



Australia Awards

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AlumniNews

Africa Newsletter

Joining hands to positively impact Africa's economic development

A call to action by Alumni to Alumni in supporting innovation in small stock farming, advocating for safety and regulation in artisanal and small scale mining, and developing progressive HIV/AIDS policies

Australia Awards strives to develop leadership potential and stimulate economic and social development by empowering a global network of talented individuals through high-quality education experiences in Australia and Africa.

Recipients return home with new ideas and knowledge, and the ability to make a significant contribution to their home countries and the continent at large as leaders in their field. This ability to adapt their learnings from Australia to an African setting has seen the advancement of policy, research and practice in sectors crucial to Africa's economic development namely agricultural productivity, the sustainable management of the extractives sector, and development of effective public policy.

In this edition of Alumni News, we profile Alumni who are active in three thematic areas (drawn from the broader priority sectors mentioned above):

- Small stock farming – increasing income generation from goat rearing through value-addition activities and improved farming methods.
- Artisanal and small scale mining - advocating for safety and the recognition of the sector as an important economic activity that provides a livelihood for thousands.
- HIV/AIDS policy development - acknowledging the changing nature of HIV Policy now with greater focus on treatment and prevention; and understanding the importance of scientific research in informing policy.

Through these stories, it is hoped that Alumni will reach out to each other to share knowledge and collaborate on projects, particularly in areas where continental solutions are needed.

* / Australia Awards Alumni and Awardees at the 2016 Africa Down Under Conference in Perth, Australia



★ **Call to action:**
Encourage dairy goat production: rural households can access nutritious food and earn an additional income through goat milk sales and the sale of supplementary products like sour milk and yoghurt.

Enabling the economic empowerment of women dairy goat farmers in Malawi

Writer: Janine Smit

Photography: Patricia Mayuni

In Malawi, goats are the most common small ruminant, and are raised for meat, milk, hide, and manure to improve soil fertility and structure. They are predominantly raised under extensive production (where animals are left to roam freely for part or all of their production life cycle), which is characterised by low-level livestock production and productivity. The low productivity is mostly due to poor nutrition, seasonal lack of feed, poor breeding practices, goat breeds that have a low productive potential, limited livestock programmes for vulnerable communities and low small livestock products' consumption among underprivileged communities.

In addition to low productivity levels, smallholder farmers (who make up about 80% of the population in Malawi) are yet to generate meaningful incomes from farming primarily due to the narrow range of enterprises they pursue and poor market access. The government of Malawi, together with development partners is focusing on boosting socio-economic development by adopting strategies that will enhance the performance of the agricultural sector such as value addition in the dairy goat value chain.¹

Patricia Mayuni is Deputy Director: Animal Health and Livestock Development for the Secretary for Agriculture and Water Development in Malawi. She is also an Australia Awards Alumna, who completed a Master's degree in Animal Studies at the University of Queensland in 2007. Patricia is making use of the knowledge she obtained to enhance the skills of women dairy goat farmers and enable them to make a greater contribution to the economy. In 2015 she received an Australia Awards Small Grant valued at AUD15,150 to develop a vibrant dairy goat value chain, with the main goal of empowering women farmers, who tend to lack basic business skills to generate higher levels of revenue from their farming activities.

★ / Women goat farmers learn how to prepare sour milk



The project targeted 200 women dairy goat farmers in the Thyolo District of Southern Malawi and had the full support of the local assembly leadership, local leaders and farmer organisations associated with these women participants. "It was an exciting undertaking after the skills I gained in Australia and also after interaction with fellow Alumni who have been implementing different types of development projects in the various parts of Africa. I felt so motivated to do something for the rural farming community of Malawi, especially women."

Patricia introduced women farmers to the idea of increasing the value of raw goat milk through processing, in order for it to fetch higher prices. "Through dairy goat production, these rural households are accessing nutritious food and are able to earn an additional income through goat milk sales and the sale of products like Chambiko (sour milk) and yoghurt made from goat's milk," Patricia explains.

Throughout the implementation period, she enabled the training of project participants in basic agribusiness concepts such as pricing and using gross margin analysis. The training enhanced the capacity of women dairy goat farmers to engage with the dairy goat value chain by looking for goat milk markets on their own; developed their management skills by making critical decisions about livestock feed and kraal construction; and established a dairy goat value chain model that is user friendly to rural women.

The project has been able to train 12 extension workers, 10 farmer technicians and 180 women farmers. Farmers were also trained in goat production and breeding techniques, and equipped with skills to perform market sourcing. The women farmers were trained to carry out the value addition of milk and were equipped with skills to make dairy products such as Chambiko and yoghurt and identify markets for these products, to not only increase the keeping quality of their milk, but also to improve the value of their product.

The outcome of the project is an improvement in the capacity of the women dairy goat farmers to earn an income, as well as an improvement in the availability of goat milk markets through training and improved dairy goat extension. The project improved the breeding indices of the goats and milk availability to households with children under five years of age, as well as those living with HIV and the elderly.

"The women and the implementers are very grateful to Australia Awards for the project funding received," Patricia says. While the project evaluation is still forthcoming, the project participants have agreed to continue with radio programs, particularly on milk marketing (radio teams are in the field making the programs ready for airing) which will help both existing and new dairy goat farmers to learn from the training experience and gain from expert advice.▲

¹ Plan of Action for Malawi 2012-2016, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2012

Access to information,- improves productivity of livestock farmers

Writer: Otae Mkandawire
Photography: James Machingura

“I am proud of Australia,” says James Machingura when he describes the impact his 2013 Australia Awards Short Course in Livestock Systems has had on thousands of farmers in Zimbabwe. “I gained a lot of knowledge and skills in livestock systems in Australia; skills in planning a programme and techniques in project presentation among others.”

The short course also covered gender mainstreaming in agricultural extension and technological change – an area James felt could make a sustainable difference to farmers back home in Zimbabwe. “I used the skills gained to introduce knowledge and share new technology with vulnerable communities.”

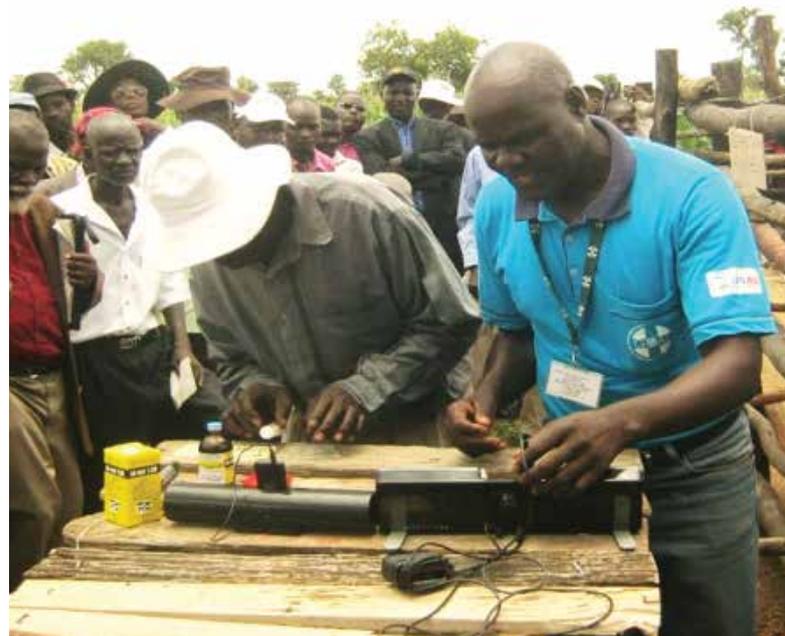
The technology, James refers to is podcasting - a digital extension method James introduced as Program Coordinator at his organisation, GOAL Zimbabwe. For many rural farmers in Zimbabwe, access to information is the difference between making a living or not – sick or dying animals present a loss to farmers yet often the closest animal health management centre could be up to 20km away, making it costly for farmers to receive advice on caring for their livestock. Local veterinary experts come through communities intermittently, which is of value but does not always meet the needs of farmers sufficiently or make a sustainable difference in farming methods. By bringing veterinary services and advice directly to communities in Buhera, through the podcast initiative, farmers are educated and many now have the confidence to treat their own animals, as each lesson provides step-by-step directions.

