

OBITUARY

Tatenda Murigo: A passionate advocate for science in Africa (June 17, 2000–July 14, 2023)

We are devastated to relay the news that Tatenda Murigo, an African representative from Zimbabwe on the IUBMB's Trainee Initiative committee, passed away in a motor vehicle accident on July 14, 2023. Tatenda was a passionate science communicator, educator, and advocate for women in STEM.



Tatenda attended high school at the Dar Es Salaam Independent School in Tanzania, Africa. From an early age, she was an independent and innovative thinker, and ultimately, it was the creative aspect of life that fueled her pursuit of a scientific career. At the time of her passing, Tatenda was attending the University of Zimbabwe in Harare, where she was a postgraduate honors biochemistry student with a focus on biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and health technology solutions.

Tatenda was not only a gifted A+ science student, but she was passionate about uplifting her fellow African citizens. Tatenda's love for science and helping

others drove her to seek ways to integrate a scientific perspective with African politics and education. She advocated for the pillars of the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. It was her vision to use scientific innovations to improve the standard of living for those around her. Tatenda was also passionate about mobilizing socioeconomic empowerment in youth. Accordingly, she was the host of the #ForwardSTEMSpace on Twitter, which promotes public conversations around bridging science advocacy, science policy, and creativity in Africa. In her honors undergraduate research in the Department of Biotechnology and Biochemistry at the University of Zimbabwe, she focused on developing treatments for common pathogen-driven skin diseases under the supervision of Professor Stanley Mukanganyama, President of the Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Society of Zimbabwe (BMBSZ), who noted “she was a hardworking student, diligent and enterprising.” Dr. Farisai Chidzondo, Chair of the Department and current Past President of the BMBSZ reflected that “she is a great loss to us as a Department and BMBSZ in particular, and the nation in general.”

In addition to being a member of the IUBMB's Trainee Initiative, Tatenda was an active participant in a large number of societies, holding leadership positions in many of them. She was a valued member of the University of Zimbabwe's Rotaract Club, where she held the position of Secretary General from July 2020 to June 2021. She also served as a volunteer administrator for Visibility STEM Africa. During this time, she interacted with various stakeholders in the STEM industry, including academia, technopreneurs, institutions, and organizations, to assist in the planning of the inaugural “Visibility STEM Africa For US, By US” conference. From November 2021 to the present, Tatenda volunteered as a youth drone instructor for Precision Aerial in Harare, educating Zimbabwean youths on drone applications in the STEM industry and providing training in the operation and flight of multi-rotor drones. She was also a student-elect of the British Association for Cancer Research and British Immunology Society, a Member of the National Association of Science Writers, a

Abbreviations: BMBSZ, biochemistry and molecular biology society of zimbabwe; FASBMB, federation of african societies of biochemistry and molecular biology; FEBS, federation of european biochemical societies; IUBMB, international union of biochemistry and molecular biology.


Science Communications Affiliate of the Zimbabwe Young Academy of Sciences, and many more.

Tatenda joined our leadership team on the IUBMB Trainee Initiative in January of 2022 as an African representative after finding inspiration from the Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS) online initiative. She reached out to the current chair, Elyse Fischer (a writer of this perspective), and expressed her excitement and passion for science communication and her desire to uplift and inspire other young African scientists through scientific engagement and opportunity. More than a year later, there is no doubt that her presence on our committee had a hugely positive impact. Her creativity, experience with scientific communication and ability to prioritize positive change made her excel as our social media representative on the African team. The African team also hosted two online webinars, of which Tatenda's volunteer work in organizing these events was invaluable. While hosting the events, her enthusiastic personality set everyone at ease, and she conveyed the importance of the topics through her insights and thoughtful questions. Most recently, Tatenda had been instrumental in initiating a social media presence for the Federation of African Societies of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (FASBMB) to further promote BMB in Africa and to garner interest and passion among African peers. It was this project that Tatenda was actively working on when we received news of the tragic event. Dr. Nyarai Soko of the FASBMB tells us Tatenda's passing "is a great loss to us in Zimbabwe and the greater FASBMB community. Her zeal, vibrancy and creativity will be sorely missed. May her beloved soul rest in eternal peace."

The day before her accident, the IUBMB Trainee Initiative, along with IUBMB President Alexandra Newton, had a Zoom call to celebrate 18 months of the trainee initiative and where the team gathered to brainstorm about the future. Tatenda was brimming with ideas, her passion shines through. At one point, the WiFi was cut on her campus, so she rushed home to continue the Zoom meeting, only to find out that service was out across her entire neighborhood. She texted us all that she would finish giving her insights when the WiFi was back, and when Elyse Fischer thanked her for her input, she drew a big heart on the WhatsApp message app. Her last message to us is how we will always think of Tatenda—an enormous


heart from an enormously talented young scientist who was taken from us far too soon.

In a recent interview for the Trainee Initiative, Tatenda described herself as a very creative person and shared that what "*characterizes [her] approach, might be thinking about how to take different perspectives on a process or a particular opportunity. Instead of merely doing research, we have to communicate our findings. Making others understand, even though they might be from other backgrounds. Creativity can be expressed in animations, films or comics. Again, do not just break things down to make the audience understand but also transmit the importance and especially the beauty of solutions.*" These beautiful words capture Tatenda's true nature and passion for science communication. She was a brilliant young mind with an immense potential. Her loss will be deeply felt in our community. We will be celebrating and remembering the remarkable woman, scientist, and friend that Tatenda was by establishing an IUBMB fellowship in her honor; this fellowship will be awarded to a promising young female biochemistry student in Zimbabwe.

Victoria Patten¹ 

Elyse Fischer² 

Patrick Penndorf³

Alexandra C. Newton⁴ 

¹University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

²Monod Bio, Seattle, Washington, USA

³Max Planck Institute of Immunobiology and Epigenetics, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany

⁴Department of Pharmacology, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, California, USA

Correspondence


Alexandra C. Newton, Department of Pharmacology, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, CA 92093, USA.

Email: anewton@health.ucsd.edu

ORCID

Victoria Patten  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1374-2006>

Elyse Fischer  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8746-039X>

Alexandra C. Newton  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2906-3705>