

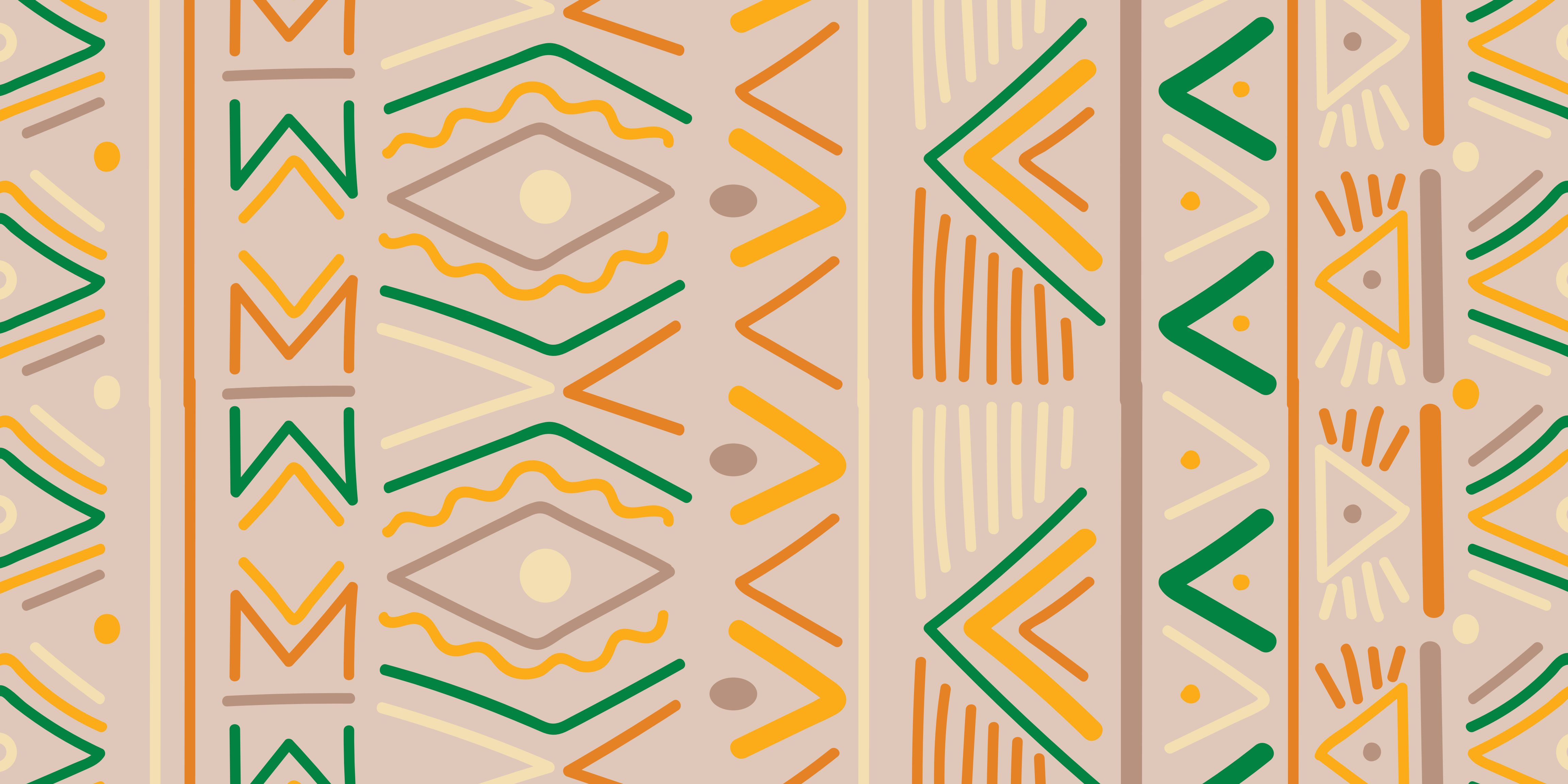


THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

# STORIES OF CHANGE

INSPIRING VOICES FROM OUR ALUMNI

Edited By Nancy Booker and Rosalind Raddatz



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This volume is the brainchild of Dean Nancy Booker, who first conceived of the idea, then tirelessly championed its ambitious breadth, and directed it to fruition.

Our deepest gratitude to KfW, the German Development Bank, and The Aga Khan University for their generous scholarships and financial support. This assistance enabled each student, innovator, and participant featured in this book to complete their programmes and share their inspiring stories. Thank you for making this journey possible.

Our thanks to the colleagues and friends without whose tireless efforts this project would not have been completed.

Much appreciation to Rosalind Raddatz for editing the volume and for shepherding this book through to completion.

To wordsmith extraordinaire, Biko Jackson, you captured the heart, mind, and soul of each alumni and member of faculty featured herein with lyrical candour.

For his masterful design, we offer recognition and gratitude to Michael Njuguna and Centrepress Media Ltd. This book features the outstanding photography of Benson Githaiga in Nairobi and Shemei Agabo, in Kampala. Uncredited photographs are from the subjects’ personal collections.

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# contents

“The pursuit of this goal is particularly important at a time when information is flooding over all of us in ever-greater quantities. Someone has said that plugging into the media today can sometimes be like trying to drink water from a high-pressure fire hose!

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In such a world, effective communicators must truly be effective educators - providing background as well as foreground, the big picture as well as the close-up detail. And this will be true not only for journalists, but also for communication professionals in government, at NGO's, in the business sector, at entertainment and cultural organisations -and with a host of civil society institutions. In brief, the School of Media and Communications is designed to serve a very wide range of constituencies - engaging a broad array of disciplines.”

— His Highness, the Aga Khan IV

## FACULTY & STAFF

Foreword: Dr. Tania Bubela .....	6
Nancy Booker.....	8
Alykhan Peermohamed.....	33
Marion Njoki.....	41
Benson Githaiga.....	51
Peter Kimani.....	69
Joseph Odindo.....	73
Henry Kibira.....	93
George Nyabuga.....	112

## 01

### SOCIAL IMPACT & CIVIL SOCIETY

James Okongo.....	14
Mercy Gaki.....	18
Donald Magomere.....	20
Simon Wakarach.....	24
Ferdinand Mbonihankuye.....	26
Kamau Muthoni.....	30
Henix Obuchunju.....	34
David Oluoch.....	38
Galago Bocha.....	42

## 02

### INNOVATION & CAREER MOBILITY

Eve Masawi.....	48
Patience Ndinawe.....	52
Caroline Kimutai.....	54
Aly Ramji.....	58
Peter Mwangangi.....	60
Sandra Lamwaka.....	64
Linet Igadwa.....	66
Faith Oneya.....	70
Ian Dennis.....	74

## 03

### LEADERSHIP

Alex Taremwa.....	78
Irene Majale.....	82
Andrew Arinatwe.....	84
Bakari Machumu.....	88
Jamila Mohammed.....	90
Patrick Gathara.....	94
Aleya Kassam.....	96
Beryl Oywer.....	100
Bella Twine.....	104
Martin Wachira.....	108



DR. TANIA BUBELA

Provost and Vice President Academics  
The Aga Khan University.


The Graduate School of Media and Communications (GSMC), founded in 2015 at the Aga Khan University (AKU), welcomed its first academic programme in 2018. Six years later, GSMC proudly celebrates 143 graduates from its Master of Arts in Digital Journalism and the Executive Masters in Media Leadership and Innovation, along with over 300 admissions to these programmes. In 2024, it launched its Master of Arts in Strategic Communications, opening opportunities for careers in marketing and communications. In addition, GSMC has provided professional development for over 6,000 media and communications professionals across East and Southern Africa, a number that continues to grow as GSMC’s influence broadens.

GSMC’s diverse student body represents not only the East African Community (EAC) but includes students from Southern African countries like Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi. This diversity has been enabled through generous support from AKU’s Chancellor, His Highness, the Aga Khan IV and the German Development Bank – KfW. Their combined generosity has enabled talented, yet financially constrained students from across the EAC, to access GSMC’s programmes.


Embodying by the AKU’s principles of Impact, Quality, Relevance and Access (IQRA), the stories in this book highlight the powerful contributions

of GSMC alumni in three key areas: social impact and civil society, innovation and career mobility, and leadership. Alumni are advancing the needs and interests of their communities, practising ethical journalism, innovating the art of storytelling, and driving transformation within the media and communications sectors. The stories include voices of the faculty and staff, who have inspired students on their journeys, provided mentorship, and helped shape future communication and media leaders.

With more than 30 stories, this collection aims to inspire continued support for a vibrant communication ecosystem and a media landscape that informs and empowers communities. This support is vital not only for strengthening the role of media and communications in Africa but also for enabling GSMC to continue training future leaders facing financial need. This new generation of skilled professionals will make a lasting impact in a continent where more than 60% of the population is under the age of 25! This collection underscores the power of storytelling and the need for credible, ethical, and factual information to drive social advancement. As GSMC expands its programmes and reach, our vision is to see a graduate of GSMC in every sector across East Africa within the next decade, championing impactful, relevant, responsible media and communication. My congratulations to Dean Nancy Booker and the GSMC team.



The stories include voices of the faculty and staff, who have inspired students on their journeys, provided mentorship, and helped shape future communication and media leaders.







# NANCY BOOKER

Dean, GSMC

Professor Booker comes from a long line of teachers, as long as she can remember. Her mother was a teacher, as were a number of her great aunts. She recalls a sprinkling of uncles coming back home at day's end with the dusty white of chalks highlighting their hair. One of her grandparents was a professor at the University of Nairobi. "I never thought that I would get into teaching," Nancy says. "I saw how hard my mother worked, coming back home in the evening to continue grading papers and needing to prepare for the next day's class, and I thought, no way was that going to be my life. No way I'll be writing on a blackboard with chalk."



As a young adult, Nancy admits to wanting something a little glamorous, with visibility and impact. "That's why I got into journalism and media," she tells of the profession in which she excelled and shaped what she has been doing for the last 23 years, shaping the next generation of media and communication professionals and entrepreneurs. "You don't choose this life to make lots of money, but the rewards, seeing students excel, making major strides in their careers and lives, is deeply gratifying. We are not only imparting knowledge but shaping and impacting lives and generations."

Established in 2015, the Graduate School of Media and Communications (GSMC) is one of Aga Khan University's newest schools. Before it received full accreditation from the Commission for University Education, the School hosted numerous professional development courses. GSMC's first academic programme, a Master of Arts in Digital Journalism, was approved in 2017 and launched in 2018. Its second programme, an Executive Masters in Media Leadership and Innovation was launched in 2021. A new Master's programme in Strategic Communications was launched in September 2024.

Nearly five years on, GSMC has positioned itself as the leading journalism and media training institution in all of East Africa. Over 142 students have graduated from the two programmes of the 260 admitted. "If you walk into any newsroom in East Africa," Booker says, "you're likely to find either a student or a graduate of GSMC in those spaces. That's real impact."

When Professor Booker joined AKU she had been teaching for 16 years. As part of her onboarding, she enrolled in a Teaching and Learning Enhancement Workshop. "I remember asking my boss, 'What am I going to learn? I've been teaching for more than a decade, and I have been nominated as best lecturer of the year on more than on occasion. So why am I being made to do this programme in Dar Es Salaam, for a whole week?" she recalls with a chuckle. With the benefit of hindsight, Nancy tells how the programme helped her "position my students in a holistic learning environment and put the work at the centre." It's a formula that she has since encouraged all of GSMC's faculty to adopt.

