

Women's University in Africa (WUA) Alumni Engagement Lecture Highlights the Power of Networks in Global Exposure and Job Creation



HARARE - Networks are not merely collections of contacts or names in a phone directory. They are corridors that carry trust, evidence, discipline, credibility and shared execution. This powerful message was delivered by Mr Samson Muzenda, Founder and Executive Director of the Tariro Youth Development Foundation (TYDF), during the Women's University in Africa (WUA) 4th Alumni Engagement Lecture Series held on 21 August 2026.

Speaking under the topic "WUA: My Gateway to Global Exposure and Job Creation," Mr Muzenda challenged students, alumni and development practitioners to rethink the role of professional networks and higher education in shaping careers and creating opportunities. He argued that education becomes transformative when it produces identity, purpose and relationships that can be leveraged for social impact and economic development.

Throughout his presentation, Mr Muzenda drew from his lived experiences as a development practitioner, researcher, consultant and social entrepreneur, tracing his journey from the classrooms of WUA to international leadership platforms and ultimately to founding an organisation that is creating opportunities for young people in rural Zimbabwe.

"A university experience becomes a platform when it produces identity, not just a certificate," he said. He explained that WUA helped him develop a stronger professional identity and clearer purpose beyond academic achievement. His MSc in Development Studies equipped him with intellectual and analytical tools to understand inequality, participation, institutions and community transformation, while recognition through academic excellence strengthened his confidence that rural-based work could contribute meaningfully to national and global development debates.

Mr Muzenda reflected on four forms of capital that WUA provided: Knowledge Capital, Confidence Capital, Credibility Capital and Relationship Capital. These assets enabled him to transform education into action, leadership and opportunity creation.

He highlighted that his global exposure was built upon strong local foundations. His leadership at TYDF, participation in the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) in 2022 and selection for the Mandela Washington Fellowship in 2024 demonstrated how local credibility can create pathways into global spaces. “Global exposure was not an escape from local realities; it was an expansion of how I could understand and respond to them,” he said.

Beyond international travel, Mr Muzenda described global exposure as the development of “systems literacy” – the ability to understand how ideas, partnerships, funding mechanisms, institutions and accountability systems operate across different contexts. He explained that meaningful exposure enables professionals to frame local challenges in language that global partners can support, appreciate international standards of quality and accountability, build credible collaborations and develop the confidence to participate in high-level decision-making spaces. He emphasised that the real value of global exposure lies in returning home with sharper tools, broader perspectives and a stronger commitment to community transformation.

A central feature of the lecture was his insistence that exposure must lead to institution-building. Through TYDF, he has channelled lessons, networks and relationships acquired through both local and international experiences into programmes focusing on Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), youth leadership and agency, economic livelihoods and community resilience initiatives. “Personal success celebrates one person; institutional leadership creates platforms where others can rise,” he noted.

Addressing employment, Mr Muzenda framed job creation as an ecosystem rather than a single event. He argued that opportunities emerge when networks connect information, trust, resources, markets, mentorship and talent. “Networks create jobs when they reduce distance between talent, evidence, resources and opportunity,” he said.

He illustrated this through practical opportunity channels that emerge when networks function effectively, including project staffing and field facilitation, peer-led youth mentorship roles, vocational and enterprise development pathways, agricultural inputs and local value chain initiatives, and consultancy, research and advocacy opportunities. He explained that real community problems, supported by credible evidence, effective teams, strategic partnerships and accountable delivery, can be transformed into sustainable livelihoods, enterprise growth and community-based employment.

In line with the lecture theme, “The Power of Networks: From Classmates to Collaborators”, Mr Muzenda encouraged students and alumni to move beyond maintaining social connections and instead build purposeful professional ecosystems. He advised participants to identify strengths, create small collaborative successes, formalise trust through clear roles and accountability, and ultimately build projects, enterprises, research initiatives and institutions together.

To strengthen the impact of the WUA alumni community, Mr Muzenda proposed establishing a structured mentorship pipeline, an opportunity-sharing desk for scholarships and jobs, collaborative proposal-writing platforms, an alumni enterprise marketplace and a speaker and research bank. He stressed that “a network without structure depends on chance. A network with structure becomes a system.”

He also encouraged students to build professional reputations while still studying by taking assignments seriously, treating dissertations as potential policy tools, and volunteering strategically. He cautioned students not to confuse valuable exposure with long-term exploitation, emphasising that volunteer experiences should contribute meaningfully to personal and professional growth.

Closing the lecture, Mr Muzenda reaffirmed his commitment to supporting the WUA community through mentorship, leadership opportunities and opening TYDF as a platform for research, community engagement and development practice. He challenged the WUA alumni community to move beyond informal social connections and deliberately build structured systems for mentorship, opportunity sharing, collaborative research, entrepreneurship and leadership development. He argued that while networks built on chance may occasionally benefit a few individuals, networks built on purpose and structure become engines for sustained opportunity creation and shared prosperity.

“Let us turn classrooms into networks, networks into collaborations and collaborations into opportunities,” he concluded. “The higher goal is shared opportunity.” The lecture reinforced WUA’s commitment to fostering meaningful alumni engagement and demonstrated how higher education can serve as a catalyst for leadership, innovation, global engagement and sustainable job creation.

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