The podcasting process starts with lesson development in livestock and crop production conducted by managers from the Ministry of Agriculture and Goal Zimbabwe funding partners. These lessons are then recorded onto an MP3 and connected to a loudspeaker for 50-100 farmers to listen at a time. Trained para vets (community based animal health care workers) who are chosen by the community as their representatives, have custody of the MP3 player and the speaker. The lessons are in keeping with farming cycles so that they are always appropriate and involve themes that James explored during his short course, such as dairy handling and processing, meat quality and processing and livestock value chains and markets. Some lessons are replayed often and have become favourites due to their timeless nature; for example lessons on supplementary feeding where farmers learn how to appropriately prepare fodder for their animals.

The podcasts are also used for rapid information dissemination or sensitisation about disease outbreaks as para vets can simultaneously play messages to affected groups of farmers. “Farmers are now accessing knowledge at their village any time they wish because they stay with information at their doorstep. For example, through one of the lessons, farmers learn how to treat a sick animal using a syringe and a needle following instructions from the podcast,” James explains.

The use of podcast technology has enabled livestock production education to reach the most vulnerable smallholder farmers, particularly women (a third of all smallholder goat sellers in Zimbabwe)

★ / James Machingura (in blue) shows farmers how to use podcasting equipment



★ **Call to action:**
Use podcast technology to reach the most vulnerable smallholder livestock farmers with vital information. The results are improved livestock management, animal health and production leading to improved livelihoods.

are women¹) who may be excluded from information; the results are improved livestock management, animal health and production. Because their animals are healthier due to knowledge and skills acquired through listening to the podcasts, farmers can demand better prices of livestock leading to improved livelihoods. Records of livestock conception, calving and kidding rate from the department of Veterinary Services and Livestock Department and Development and also farmer testimony show an increase in livestock productivity. “The productivity of livestock increased from 46% to 75% to date due to the use of knowledge gained through the podcast,” James confirms.

To date, Goal Zimbabwe with the podcast technology has managed to educate 15000 thousand livestock farmers across three districts in Zimbabwe and it is expanding into four more districts next year. James believes podcasting is increasingly critical to rural agricultural productivity, “The use of podcasts remains the answer to [reaching farmers in] remote areas that are not accessible to information; and podcasts support other extension methods in the country.”

¹ International Livestock Research Institute, 2013

Podcasting has the following advantages

- The recorded information does not change content once recorded even if played uncountable times
- Beneficiaries can access information at any time they want
- The podcasting project has instilled a sense of ownership to the beneficiaries
- Information can be shared to a large number of people in a short space of time
- Podcast saves time and resources
- The podcast equipment is the community's inheritance which they use after the exit of project funding
- The program is sustainable since it is community driven. ▲

Decreasing goat mortality to improve incomes and food security in Mauritius

Writer: Renate Louw
Photography: DFAT

Mauritius is a net importer of agricultural and food products (up to 75% of its food requirement), making the country vulnerable to food price volatility. The Mauritian government has set up the Food Security Fund, with the aim of bolstering the capacity of the country to produce enough food for its citizens consumption – particularly creating self-sufficiency in the production of milk and meat. Improving the productivity of goat farmers is therefore critical as goat meat is an important source of protein in Mauritius particularly during large social gatherings. As a development partner in the Indian Ocean region, Australia realises the importance of creating a food secure region, particularly for island nations which are prone to unpredictable environmental and market changes. A critical solution is ramping up initiatives that drive sustainable agricultural productivity.

One such initiative is a project to decrease mortality and enhance the quality of goat farming in Mauritius for higher income earning led by Australia Awards Alumna, Dr Devika Saddul a senior research scientist at the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (FAREI) in Mauritius. Dr Saddul has been involved in goats, sheep and ruminant nutrition research and development for more than 15 years. In 1995 she completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Science, specialising in Ruminant Production, at the University of Queensland in Australia. In 2012 she also completed

★ **Call to action:**
Provide technical support to farmers to help them professionalise their farming activity for more income; encourage farmers to develop multiplier goat farms for production of quality breeding animals for sale to other farmers.

★ / Goats feeding on locally produced forage



an Australia Awards Short Course on Livestock Systems at the University of New England. Her work focuses mainly on finding new and improved methods of rearing animals, technical and research support, as well as the formulation of policy measures to boost the sector.

In 2015, through Dr Saddul, FAREI was awarded an Australia Awards Small Grant worth AUD10,000 to initiate a project to boost the goat sector by increasing herd size. Increasing herd size reduces the effect of revenue loss from animals that may get sick or die and animal performance which ensures that those that reach market are of high quality. Prior investigations had revealed that the high mortality rate among young goats was a major constraint. "Goats are easy to work with because of their size. However, in order to get the most out of them, farmers need to understand their habits in terms of feeding, general care and their environment, as they can be quite sensitive," explains Dr Saddul.

* / **Dr Devika Saddul, Senior Research Scientist at the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute**



Goat farmers face challenges such as: inadequate herd management in the traditional backyard system; informal backyard slaughter; space constraints; lack of business orientation and market structure; no value addition; and a lack of quality breeding animals of local or superior (exotic) breeds. These constraints result in high goat mortality, low productivity and a shortfall in income earning. Support measures to boost the goat sector by the Mauritian government include setting up multiplier goat farms based on the use of boer goats (recently imported through the Food Security Fund), known for their high quality of meat. It is expected that introducing the exotic breed will generate quality breeding animals that will be sold to other farmers as part of the genetic upgrading programme, which may have a national impact. The success of any initiatives to boost the goat sector particularly the introduction of new breeds rests on proper herd management. Dr Saddul's research and development also served as an important pilot project in terms of the national herd development.

The project benefited 12 goat farmers who depend on goat rearing for a household income - six of them were women. These women are involved in goat-rearing activities on their own farms and are involved in decision making regarding the implementation of project activities. Dr Saddul explains that for the women, farming activities form part of their routine household chores. "The women have a key contribution to day to day herd management, fodder collection, animal feeding, cleaning of sheds and implementation of improved animal husbandry practices for enhanced animal productivity."

The project took place in l'Escalier in the south of Mauritius. This location was selected because of the proximity of the farmers, which was important for group meetings and discussions to foster networking, interaction and support. "Group meetings added a social dimension to the project, as they served to consolidate ties among the women and other [male] farmers, thus breaking the gender barrier that may be prominent in villages."

