

Empowering African Women Leaders: Insights from the Global Health Leadership Fellowship training in Cape Town

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Fellows and organizers after an exciting talk with Dr Nomafrench Mbombo (who sat in the middle dressed in fuzia), the current Minister of Health and Wellness for Western Cape, in South Africa.

The Women in Global Health Leadership Fellowship (WGHLF), a part of the Healthy Futures South Africa project in the Faculty of Health Sciences, kicked off its inaugural in-person training in Cape Town, South Africa, from March 10th to 15th, 2024. This training is part of a hybrid year-long fellowship that was specially designed to elevate the leadership skills of talented African women who are public health professionals and passionate about promoting gender equity in global health systems.

The 12 remarkable fellows from Kenya and South Africa hail from diverse backgrounds in academia, government, and health practice.

Throughout the week fellows delved into didactic lectures, collaborative exercises, health site visits and met with trailblazing guest speakers such as Dr Precious Matsoso the former Director General of the Department of Health and now the co-chair of a global body that is drafting a future pandemic treaty for the WHO.



Organisers and fellows with the pioneering Dr. Precious Matsoso (centre), the former Director General of the South African National Department of Health and current Co-Chair of the (WHO) Intergovernmental Negotiating Body, after an insightful session

Other noteworthy guest speakers, like Minister Nomafrench Mbombo, Minister of Health for Western Cape, Professor Lydia Cairncross, and Professor Salome Maswime, emphasized seizing opportunities and driving change to advance gender-transformative systems.

Site visits to local health centers and the Grootte Schuur Hospital provided invaluable insights. Through the activities and site visits, fellows observed striking parallels in the challenges confounding the healthcare systems of both countries.



Rachel Ngugi, a fellow from Kenya, leading a presentation of her team’s drawing of the healthcare system in Kenya including the identification of gender-blind or gender-transformative spaces and policies.

Charlyn Goliath, a fellow from South Africa, emphasized this sentiment when she stated “We are all sharing the same challenges within the health system. How we are organized as a health system is different, but both are dependent on partnerships across sectors. Community health workers are the foundation of both countries. Strong leadership and governance are key to support the health system in both countries.”

Despite starting as strangers, the fellows fostered profound connections, documented through vibrant exchanges and picture sharing in the WhatsApp group. The training culminated in fellows pitching innovative ideas for projects aimed at addressing gender equity and global health challenges within their respective organizations.

The WGHLF is run in collaboration between the Centre for Global Health at the University of Toronto’s Dalla Lana School of Public Health, Moi University’s School of Public Health in Kenya, and the University of Cape Town School of Public Health in South Africa, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation.