

A **MATRIX** *Minute* with Tsungai Mhembere



About Tsungai

Tsungai Patience Mhembere is a Research Pharmacist of Record at the [University of Zimbabwe Clinical Trials Unit](#) in Harare and MATRIX's newest fellow through the [CaSE](#) (Capacity Strengthening Engagement and Mentorship) Track 2 program. The seven-month fellowship affords Tsungai the opportunity to work under the mentorship of Dr. Gabriela Gomez (IAVI) and Dr. Sergio Torres Rueda (London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine) on the [BACH](#) (Business, Market Dynamics and Commercialization Hub) economic evaluation (cost effectiveness and costing) of MATRIX products.

Why did you apply to be a CaSE Fellow?

The motivation to apply for this fellowship stemmed from my eagerness to acquire practical health economics experience in support of my career goal to serve as a technical advisor to policy makers, aiming to promote access to a selection of effective HIV prevention products that suit the varied needs of women in Africa.

What do you want to accomplish through your fellowship?

With mentoring from experts in the field, this fellowship provides a unique opportunity for me to gain the practical skills I require in costing, and preparing data for early economic evaluations. I would like to gain expertise in the design of mathematical models, a skill which will impact my contribution to cost effectiveness assessments of novel health technologies.

What do you hope to accomplish beyond your fellowship?

I have a desire to see the movement of novel effective HIV prevention and treatment strategies, from research all the way out to roll out and accessibility within the community. My goal after completion of the scholarship is to impact women within my community through deliberate participation, on my part, and engagement with organizations that promote innovative reproductive and sexual health medical technologies that are safe and effective. I also, in the long term, would like to contribute meaningfully to national health technology selection and assessment within low-income settings, even in my own location. It's quite important on what technologies are chosen and for what.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

I envision myself as part of a national or global multi-disciplinary team that is at the forefront of promoting the adoption and sustainable access of proven cost-effective HIV prevention technologies in all communities that need them.

-more-



How did you become interested in the field of HIV prevention?

In the 1990s before antiretroviral therapy was widely available, I lost several family members of various age groups to complications and symptoms related to HIV infection. I was still in high school then and resolved within myself to pursue a medical career, having experienced the gaps in the field (so to speak) personally. I studied pharmacy at university with a real intention to contribute towards drug development. After my graduation and a few years in hospital and community pharmacy, an opportunity presented itself to contribute to HIV clinical trials that focused on both HIV prevention and treatment. As part of my role, I administered adherence counselling to patients including young women and mothers and I became aware of some of the challenges they faced, drawing my interest particularly towards prevention of mother to child transmission and HIV prevention in women. The intention to improve access to effective HIV treatment and prevention health technologies then prompted me to study Public Health and Health Economics.

Do you have any heroes?

I had the distinct privilege of working under the late Professor James Hakim as part of the UZ-CTRC team. He dedicated his life to the fight against HIV and was an excellent researcher, scientist, and clinician whose work and influence spanned communities and regions. Professor Hakim played a pivotal role in the introduction of antiretroviral therapy in Africa, and through the HPTN 052 study was key in proving that early antiretroviral therapy can prevent HIV transmission. He successfully brokered strong diverse partnerships and collaborations with global organizations in the fight against HIV. So, to me, he is someone I looked up to and I would like to emulate and, in my own way, I aspire to positively influence my own generation in the fight against HIV, especially with regards to women and mothers.

What do you do in your free time?

I enjoy spending time with my family, watching my three boys play rugby and soccer, and baking. I am also involved in the women's department in my local church.

What is a fun fact about you?

I enjoy doing crossword puzzles and am often in the process of actively solving one.

What do you think you'd be doing if HIV were non-existent?

If HIV was non-existent, I would probably be a food scientist or making cosmetics some way, or running a bakery, because I do love baking.

September 27, 2023

MATRIX

A USAID Project to Advance the Research and Development
of Innovative HIV Prevention Products for Women

MATRIX is made possible by the generous support of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the MATRIX program. The contents in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the U.S. Agency for International Development or the U.S. Government.