The project aimed to address some constraints goat farmers face by helping them adopt improved husbandry practices to enhance productivity for better income earning. The main activities included evaluating the feeding practices of farmers with a view to regulating their animal's nutrition so the quality of meat and milk could be controlled. In addition, new forage species, with a focus on locally produced feed was introduced to the farming community. Farmers were also trained on improved husbandry practices such as the use of maternity pens for better kid management, partitioning goat sheds and adopting weaning practices to separate males from females.

At the end of the project, the recorded kid mortality dropped to 5% compared to the 35% that was generally reported during previous studies – which meant farmers could offer animals of a better quality for sale, more goats were going to market and more revenue generated. Therefore, the project benefited consumers, farmers, butchers, service providers and the community.

Dr Saddul credits her short course with providing an avenue to undertake the research project. "The skills and knowledge I gained through the Australia Award were invaluable. My [development initiative] was run as a pilot project and I received support from my employer in terms of logistics, human resources, in-kind contributions and – most importantly – support in terms of acknowledging the [initiative] as a priority project of national importance." ▲

Changing government perceptions of artisanal and small scale mining's contribution to development in Uganda

Writer: Don Binyina Bwesigye
Photography: Don Binyina Bwesigye

Australia Awards Alumnus (MSc in Mineral and Energy Economics), Don Binyina Bwesigye, is the Executive Director of Africa Centre for Energy and Mineral Policy (ACEMP), a think-tank committed to promoting equity, shared value, socio-economic justice and the sustainable development of mineral and energy resources in Uganda and the East African Community.

Don is keen on improving the community, health, safety and environmental aspects of the neglected Artisanal and Small-scale Mining Community in Uganda which currently employs over, 400,000 Ugandans directly - majority of whom are women and the youth - with another estimated indirect employment of over 1,500,000 Ugandans through its supply value chain. He speaks here about convincing government to recognise the economic importance of the ASM sector in Uganda ...

Describe your experience working with artisanal and small scale mining?

Individually and through my organisation, the Africa Centre for Energy and Mineral Policy (ACEMP), I have been working with Artisanal and Small-scale Miners (ASM) in Uganda since 2013, immediately after my return from my Masters course in Australia.

During this time, we have managed to change the government rhetoric from being against artisanal mining as an impediment to the development of the mining sector, to recognising it as a critical sub-sector in the country's development agenda, a major source of employment, and an avenue for poverty eradication and sustainable development.

What are the critical issues in artisanal mining from your perspective?

The ASM sub-sector is faced with a wide range of challenges. The current policy and regulatory framework for mining makes no clear distinction between large scale, small scale and artisanal mining. The extent of illegal mining and illicit marketing has been linked to difficulties in obtaining permits and the existence of inadequate government policies.

★ **Call to action:**
Alumni should share research and case studies which builds on our understanding and capabilities to address the issues encountered in extractive work. With the availability of resources, joint research around the extractives sector and other innovative ways of sharing experiences from each would be beneficial to maximising our impact.

According to a baseline survey conducted in Uganda under the Sustainable Management of Mineral Resources Project (SMMP), 2004 – 2008, access to credit was the major issue cited by ASM operators. Consequently, even when mining rights exist, banks are not readily prepared to take these rights as collateral because of: the geological risk of unmined reserves; the short duration of the license (Location License lasts two years) and the small size of the license area of the mining rights, which do not guarantee security of tenure; the mobility of many artisanal and small-scale miners; and the widespread lack of enforcement of laws and regulations.

Financial issues (inclusive of access to credit and obtaining equipment) account for about thirty (30) per cent of the total challenges faced by ASM. It was further revealed that labour issues (training, health, safety, working conditions, child labour, job security) accounted for another thirty (30) per cent.

Other related issues such as technical assistance, the environment, selling arrangements, transport and the tax regime accounted for the remaining thirty (30) percent of the issues that prevent ASM operations from developing beyond subsistence levels. Therefore, there is need for the ASM policy and regulatory environment in Uganda to be adequately supportive in the above vital areas, lest ASM will continue to be a source of conflict among the mineral operators, revenue loss to the Government and environmental degradation.

How are you contributing to resolve these issues?

The mineral industry recognises that ASM operations are often the reason the large companies arrive on the scene in the first place. Therefore, the economic and social impact of artisanal and small-scale mining is far from small.

The Africa Centre for Energy and Mineral Policy has managed to forge good working relations with the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development. This has been critical in enabling the incapacitated Directorate of Geological Surveys and Mines (DGSM) to interface with the ASM participants, talk to and listen to them. This has enabled us to facilitate appreciation within government of the sub-sector and its potential to transform the mining sector as whole. It has also enabled government to appreciate the need to support, develop, regulate and formalise this sub-sector and to allow it to co-exist alongside medium and large scale mining operations in the country.

★ / Artisanal miners in Uganda



The current ASM project has regional impact in as far as it seeks to create three regional ASM Associations from the East, Central and Western regions of Uganda. These regional associations will also form one National Artisanal and Small-scale Mining Association that would be a national platform for ASM in Uganda.

As an organisation we have also partnered with the Uganda National Planning Authority in developing a Minerals and Petroleum Balanced Scorecard that monitors the progression and development of the Minerals and Petroleum Sectors as some of the identified development priority areas in Uganda's National Development Plan NDPII (2015/16 – 2020/21) and Vision 2040. Inter alia, this project seeks to increase government coordination in planning and budgeting for the development of these sectors.

In addition, the project also seeks to highlight and facilitate government in embracing the role of regional sub-national governments in what has been a centralised sector as an efficient means of effectively tracking mineral revenues from the grassroots at the districts to the port of export in the development value chain of these sectors. The project will also ensure that planning for mineral beneficiation and value addition takes local market dynamics, local content and local employment through the minerals and petroleum value chains into consideration.

If these issues are addressed, what could be the impact - what does success look like?

We anticipate that by resolving these issues highlighted above, we can pave the way for the formalisation of the Artisanal and Small-scale Mining sub-sector in Uganda. Success will mean reducing the number of fatalities currently rampant in the ASM sub-sector in Uganda due to government's failure to recognise the sector as a legal

industry through formalisation, which forces many ASM to operate at night under difficult and insecure circumstances.

The success will also bring about the co-existence of large to medium mining companies and ASM players. It includes formalisation, licensing of the ASM associations for easy monitoring, regulation and revenue tracking and collection. It encompasses observance of health, safety and environmental standards, increased inter-ministerial collaboration in the regulation and monitoring of ASM operations. From the ASM perspective, the success and major theory of change will be the transformation of the sector from illegal to legal status, a key contributor to youth employment and a recognised source of livelihood.

Are there opportunities for collaboration with other Alumni and how would they get involved?

We welcome collaborations with other Australian Alumni and look forward to sharing our experiences with them too. ACEMP already has two Australian (International Mineral for Development (IM4DC)) trained Alumni. Notably, our successful partnership with the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development was made possible because of our ability to forge good working relationships with a predominantly Australian-trained human resource base in various departments of the ministry.

We would very much appreciate sharing learning experiences from other African-Australian Alumni working in the Extractives sector; particularly sharing research that would enrich and support our engagement with stakeholders. We have already received research from another Australia Awards Alumnus from South Africa, Dr Sizwe Phakathi ("Making a Living. The Safety Practices, Risks and Challenges of Informal Artisanal Miners in the Community of Blaauwbosch in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, see pg. 9). ▲

★ **Call to action:**
Educate artisanal miners on the importance of paying mining royalties which allows local government to finance social infrastructure development

Increasing mining revenue to fund social infrastructure development in Madagascar

Writer: Renate Louw
Photography: DFAT

Some 80% of Malagasy regions and towns depend on state subsidies or grants to function. Any tax revenue derived from mining activities is therefore an important source of income for local government in order to provide public services and infrastructure. The Court of Accounts in Madagascar which controls public revenue and expenditure is tasked with ensuring that this revenue is channelled appropriately.