All incoming GSMC students are adult professionals. As such, "I see them as colleagues. Some students have spent more time in the newsroom than some of us have," Booker says. Oftentimes, when students start their studies at GSMC, they approach graduate education like a product that you might buy in a shop. "This is something that we must debunk. Instead,

it's a process of unlearning, learning, relearning. The classroom is a space for us to share our experiences and learn from each other, guided by a curriculum."

At GSMC, the student is the central participant in the learning process, and they are accountable for their work progress. This approach sets GSMC apart from other institutions. As a result, class discussions are enriched in unimaginable ways. In fact, students often leave the classroom so inspired, they thank the professor for teaching. "The first time a student ever thanked me for teaching, I was in Liberia," Prof Booker laughs. "No one had ever done that, but I get it here a lot. It all goes back to students realising that they're valued and that their contributions are valid."

Teaching adults doesn't come without its challenges. Frequently, adult learners attending evening or weekend classes juggle competing interests, including demanding work schedules and family obligations. "As a teacher, it's important that you step back and understand what your students are dealing with," Prof Booker explains. "But we also must ensure that we don't compromise the learning," she says. Faculty and staff alike are sensitised to support students' unique needs in the best way possible. "Do we always get it right? Maybe not always. But we're always trying, always learning, and for me that's the important piece."

It's a constant process of reflection and review, of corrections and revisions, and of managing a growing staff. Work may not be as glamorous as Dean Booker once imagined it would be, but it is undeniably impactful and deeply rewarding. The demands of her position now pull her away from fulltime teaching. She swims against this current by making her way into as many classrooms as she can to teach. She teaches courses in media leadership, research and strategic communications, as well as professional development courses. "I get a kick from teaching, I really do," she says. "To be able to guide a discussion and give the students something to walk away with, to make a difference...This is what really matters".

After so many years in academia, Prof Booker admits to being (pleasantly) surprised by how often she is approached at airports, supermarkets, walkways, or restaurants by passersby who stop her and exclaim, 'Prof Booker, you were my teacher!' And Dean Booker will exclaim, 'I was!' The professor laughs, "It's deeply humbling that people remember their teachers. It's such a privilege."



"You don't choose this life to make lots of money, but the rewards, seeing students excelling, making major strides in their careers and lives, is deeply gratifying. We are not only imparting knowledge, but shaping and impacting lives."

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01

**SOCIAL IMPACT &  
CIVIL SOCIETY**



# James Okongo

Digital Verification Journalist, AFP News Agency





**One of the master's programme requirements was working experience in a newsroom.** I didn't have any experience in the newsroom. But I applied anyway because my life has been full of obstacles bigger than lack of newsroom experience. I applied and found myself doing a written exam -- a news story. I was intimidated because in the room were journalists I recognised from *The Nation* and *Standard* along with journalists I'd seen on TV. These are guys who had newsroom experience. I was the unknown guy. I kept to myself, the underdog.

I didn't think I'd make it, but I was surprised when I got a call inviting me for an interview. I was the last person to be admitted to the first cohort of AKU-GSMC's inaugural master's programme. I was the 25th guy. The class had been capped at 25. The day I was told the good news, I sat on my bed and held my head in my hands.

**This was not something that should have been happening to me.** I'm an orphan. I didn't know my dad, the only time I met him was when he was in a coffin. My mom passed on when I was 11 years old. We had to move to the village and live with my grandmother and great-grandmother. Village life, for a city boy, was difficult. School was erratic because of the lack of fees. I ended up back in Nairobi living with my brother and I attended Kamiti Secondary school. (Yes, there is the prison, then there is the school).

I loved reading and media and I'd frequently write letters to the editors of

newspapers, which they published. My brother encouraged me. He said, 'If you get a college degree, these media houses will employ you. You will see.' I finished with terrible grades and started doing odd jobs. I moved around a lot. I loved photography, so I bought a camera and started doing street photography in my free time. I was housing my younger siblings from the village as they went to school. When I had saved a bit of money, together with help from my brother, I started a diploma in a polytechnic. I was the old man in class.

I never lost my love for newspapers, books, and novels. I read many under the weak light of the lamp at night when growing up in the village. I was an ardent fan of BBC Radio's *Dira ya Dunia*. In time, I was able to join Daystar University for my undergraduate degree. There I learned to be a journalist.

The AKU Master's programme was a great validation on top of being a learning

**experience.** I learned about disinformation and ended up specialising in what I'm doing now - working as a fact checker for Agence France-Presse (AFP). The master's programme was a very lonely journey that required a lot of hard work and fortitude, just like the other roads of my life.

Although I was the 25th student accepted into the first cohort, I was the first student to defend my thesis proposal!



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"I didn't have any experience in the newsroom. But I applied anyway because my life has been full of obstacles bigger than lack of newsroom experience. I applied and found myself doing a written exam -- a news story."







# Mercy Gakii

Copy Editor, Code for Africa



Mercy cut her teeth in the trenches of print newsrooms, working at the *Daily Nation* and the *Star* newspapers on the business beat before moving into communications consultancy and then returning to school. "I joined the second cohort of the master's programme in Digital Journalism because I wanted to better understand what I had experienced in the newsroom and put a name to it, put a theory to it, and be able to discuss it," Mercy recalls. "I had been out of the newsroom for a bit and the itch to sit with intellectuals and have a conversation about new media was too enticing to pass up. I wanted to explore academia."



Mercy was surprised at how different AKU's learning environment was compared to the public university where she had done a master's in Human Resources a decade earlier. "The GSMC faculty was exceptionally helpful and friendly," she recalls. "I could reach them on WhatsApp, something unheard of when I did my HR degree. Lectures were more like peer exchanges. The course was gruelling and challenging, but they made it bearable, and even exciting."

After completing the programme, Mercy real-

ised how much she had missed the newsrooms when she had first started in the business. She now works in a digital newsroom as an editor, where she and her team undertake fact-checking across Africa and offer training. Mercy relishes the mentoring that she is doing in her newest role. "I'm in a space where there are many young journalists and content creators who I can train and guide to navigate the new media landscape with professionalism."

Mercy also learned that education doesn't

end when your degree is over. The greatest power of a graduate degree isn't the opportunity to get other jobs (although that helps), she says, it's the ability to read more and read more critically. "We are only as slow as we believe ourselves to be. The reality is that our brains can seek and retain so much more than we give them," Mercy exclaims. "I'm excited to read more and learn more for the rest of my life, knowing I will get so many more opportunities to advance in this new space."





# Donald Magomere

Journalist, African Union/United Nations  
Information Support



# Life and Death by the 30 Second Siren

When the siren goes off, Donald Magomere has 30 seconds to grab his bullet-proof vest and rush to a bunker next door. It doesn't matter if he's in the middle of a dream, if he's just stepped out of the shower and is towelling his head...30 seconds. Because half a minute could mean the difference between life and a mortar blowing up his house. This is Mogadishu, after all.



Donald works in the newsroom under the African Union and the United Nations as a journalist. He reports on the African Union Transitional Mission in Somalia. He lives in a kind of Green Zone on the outskirts of Mogadishu, a large camp manned by the Uganda People's Defence Forces with guns and helmets. "My room is kind of a bunker to protect me from any Al-Shabab attack," Donald recounts. It's a threadbare but air-conditioned room, with a small wooden desk, a bed, and the rest of his meagre belongings in a suitcase. There are no photos of his family anywhere. If it comes down to the wire, Donald can pack and leave the room in a record 15 minutes, without leaving a trace that he was ever there.

How did Donald end up in a bunker in Mogadishu, listening for a siren, and facing his mortality daily? "That's the thing with the passion of journalism," Donald chuckles, "you never know where it will take you." Before taking on this job, Donald was the assistant correspondent for the *Financial Times* in East and Central Africa. However, with COVID, the office closed, and the lid came off his gravy. Donald became a freelancer and received a Henry Zumanu Foundation grant

from South Africa to pursue an investigative story about fish smuggling in Lake Turkana.

With some time on his hands, he joined the Master of Arts in Digital Journalism Programme at AKU, then the call for the Somalia job came. "Of course I was anxious," he recalls. "We all have read stories out of Mogadishu, the bombs, and kidnappings. I didn't share it with my parents because I knew they would be hesitant. Luckily, I had a cousin who had worked in Mogadishu some time back. She gave me some insight on what to expect. But Mogadishu remains unpredictable, anything can happen anytime, and things are hardly ever what they seem to be."

The work in Mogadishu is very intense and mentally challenging. "A story isn't worth dying for, but I believe that journalism is about gazing at the other side of the coin and sometimes that comes with great sacrifice, and it requires immense courage," Donald observes. "It's also alluring, you have to admit, the seduction of danger."

Donald recounts childhood events that triggered his career path in journalism. He

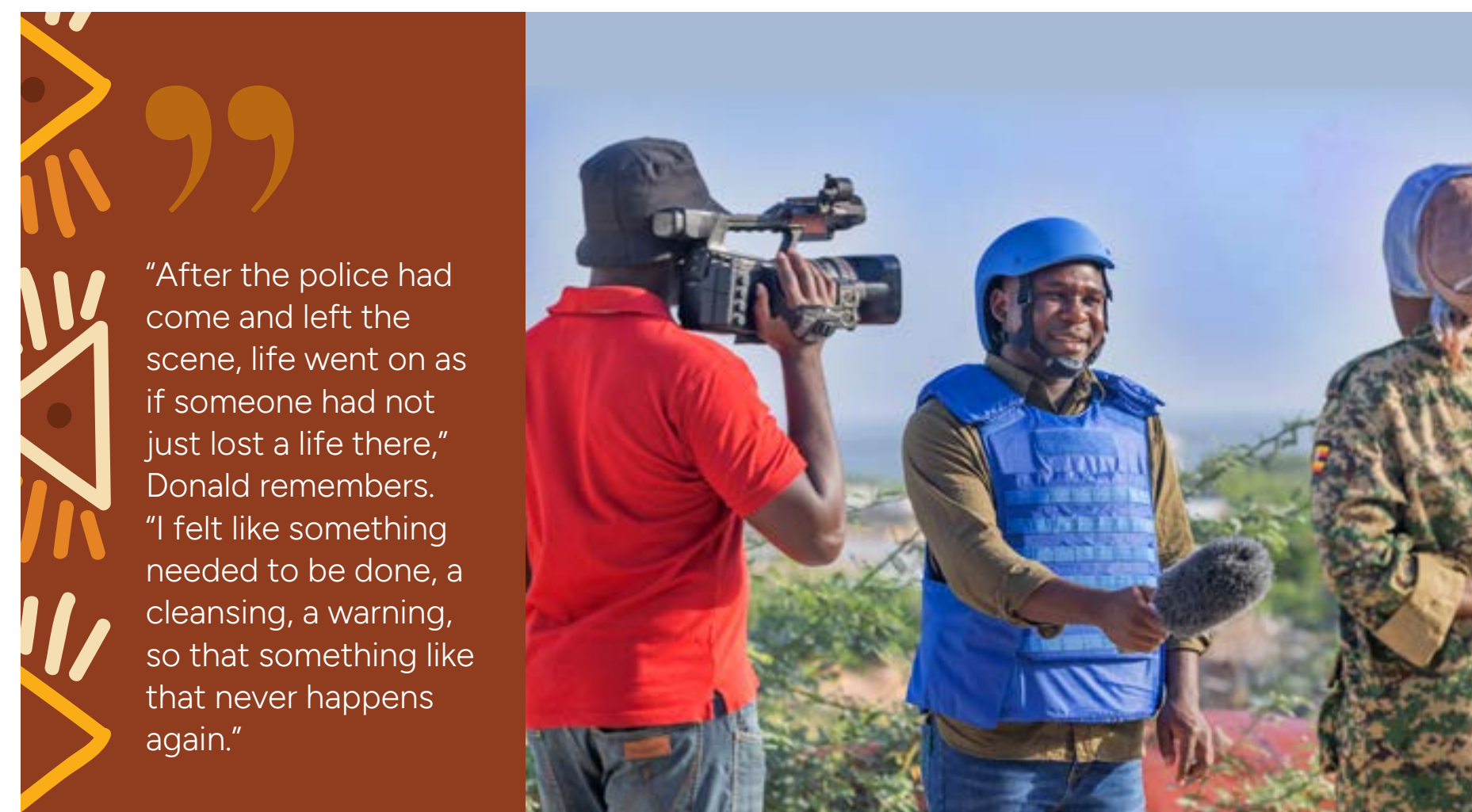
was 15 when he witnessed a devastating road accident in his village, a place called Mayoni, between Mumias and Bungoma. A motorbike and a pickup collided. The motorbike rider died on the spot. "After the police had come and left the scene, life went on as if someone had not just lost a life there," Donald remembers. "I felt like something needed to be done, a cleansing, a warning, so that something like that never happens again." Burning with a sense of righteousness, he wrote a letter to the editor at *The Nation* newspaper and was surprised when they published his letter. "I was shocked," he says. "I couldn't believe I was reading my name in a national newspaper; that thousands of other people were reading my name! That's what sparked my passion." While completing his undergraduate studies at Maseno University, Donald was appointed editor of the student paper. He also contributed to *The Standard* and became a correspondent for the paper

upon graduation, in 2017.

Back in Somalia, Donald's small bunker is filled with memories of his master's programme. "It's in this very room where I defended my thesis," he laughs, spreading his hand around the room like a lord in his manor. "My thesis was about politicians with active economic crime cases from the run-up to the 2022 general elections." Thankfully, the internet never failed him, nor did a mortar fall on his roof. "The master's programme shaped my reporting a lot," Donald remarks. "It has built my research skills when it comes to investigative reporting in war-torn areas. It's been quite useful for my job here." Strategic Communications, which he learned during his graduate studies, has also come in handy. Donald interacts with primary news sources regularly, including the military, police, and local community members. "Our role is sensitive and strategic because all

global outlets rely on our news so our content must have minimum errors," Donald observes. "Remember even the enemy, Al Shabab, is also watching and reading!"

The first time he was within reach of a mortar launch, Donald had been in Mogadishu for a week. The siren was loud. The speakers screamed, 'incoming, incoming.' He remembers grabbing his phone and texting his parents as he ran to his bunker. "It was very scary," he recalls. "I stayed in the bunker for around 30 minutes before everything came to normalcy," he pauses. "I think I've developed the muscle now. I hate to say it, but it's a bit normal for me. I mean, I'm a Christian; we commit what we do unto the Lord because we know not what tomorrow holds. This faith keeps me going because I have to accept that there is a Lord in heaven who brought this opportunity and also one day He will take it."



"After the police had come and left the scene, life went on as if someone had not just lost a life there," Donald remembers. "I felt like something needed to be done, a cleansing, a warning, so that something like that never happens again."





# Simon Wokarach

Freelance Journalist and Author



War has a face you can't bear to stare at. Its ugliness burns your retinas, stays on your skin, on your hair, and curdles in your mouth. Simon knows this ugliness; he's witnessed it since he was a small boy growing up in northern Uganda. "Because of conflict with rebels, we kept moving a lot and this interrupted my education," he says. Simon studied in five different primary schools. Eventually, he joined Nkumba University to study journalism and communications but couldn't finish because of financial constraints. "My sister wanted to drop out for me to proceed, but I was sure if she did, she'd marry a useless man and waste her life away," he recalls. "So, I offered to drop out to let her proceed instead."

"We need to prioritize human interest stories and development journalism. I want to report on what I saw growing up; issues to do with children's rights. I need to stand for them and speak for them."



Simon's passion is to tell stories of the people in his community. A couple of years ago, he took a short course in Health Journalism at Aga Khan University. "We need to prioritize human interest stories and development journalism. These are areas that I think need special attention," he says. "As a health and environmental journalist, a career that I have held on to for close to six years, I saw an opportunity in health philosophy at AKU. After I did this course, I remained under mentorship for close to three months. In this time, I networked with several experts with vast experiences and brought back new knowledge."

Today, Simon is back in school, studying International Relations and Security Studies at Gulu University. He still plans to study journalism because he believes there is no greater voice than those of journalists. "I want to report on what I saw growing up, and which is still happening; issues to do with children's rights," he says. "I need to stand for them and speak for them."





# Ferdinand Mbonihankuye

Journalist and Correspondent, SciDev.net Burundi





**I was pulled into this profession. It was a magnet.** You have to believe in liberty and have a heart of love to write true stories about society, with all its marks and cracks. There are voiceless people in so many hidden communities, silenced because they do not know where to go to get their voices heard and their messages listened to.

Many in the profession start out the same way: I used to practice reading stories in the newspaper out loud and I would listen to the news broadcasts on the radio. I wrote for the student newspaper in secondary school. In 2016, I started as an intern at a community radio station, before moving into blogging for an economic think tank, CDE Great Lakes. I love blogging and joined Yagaburundi.com, a blogging collective in 2018. Two years later, I was recruited to join Burundi's key business and economics digital newspaper, *Burundi-Eco.bi*.

**Environmental causes do not have their own media outlets.** I came to environmental journalism because I could not help but see Burundi's many challenges owing to climate change. I took it upon myself to tell stories about the environment in any medium I

could. This gave rise to *ibihe.org*, an online media outlet that broadcasts stories on geo-data and environmental crimes.

**I cannot say which story is more important than the other. My readers can tell you this better than I can.** Awareness and impact are what I aim for. I can say that we bloggers in East Africa are making big waves. Any column in Yaga Burundi, *scidev.net*, *lwmf.org*, and *africanliberty.org* is trophy-worthy for their incisive reporting.

**The Excellence in Journalism Fellowship at AKU truly helped me bring new life to my stories; they now have greater pertinence and impact on communities and issues in**

**East Africa.** I am so grateful for the opportunity to have done this programme. I now write stories that open and change people's minds, particularly on complicated and contentious issues. These stories, in turn, can drive the development of the country. These same stories also inspire colleagues to become activist journalists.

**Looking ahead, I want to focus on being a strong mentor for other journalists in Burundi and further afield in East Africa.** I am part of the Africa21 Network, a group of journalists who report on climate change, economics, and public health. I have many published by-lines in numerous outlets and this exposure propelled me to be a delegate

member at the 2023 Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi. I was also selected to be one of the few Burundi journalists to attend a scientific journalism summit in 2022. In 2023, I received an award for my reporting by Network for Science Journalists in Francophone Africa (RJSFA). I want to pay this recognition forward to other journalists.

**Public health and climate are among the most important issues in Africa.** It is obvious that African citizens deserve better in terms of public health and well-being. To this end, African-driven innovation and development, particularly in vaccination development, diagnostics, and therapeutic products is crucial.







# Kamau Muthoni

Court Reporter, Standard Media Group



## Serving a Purpose



Funny how journalism finds people. For some, it's the allure of reading one's name in a newspaper. Or the idea that millions of people may be watching you on the television and recognising you on the streets. For some, it's the need to tell a story of themselves and their environment, stories of injustices, but also to write and be seen, collectively, as a people, as dignified humans. Others turn to journalism to settle scores, to correct the natural order of things, to fight for a cause.

Kamau Muthoni became a journalist because of his grandfather. "I was raised by my grandparents in the village," he recounts. "My grandfather was an architect. Every day he would come home bearing two newspapers: *Taifa Leo* and *Daily Nation*. For as long as I remember, I religiously read Kamau Kamau's column. I loved history. I was the best history student in my school. On Sundays, one of my uncles would come over with a copy of the *Standard*. So even though I herded cattle and lived a village life, I knew of a different world presented by the newspapers that I would immerse myself in."

When the time came to pick a career, journalism seemed like a shoo-in. Kamau joined Moi University to study communication. "I have always wanted my study path to lead me to a PhD. To grow a beard and a moustache that covers my mouth, so that when I

speak my students only hear my words," he chuckles. "I promised my grandmother that I would go back to school after my degree, that I would not just stop at that." His grandmother was a teacher and education was highly prized.

But first, Kamau had to do a Master's. Consulting with his former lecturer, Dr. Nyakundi Nyamboga, they settled on Aga Khan University. "The other option would mean me leaving the country and I was already established as a journalist at the *Standard* newspaper. I didn't want to disrupt my life." What also tipped the balance was discovering that the school had high-profile media personalities "who I read religiously growing up and who I related with because they had influenced me as a young person." GSMC felt like home or coming back to a home he had dreamt of.



Meanwhile, Kamau's career was soaring. He was an award-winning journalist, having won the Annual Journalism Excellence Awards thrice and was known for his incisive reporting on information communications and technology, good governance, courts and health.

Kamau claims AKU's master's programme in Digital journalism further boosted his career. "It shaped my thinking. I conceptualise ideas differently now. There is a different way in which I now approach and do stories. I just don't do stories to tick a box or push the day. Society has issues and it's the job of journalism to highlight those issues in the hope that solutions will be found. My writing often offers solutions."

Were it all to end tomorrow, Kamau feels like his journalism has served a real purpose since publishing a story on a woman named Njeri. A wanted gangster's girlfriend, Njeri was on the run back in the day. "The cops grabbed her and locked her up in the hope that she would reveal the whereabouts of her boyfriend, but they also wanted to lure the boyfriend to come out," he recounts. When this didn't happen, "the police tortured Njeri, assaulted her sexually, and released her as a shell. But then she sued the government." Kamau met Njeri by chance as he went about his court reporting business and was touched by her story. He traced and wrote about her harrowing experiences with the law. Within 24 hours, Kamau recalls, "the then attorney general called me." Thanks in great part to Kamau's perseverance and in-depth coverage, Njeri was awarded a compensation of Ksh. 13 million.

In the aftermath, Kamau speaks of the satisfaction of doing good, and how through his profession, he can give back to society. "Kenyan journalists are making history," he says. "I'm proud of creating a body of work that can be referred to and be a point of reference in the future."



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"I just don't do stories to tick a box or push the day. Society has issues and it's the job of journalism to highlight those issues in the hope that solutions will be found. My writing often offers solutions."

## STAFF

# Alykhan Peermohamed

Head of Training, GSMC

I was in Lisbon, Portugal, for the Jubilee Arts Festival in 2018 when I received the email confirming that my interview to join GSMC as a project manager had been successful. I'd been involved in Jamati Institutions, but the idea of joining the AKDN in a professional capacity was a dream come true.

From the moment I stepped into the GSMC offices, I discovered a rare harmony between my personal values and professional aspirations. Each day at work brings a blend of challenge and excitement, knowing that my efforts contribute to the overall vision of His Highness, the Aga Khan IV. It is a special feeling that has allowed me to learn, grow, and contribute to this unique University.

What began as a short-term consultancy to help launch new programmes, turned into a full-time role. Now, six years later, I proudly lead the department where I first contributed to developing our initial short courses, and I couldn't be happier. The Professional Development and Executive Education

Department works at the intersection of media, development and education - and no two days look the same!

