

MCW Global Communications Team

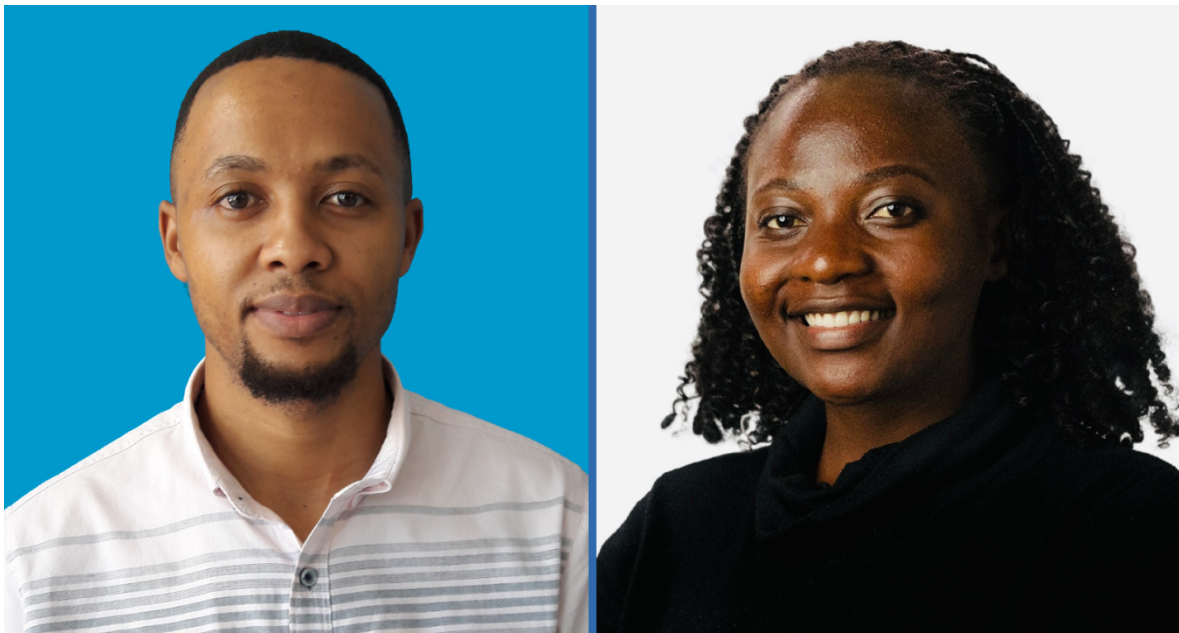
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Introducing 2023 Alumni Ventures Fund Impact in Improving Communities in Zimbabwe and Tanzania



New York, NY, November 15th, 2023 - 2023 Alumni Ventures Fund Recipients [Diana Mandewo](#), from Zimbabwe, and Dr. [Winfred Mgaya](#), from Tanzania, embarked on important journeys for themselves and their communities with their initiatives, “HPV Access,” respectively, “Plastic-Free Smiles.”

Supported by the Alumni Ventures Fund, they are working on these initiatives to improve people's well-being by promoting healthcare access and tackling plastic pollution. Both initiatives touch upon the awareness-raising component, too.

Diana, with her initiative to create a digital-based platform to provide information regarding Human papillomavirus (HPV), and Winfred, with his initiative to promote the use of wooden toothbrushes as an alternative to plastic ones, are addressing their communities' needs and widening the Alumni's Ventures Fund impact worldwide.

The [Alumni Ventures Fund](#) is a unique opportunity for all graduates of the Fellowship and Conference, which offers them a chance to scale up their existing community development work in health, education, or economics.

These two initiatives started this November and will run until November 2024; to better understand them and their impact, in this piece, we highlight these two initiatives and how implementing them benefits the respective communities.

HPV Access- Increasing Awareness and Access to Vaccination in Zimbabwe

HPV remains the most common sexually transmitted infection worldwide, with one in every two sexually active young people being infected with HPV at some point.