Australia Awards Alumna, Harinirina Rajaonah, a senior auditor at the Court of Accounts in Madagascar, is using her award-gained skills and knowledge to increase revenues for municipalities, in turn creating a source of funding for much needed infrastructure and social development. She says her organisation had been trying for three years to start making inroads in tracking the payment and subsequent use of mining royalties. "Since 2012, the Court has been trying together with the Madagascar Extractives Industries Transparency Initiative to follow the trail of funds from mining royalties but we did not have experience in this field".

In 2015, shortly after returning from her short course in Mining Resources – Regulation and Revenue Management at the University of Sydney's Graduate School of Government, Harinirina started working with financial courts to design a system to track and control the use of cash flows received from mining activities. This means accessing the different mining contracts to see whether the different approved social projects, such as the construction of houses, roads and hospitals, have been realised and if all regions have received their share of mining royalties. The Court of Accounts can then take action if irregularities are found.

The Financial Court of Toamasina was the first jurisdiction in Madagascar to participate in this project given the significant extractive industry in the region. The project involved area managers, mayors, the public, small-scale operators and existing mining companies in the region. Harinirina says the skills gained through the short course have helped the whole region.

Another critical part of increasing mining revenue is including taxes from small scale and artisanal miners who are often left out of the legal framework of mining revenue collection. Harinirina's work also involves educating small-scale miners: encouraging them to pay mining royalties and explaining to them that the royalties allow municipalities to receive an inflow of funds to finance social infrastructure. Her team also assists artisanal and small-scale miners with the difficulties they may encounter, such as obtaining operating permits. "The first step for artisanal miners is to obtain operating



★ / Artisanal gold miners in Madagascar

licenses. However, these are very expensive and difficult to obtain, as most of these miners cannot read or write." Harinirina says she has found that artisanal miners, who are not licensed are more likely to lose their mining activity as soon as larger operators arrive on the scene, so getting them registered is important to maintain their livelihoods and their ability to contribute to revenue collection.

While more districts are being included in the project, a key challenge Harinirina faces is gaining access to all the relevant mining contracts; some of them are confidential yet contain critical information that would allow her team to analyse the impact of royalties on social development. "It is essential to educate both the government and the population on the benefits they can derive from the country's mineral resources if the management is transparent. But the road is still very difficult." However, she is motivated to continue her project, as more districts continue to come on board. "Training and exchanges with other participants and trainers with the Australia Awards program in 2015 gave me the opportunity to understand the contents of the mining contracts, the means to [engage] the operators, to assist small scale miners to comply with existing standards and especially to mobilise municipalities to work with the mining industry in the development of their communities."▲

Placing a spotlight on the occupational health and safety needs of informal miners in South Africa

Writer: Otae Mkandawire
Photography: Sizwe Phakathi

Whilst the South African mining industry has consistently reduced fatalities since 2007, mine health and safety remains a great cause for concern. The situation is even worse in informal and artisanal mining operations as most often fatalities and injuries do not get reported to the national Department of Mineral Resources (DMR).

Informal mining is an “invisible” world in the midst of a plethora of occupational health and safety (OHS) policies in South Africa. There is no targeted policy framework for the occupational health and safety needs of informal artisanal miners. It is a cause for concern that there are worker fatalities and injuries that do not get reported to the national department of mines.

For many decades, the visibility of the needs of artisanal and small scale miners has been overshadowed by attention to medium-sized and larger mining companies. The occupational health and safety legislation tends to favour the needs of these bigger companies than artisanal and small scale mining companies, let alone the informal miners who engage in informal mining activities as a livelihood strategy.

Dr Sizwe Phakathi participated in the 2014 Emerging Leaders in African Mining (ELAM) Program delivered by the Australian Government funded Australia Africa Partnerships Facility. Dr Phakathi also received an Australia Awards Small Grant in 2015 to the value of AUD 10,000 to conduct research on the safety practices, risks and challenges of informal artisanal miners. The research project was conducted in an open cast mine with informal artisanal coal and clay miners in the community of Blaauwbosch, KwaZulu Natal province, South Africa. “The main objective of the research project was to illuminate the voice of informal artisanal miners as participants who can shape intervention programmes rather than passive recipients and beneficiaries who need decisions to be made on their behalf on what their OHS needs are and in what form such needs should be delivered to them,” explains Dr Phakathi.

★ **Call to action:**
Apart from its challenges, artisanal and small scale mining plays a significant role as a livelihood strategy for miners and local communities. It is for this reason that artisanal and small scale mining ought to be supported and developed given its significant contribution to poverty alleviation, job creation and revenue generation for national economies.

To develop his research strategy, Dr Phakathi drew on skills and knowledge gained during his ELAM training in Australia through the Minerals and Energy for Development Alliance (MEfDA) at the University of Western Australia and University of Queensland. “The skills and knowledge relating to sustainable development of the extractives sector, for the benefit of local mining communities, have helped me a great deal in identifying the research and policy-making gaps that the project sought to address, through the narrative accounts of informal artisanal miners of their safety practices, risks and challenges they faced as they made a living in an open cast mine.”

The research project was also an opportunity for Dr Phakathi to work with and mentor graduates in the field while they gained valuable practical experience in research design and implementation. “I worked closely with Ms Pfumelani Siweya from the University of Johannesburg on the comprehensive review of literature for the study. Whereas Mr Musa Malabela, a PhD candidate at the University of Witwatersrand and Mr Tony Nyundu who finished a Masters degree during the course of research, were intimately involved with the fieldwork conducted in the informal open cast mine.”

Over 170 informal coal and clay miners who work on a daily basis in the open cast mines and local community of Blaauwbosch were part of the research. The research collection phase gave the informal miners an opportunity to present their views in terms of the safety challenges they faced and how these challenges impacted negatively on their informal mining activities. Key issues raised were: the use of unsafe, traditional equipment to mine coal; unhealthy working conditions including lack of sanitation on site; exposure to disease; lack of safety training; and insufficient protective personal equipment or clothing. Interviews with the miners also revealed a clear lack of knowledge of safety standards, the safety risks they face and implications for their health and environmental degradation.

★ / Informal miners at Blaauwbosch, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Vulnerable groups including women and the elderly presented their views on their occupational health and safety needs and sustainable development challenges of the mining activities. The research discovered that the involvement of women in Blaauwbosch's informal and artisanal mining activities was as strong as that of men miners. The focus group discussions conducted in the open cast mine provided a space for women to highlight differences in the impact that the challenges of informal mining has on their lives through the livelihood activity of mining coal and making bricks from the clay mined. The involvement of the elderly, in informal artisanal mining, showed the burden of poverty and unemployment on pensioners who found themselves compelled to supplement their monthly government grant by engaging in a physically demanding mining activity, in order to provide for their children and grandchildren.

