



# MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

## FEBRUARY 2025



## UPDATES

### THRU-ZIM launches The Wellness Series with lunchtime walks

THRU-ZIM kicked off its Wellness Series in early February with lunchtime walks—and the response has been fantastic! What began with just eight participants has now grown to 18 enthusiastic walkers, each covering an impressive 3.5 km on average. These walks offer more than just physical activity; they've become a time to connect, unwind, and take a refreshing break from our desks. Led by Ethel Dauya, the initiative has quickly become a favorite among colleagues looking to add a little movement to their workday.

The Wellness Series coordinator, Kate Mattick shared that the walks are just the beginning. *“Throughout 2025, we’ll be focusing on different aspects around wellness which include physical activity, mental health, and nutrition, offering a variety of activities to help everyone find a way to prioritize their wellness.”*

Look out for more exciting sessions coming up in the first quarter, including stretch sessions, pilates, zumba, and general fitness activities.



Highlights from lunchtime walks

## Exploring the impact of maternal stress on pregnancy outcomes

THRU-ZIM recently hosted Dr. Sinead English for an engaging seminar on how stress during pregnancy influences both maternal and child health from an evolutionary biology perspective. She highlighted key factors such as maternal diet, environmental stressors, and infections, reinforcing the concept that the first nine months shape the rest of your life.

What stood out most was how THRU-ZIM's interdisciplinary approach brings together public health, evolutionary biology, and clinical research—fostering collaboration that enhances maternal and child health outcomes.

The seminar is available here: [Dr. Sinead English Seminar](#)



Dr. Sinead English shares her research on the impact of stress during pregnancy

## Professor Arjune Sen explores the global links between epilepsy and dementia

We were honored to host Professor Arjune Sen, for a thought-provoking seminar on "Intersections between Epilepsy and Dementia: A Global Challenge." In his presentation, Professor Sen shed light on the complex relationship between epilepsy and dementia, highlighting shared risk factors, the global burden of these conditions, and the importance of integrated care approaches. Drawing from his groundbreaking research, he emphasized how older adults with epilepsy are at a heightened risk of cognitive decline and dementia, while individuals with conditions like Alzheimer's disease are more likely to develop epilepsy.

A highlight of the seminar was Professor Sen's demonstration of the Epilepsy Diagnostic Companion—an innovative, easy-to-use head device designed to help healthcare workers, especially in resource-limited settings, identify individuals who have experienced convulsive seizures. The device uses a region-specific questionnaire and predictive model to offer accurate diagnoses without the need for specialized training. The seminar is available here: [Prof Arjune Sen Seminar](#)



Professor Arjune Sen unpacks the epilepsy-dementia link and showcases a game-changing diagnostic tool

## THRU-ZIM and partners complete intensive R training for epidemiology

Nineteen staff from THRU-ZIM, UZ-CTRC, OPHID and Zvitambo came together for two weeks of intensive training to master statistics for epidemiology with R. The course was facilitated by an international team of statisticians from the International Statistics and Epidemiology Partnership (ISEP) including Vicky Simms from the UK, Elia Magwaja from Tanzania, Peter Kaberia from APHRC in Kenya, and Levicatus Mugenyi from the MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Research Unit in Uganda, plus 6 facilitators from BRTI.

Before the course, the facilitators took part in a workshop to build their skills at teaching R, led by Lizzie George and Michelle Clements from the MRC Clinical Trials Unit at UCL. Thanks to UZ-CTRC for hosting the course and to our funders: ISEP, the Africa and Middle East Teaching Fund Initiative at UCL, and the EDCTP recognition prize for outstanding research team won by THRU-ZIM



Participants and facilitators unite at the R training course

## Zimbabwe Qualitative Research Network: A new era for cross-learning

We are excited to announce the rebranding of the Social Science Working Group to the Zimbabwe Qualitative Research Network (ZQRN). This marks an exciting new chapter as we expand the network to include qualitative researchers from various disciplines, fostering a platform for sharing methodologies, experiences, and insights.

Led by Dr. Constance Mackworth Young and Faith Rutendo Kandiye, ZQRN aims to become a dynamic hub where qualitative researchers across Zimbabwe can exchange knowledge, refine research practices, and engage in meaningful discussions on emerging methodologies. Our goal is to build a strong, interconnected community that enhances the depth and impact of qualitative research in Zimbabwe.