GSMC was built on the foundation of these short courses, addressing a critical need in an industry facing significant disruption. In a region where not everyone has the resources or qualifications for a two-year master's degree, we step in to fill the gap. Our short courses cater to professionals in media, communications, civil society and beyond, helping them navigate the disrupted landscape and contributing to an informed society. Our offerings evolve with the industry and are often linked to critical regional issues. From mobile storytelling to data journalism and health communications to gender reporting, climate reporting, participants gain practical skills that they can apply immediately to their careers.

A generalist by nature, I love co-designing new programmes across a broad array of disciplines. However, I recognize that no

short course can make someone an expert overnight. So, I strive to ensure that, in addition to meeting the learning objectives of each course, we foster an environment where professionals can nurture their curiosity, critical thinking, creativity and develop a lifelong learning mindset. To emphasize this, I take pride in opening every training programme with this quote from His Highness, the Aga Khan, that serves as a powerful reminder of our mission, and the ever-evolving nature of knowledge in this change-filled world:

"The most important thing we can learn - or teach - at any School - in a world of perpetual change - is the ability to go on learning. None of us have all the answers - quite often we don't even know what questions to ask. Nor can we discern the road ahead by looking in a rear-view mirror. Past lessons must constantly be renewed and reapplied, as we adapt to new technologies and new expectations."





# Henix Obuchunju

Journalist



## Letters and Law in Kibera's Disorder

Everybody who grows up in Kibera has a story about their Kibera. And no two stories about Kibera are the same. But if you step close, you will see a resemblance in the grains and pixels of the story. Kibera is a broth. Violence runs through these stories, intersected by poverty, desperation, and sometimes death. There is also hope, fortitude, and perseverance.



"I never knew what my father did. He never told us. But I saw him struggle to raise the five of us. It's only later that I learned that he worked in a steel factory," says Henix. "If you looked at his hands while he washed them, they would tell you the tale of struggle." His mother was back in the village in Western Kenya. In Kibera, his dad ruled with an iron fist. He stressed the need to stay the course, work hard, and succeed. "He was very thorough in how he raised us, I feared him because I didn't want to mess around and disappoint him."

All around Henix was anarchy and the degradation of morals. "I yearned for order as far as I could remember," he says, "I wanted to be a policeman or join the military. I guess this came from my dad who had that in him. Amidst the chaos around me, he raised us to stay disciplined."

In school, however, Henix was a clown. "I liked to entertain people. I liked to play with words and make people laugh." Someone suggested that with his cheekiness he would thrive best as an entertainer on TV. Acting seemed like the thing to do, but "my dad would not hear

of it," Henix said. He remembers listening to Radio Citizen, particularly the presenter Kamau Wamunywa. "I found him fascinating, how he could just talk and remain interesting. I think that's when I started loving journalism. I thought, maybe I could talk like Kamau." After finishing his bachelor's in journalism, he approached his neighbour, Adam Hussein, who was the station manager for Kibera's radio station, Pamoja FM, for an internship position. "I reported to work at Pamoja FM, and I haven't left since," he chuckles. "It's been six years and now I'm the news editor."

Pamoja FM fashions itself as the voice of Kibera. "Initially, I got into media to entertain," Henix recounts. "When I came here, I realised there was more I could do to shape my society because it pains me that nothing has changed in Kibera since I was a child growing up here. Men still beat their wives. Women still sell their bodies to get by. There are drugs. And crime," he laments. "These issues can be addressed by true journalism, not entertainment."

Studying for his Master's was a game-changer. Henix claims the programme



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upended how he practiced journalism. "It changed how I viewed the stories in my community," he says. "Previously, I wasn't passionate about investigative journalism, but my classes shifted how I addressed the issues Kibera faces on air," Henix attests. "Journalism is evolving. This master's programme awakened a sleeping giant because now I look at all stories from different angles."

Since completing his degree, Henix has continued to cover stories in Kibera -- fire outbreaks, gender-based violence, rape, sodomy, girls and sexual and reproductive health, prostitution, and drug abuse. "We highlight these stories, but we also seek to educate and motivate the people of Kibera," he explains. "Especially the youth on how to find solutions to some of these problems. We also give them hope and a voice to talk about these issues. That empowers them." Henix notes that the radio station plays a vital advocacy role for the community. Through its broadcast stories, vulnerable women, for instance, are made aware of their rights.

For his exceptional work, in 2023, Henix was feted for the best investigative story at the Annual Journalism Excellence Awards in Kenya. Even so, Henix is quick to say he has to never moved out of Kibera. "It's my identity, my life's work," he says. "I believe the best time for me to leave Kibera will perhaps be when I switch jobs. However, when I once told my dad I was thinking of moving to another job he asked, 'Where do you want to go? Pamoja FM has shaped you into who you have become today, you can't just leave,'" Henix laughs. "I guess that's his way of telling me he is proud of me."



# David Oluoch

Communications Officer, Kenyatta National Hospital



News is a never-ending rollercoaster. It's fast and intense; men and women spend a lot of time on their computers, crafting stories, editing stories, and on the phone with sources to get comments or verify information. The days are long and often they extend into the night. This was David Opiyo's life, running the *Daily Nation* news desk.



The days rush at you; Mondays blend with Wednesdays and Thursdays start resembling Tuesdays. "Your day starts at 7:30 with an editorial meeting to plan for the digital platforms. At 10:30 there's another meeting for the main paper and a review of the previous day's paper, then the architecture of the newspaper for the next day," says David, quickly, precisely. "What's the headline story? Then you assign about 20 writers with stories and brief some 30 correspondents in your bureaus all over the country. There is a quick lunch before you come back, and the newspaper is now taking shape. Three o'clock, another meeting to agree on headlines. Between 4:00 pm and 7:00 pm is intense copy editing, and fact correction, until the paper goes to press. There is no time to do anything else."

David joined the *Daily Nation* in 2006 as the Kisumu correspondent, before moving to Nairobi as a reporter. In 2013, he transferred to Kisii to be the bureau chief. From Kisii, he moved to Eldoret as bureau chief, then back to Kisumu in 2018. In 2019, he was back in Nairobi as assignments editor, before moving to a new role as a deputy news editor. "I have always wanted to be a journalist," David

recalls. "In high school, I hung out with the guys who were in the journalism club class. Churchill Otieno was a big influence in me becoming a journalist. He was my neighbour growing up and I admired reading his by-line in the newspaper. When I got admitted to Maseno University, and I saw my own by-line in the *Standard* newspaper for Letters to the Editor...my dad was over the moon about that, and I was hooked!"

One overcast evening, Churchill Otieno, the then managing editor of *Nation's* Digital platforms stopped by David's desk and asked him if he could consider enrolling for the master's programme at AKU. "Yes, but where is the time?" he mumbled, from behind his monitor. A few weeks later, one of his bosses asked David if he had yet applied. David thought further then figured he would try, that time would present itself. He was in good company; several other colleagues also enrolled in what was AKU's "pioneer class" in Digital Journalism.

Once classes began, David soon realised that he had bitten more than he could chew. "Imagine making sure that a factual, informative, and entertaining paper is off to



press in time for your 5:30 pm class. It was nearly impossible," he says. "Sometimes, I found myself in class at 7:00 pm, the lesson half-way gone. Sometimes I missed class altogether." Somehow, he juggled and kept all the important balls in the air. "It was worth the sacrifice," he says about the programme in hindsight. "It refined how we told stories, and most importantly, shaped how we told stories in multimedia, doing short videos, memes, podcasts. The course sharpened me as a storyteller."

After two decades in newsrooms throughout Kenya, and even longer in mainstream media, David received a new job opportunity, this time in Communications. He moved to the beleaguered Kenyatta National Hospital as their communication manager. It was a gear shift, David recalls, "It was a culture shock, much slower than the adrenaline in the newsroom, of course, but there was a lot of work to be done in terms of communication structures." He pauses, "Plus, now, I was on the other side, facing journalists." David likens it to "standing in the firing line." It's been a challenging transition. "There is a lot that the general public doesn't know. We need to share our success stories better. We need to tell people what the hospital's mandate is."

To crest this hill, he is revisiting how to tell stories in new and interesting ways, because "KNH is winking in the dark and no one is seeing the wink." David notes his master's degree is coming in handy now more than ever, particularly the skills he acquired to tell stories in different ways and on different platforms. "I'm not sure there's any other hospital that does a lot of marketing and storytelling using their social media pages, like we do. This is a big part of what we are doing here."

“Imagine making sure that a factual, informative, and entertaining paper is off to press in time for your 5:30 pm class. It was nearly impossible. Sometimes I found myself in class at 7:00 pm, the lesson half-way gone. Sometimes I missed class altogether. It was worth the sacrifice. The course sharpened me as a storyteller.”



## STAFF



# Marion Njoki

Technical Operations and Administration Manager, GSMC

Marion has always worked with her hands; carrying equipment, rigging equipment, tinkering with blinking, malfunctioning equipment, trying to figure out how to fix the problems that ails the equipment. She started as an engineer, installing telephone heads in offices, equipment called PXS, and pulling all manner of telecom cables. In time, Marion moved into media broadcast and erect broadcast masts for transmissions. She helped set up television stations from scratch as a studio engineer.

"Studying telecommunication engineering in college, there were only two women in a class of 22," she says. "I saw myself as having as many opportunities as my male counterparts. There was also a motivation there to prove something, that I could do this as a woman." Looking back, Marion has spent a great deal of her career hoisting masts, ideological ones as much as physical ones.

Having earned her scars and stripes in telecommunications engineering, Marion arrived at GSMC. The job involved establishing functional media studios for student journalists. "It was a very big contrast to the hectic media world. The academy does not have the frantic urgency of the media," she remarks. "In the media, I never knew how my day would end or when it would end. If the equipment has broken down in Kisumu or Mombasa, it means that you'll be sent there, and you'll work all night if you have to."

Today, Marion oversees technical operations, as well as the ICT team. "I ensure they are uploading the materials to the virtual learning environment for the students and that we are correctly training the students on how to access the virtual learning environment." Her team also handles schedules and ensure class recordings for all academic programmes are available on

time. "I bridge the gap between the students and faculty, when it comes to timestamps, academic calendars and assignments. I also see to it that grading has been completed and posted for students to access."

The shift into higher education has brought a refreshing perspective to Marion's life. She can now spend more time with family and also spare a few days to mentor high school girls in her village as well as those interested in careers in engineering. "I show these girls that it is not only normal to want to get into these male-dominated careers, but it's possible to excel in them." Wherever she has worked, Marion has always opened doors for girls coming in as interns.

She doesn't miss the private sector, she is quick to add. "I don't miss the pressure; I don't miss going to Kasarani at 4 am to cover a presidential event. I think this is a great chapter in my career."





# Galgalo Bocha

Freelance Journalist



## Pulling Tragedy and Triumph from Tana River



**I can't see with my left eye. I also don't hear with my right ear.** These are not the only tragedies from my childhood. I was born and raised in one of the toughest areas in Kenya, the Tana River. When I was barely five years old, a sickle was plunged in my eye in a rice farming accident. I remember the pain, yes, but I also remember my mother's horror and my aunt carrying me on her back for more than 20 kilometres to the local hospital. I was in the hospital for four months, but they couldn't save my eye. The story of my hearing is less dramatic, I'm afraid; it was the mumps. That was in 2016.