Despite the operational challenges they faced, the research showed that the informal artisanal miners of Blaauwbosch were very much attached to the mine as it is a significant source of livelihood. The miners indicated that they would not support the closure of the mine but will support the development of the mine for their benefit and the community as a whole. "The findings of this research highlight the potential that the artisanal and small scale mining sector has in



addressing the development challenges of poverty and unemployment and make a call for the sustainable development of this sector and empowerment of informal artisanal and small scale miners. Artisanal and small scale mining businesses will thrive when the miners are capacitated and empowered with OHS training, compliance with OHS legislation/standards, business management skills, financial skills, access to credit, access to finance and improvement of working conditions that comply with and promote the ILO (International Labour Organisation) Decent Work Agenda," says Dr Phakathi.

The next steps of this initiative will focus on disseminating the findings and recommendations of the research project at various forums with multiple stakeholders, interested parties and organisations. Specifically, Dr Phakathi is looking at creating OHS tools for informal miners. "I am seeking further funding to develop occupational health and safety training manuals or toolkits for the informal artisanal miners of Blaauwbosch. Lives would be saved as the safety performance will increase in terms of the number of fatalities incurred and injuries sustained by artisanal and small scale miners. A sustainable artisanal and small scale mining sector will be developed to make a significant contribution to local economic development and national economy." ▲

Bolstering Lesotho's antiretroviral therapy efforts through evidence-based policy development

Writer: Janine Smit
Photography: DFAT

Lesotho is among the countries hardest hit in terms of tuberculosis (TB) and HIV. The national HIV prevalence is 25% - the second-highest prevalence in the world. The situation with TB is similar; among the 22 countries with the highest burden of TB worldwide, Lesotho is ranked second. Lesotho also has a high incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STI), which facilitates the transmission of HIV. Unless the country strengthens its TB and HIV programmes, the situation will not improve. This can negatively influence Lesotho's development because young people and women are the most susceptible to contracting these diseases. The country has reinforced its HIV prevention strategies and has prioritised antiretroviral therapy (ART) to reap the benefits of treatment.

Dr Limpho Maile completed a Master of Medicine Sexual Health at the University of Sydney in 1999 as part of the Australia Awards program and has been a key contributor to Lesotho's sexual health policies since. She is currently employed in Lesotho's Ministry of Health as an STI/HIV consultant. Over the last 17 years, she has been using the skills she gained to contribute to policy making and strategic planning on Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI). "The skills and the knowledge that I gained in Australia helped me to strengthen the STI programme in Lesotho."

In 2004, she established and was appointed director of the National STI, HIV and AIDS Directorate in the Ministry of Health. She also contributed to the development of Lesotho's second National HIV and AIDS Policy and National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan 2006/07-2011/12, and was part of the team of consultants to undertake the mid-term review of the country's National HIV Strategic Plan for 2012/13.

In order to understand the extent of the problem of STI as a precursor to HIV in Lesotho, Dr Maile conducted the country's second STI survey. The results of this survey enabled her to develop the second National STI Guidelines, as well as training manuals on STI treatment for healthcare workers. The survey also revealed the need for better data quality, so she established six high quality STI data collection sites countrywide with a high probability of seeing incidents of certain diseases, good laboratory facilities and experienced, well-qualified staff.

Dr Maile also credits her Australia-gained knowledge with giving her the tools to develop National ART Guidelines for Lesotho, and subsequently establish the country's National ART Programme. "The skills and knowledge gained in Australia helped me to develop the first, second and third national ART guidelines, launch the National

ART programme, and establish ART clinics in all 18 hospitals in Lesotho. This was further decentralised to all health centres in Lesotho."

The ART coverage in Lesotho is now 38% of HIV positive patients, based on the new indicator of treating all HIV-positive patients regardless of their CD4 count. A CD4 count is a laboratory test that measures the number of white blood cells in a sample of blood. In people with HIV, the CD4 count is the most important indicator of how well their immune system is working, and the strongest predictor of HIV progression. Some 62% of HIV-positive people in Lesotho with a CD4 count of between 350 and 500 are receiving ART. "The current priorities are young people, women, people with disabilities and key populations that have a higher HIV prevalence than the general population and additional programmes have been developed at community level to identify such individuals," explains Dr Maile. Through the national HIV testing campaign at community level, a high proportion of these vulnerable groups have been diagnosed and most of them have been linked to care. In addition, the ART programme has benefited women by training them as village health workers, lay community counsellors and expert patients among those who are infected and are receiving ART. People living with disabilities have also benefited because they can access educational materials in specific formats like Braille and video, and some have received training as sign language interpreters.

With the help of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Baylor College of Medicine in the USA, her team developed material to train healthcare workers in the management of adult and paediatric HIV. She also established a mentoring and preceptorship program to strengthen the capacity building of healthcare workers, and helped set up laboratory monitoring systems for HIV management, as well as systems to strengthen the procurement and supply chain management of antiretroviral drugs and other commodities for the National ART Programme.

Dr Maile is a strong champion of the so called 90-90-90 targets - diagnosing 90% of people living with HIV, ensuring that 90% of them are on treatment and that 90% of them are virally suppressed. She is also advocating for a greater emphasis on tracking patients who miss consecutive clinic appointments or have not been seen for several months. Dr Maile is mitigating these issues by helping to increase HIV testing nationally and strengthening links to care for infected persons. She aims to increase the retention to care and collaborate with communities to increase adherence to ART. "If the challenges

★ **Call to action:**
Let's work towards the 90-90-90 targets - diagnosing 90% of people living with HIV, ensuring that 90% of them are on treatment and that 90% of them are virally suppressed.



★ / From left, Dr Limpho Maile, Gugu Mona, Tau Modiri, Caroline Nyongesa, Dr Cecilia Natterembo and Zandile Mnisi at the 2016 International AIDS conference in Durban, South Africa

encountered in Lesotho are addressed, it will be able to achieve its 90-90-90 targets, reduce new HIV infections, and also reduce HIV mortality and morbidity.”

Dr Maile is now looking to make a difference beyond Lesotho’s borders. Based on her expertise in the field, Dr Maile has been appointed to HIV technical working groups for STI and HIV at regional and continental level and has worked with colleagues from Uganda, Botswana, Swaziland and South Africa. Through her attendance of these technical working groups and the consultation work she has undertaken in the region, countries in the Southern African

Development Community (SADC) and East, Central and Southern Africa (ECSA), as well as the WHO and the African Union, have also benefited from her expertise. She is currently working on a project that helps long-distance truck drivers, sex workers and communities around the borders of 10 mainland countries in the SADC region access HIV testing and treatment. She is also addressing the barriers to accessing healthcare services, HIV and TB treatment in African prisons and would like to collaborate with other Alumni on these projects. “Let’s share knowledge and lessons learnt from national HIV programmes so that we do not reinvent the wheel.” ▲

★ **Call to action:**
Policy initiatives and interventions should impact the whole country, right down to community level.

Addressing Swaziland's high maternal mortality rate through policy intervention

Writer: Janine Smit
Photography: Zandile Mnisi

According to the Swaziland Demographic and Health Survey, in 2007 maternal mortality was estimated at 589 out of 100 000 live births; in 2012, this ratio increased to 593 out of 100 000 live births. In addition to the high maternal mortality rate, Swaziland's HIV prevalence is a major concern. According to UNAIDS, Swaziland has the world's highest estimated prevalence rate of HIV-infected adults (28.8% of people aged between 15 and 49)¹. In Sub-Saharan Africa, HIV positive women who are not on treatment are six to eight times more at risk of dying during pregnancy and childbirth than non-infected women. With these facts, it had become imperative for policy makers, programmers and service providers in Swaziland to understand the underlying causes of maternal death and to see what solutions could be undertaken to remedy the situation.