ZQRN offers a unique opportunity for qualitative researchers to engage in cross-learning by sharing challenges and innovative solutions, stay updated on methodological advancements through discussions and workshops, expand professional networks by connecting with researchers from diverse fields, and enhance research impact through interdisciplinary collaborations and shared resources.

### ZQRN has lined up exciting seminars from March to June

- 18 March, 11:00 AM – Nonhlanhla Ndondo -*Ethical Engagement & Emotional Awareness in Qualitative Research*
- 22 April, 11:00 AM – Chipso Mpandaguta & Fadzai Mhino-*Community-Based Participatory Research*
- 13 May, 11:00 AM – Rumbi Gumbi & Lydia Davidson -*Experience-Based Co-Design in Healthcare*
- 17 June, 11:00 AM – Rudo Chingono & Chipso Nyamayaro-*Process Evaluation in Implementation Science*

Venue: THRU ZIM (Gazebo), 8 Ross Avenue, Belgravia, Harare

Hybrid Format: Join in person or via Zoom

Zoom Meeting ID: 976 3528 1584 | Password: 628299

If you are a qualitative researcher in Zimbabwe or know someone who would be interested, we invite you to join this growing community.

For more details please contact:

- Constance.Mackworth-Young1@lshtm.ac.uk
- faith@neotree.org
- fayruekay@gmail.com

## Congratulations Tafadzwa Madanhire

Congratulations to Tafadzwa Madanhire on reaching a major academic milestone! He has officially submitted his thesis to the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) Research Degree Examinations for marking.

His research among adolescents living with HIV and established on ART (enrolled in the VITALITY trial) focuses on understanding vitamin D, calcium, and bone metabolism and determining their roles in bone development and linear growth.



Tafadzwa: "Thesis submitted, on to the next adventure!"

## THRU ZIM welcomes its first junior health economist

We are delighted to welcome Sandra Chidawanyika, a new **Junior Health Economist**, who will be joining the group. Sandra brings a wealth of valuable professional experience and will be contributing her expertise to the CAMFED Livelihoods Research project, dedicating 50% FTE per month over the coming year

We are also pleased to share that Sandra's availability as a resident health economics expert presents a unique opportunity for collaborative engagement, and she is open to offering her insights and support to other projects during her available time.



Sandra

## SIMBA Grip Strength challenge

The SIMBA study, led by Edson Marimbire and Angus de Wilton, recently hosted the THRU-ZIM Grip Strength challenge on 20th February as part of their community awareness initiative. The event educated staff on the study's focus: exploring the impact of pulmonary tuberculosis on muscle strength.

Angus shared, "As part of this research, we will measure grip strength using a simple test where participants squeeze as hard as they can to measure the force they can generate. The results will be calculated to provide insights into the functional impact of TB, which may not be detected by less sensitive methods previously employed. This technique aims to offer a more accurate measure of how diseases like TB affect muscle strength, helping researchers gain a deeper understanding of the condition's functional impact. Ultimately, our study will use these techniques to explore whether TB causes persisting problems with muscle strength, even when patients are otherwise 'cured', that may lead to disability and impacts on quality of life previously not recognised."

The friendly competition saw some impressive performances, with winners walking away with SIMBA-branded baseball hats! Congratulations to Edson and Vimbai—the THRU-ZIM Grip Strength Champions!



THRU ZIM staff brought their A-game to the Grip Strength challenge

## Welcome new employees and volunteers

THRU ZIM is excited to welcome new members to our growing team!

**Rangarirayi Nyamwanza** has come on board as a Research Assistant under the KOSHESAI Study, supporting the formation of peer-to-peer support groups for older adults (CHAPS). These groups aim to foster a sense of community, connection, and empowerment.

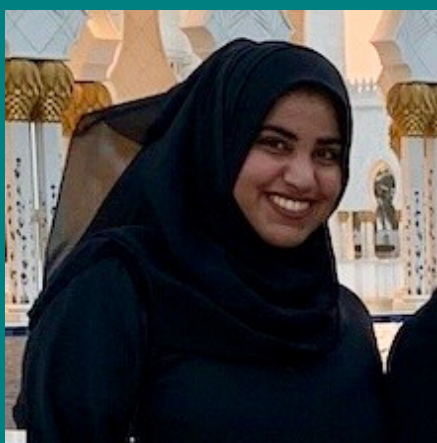
**Raheemah Mahomed Adam**, a junior medical doctor, is volunteering on the KOSHESAI Study. She will work on patient-facing resources covering key health topics identified through community engagement. She looks forward to gaining a well-rounded understanding of research and its role in improving patient care. Beyond research, she hopes to engage with experienced professionals, gain insights into public health initiatives, and explore how evidence-based interventions can create real-world impact.

**Sisquo Sihlangu** joins the team as a Finance Intern from the University of Zimbabwe.

We look forward to their contributions and wish them all the best in their roles!



Ranga



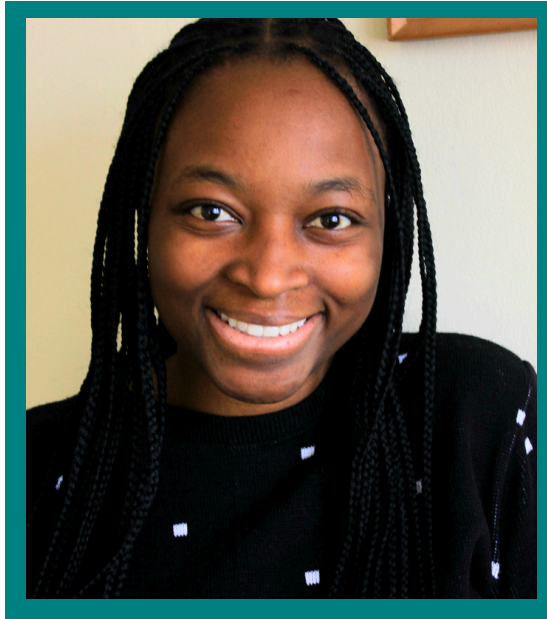
Raheemah



Sisquo

# 5 MINUTES WITH...

## Chido Kelly Saruh Rusike



### **What do you do and when do you start?**

I am a sexual and reproductive health (srh) specialist by background, and I am currently a PhD student with the University of Bristol and hosted by BRTI. I just started this month (February 2025), and my PhD is focused on co-developing a public health intervention for Zimbabwean healthcare professionals to support mid-life women as they transition into menopause.

### **Where can we find you in the office?**

I usually am based in the field management/PhD office with the other fellows. Please feel free to come through and say hello.

### **Who and/or what inspires you?**

I have been very privileged to meet and interact with such incredible people over the course of my career and life, so picking out one specific person might make my brain freeze. I will say this, though: the most consistent source of inspiration, apart from my family, has been Taylor Swift's music. Her songwriting and storytelling cultivate my critical thinking and enhance my people skills and persuasive writing, which makes me good at my job in a somewhat taboo field. Also, a good meal always saves the day!

### **Why is SRH research important, and what do you enjoy most about it?**

Sexual and reproductive health is a critical yet often overlooked aspect of overall well-being. Many populations, particularly menopausal women face significant barriers to accessing quality care due to stigma, misinformation, and gaps in healthcare provider training. My work is important because it addresses these challenges through research, policy advocacy and capacity building—bridging the gap between research and practice and ultimately contributing to more inclusive and effective services.

What I enjoy most is the ability to create meaningful change through both research and practical implementation. I have been extremely fortunate to work in multiple countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and seeing first-hand the shifts in attitudes in healthcare provision and policy is... a joy, to say the least. I hope I keep doing this for a long, long time.



# OPPORTUNITIES

## **PhD Fellowship Opportunity**

The RADIO-TB trial is offering a Wellcome Trust-funded PhD in Epidemiology. Based in Zimbabwe & London, this 42-month program focuses on TB management, cost-effectiveness & impact modelling.

Apply by 25 March 2025 to [radiotbfellowship@gmail.com](mailto:radiotbfellowship@gmail.com)

More info: [thruzim.org/opportunities](https://thruzim.org/opportunities)

# PUBLICATIONS

**Evaluation of a novel point-of-care lateral flow assay screening for *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* infection among pregnant women in Zimbabwe** Martin K, Dauya E, Dziva Chikwari C, Mackworth-Young CRS, Simms V, et al. (2025) Evaluation of a novel point-of-care lateral flow assay screening for *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* infection among pregnant women in Zimbabwe. PLOS Global Public Health 5(2): e0003839. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0003839>

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# THANK YOU!