**To understand where my journalism comes from, you first have to understand my childhood.** My father was a police officer. He worked in Central Kenya, while we lived in Tana River, so he was away for the most part.

Sometimes we'd not see him for a whole year. When my mom passed on, I stayed with my grandparents. What I remember of my mom is her constantly telling me to work hard and never to depend on anybody. I went to school barefoot, at a time when police officers were paid 200 shillings. My uncle was my greatest influence, the first in the family to finish form four. He was a teacher, the pride of the community. He took me under his wing. We walked for over 10 kilometres from our village to school each day. Sometimes through floods, snakes drifted in those waters. I finished my KCPE in 1997 and joined Hola Secondary School during the El Nino rains. We walked from the village to Hola, a distance of more than 200 kilometres. I remember walking with my dad and my brother for almost three days. I stayed one year then moved schools because the environment

was quite hostile. I moved to Kipini Secondary School, at the corner of Tana River and Lamu. It was an old prison converted into a school. I finished and joined Mombasa Polytechnic to study for a certificate course in Mass Communication. Then I continued, I did a diploma and then a degree.

**The only thing I ever wanted to be was a journalist.** There was a lot of banditry and violence in our area in the 80s and 90s. Somali bandits would often descend on our villages or attack motorists. This would bring the police, who would beat up innocent people including elderly men, and demand that they produce guns. They didn't have guns. Innocent men would be locked up in police stations and held for weeks before being paraded at the courts. These were innocent, voiceless people. Someone needed to tell

“When you look at the soles of my feet they resemble shells. That's from all the years I walked barefoot to school towards my dreams, through floods, thorns, and on hot ground. It seemed impossible at times, those dreams and a Master's degree wasn't even on the radar.”

their stories. I wanted the world to know the wrongs that were going on in our village. The truth needed to come out. Journalism was the only profession that could do this.

**I worked at Nation Media as a crime and court reporter.** I was interested in people, crime, and the judicial process. I liked to unearth ills, to hold those in power accountable. Around 2018, I saw an advert in the newspaper which led me to apply for the Master of Arts in Digital Journalism at the Aga Khan University. I moved to Nairobi for my studies, while still covering courts, crime, and investigations. I was in Nairobi 10 years, from 2008 to 2018. In the middle of the programme, I decided to resign and go freelance to concentrate on my studies. I now work as a field producer and a writer for foreign media. I also work as a fixer and translator for foreign journalists and media organisations. My areas of interest are organised crime and terrorism.

The master's programme did for my career deepened my knowledge and skills in investigative journalism but also opened my world to the use of multimedia tools to tell stories. The course I took on developing media content through social media was especially valuable. A simple story can be told in many formats. A few days ago, I was watching a story on the Gaza conflict on the Al Jazeera network hosted by one of my former classmates and I was proud to see him employ what we had been taught in class.

I believe in a just society. I detest the oppression of people. I detest injustice, even in my community where women are oppressed, experience violence and are not allowed to inherit, for instance.

When you look at the soles of my feet, they resemble shells. That's from all the years I walked barefoot to school towards my dreams, through floods, thorns, and on hot ground. It seemed impossible at times, those dreams and a master's degree wasn't even on the radar. It took me four years to complete my graduate studies because my wife fell sick - advanced breast cancer. I had to take a break to take care of her and our children. Sadly, we lost her in May this year, after a six-year battle. I thank members of faculty for supporting me during that difficult time. I cannot forget Henry Kibira, for his enormous moral support. He would call me daily, urging me on, encouraging me. So, for me, the master's degree at AKU turned out to be more than just a quest for academic excellence, it revealed the beautiful nature of people.





# 02

INNOVATION &  
CAREER MOBILITY



# Eve Masawi

Ex-Freelancer, BBC Africa



## The Lemonade Stand at the Bend in the Road

When Eve lost her job at the BBC as a freelance journalist on the gender desk she didn't wallow long in self-pity. There was no moping around the house, wondering what went wrong, or if her life was over as she knew it. "Losing your main source of income is obviously disorienting, but somehow when you have tools and know-how to survive, you go over that hump quickly," she recounts matter-of-factly. "I didn't see it as the end of the road, but as a bend in the road."



Eve had one important tool at her disposal, through which she could continue telling stories and earning a living as a freelancer -- her mobile phone. "At the BBC, I had seen how traditional media was changing with digital advancement," she says. "Because of this, I enrolled for a master's programme in Digital Journalism to help me focus on

multimedia storytelling, including video production, podcasting, and interactive content creation. It was the best thing I ever did." The practical lessons in mobile journalism that Eve learned -- shooting, editing videos using a phone -- not only came in handy in putting food on the table, but these also engaged her creatively.

"The first time I left the country and travelled to Europe, I did on the strength of the skills I learnt in the master's programme. I was the only African in a group of young journalists selected to cover the World Mountain Trail Running Championships," Eve remembers. "It was so exciting and such an enriching experience." Her edge, she recognises, was that in addition to being able to write articles, she could also shoot and edit videos





from her phone. "What the programme did for me was not just offer me essential technical skills, it also opened my intellectual horizons and taught me to be adaptable."

Freelance is a whirlwind; one moment the work comes in a flurry, the next it can be as still as an old bar at breakfast. Losing her job gave Eve perspective and resilience. She says she's driven by a thirst to make lemonade from the lemons life handed her. "It's an exciting time for me! I see the opportunities arising from the evolution of digital media and I'm glad that I'm a part of it."

"The first time I left the country and travelled to Europe, I did on the strength of the skills I learnt in the Master's programme. It opened my intellectual horizons and taught me to be adaptable."



## STAFF

# Benson Gitthaiga

Innovation and Community Manager, GSMC

After high school, music and the stage filled Benson's life. He belonged to an a cappella and acoustic trio. The three were young, idealistic and hungry to travel all the roads that led to music. "I wanted to sing for life," he recalls. On the road, they met a talent searcher who invited them to Norway. "It was nice to wake up and get to play music the whole day," Benson remembers. After a year, they had to return to Kenya. Soon after, one of the band members fell in love and got married. "We couldn't do it as duet," he remembers. "And we weren't making grown-up money, so we disbanded."

Benson left music, but life still had many stages on which he could perform. "I have a life moto, 'My life is meaningless if I only build for myself,'" he says. "I cannot think of a time that I have worked for the sole betterment of myself. My jobs are always for building others and communities." Benson returned to school and completed university. One of his first major roles came

five years later, as Community Manager at iHub Nairobi. There, Benson launched and oversaw a more than 30 start-ups across East Africa, with 200 resident community entrepreneurs. The rich learning environment fulfilled Benson's desire to help others achieve their personal bests and prepared him for future career moves.

"I love to watch individuals transform before my eyes. I see them come with an idea and how that idea snowballs and takes different shapes before it transforms into something that validates their creative efforts, but also supports a wider creative ecosystem," Benson gestures as he walks; he is always moving.

All innovation starts with a crazy idea. Sometimes those ideas germinate and flower into results. Sometimes ideas dry up for lack of sunshine, but that doesn't mean they weren't worthwhile.

At GSMC, Benson's role is to create a space

for media practitioners to grow, either through training, or in the exploration of new ideas. Here, Benson has found a home where crazy ideas come to life. "Take Hamasa Media in Tanzania," he gestures excitedly. "They built an ERP [enterprise resource planning software] System for media houses. It seemed crazy and unfeasible since there are so many ERPs, but Hamasa offered a tailored experience for media houses. Since incubation, they have rolled out several modules, they have attracted more funding, and have more clients paying licensing fees. The system has expanded into Kenya and other southern African countries."

"Everything I have done in my career allows me to think a lot wider and a lot crazier than most people! I work in human-centred design as well, and one of our core principles is to encourage wild ideas. I want to open doors for people I interact with and for them to jump up and say, Wow!"





## Holding on for Life

How is it that a good thing can evoke both pain and sadness? When your mind hurtles to a moment in time, why is it that you wince and smile at the same time?

For Patience, that moment in time came when she was partway through her master's programme at AKU. "I work for a tax firm in the US, handling their communication and administration," she explains. "This means I work from the house, and because of the time difference, I work at night. To fill my days, I enrolled in the master's programme in Digital Journalism." A year into the programme, Patience's world tipped upside down when she found herself dealing with severe mental health difficulties. To make matters worse, she also learned that she was pregnant.

Patience spent months retching in the toilet or curled on her couch, feeling her mind disintegrate like a cookie in a teacup. She decided to take time off from work to regain her health. During those dark days, "I think I lost my mind, operating on autopilot," Patience remembers. "But throughout, I did not leave school. The only time I could escape reality was during the evening online classes because they gave me something other than myself to focus on."

Thinking back to the worst days, Patience knew she could not just rely on hope, she needed a plan. "It was not a complicated plan, I just knew I had to study," she recalls. Immersed in her studies, Patience believes the master's programme saved her life. She didn't sleep much during her pregnancy and gave birth at the most demanding time of her research. "I just knew I couldn't give up," she says. "I needed to get out of this funk, finish my degree, so I could tell my baby one day that anything can be done. That life will work out and get better."

When Patience was able to resume work, she found her role had been reassigned and she suffered after-effects from being unwell. "I was rusted out and couldn't remember anything," shaking her head. But with the degree that she had earned under her arm, "that was akin to carrying some sort of magic wand," she smiles. "I was suddenly very useful to my employer because I came back with advanced skills that I have been able to use in my work, with visible results. My master's programme saved my life and my job."

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"[The degree] was akin to carrying some sort of magic wand. I was very useful to my employer because I came back with advanced skills that I have been able to use in my work, with visible results. My master's programme saved my life and my job."



# Patience Ndinawe

Senior Administrative Assistant, Tax Goddess Business Services, PC





# Caroline Kimutai

Head of Content & Audio Visual Storytelling -  
Hill + Knowlton Strategies



## At Home in an Uncertain Landscape

**The pandemic transformed everything we knew about media; about how it's consumed and where we fit in this new uncertain landscape.** When the gale of COVID-19 came blowing in, I was the group Digital Editor at The Standard Group. The country went into lockdown. A curfew was imposed. Public gatherings were outlawed. This all changed the very essence of our trade. We had to work from home, which meant we had to embrace technology - to hold meetings and create media products for people to consume from their homes.



Around that time, I saw a poster on social media about the Executive Master's in Media Leadership, and Innovation. I was intrigued by the course content because it was relevant to the times. This was right when the Standard Group was preparing to con-

verge its newsroom. I wanted to be ready for the change. The last time I was in class was in 2011, when I did an MA in New Media & Society at the University of Leicester. Unbeknownst to me, I craved a shift and I promised myself that as soon as the pandemic abated, I was going to do something different for myself.

**My classmates were phenomenal and accomplished and so diverse; always bringing different thoughts and perspectives about media to the table.** I had classmates from Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda. I greatly enjoyed the programme. In two years, I only missed class twice. There was a lot of reading! To this day, I frequently refer to 'The Lean Startup' by Eric Ries because of its appli-

cability to my role as a media leader. Some units were especially impactful in my career, such as Change Management. There was also a course on revenue models which helped me think through the paywall project that we implemented in 2020. We had a unit in Law, which helped me review our editorial policy critically, especially how we were packaging content online and posting on social media.

**Learning never stops! That's one of the key lessons I took away.** Improve yourself by going back to school! You will be better for it because learning should not have a final stop. Most importantly, because of this degree, I have made lifelong friends.