In 2016, the first policy brief on maternal mortality was published primarily to sensitise public health officials on the reasons for the high level of maternal deaths in Swaziland spearheaded by Australia Awards Alumna, Zandile Mnisi. Zandile completed a master's degree in Research Studies and Epidemiology at the University of Adelaide in 2015 and is now the Research Manager at the Swaziland Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. The Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Programme supported Zandile's initiative by providing the resources she needed. The Ministry was also very helpful in encouraging her to undertake this activity.

The first step was conducting a desk review of five maternal, neonatal and child health (MNCH) studies conducted in Swaziland between 2009 and 2015. She then reviewed international technical guidelines on MNCH and key Ministry documents. Zandile says she relied on the critical thinking techniques she learnt while on Award. "The skills I gained on critically reviewing articles whilst undertaking my studies in Australia helped me a long way in this exercise."

The review found that pregnant women continue to succumb to preventable complications. Between 2009 and 2010, more than half of the maternal deaths that occurred in health facilities were caused by direct obstetric causes. The factors associated with maternal mortality can be broadly categorised into health systems, patient and provider-related factors.

Since this was the first brief of this nature to be published in Swaziland, Zandile hopes that the analysis of maternal death data and subsequent recommendations contained in the review will be adopted to lead to solutions to lower maternal deaths. Importantly, she anticipates that the impact of the findings will be felt widely. "It is hoped that this initiative will benefit the whole country from policy to community level."

Already the brief has helped government to respond to some of the questions about the high maternal mortality rate in Swaziland. The Health Ministry used Zandile's document to prepare for the Southern

African Development Community (SADC) Heads of State Meeting, which was held in Swaziland in August 2016.

Zandile is keen on sharing the policy document beyond government officials, for maximum impact. "This document will be shared with health care providers with the intention of strengthening areas that require improvements at service provision level. Also, it will be shared with communities through the radio, sensitisation of community based volunteers and health promotion messages from the health facilities; with the ultimate aim of improving maternal health and child health and ultimately reduce maternal deaths in the country," says Zandile.

Following her success with the maternal death policy brief, Zandile is now looking to start a demonstration Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PreP) project which will introduce antiretroviral medications which can prevent the acquisition of HIV infection by uninfected persons; and a knowledge management project where research is translated into useable products. Both of these ideas are a result of her participation in the 2016 AIDS Conference, funded by the Australia Awards. "I learnt a lot; I also interacted with a lot of experts who were presenters during the sessions. Scientists and researchers understand HIV/AIDS better now than ever before after spending years conducting research on the epidemic." If Zandile's PreP project is successful, it will result in better public education on PreP and its role in the healthcare cycle. Her knowledge management project is also on track as she already plans on using findings presented at the AIDS Conference to compile meaningful information to educate the people of Swaziland about HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

Zandile would like to maintain the momentum gained from engaging with fellow Alumni during the AIDS conference and says knowledge resources, case studies and image galleries should be shared among interested parties. "Alumni can also facilitate exchange visits to their countries centres of excellence. For example Swaziland can learn from Kenya and South Africa on the conduct of PreP clinical trials." ▲



★ / Zandile Mnisi visits a Pre-exposure Prophylaxis clinic

¹ UNAIDS 2015

Preventing new HIV infections in Uganda by prioritising testing and medical circumcision

Writer: Renate Louw
Photography: DFAT

Since the 1990s, Uganda has been struggling with the HIV/AIDS epidemic that reached a prevalence rate of 15% at its peak. It is estimated that about 1.2 million Ugandans are currently living with HIV; this is equivalent to about 6.5% of the total population. Despite the country's policies to reduce the prevalence of HIV, in 2015 there were 83,000 new HIV infections, the third highest rate of new infections in Sub-Saharan Africa.¹ A renewed focus on HIV prevention is needed to stem the rise of new infections.

To address this challenge, the Ugandan government in its National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan 2015/16 – 2019/20, has embarked on a comprehensive prevention strategy that combines biomedical, behavioural and structural solutions in order to reduce infections among youth (by 70%) and children (by 95%) by 2020.² The strategy also calls for a multisectoral approach, utilising public infrastructure, private funding and civil society programming.

Australia Awards Alumna, Dr Cecilia Nattembo who completed her master's degree in International Public Health at the University of Sydney in 2013 is working in line with Uganda's revised prevention strategy. As the South Western Regional Medical Director for Uganda Cares, a partnership between the Uganda Ministry of Health and the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, she is focused on increasing accessibility to prevention methods, testing and HIV treatment.

Uganda Cares offers HIV testing and circumcision in six districts in the South Western Region of Uganda and Dr Nattembo heads the Circumcision Department, where non-surgical circumcision is primarily used. Circumcision is said to reduce the risk of HIV infection for circumcised males. After noting dwindling numbers of men opting for circumcision, she devised a strategy to first educate men on the benefits of circumcision before offering the service. "I came up with a strategy to provide services to pre-mobilised communities; this is something I had learned in Sydney." Her team recently embarked on the sensitisation and circumcision of young men in institutions of higher learning. This increased the number of people who realised the importance of circumcision in the fight against HIV/AIDS. By mobilising communities and taking services to the people, Cecilia and her colleagues have increased the number of circumcisions from about 10 a month to 60 a month.

Cecilia says there is no doubt that her education at the University of Sydney has helped her achieve positive results in her organisation.

★ **Call to action:**
There is nothing more important than HIV/AIDS prevention. This is especially true for the young women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa. Empowering girls to have their partners tested for HIV and use condoms, as well as refusing transactional and cross-generation sex, is key to prevention.

"Without it, I would never have [had] this opportunity to be a part of an organisation that has tested over 300 000 people in 2015 in this region."

Despite her achievements with Uganda Cares, Cecilia feels that the battle against HIV/AIDS will only be won if the next generation is infection free and children are no longer being born with HIV but she says reaching this goal requires a clear focus on preventing new infections particularly for women. "There is nothing more important than HIV/AIDS prevention. This is especially true for the young women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa. Empowering girls to have their partners tested for HIV and use condoms, as well as refusing transactional and cross-generation sex, is key to prevention. Getting every person tested and putting all those that are positive on treatment will also help fight the epidemic." ▲



★ / Dr Cecilia Nattembo

¹ UNAIDS Gap Report 2016
² National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan 2015/16 – 2019/20

Recent and returning Awardees encouraged to connect with broader Australia Global Alumni Community

African Awardees attended the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - Australia Awards Welcome and Farewell event held in the ballroom at Perth's Government House on 7th July. A total of 12 African Awardees were present from Sierra Leone, South Africa, Ghana, Botswana, Mauritius, The Gambia, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia representing Murdoch University, Curtin University and University of Western Australia.

Mr Ian Whitaker, Honorary Consul of Mauritius was there to support and congratulate Mauritian Award recipients with other Awardees supported on the day by family, friends and staff from their respective universities. Assembled guests and dignitaries from tertiary institutions, government and the diplomatic corps took the opportunity to greet and welcome new Awardees at the early stages of their Australian education experience and bid farewell to graduates who will join the ranks of Australia Awards Alumni.

