

Network Update

2022 MTAWA Annual Meeting

The 2022 MTAWA Annual Meeting was held on July 9, 2022 with the theme



Mentoring African Women in the Diaspora and on the Continent, primarily focused on experiences, challenges, and opportunities in Europe. This was an All-Virtual event with Invited Speaker, Dr. Phyllis Kalele, Science and Technology Specialist, U.S. Government. Dr. Kalele shared her findings and perspectives from her recent work on Female and Early-Career Academics in Africa.

The meeting included four breakout working sessions covering pertinent issues in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The full [Meeting Report](https://mtawainc.org/events/) and other meeting materials are available here (<https://mtawainc.org/events/>).

Meet our Awardees

2022 MTAWA Outstanding Graduate Student Award

Mercy-Gloria is a PhD student at KU Leuven and the Royal Museum of Central Africa, Tervuren in Belgium. She is a biologist by training (BSc. Biology of Makerere University and MSc Human-Ecology at Vrije Universiteit Brussels). Her interests lie in balancing development, conservation and human well-being particularly in Africa. Currently, Mercy is exploring the potential of citizen science as an inclusive approach to address snail-borne diseases and natural hazards in Southwest Uganda. She hopes that her research will offer citizen science insights that are unique to a non-western context, and the Global south in general.



2022 MTAWA Travel Award



Kujang Laki is an Assistant Professor of Communication Arts in the Communication and Media Studies program at Ohio Northern University and a doctoral candidate in Health Communication at Ohio University. Kujang's research interests lie at the intersection of health policy, social and behavioral change, infectious diseases, and health disparities. Her prior work includes appointments with: Ohio University's Infectious and Tropical Disease Institute (ITDI); Dr. Harold Thompson Racial Health Equity Research Fellowship Program; and, United Nations Emergency Children's Fund (UNICEF), South Sudan. Recognitions include Outstanding Doctoral Student and honorable mention for excellence in teaching. Kujang received her B.A. from Central State University and M.A. degrees from Ohio University and DePaul University.

In Brief

Dear Members and Friends,



I hope this newsletter finds you well. With the pandemic now getting behind us and the transition to a new normal way in progress for many of us, some key topics warrant attention: 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, and experiences specific to African women in academia? These and other topics were part of our 2022 Annual Meeting held on July 9, 2022. The Meeting Report is accessible [here](#). More recently, we have held a panel discussion (pg. 3) in part to help with on-boarding new student members. This year, we introduced a new award—the **MTAWA Travel Award**—to support African women graduate/post-graduate students presenting their research at a professional meeting. This is in addition to our regular MTAWA Outstanding Graduate Student Award. Congratulations to our awardees Mercy Gloria Ashephet and Kujang Laki (at left). We are grateful for the generous support we have received that has made these awards possible. As we move into 2023, I am proud to say that we have made good progress over the past six years and, in particular, have had several key achievements despite the pandemic. I also extend special thanks to our volunteers (listing, pg. 2) who have worked efficiently and effectively, often behind the scenes, to help us meet our goals.

My very best wishes for the holiday season and the New Year.

Margaret Gitau, President.

MEMBER PROFILE

Meet Dr. Jacqueline N. Kariithi, CEO, El-Koony Center, Kenya



I am a Kenyan interdisciplinary environmental scientist who is passionate about tourism, conservation, and development issues. I gained interest in nature and the environment at a very young age, while traveling with family during the holidays. These moments sparked my interest to pursue a professional career in environmental science. By the end of my undergraduate studies, I developed a specific interest to explore the nexus of conservation and human impact and interventions.

A few years later, I completed my PhD in Environmental and Geographical Science from the University of Cape Town, South Africa, with a focus on Nature-based Tourism on the Mount Elgon ecosystem. At the start of my post-doctoral research at Princeton University, I focused on two specific areas: Reconciling livelihoods for community stakeholders in protected areas and Climate Resilient Agriculture as a biodiversity conservation mechanism for small-holder maize farmers in the Mount Elgon region. These research topics culminated in a detailed case study research analysis on various stakeholder groups in the Mount Elgon ecosystem in Kenya. This spurred my interest to focus my career on decision science having identified through my field experiences that applied science was essential to creating definitive change in all anthropogenic activities particularly in high biodiversity regions.