"I was intrigued by the course content because it was relevant to the times. I wanted to be ready for the change... My classmates were phenomenal and accomplished and so diverse; always bringing different thoughts and perspectives about media to the table."





# Gratitude and Resilience After the Grind

**When I applied to get into the Executive Master's programme, my wife wondered, 'What are you doing, you already have two master's degrees, why do you need a third?' I said, 'I don't have a master's in this part of the world.' For me, this programme was very important to achieve local credibility, as well as to learn and be counted alongside my fellow professional colleagues.**



**You may call yourself a media professional, but until you immerse yourself in a programme like this, you won't realise how beneficial it is for your career.** The executive programme was mostly about personal growth. One of my previous master's degrees is in Communications and Media, from the US. But the reality at AKU is that you're not only being educated by your professors, but also by your classmates. This made it one of the most fantastic learning experiences of my life. It's also given me a tremendous value for my career. I am proud to have been one of three recipients of a distinction in the programme. I was lucky enough to also get the award for the most significant contribution to the media industry.

**The programme was very difficult due the tremendous personal challenges I experienced along the way.** My mother was diagnosed with cancer in March 2022, and she passed away in December 2022. I was constantly shuttling between Dubai, Nairobi,

and Toronto for work, and it was difficult to attend classes. I would wake up at 3:00 am to get some work in before attending classes at 9:00. I experienced a lot of stress and physical pain, and I felt the demands of both my personal and professional life pulling me in different directions, always demanding more from me. But I forged on.

It was a grind, and I did not have time to think. I had to keep at it and meet the obligations demanded of me. Once it was all over, once I buried my mother and graduate with a distinction, I realised that I was stronger for it.

**My biggest take-home from this programme is, 'be prepared to grind.' I learned about resilience.** How much can I take on? How much stress could I handle? Your body will get tired, and your mind will get tired. But we don't realise that our minds and our bodies are capable of withstanding much more than we think.

# Aly Ramji

Media Practitioner

Executive Masters in Media Leadership and Innovation





# Peter Mwangangi

Senior Journalist, BBC Africa



# AI is an Enhancer, Not a Thief

**I applied for a job at the BBC 11 times.** There was a lot of waiting and e-mail refreshing. Even though my in-box haemorrhaged regrets, I still believed I was the guy they were looking for. It's the same mentality I had as a child growing up in Ngakaa village in Makindu. Guys who know where that is always say, 'There is no way you made it out of there,' because not many people do. Nothing happens there. Nobody leaves to do anything substantial. The sun never seems to set so it's always dry and hot. Farmers can see a good harvest after four years.

By village standards, I was a bit privileged. My mom was a teacher, and still is, in one of the local schools. She bought me books and that developed my reading. I could read when I was very young and performed very well in English and Kiswahili. I recorded the best grades in languages in my local primary school.

**My only dream - as I herded cows - was to be a rich man.** There were not many people to look up to anyway. There was not a lot of exposure. I could tell I would amount to something. I just didn't know what. I didn't know there was an option to be in the media.

However, whenever I came to Nairobi to visit my dad, I would listen to Munene Nyan-ga and Nuhu Bakari on QFM in Kiswahili. Maybe that did something for me. They may have led me to choose this career. I've always been creative. When I joined Daystar University to study media, the path became clearer.

I later had an opportunity to be admitted to the Media Lab Programme at the Nation Media Group. I joined NTV as a reporter sometime in 2012. I was later posted to Mombasa where I worked between 2014 and 2018 as a TV journalist before joining the BBC...Yes, that happened! I now present one of the biggest Swahili TV programs called Dira ya Dunia. That experience, while working in Mombasa, grounded me in the language and the city. It gave me immense contacts. I know Mombasa inside, out.

**For my thesis, I explored the disruptions of Artificial intelligence in the media.** As a business reporter with the BBC, I saw how AI was being integrated in other industries, such as banking, transport, and healthcare. I had questions about whether AI would be the fu-

ture of journalism and what impact it would have. When I started my research, I realised it was timely because there were few other Kenyan studies on the topic. There was not much understanding in the newsrooms.

**My findings show that AI has been adopted, but not yet extensively.** Is my job at risk of being taken by AI? I don't think so. First of all, my current job is Kiswahili and AI hasn't cracked the language issue, or at least not the African languages. So, at the moment, I don't think I'm at risk. Some bits of my work could be taken over, but I think those are the bits that take much of my time and when taken away will allow me to concentrate on more important things. AI is an enhancer, and worth keeping a keen eye on.



“My only dream - as I herded cows - was to be a rich man. There were not many people to look up to anyway. I could tell I would amount to something. I just didn't know what. I didn't know there was an option to be in the media.”







# Sandra Lamwaka

PR Manager, Pivot Media and Marketing



## Nova Nairobi

A master's degree shifts something in you. And it changes you. When I came back to Uganda after doing my programme at GSMC, everything had changed for me. I had changed. I had immense clarity on where exactly I wanted to go and what I needed to do with my career. I approached tasks with greater creativity and courage.



Someone at work must have seen that shift, that change, because I got a promotion. Then other offers for jobs started coming in. I spoke better, with great confidence. I recall my bosses telling me, "Looks like Nairobi was good for you, they gave you confidence down there."

Nairobi was vast and busy and unending with many different things happening all at the same time. But Nairobi was, indeed, kind to me. The experience at Aga Khan University was amazing. I remember how everyone checked in on me at the start, knowing that I was a foreigner, and I was probably lost. That kindness lasted and I came away with a strong, enduring community.

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“After doing my Master's programme at GSMC, everything had changed for me. I had changed...I approached tasks with greater creativity and courage.”





# Linet Igadwa

Multimedia Journalist and Consultant,  
Sasa Media Services (Ltd)

## Heeding the 'Bright Flash of Light'

First, there was a good fight in the media trenches. Linet started as an intern in 2008 at *Kenya Times* while a student of media and communication at Egerton University. There she did what interns do; she did the dirty journalist work and had her nose bloodied while learning and laying low. Then the newspaper folded. Linet joined Nation Media Group as a correspondent, first writing for their tabloid paper before acquiring a taste for business news and joining the *Business Daily* as a correspondent, where she was made staff in 2018.



Along the road, Linet chose to return to school. "I decided to do a master's in Digital Journalism because all the buzz was on digital. It was cutting edge," she says. "This move changed everything. After I graduated, I started interrogating my career and the choices I had made. This degree made me question everything I thought I wanted."

First thing Linet did was change the terms of her contract from staff to correspondent because, "I was happy fishing in the areas of the pond I deemed as safe." The new contract meant that she was now free to fish further down the river, maybe even enter the lake. "I felt I was limiting my potential and I needed to go out there live a little," Linet says, while acknowledging she took a real risk. "Suddenly, I had the mindset of a global journalist in motion, as opposed to an old-fashioned journalist coming into the office each morning, chasing stories, writing stories, logging out for the day, and waiting for a salary at the end of the month."

With the new consultancy has come more learning and an increased dose of stoicism, resilience, and determination. "It's given me



freedom to decide my hours and tasks and to hold myself more accountable,” Linet says, noting that she looks at work through a new lens now. Where she previously focused exclusively on business stories, her recent topics are increasingly diverse, delving into different fields like education, dealing with wider pool of clients, all of which have unique needs. “I’m just not a writer anymore, I’m a multimedia journalist. I shoot and edit videos and communicate through diverse media.”

That the media landscape in Africa is chang-

ing is undeniable. Few people feel those changes more than journalists. “We are in a very dicey and shaky economic environment,” Linet acknowledges. “But having the knowledge from the master’s programme has given me confidence to manoeuvre these tricky times.” She’s adamant that she would still be tied to a desk today had she not heeded that “bright flash of light” that hit her in the media entrepreneurship class. “When I learned not just to see myself as an employee, but a potential and able media entrepreneur, I knew then my life was changed forever.”



“Suddenly, I had the mindset of a global journalist in motion, as opposed to an old-fashioned journalist coming into the office each morning, chasing stories, writing stories, logging out for the day, and waiting for a salary at the end of the month.”



## FACULTY

# Peter Kimani

Professor, Novelist and Journalist, GSMC

**Writing is what I do for a living, so I enjoy the process.** I’m writing books now and I’m enjoying it. What I’m not enjoying is the waiting that books take to complete and to get out.

**When I was 16, I thought I would be a writer, but I didn’t know what that meant.** My sole career guidance came through two books; *Things fall Apart* by Chinua Chebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Weep Not, Child*. There were tiny blobs on the back of these books that said these guys had served as journalists. So I wanted to be a writer, a journalist, even though I wasn’t sure what that meant. Much later in life, I was fortunate enough to be mentored by Ngũgĩ, who was my external supervisor for my doctorate. He served as a leading light in my writing life.

**My joy as a teacher is in seeing youngsters come into class and then go on and make their inroads in life and journalism.** We have very motivated, enthused students who are ready and willing to learn and go and

make a contribution out in the world. Our students are keen to learn and transform society in different ways.

**I cut my teeth in the profession 30 years ago.** Back then, journalists were relaxed, informal individuals. They didn’t carry themselves too seriously. Now the character of journalism is a business. There are more rigorous structures in the business of journalism now, which I think are strictures that limit the free flow of ideas and limit the individuals who have these ideas.

**We forget the main core of journalism is writing.** It’s about thinking things through, to sift and make sense of information. Your ability to convey thought is the foundational skill that you need. The tools that we use today will be obsolete in four or five years. The ability to think, to be a creative mind, to analyse information, and to convey a thought, those are the core skills that journalists will still need. We cannot be bogged down by the mechanics of the tools, which to me are tran-

sient. They’ll keep changing as we go. **I’m hoping that my writing will mature into another level of sophistication.** I want to challenge myself in different directions. I want to do something different with every new work. By the time I’m in my 60s, *inshallah*, with another two or three more books, perhaps, I hope my writing will be maturing and challenging me in different territories. My mentor is 86 now. I wonder, if I live to that age, what will my writing look like? Shall I degenerate into incoherence as old people sometimes do? Or shall I gain more clarity looking back on life?

**Having journalists in the market who trace their success to our teaching is a success.** Our success is the success of our students. If they fail, we fail. So if you’re producing students who are not making any impact on the market, that should be a red flag. We’ve been fortunate to have journalists who are making inroads in different jurisdictions.





# Faith Oneya

Writer and Editor, Ipas



Faith has always loved words. Words are tools that she used to make sense of the world. “When I’m confused, I read, when I want to understand the world I read, when I want to be a better human being I read,” she smiles. “Words help me to unravel the world around me. Growing up, it was a great source of comfort for me because at some point we lost our TV, and with no form of entertainment, I escaped to books.”



Faith’s love for words is a legacy her parents’ left her. Faith’s father died a long time ago, her mother more recently. Her father was a civil servant, and her mother was a primary school teacher. “When we were burying my dad, my uncle told me that my dad always wanted to be a writer, which made me realise that he was living vicariously through me,” Faith recounts. “Although he developed a negative view of journalism because back then journalists were being brutalised by the Moi government. I chose this career to honour my dad, to respect him.”

Before it was cool, Faith’s career started with blogging, which got her a writing job. Then in 2013, she was hired at Nation Media Group as a digital sub editor.

Being in the newsroom is like being in a submarine. You stay under for so long that by the time you come up for air, the world has changed. After nine good years at NMG, Faith came up for air and found that she was restless. The world had changed and so had she. “I felt I reached my peak, as an editor,” she recalls. “I needed to get out and experience writing and editing in a different world, in a different way.”

