engage.* The need for separate gatherings of mentors similar to ones we have with mentees has come up at least a couple of times in past meetings. We will soon be holding our inaugural gathering of mentors (Mentors Café). More information to follow shortly.

**MTAWA Meeting of the Membership:** *Sign up* for volunteer roles by contacting us at [mtawainc@gmail.com](mailto:mtawainc@gmail.com). Positions open: Rapporteurs (3-5), Technical Assistants (1-3).

*For more information, email us at [mtawainc@gmail.com](mailto:mtawainc@gmail.com).*

## MTAWA Travel Award

*Now Accepting Applications*

More info and download application form [here](#)