Thereafter, I began to develop the idea of establishing a landscape focused research center which was named El-Koony Center, and launched in 2020. The El-Koony Center serves as a multi-purpose center, focusing on scientific research while providing professional and vocational training for community stakeholders in the Mount Elgon region.

I am a strong advocate for pursuing scientific research through an anthropocentric approach to create maximum impact on local communities. My work with El-Koony Center has impacted the lives of the local population of the Mount Elgon region through various applied science projects that enhance livelihood opportunities for local communities such as the Climate Resilient Agriculture (CRA) project. This project has worked mainly with women farmers to recognize their input as the primary labor force in the region.

Additionally, I am currently working with female Masters and PhD students under my mentorship and thus connected with the MTAWA network to engage in their activities. My dream for the Center is to popularize decision science and make it the norm for those pursuing scientific careers to think about impact in a direct and meaningful way.

“We need to develop a bioeconomy strategy for ecosystems and human well-being through applied science and developmental interventions” – Dr. Jacqueline N. Kariithi

Members on the Move

Recognitions/New Appointments

Graduated: Adebukola Dada, PhD in Soil Conservation and Nutrient Management, Purdue University, 2021. Now **Project Manager**, Soil Health Institute.

Graduated: Caroline Marete, PhD in Aviation and Transportation Technology, Purdue University, 2022. Now **Assistant Professor**, Purdue University.

Appointed: Kujang Laki, **Assistant Professor** of Communication Arts, Ohio Northern University.

Our 2022 Volunteers

Abigail Ekeigwe

Amina Brenda Naliaka

Cecilia Wangari

Christine Adhiambo

Clare Muhoro

Gugulethu Khumalo

Jelieth Kagendo

Margaret Gitau

Margaret Okomo-Adhiambo

Mercy Okezue

Pauline Welikhe

Senorpe Hiablie

Wairimu Nzoka

Many thanks for your support!

Special Thanks

Tabitha Mwangi

Jacqueline Kariithi

Nancin Dadem

Caroline Marete

Kujang Laki

Adebukola Dada

Do you wish to apply for a MTAWA Award?

Stay up to date!

Visit our website and follow us on social media!

Welcome New Members

Chidiebele Constance Obichi, PhD, RN - Assistant Professor, Indiana University Northwest

Nyakallo Metsing - North West University

Sharon Manzini - North West University
Seipati Poopedi - NWY

Zamadube Dube - Rand Water

Fanelesibonge Vilakazi - North West University

Bongiwe Mbombo - University of Johannesburg

Refilwe - University of Johannesburg

Nopisho (no further info)

Qinisile Vilakazi - Wits University, PhD candidate

Khuthadzo Prudence Mavhona - Black Women in Science (member)

Michelle Nyoni - Chinhoyi University of Technology and University of the Witwatersrand

Eunezia Siteo - University of Johannesburg

Gugu - Stellenbosch University

Ashina Mtsumi, LL.B (UON), PG-Dip (KSL), LL.M (UP) - Advocate of the High Court of Kenya

Ebele Onwuchuluba - Faculty member, Department of Clinical Pharmacy & Biopharmacy

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



“What I Wish I’d Known “: A Panel Discussion on Graduate School Do’s and Don’ts

Meeting Highlights

In this virtual panel discussion, panelists outlined ways for prospective applicants to put their best foot forward and shared the strategies that have been most successful in graduate school applications. The discussion revolved around the reasons for African women to pursue graduate education, their choice of university, the application process, funding, and mentorship. Many thanks to Paula Welikhe (MTAWA Mentoring Coordinator), volunteers, and panelists for making this event a success!



"African women especially need mentorship to achieve the goals they have set for themselves." Caroline Marete, Purdue University



"[Take the initiative to] Maintain the relationship between you and your mentor." Adebukola Dada, Soil Health Institute



"Networks matter." Abigail Ekeigwe, Foundation Medicine, Inc.



"There is more work that [still] needs to be done in Africa than in other areas of the world." Mercy Gloria Ashephet, KU Leuven

Best Wishes for the Holiday Season and a Happy and Healthy 2023!

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.