Online journalism had always fascinated Faith and the idea of making money independently from the digital space interested her. She had also experienced some personal setbacks and wanted to feel like she was winning at something. Going back to school seemed like a good plan. Studying digital journalism at Aga Khan University was better still. “I



wanted to be able to bury myself in books, because academia is one of the places where I knew that I would excel,” Faith explains. “And I knew that if I had a different focus, I’d be able to forget about all these other things that were happening in my life at the time.”

Faith’s degree from AKU gave her a competitive edge and the confidence to pursue what she ordinarily wouldn’t have dared to achieve. “It pushed me to the next level. When I saw a global web editor role opening at the International Committee of the Red Cross, I went for it with confidence,” she says. “When you don’t have that confidence of your experiences on top of your master’s degree, you don’t apply for such good roles.” Faith got the job.

Faith remembers that at the outset of the programme, she hadn’t prioritised making friends or building networks, but she emerged with numerous lasting connections. “When you’re working together, going through the same issues, fighting through the same thesis challenges, you build very, very strong bonds and friendships,” Faith recalls. “I was able to talk about my issues and the things I was going through.” Faith’s cohort became an important community and source of support during an otherwise difficult time. And those bonds have held over time. “We are in WhatsApp groups, we are in funeral committees, and in wedding committees,” she laughs. “It’s given me much more than I expected. I am blessed.”



“It pushed me to the next level. When I saw a global web editor role opening at the ICRC, I went for it with confidence. When you don’t have that confidence of your experiences on top of your Master’s degree, you don’t apply for such good roles.”

## FACULTY

# Joseph Odindo

Lecturer, Journalism and Media Leadership, GSMC



I always wanted to be part of the media and work as a journalist. I am most alive in the heartbeat of the media. I trained as a teacher, with a Bachelor of Arts Education, Literature and Linguistics, from Kenyatta University. But journalism came first for me while I was a student at Starehe Boys Center. I worked for Nation Media during school holidays, writing stories, office messenger, and other odd jobs. After university, I was posted to a school as a teacher, but I never reported.

The call for journalism was too loud, too urgent. Instead, I made my way to Tom Mboya Street and persuaded them to give me a job. So I started again as a junior reporter, but this time with a university degree. Journalism was kind to me. I ended up working in the media for close to 40 years.

Life, an ever-full circle, has led me here to AKU to do what I trained to do initially, teach. I’m semi-retired and I’m redirecting my imagination to teaching. I think I have always

been a teacher, I just did a small four decade detour. I still find myself with journalists daily

Journalism has to be thoughtful, and analytical. Journalism generates new knowledge. The university generates knowledge through academic research, while the media generates knowledge through interviews. The applied standards are different. For me, it’s exciting now to be part of academia, where I am part of the effort to bridge the gap between the two fields. I’m also excited to be part of an effort to help academia better communicate the research it generates, especially at a time when the media is going through so much turbulence and change.

Funny that many of the things that I was taught as a secondary school teacher are coming back to me now, but refined and burnished with a different perspective. Digital technology has truly changed things; I am having to learn to interact with students who are not in the same room with me.





## First Love, Second Time Around

A wise man once said, 'The oak fought the wind and was broken; the willow bent when it must and survived.' I'm getting into the heart of a cruel wind, and I intend to be a willow through it. I'm in a career transition. Until recently, I was the head of Innovation at the Standard Media Group. But I left -- although I still retain my Tuesday show the *Late Night Business*.



I've learned that everybody has a season when they do their time. Everybody endures a struggle or a difficult time in their lives. This can be of a personal or business nature. We all pay our dues, either early in life or later in life.

The cruel winds in my life arose when I left something I once enjoyed that had stopped fulfilling me, and I found myself back in a place of uncertainty. Not being on a salary, getting into debt, and being threatened by auctioneers is not easy. It's been a trying time and I'm glad I'm now getting out of it. Through the storm, I have learned that for all the success that money can give you, what matters most is family and their support. My wife has held my forte, reinforcing my faith in my choice of spouse. I have come to value the importance of spirituality and I learned that I have great mental fortitude.

In a beautiful turn of events, the master's programme I did at AKU is proving to be the

turning point and silver lining in my career. My undergraduate was in commerce. And my master's in media was a learning place for future business exploration. It was a great place to also interact with media guys from other countries and media houses and learn from them. It offered me the breadth of mind to explore new areas of interest and ideas. It impacted my thinking greatly.

Now I'm going back to something I used to love and do before the media seduced and stole my heart -- business. I've always enjoyed the interactions I've had with entrepreneurs, and I find these conversations meaningful. I now know that my purpose in life is to create, teach, and guide. With this knowledge, my ambitions are clearer than ever. One of the main reasons I took on the master's programme was to understand first-hand a programme that is based on excellence. Now, I am thinking about how programmes of excellence can be scaled, and I intend to set up a learning institution one day.

Ian  
Dennis  
TV Presenter and Producer





# 03

LEADERSHIP





# Alex Taremwwa

Co-founder, Last Drop Africa and  
Programme Manager, GSMC



## The Incubator: Hatching an Idea while locked in a boardroom



**I never envisioned myself as an academic.** I was content with remaining a journalist, a profession I had worked at for over a decade. I started at the *Daily Monitor* in 2012 as a writer before moving to *The Observer*. Just before COVID, together with some former colleagues from the Monitor, we hatched an idea to start a digital platform, an online entertainment paper in Uganda. We did that until 2019, when I left for Nairobi.

**I went to Nairobi because I received a scholarship to be in the pioneer class of the Master's of Arts in Digital Journalism.** I was the first Ugandan student. At first, I was in Nairobi, but then COVID happened, and we went virtual. After graduation, I became a teaching assistant for the school I graduated from, helping to recruit students, doing media appearances, and conducting training. To my surprise and enjoyment, I have sort of morphed into a lecturer in digital journalism. I have published research papers in academic journals, including a paper on the viability of paywalls in data subscriptions.

**The master's degree was intellectually transformational.** When I came back to the newsroom in Uganda, I knew I could not continue doing what I had been doing before.

I had new inspiration.

**One of the most exciting things to happen during the master's programme was being locked in a boardroom.** In our entrepreneurship class, we had to incubate an idea that we had always wanted to work on. One of the facilitators locked us in a boardroom and we were told to find an idea that would fit our expertise, exposure, and education. Last Drop of Africa came out of that room. It's a podcast and documentary tackling climate change in an everyday way that even grandmothers can comprehend. We use common speech and slang, so people can learn what actions they should take to combat disasters occasioned by climate change.

**You are just another random person**

**with an opinion if you don't have the evidence and research to back it up.** The master's programme gave me (and my words) weight. Achieving this degree has turned me into a leader, an expert, even an authority on some topics. I have travelled, I've spoken at conferences, and I have written extensively about subjects that I only came to understand and appreciate after doing graduate studies. There are other fantastic intangible benefits from this programme; it's the way I talk, the way I write, the way I communicate, the way I express myself, the way I walk into a room.

"You are just another random person with an opinion if you don't have the evidence and research to back it up. The Master's programme gave me (and my words) weight."

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# Irene Majale

Managing Director, TUKO.CO.KE



## Lady Boss: Leadership and Mentorship

From the time she could talk, Irene was an inquisitive child. “Whenever we had visitors at our home, I’d be asking incessant questions,” she recalls. “I was the one being shooed away to let the adults talk, the one who used to read notices out loud in church. As the firstborn of seven children, I was very confident.” It surprised no one when Irene chose to study media at Daystar University, or when upon graduating she was hired as a junior editor at the *Standard* newspaper.



After two years, Irene sought greener pastures. She joined *Tuko*, a digital media platform, and found herself in a completely unfamiliar work environment. At the *Standard*, editors like Irene would repackage already existing content. At *Tuko*, a lot more was expected. “I sourced the stories and then packaged them. The work required a lot of thinking and I did a lot of writing,” she recalls. “The audience was different. It was a whole new game.” Irene found herself handling multiple tasks, including writing and moderating online forums. She proved to have a knack for identifying stories that involved intense research online for content. Soon Irene was promoted to the position of Monitoring Editor, which she held for four years before being appointed Managing Director, the role she holds today. “We were and we are disrupting media, how media is sourced, and how media is consumed and viewed,” she asserts.

Finding herself a young, inexperienced leader posed new, unanticipated challenges. Irene had to manage a team, something she had no formal training for. She struggled to find any accessible female media leaders to act

as mentors. “It was all very male-heavy,” she recalls. “I could not find a female leader that I could seek advice from on how this complicated world of leadership in media and newsrooms really worked.”

The mentorship Irene sought ultimately came from an unexpected place – AKU’s master’s programme on Media Leadership and Innovation. Irene had applied to the programme for deeper knowledge of the digital media landscape but found more than she expected. “This programme offered me vital mentoring in leadership, seeing as I was now managing a full newsroom,” Irene smiles. “I also learned about finances, a topic I had never thought would be useful until I found myself as the MD and had to learn about money and running an organisation.”

Where she was one of the youngest of her cohort at AKU, Irene notes that the media’s workforce is becoming progressively younger. This new generation has different working cultures and perspectives. “Change management is crucial to navigate the media leadership space,” she insists. “The programme gave me insights on this tricky environment.”





# Andrew Arinatwe

Co-founder, Last Drop Africa and  
Programme Manager, GSMC



## The Incubator: Hatching an idea while locked in a boardroom

**The truth is, it helps to be on television if you aren't too bad looking. And to be clear, I don't think I'm too bad looking!** I got into television, not on the strength of my looks, but because I didn't have a job when I finished university and TV presented itself. They said I had a presence on camera and the viewers liked how I looked, so something that started as vanity became a career, albeit one that didn't have much financial significance, as I was mostly freelancing. I still freelance at NTV as a reporter.



**In life, you might be sure of what you don't want, but you might not be sure of what you need.** I was happily doing TV with no solid ambitions elsewhere until I saw an advert announcing a master's programme in Nairobi. It's what I needed, but did I know it? No! On a whim, I applied and was accepted. I packed my bags and bused down to Nairobi to start my master's and it was all very exciting because who

doesn't like the idea of being in Nairobi for their masters?! Well, COVID didn't like that idea too much, and the pandemic happened fast like an avalanche. Our Presidents, and all other Presidents, said, 'OK, we are closing our borders; if you aren't home by Friday we will lock you out indefinitely.' So, I ended up doing most of my programme virtually... So much for the Nairobi experience!

**Getting my master's degree changed my career in a profound way, because as it turns out, when you have a master's degree people listen to you.** They take you seriously because suddenly you have something to offer. Media professionals and editors suddenly were looking at me as someone who could add value to their news stories, a touch of gold. And indeed, they were right. I have the tools and

expertise, and I have learned the ways of digital media. Previously I was freelancing around town, sending stories to editors in different media houses because I always felt I needed to offer more to be noticed, to give more, for a foot-in. A master's degree changed how I saw myself, as much as how I was seen. I didn't have to send in my stories for free anymore. I worked my hide off to get the degree. I learned a lot; I gained knowledge that the media houses needed. Even more importantly, I had confidence.

**I told my editors, 'Look, I don't want to send you stories for free anymore, I need a job!'** I want a contract. I deserve one because I can write, and script and I can do podcasting and multimedia. I can do more for you. I am more. So New Vision gave me a staff position in their newsroom. They also have an English broadcast station called Urban where I appear occasionally. I'm currently making good use of my journalism at New Vision, exploring every potential I have. I've been here a year and I'm ready to look further into the horizon and sail on the open sea of journalism. I have my sights on networks like Al Jazeera, Reuters, or BBC. I want to do more with what I have learned because there aren't many with the skillset I have, at least not in Uganda. It's time I take advantage before the rest of the country catches up!