Returning Awardees were encouraged by key note speakers who appealed for them to remain connected with their universities and the broader Australia Global Alumni Community. Mwape Mulumbi, a newly arrived Awardee from Zambia was keen to offer her thoughts

at the very start of her Australia Awards journey 'It gets a little overwhelming at times when I realise how much new knowledge I will be absorbing in the next two years, but the thought of leaving with so much knowledge at the end of those two years excites me. I'm concerned about the development of Zambia and having contributed as a non-state actor for the last eleven years, I will finally feel confident of my capability to contribute to making real change, having been 'armed to the teeth' with new insights, knowledge and skills to solving seemingly intractable problems. Studying in Australia and at Murdoch University in particular has put me into contact with people from many different countries – some countries more developed than Zambia, others grappling with the same issues. I equate all the new connections I will make to having access to the great think tanks of the world. My new networks and linkages will be a source for my continued learning and ideas sharing to improve the design and effectiveness of policies in my own country".

The Awardees were encouraged to build and mobilise their professional networks, celebrate their successes and engage through the Australia Global Alumni website.



★ / Australia Awards recipients at the Welcome/Farewell Celebration in Perth, Australia

Australia Awards Short course on Managing Mine Closure



* / Managing Mine Closure Short Course participants at a site visit in Western Australia

Twenty six African Awardees attended the Australian Government funded Australia Awards Short course on Managing Mine Closure held at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia from 28 June – 21 July 2016. This tailored and innovative course is designed to expose participants to cutting edge practice in socially and environmentally responsible mining and designed to develop participants understanding of mine closure planning and implementation across the lifecycle of mine activity. The program is delivered over a four week period at Murdoch University, Perth, and a further three week period at the Centre for Environment Management at North West University in Potchefstroom, South Africa. The program includes field trips to active, closing, closed and abandoned mine sites. Emphasis is placed on networking and communication amongst participants. A group of many and varied extractives industry professionals contribute to the course program.

The Awardees were drawn from all over Africa and largely within Engineering and Environmental Science disciplines. The Short Course has attracted interest and support from government, industry and non-government organisations seeking to inspire and

empower leadership for change within career professionals from their organisations. The course was specifically aligned with the International Council on Mining & Metals (ICCM), Extractives Industry Transparency Index (EITI) and framed within the Africa Mining Vision (AMV) so that participants would better understand how their personal action in the field can contribute to international and continental wide initiatives to enhance practices in the extractives sector.

Vivian Obiadika a Senior Inspector at the Nigeria Ministry of Mines and Steel Development said the Short Course was particularly useful in terms of drawing the link between good leadership and policy implementation. "As a continent, some of the challenges we have are similar and they all rally around implementation of government policies and regulations. We have good policies but implementation is a problem, so based on some of the learnings [from the short course] on leadership and communication we will be able to find out how we can bring on the workforce, encourage them, train them where necessary and have a better system where policies can be adequately implemented."

Australia Awards Scholar makes international impact with food safety research

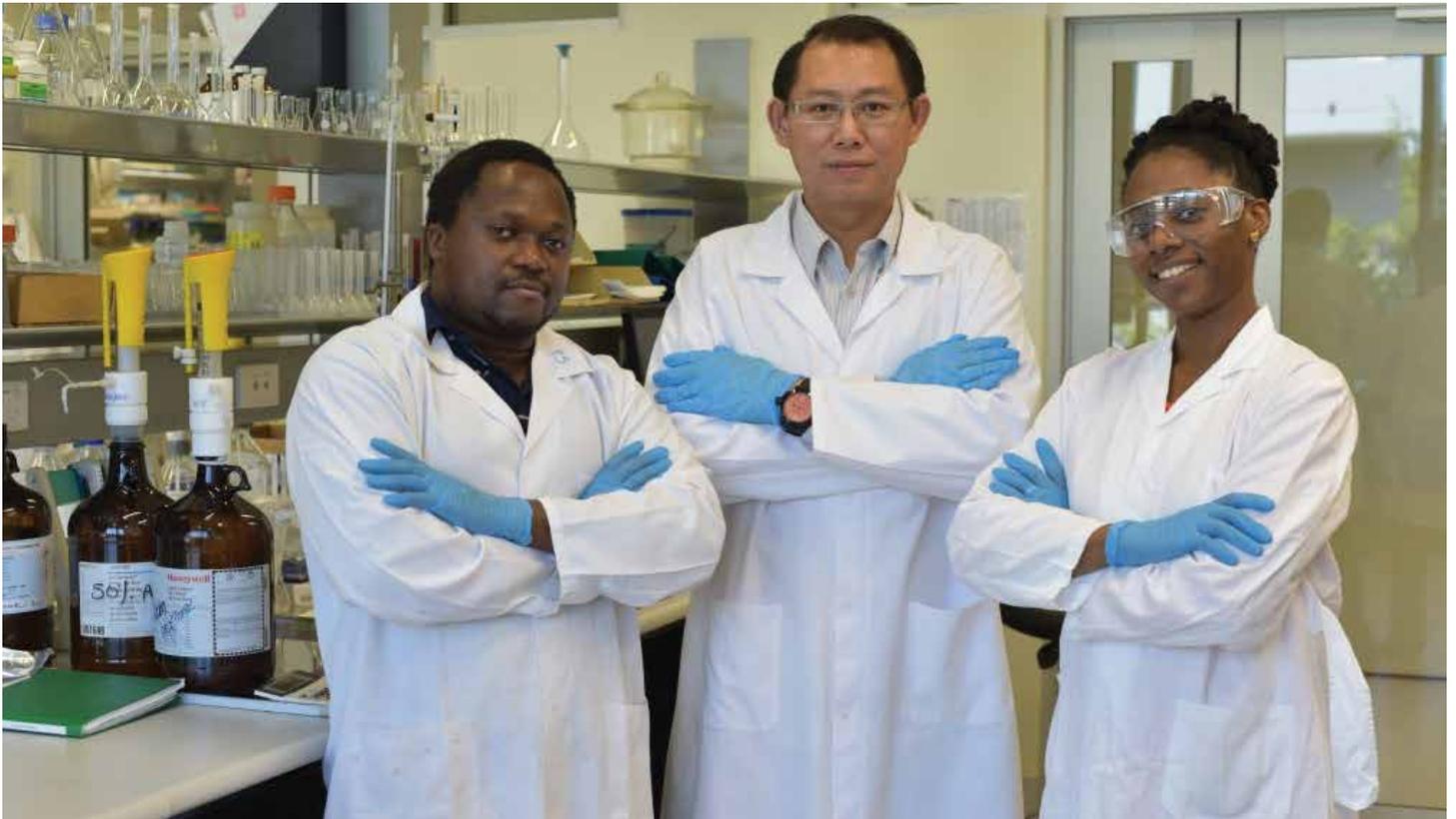
Australia Awards scholar Titilayo Falade from Nigeria is making an impact and receiving recognition for contributions to food safety research. Titilayo is a PhD research student at the University of Queensland and she was recently awarded the 2016 Lynsey Welsh Award for innovation in near infrared science. The Lynsey Welsh award is presented in memory of the late Lynsey Welsh who made a significant contribution to cereal science, near infrared science and the Australian Near Infrared Spectroscopy Group (ANISG). Titilayo was presented the award for her oral presentation on her PhD research using near infrared spectroscopy for modelling aflatoxin contamination in single kernels of maize. Titilayo hopes to make contributions towards addressing food safety and security challenges faced in the developing world. Titilayo said she is grateful for the award as well as the support and opportunities she has received from the Australia Awards and University of Queensland, which have allowed her to attend global conferences and workshops related to her field. "I also hope to inspire young researchers and women around the world in agriculture and research."