However, Diana, a global health enthusiast, acknowledges that information on HPV and the vaccine is not as readily available as it ought to be.

To contextualize, she refers to a [UNAIDS](#) study (2019) that projected that only 1 in 27 young people demonstrated full awareness of HPV and its methods of spread. This is far more ominous for Sub-Saharan Africa, with 226 million continental population aged 15-26. Moreover, the [Centre for Disease Control](#) notes that the vaccine is effective up to 26 years of age. However, most vaccination efforts are targeted at only prepubescent girls (10-14 years). This means 4.42 million young women aged 15-26 years old in Zimbabwe are left vulnerable and sadly unaware of the importance of being vaccinated against HPV.

Diana's initiative, "HPV Access," aims to establish a digital-based platform that bridges the knowledge gap by providing young people with information about HPV, its spread, and how it can be prevented. It will also provide much-needed clarifications surrounding vaccinations and demystify concerns regarding vaccination safety. She believes this will encourage vaccine uptake and foster spaces for conversations around HPV infection for young people. Through a GPS-based locator website, young people will be linked to clinics in their community that provide HPV vaccination services and family planning clinics that offer HPV DNA tests and cervical cancer screening services such as Pap smears. Through partnerships with the clinics, young people can book their appointments on HPV Access, and service providers can follow up.

"This initiative empowers young women in Zimbabwe to live productive and full lives by ensuring their reproductive health. By improving awareness and access to HPV vaccines, we will help fight cervical cancer for women in Sub-Saharan Africa", Diana says.

Plastic-Free Smiles- Reducing Plastic Pollution by Advocating for Wooden Toothbrushes in Tanzania

Plastic waste is a significant contributor to environmental pollution. As a dentist, Winfred often advises his patients to replace their toothbrushes every three months, resulting in substantial plastic waste.

To address this, he launched the "Plastic-Free Smiles" initiative to advocate using wooden toothbrushes to reduce environmental plastic pollution. The Plastic-Free Smile project aims to promote good oral health and well-being while taking climate action to save and maintain life below water and on the ground.

Winfred, who has experience working in hospitals and the care industry, believes that by using wooden toothbrushes, the amount of plastic pollution can be reduced.

"My initiative is essential to my community because it reduces plastic pollution to the environment and raises awareness in the community about the harmful effects of plastic toothbrushes while giving alternatives to the ways of making sure their oral health is taken care of", he says.

His initiative promotes using wooden toothbrushes as an alternative to plastic toothbrushes to reduce environmental plastic pollution. Plastic pollution is a severe threat to the environment, especially in Tanzania, he highlights, where a significant amount of plastic waste ends up in oceans and rivers, posing a threat to marine life. It is estimated that if every person in Tanzania uses one plastic toothbrush every three months, 254 million toothbrushes will be discarded each year, contributing to the already growing

amount of plastic waste in the environment. In just 365 days, Tanzania's population can produce 1.27 million kilograms of plastic toothbrush waste. To address this issue, he proposes switching to biodegradable wooden toothbrushes, which are an eco-friendly alternative.

Further, this initiative aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, which include good health and well-being, climate action, life below water, and life on land.

The Alumni Ventures Fund is fully supported by The Claire Friedlander Family Foundation and Hyman R. and Ruth Shapiro Foundation, Inc.

Please click [here](#) to read testimonies from the previous recipients of the Alumni Ventures Fund.

About Us

MCW Global is a non-profit organization with a vision for communities around the world to achieve greater levels of education, improved health, and increased economic security. Our mission is to address communities' pressing needs by empowering current leaders and readying leaders of tomorrow. Founded in 1999, MCW Global is based in New York with affiliates in Africa (Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zambia). MCW Global offers Young Leaders and Africa Programs. Across all our programs, we seek to act with integrity, compassion, accountability, responsibility, and excellence.

For more information and our recent activities, please visit www.mcwglobal.org

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