Titilayo says her experience in Australia has been remarkable, "I have built strong relationships with people within and outside Australia

during my time here. And by receiving from and sharing with others, my life has changed positively. This has helped me to develop as a researcher and a human being. I feel very honoured that Australia Awards has made this investment in me, this way. Also, the Lynsey Welsh Award and other awards that I have received here as a PhD student, add to a memorable experience for me. They are a reminder that investment needs to yield returns. Therefore, I am indebted to give back by continuing to make contributions to the global community."

When asked about how she will use her networks developed during her time in Australia, Titilayo observed, "My networks and linkages are already beginning to help me towards my Work Plan on Return. With the relationships between the Nigerian and the Australian governments, between my advisors and I, as well as among senior colleagues and my peers; there is a huge opportunity to make valuable advancements in agriculture, other food sciences, as well as the social and economic stages of the global community. As a result of these relationships, we are already beginning to shape our thoughts for continued collaboration and advancements in science and wider networks. I intend to pursue these opportunities."

★ / Titilayo Falade, PhD student (pictured right) with fellow PhD colleagues Benigni and Eddie



Alumni Association News Briefs

Australian High Commission in Kenya host Alumni Family Fun Day

Kenyan Alumni together with their families gathered at the Australian High Commissioner's residence on 6 August 2016 for a day of networking, entertainment and strengthening ties between Alumni. Australian High Commissioner to Kenya, HE John Feakes encouraged Alumni to continue their support of the Kenya Australia Alumni Association.



★ / Australian High Commissioner to Kenya, HE John Feakes, chats to Alumni at the 2016 Family Fun Day

Australian Alumni Welcome Home Reception and Networking Event

The newly elected Executive Committee of the Australian Alumni Association Mauritius hosted a Welcome Home reception and Networking event on 9 June at the Hennessy Park Hotel in Ebene for awardees who had returned to Mauritius. The event was an opportunity for new and existing Alumni to network and meet with the Australian High Commissioner, HE Susan Coles, the newly elected Executive Committee of the Australian Alumni Association Mauritius, and Australia Awards Program staff. HE Coles encouraged Alumni to engage with each other and build local, regional and global professional and social links.



★ / The new Executive Committee of the Australian Alumni Association Mauritius

Australian Alumni Association Mauritius observes Ocean Environment Day with family BBQ

On 3 July, Alumni and their families joined the Alumni Association Mauritius and the Australian High Commission to spend a family day at the Outrigger Mauritius Beach Resort in Bel Ombre learning about the incredible work that Reef Conservation Mauritius is doing in this part of the island. The association was very proud to have one of their Alumni members, Natalie Summers, who is currently working with the NGO, leading the day's activity.



★ / Australian High Commissioner to Mauritius, HE Susan Coles; Alumni Association Mauritius Treasurer, Sandra Lo Fan Hin and archeologist, Dr Geoffrey Summers

Mozambique Australia Alumni Association supports special needs school in Maputo

As part of their strategy to support local communities, the Mozambican Australia Alumni Association (Associação dos Antigos Estudantes Moçambicanos na Australia – AMEA) and the Australian High Commission in Pretoria donated sport equipment and games to a school for children with disabilities on the 20th of May. The event took place at the Primary Special School No2 in Maputo and was attended by His Excellency Mr. Adam McCarthy, Australian High Commissioner to Mozambique and members of AMEA including Ana Charles, Marcia dos Santos, Laila Chemane, Estevão Mabjaia and Sergio Pereira. HE Adam McCarthy highlighted the importance of sport and playing activities for cognitive development among children with special needs.



★ / HE Adam McCarthy and Australia Awards Alumna Dr Ana Charles, address children at the Primary Special School No2 in Maputo

Australia South Africa Alumni Association officially launches

The Australia South Africa Alumni Association (ASAAA) was officially launched at the residence of the Australian High Commissioner in Pretoria on 15 June 2016 and hosted by His Excellency, Mr Adam McCarthy, Australian High Commissioner to South Africa. The event was an opportunity to showcase the work the ASAAA has undertaken through partnerships with the private and public sector, with a keen focus on promoting gender equality in education.

“Australia is delighted to host South African scholars in our universities each year, both those privately funded and those who receive Australia Awards scholarships. The Alumni Association is a fantastic initiative which helps to ensure not only that their connection with Australia does not end on their return home, but that there is an ongoing platform to support their continued professional development and encourage their ongoing contribution to South Africa’s social and economic transformation” said HE Adam McCarthy.



★ / Members of the Australia South Africa Alumni Association with HE Adam McCarthy

Côte d’Ivoire Australia Alumni Association donates agricultural equipment and training to women cassava producers

On June 4, the Côte d’Ivoire Australia Alumni Association (CIV-AAA) with support from the Australia Direct Aid program, donated agricultural equipment to the Abehebo Women’s Association, located in Guitrozon, Duékoué in the west of Côte d’Ivoire. The equipment consisted of a cassava mill, a cassava pressing machine, wheelbarrows, Roman scales, machetes, rakes, boots and hoes for the women who are cassava producers.

The CIV-AAA also held a training and capacity building exercise including a basic literacy exercise, as 20 out of the 35 women in the Abehebo Association are illiterate. There was a session on cultivating high yielding cassava varieties and strengthening women’s management and leadership capabilities. This training was delivered by Gisèle Angoua Yesso, Education Inspector, and Deputy Secretary General of Côte d’Ivoire Australia Alumni Association.

★ / Farming equipment donated by the Cote d’Ivoire Australia Alumni Association and the Australia Direct Aid program to the Abehebo Women’s Association



Ghana Australia Alumni Association undertakes capacity building on improved cassava handling

Cassava is widely promoted by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and seeks to contribute to food security and poverty alleviation. However, due to lack of technical knowhow, processors often employ unhygienic practices thereby reducing the quality of the products. As a result the Ghana Australia Alumni Association (G3A) with support from the Australia Direct Aid Program (DAP), and in collaboration with the Regional Agriculture Development Unit (RADU) organized an Exposure Visit for 50 cassava processors to the Milonovise Good Practice Centre in Ghana's Eastern Region on 19 May 2016.

Following the event, a team of Alumni visited the participants in their communities to perform a post-event monitoring exercise. It was observed that the majority of participants have started establishing measures to ensure they improve their work place conditions and have shared their experiences with other cassava processors they work with.



★ / Cassava processors receive practical training on improved cassava handling

Sierra Leone Alumni Australia Alumni Association launches

The Sierra Leone Australia Alumni Association (SLAAA) was formally launched on July 14th, 2016 at the Miatta Conference Hall in Freetown, Sierra Leone. In attendance were Freetown-based Alumni, senior government officials, including the Representative of the Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Australia Desk officer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Head of the National Youth Coalition in Sierra Leone.

The launch provided an opportunity for the SLAAA to actively continue engagement with Sierra Leonean citizens, development actors, Australian Universities and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through its Australia Awards Programme. SLAAA will continue to bring Australia closer to Sierra Leone. Its Alumni network will continue to engage with Sierra Leoneans across all socioeconomic divisions to share experiences, build capacity, mentor and also share Australian opportunities. Sierra Leone Australia Alumni are already contributing significantly to socio-economic growth in Sierra Leone and across the sub-region.



★ / Outside the office of the newly formed Sierra Leone Australia Alumni Association