**The other edge of this sword is that having a master's degree can put undue pressure on you.** I see it, people say, 'You have a master's. Wow. Now what? Can you pay your bills? Do you have a car?' I don't have these things. I need to build a house; I need to get married. I'm not young anymore, I'm 37 years old. There is no room or time to gamble. People expect your financial life to change immediately when you get a master's, but it doesn't work that way. If I got a visa to go work abroad today, I would take it. I have the knowledge to practice freelance journalism digitally; I could still do that on the side. I have that flexibility and option now because I'm just not another pretty face on TV.



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'Look, I don't want to send you stories for free anymore, I need a job. I want a contract. I deserve one because I can write and script and I can do podcasting and multimedia.'



# Bakari Machumu

Managing Director of Mwananchi Communications Limited



Going back to school was part of my retirement strategy. I was a journalist for more than two decades. I started in 1998 as a trainee reporter and worked my way up to Features Editor before becoming the first News Editor of *Daily Times*, a sister paper to *Business Times* under the Business Times Limited (BTL). I now oversee the production of Tanzania's three top newspapers: *MwanaSpoti Tanzania*, *MwanaSpoti Kenya* and *The Citizen*.

After so many years as a journalist, I started to think about my exit. I felt it was time to look outside of the newsroom. I wanted to widen my scope and knowledge -- I didn't want to only know about the media, but to understand the business of the press. Aga Khan University's Media Leadership and Innovation program was ideal because it focused on media management and leadership and innovation technologies, which are the professional spaces I wanted to occupy. At the time I returned to school, we were witnessing the digital revolution and experiencing the challenges that came with that first-hand. In particular, there were questions around digital monetization and sustainability that we didn't have any

answers to.

The beauty of the AKU program was the presence of many experienced editors from the region as fellow classmates, so learning was truly experiential. School became a great forum for sharing. Between classes, there were many long conversations amongst media women and men, where we learned from each other. I was in the middle of professional transition and one of my courses dealt with the seven steps of managing change, which I ended up adopting and applying at MCL, where I worked to set up a change team. I also fell in love with the Three Boxes Solution -- manage the present, let go of the past, and invent a new future. This perspective was especially relevant in our case, as we were predominantly a print media company getting into the digital space.

The impact of the Master's program on my career has been immense. It equipped me to transition from the editorial department into managerial roles, where I am now in charge of running the business. You think you know about management until you actually learn about management. I learned about managing people, models of

governance, human resources, human capital, financial management, and discipline and marketing. It's been hugely informative and transformative.

The greatest lesson? The completeness of running media as a business is to ensure that you're sustainable.

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School became a great forum for sharing... You think you know about management until you actually learn about management.





When Jamila got into television, she didn't think she'd be allowed to read news because she wore a hijab. There was nobody in a hijab reading the news on Kenyan TV at the time. This was in 2002, when Kenya was largely closed, like a shell at the bottom of the ocean. "I was ready not to take the job if they insisted that I had to remove the hijab because this is my identity, a part of me," she recalls.



Jamila grew up in Kericho. The family lived in a big stone house with a chimney, in open country. A devout Muslim, her father worked for the county council of Kipsigis, until he died when Jamila was eight years old. Her mother, a housewife, also dedicated to the faith, relocated the family into a small section of the house and rented the rest of the home for income. "My mother was my dad's youngest wife, so we were lucky to have older half-siblings who took care of us after my dad passed on."

During her adolescence, Jamila received many compliments on the distinct, sing-song timbre of her voice and this prompted her to take a crack at media. But in the shadow of the front door to her career, she feared perhaps Kenyan media was not ready for a hijab. "Lucky for me, there were two ladies in the interview that day, Fatma Hirsi and Fatma Bashir, corporate affairs and programs manager at Nation TV, now NTV," she says. "They gave a chance to the first hijab-wear-

ing woman on television in Kenya." In August 2002, Jamila went live on air for the first time. She was remembered for her poise and delivery; her hijab was not the story.

More than two decades later, Kenya's media is near unrecognisable. "Things are easier now," Jamila says. "Technology has made broadcasting so much simpler. To script and send a story from wherever was unheard when I started. We needed a whole OB van, those big TV production trucks, to go live. Now journalists carry a backpack with a Live-U and all they need is network to go live. You can even go live with your phone!"

As an editor at one of Kenya's major media houses, Jamila finds herself leading the next generation of journalists, a role that requires special skills and tact. "The world has greatly transformed, and so has how news is gathered and disseminated. The programme at Aga Khan University was exactly what I needed," she says. Jamila was part of GSMC's first cohort in 2021 and she remembers the

# Jamila Mohammed

News Anchor/ Journalist  
Executive Masters in Media Leadership and Innovation





experience as being humbling. "You arrive thinking you know it all because you have been in the media for 20 years, but then when you get into the classroom, you realise how much you don't know."

Jamila admits that the master's helped her career more than she expected. "You don't become a strong editor because of being good at storytelling. What I learned was how to manage people, their emotions, to balance people's needs with the bottom line, and to deal with the politics and conflict that inevitably arise at work," she explains. "I also learned to better navigate the constant change, innovations, and advancement. I'm amazed that even after all these years, I can still learn something new from a 21-year-old who is the same age as my son, in the newsroom. These young people really know how to use these new tools of media!"



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There are other fantastic intangible benefits from this programme; it's the way I talk, the way I write, the way I communicate, the way I express myself, the way I walk into a room.

## STAFF



# Henry Kibira

Teaching Assistant, GSMC

I'm a shepherd in that I walk with students. For the duration of their journey, I walk with them until they graduate. Then I release them to walk alone in their profession.

As the thesis coordinator, I act as a human bridge; I connect the students with the faculty supervisors. My interactions with students are numerous, perhaps more than all other members of the faculty and staff. They call me with all manner of challenges that pertain to their studies and together we try to solve these problems.

I didn't study diplomacy, although that's a big part of what I do. I'm

a journalist by profession. I worked at Radio Africa Group for four years as a reporter. Before that, I lectured briefly at Maseno University. In school I studied development journalism because I wanted to change the world.

I love my work and I am very passionate about working with people. Working with our students and helping them become better people is the biggest accomplishment of my life. As I said, I am a bridge; I help students cross from one side of the rushing river of their studies to the embankment of their new careers.





# Patrick Gathara

Senior Editor for Inclusive Storytelling, The New Humanitarian



**The beginning:** My involvement with the Graduate School of Media and Communications at AKU started in 2010. I had been invited as part of a thinking group to get together and talk about what the challenges were, what the gaps were within Kenyan media, and share ideas about what sort of things journalists would need to know to do their jobs better. After we met, I forgot all about it, and years passed. Then in 2018, I was extended an invitation to be part of the programme's first cohort.

**The Programme:** I was running *The Elephant* at that time, as their Curator-in-Chief. In time, I had learned a great deal in terms of strategy, trends in media globally, media management, and leadership. It was time for something new. I left in May 2023 to join *The New Humanitarian*, a global online newsroom that focuses on reporting humanitarian crises and looking at the aid sector. I find the many skills and experiences I've gathered to be useful where I am now.

AKU's master's programme helped me think about media and media ethics more carefully and systematically. While I was at *The Elephant*, I was inspired to implement ideas

that would change or improve our products and make us a bit more sustainable. The programme also helped me build a network. I got to meet other people interested in media, who are working in media, and I emerged with a better understanding of the challenges that they face.

My thesis looked at editorial decision-

making around the ethics of publishing graphic and gory images as part of a news story. I considered this issue and went through countless images as I researched, contemplated, and wrote for over a year. It was hugely instructive, and it opened a whole new way of thinking about my work. The experience moved and changed me.

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“I was inspired to implement ideas that would change or improve our products and make us a bit more sustainable. The programme also helped me build a network. You get to meet other people interested in media, who are working in media, and you emerge with a better understanding of the challenges that they face.”





## Brazen, Kabrazen, Brilliant, and Bold

Brazen women are often considered mad women. Madness is a quality that typically afflicts the fringe dwellers. And it's these outliers who move the needle. In 2018, three women who know something about madness wrote *Brazen*, a play about six extraordinary women from Kenya's history. The women from the history books are Chelagat Mutai, Wangu wa Makeri, Field Marshal Muthoni Wakirima, Zarina Patel, Mekatilili Wa Menza, and the woman who took down Luanda Magere - she was a hero in her community, but nobody knows her name.

"How is it possible that nobody knows the name of this woman, yet she was the secret spy that took down the man of stone?" Aleya Kassam, one of the three writers of the play, asks incredulously. Aleya's co-authors are Anne Moraa and Laura Ekumbo. Their cracking trio was called LAM, a "most unimaginative name," Aleya grimaces, "Laura, Aleya and Moraa. The LAM Sisterhood was our name, but it felt shorter to be just called LAM." The trio started several projects and hoped to mount a multimedia play at the Planetarium, only to see their hopes smashed by the pandemic. Given that gatherings were not allowed, and theatre was dead, the only other option was to go digital. And so, the idea of a podcast was born.

LAM started with the story of Biki Dure, one of the oldest touring Taarab singers. "At



# Aleya Kassam

Founder, Director, Storyteller  
LAM Collective







Aleya Kassam, Anne Moraa and Laura Ekumbo  
LAM Collective

over 100 years old she was still travelling the world with a cigarette in her mouth and a drum strapped to her waist and she used to say, *mi naimba bila speak*," Aleya laughs. This is a woman who rejoices in the eccentricity and courage of women who swim upstream with sardines.

In search of funding, LAM wrote proposals to companies, offering their communication skills, only to receive regret after regret. Just when things were becoming dire, they saw a call-out from Aga Khan University for a media innovation residency, for which they applied. "We won the residency, and it changed the trajectory of our story," Aleya laughs. "The one-year long residency offered us a reprieve, a lifeline. They said, 'Here's some money, make the best thing you want to make in the world.' And they threw in a year's worth of office space and training." When you launch a start-up, a year without overhead can make you. "AKU gave us time to become. We messed around a lot over that year, and eventually we figured out what it looked like to make a real podcast."

The residency yielded the *Brazen* podcast, featuring stories about the lives of brazen women who are deemed crazy. "We wanted to know about the crazy, the betrayals, the anxieties, the furies that these women went through, not the sanitised and characterised version of history that's passed on to us," Aleya gestures.

With that, *Kabrazen* was born. The podcast reimagines the stories of extraordinary African women for children and sprouted from a single question: How do you explain colonialism to a four-year-old? LAM's agenda for *Kabrazen* is overtly political; educate politically conscious children who will become ethical and socially conscious adults. Public reception has been overwhelmingly positive. In addition to AKU support, the trio received funding for season two and for translation into Kiswahili. The team has also won an award for best children's podcast on the continent. They are planning to re-issue the podcasts in multiple African languages.

Aleya's recognition of difference and crazy comes from her Asian identity and the many cultural expectations around that label. "Crazy is sometimes not to be the loudest

voice in the room, but to be quiet and watch and listen and wait," she explains. "Crazy is often a term that's used to either discredit people or to silence them or to stop them from doing what is right."



"Crazy is often a term that's used to either discredit people or to silence them or to stop them from doing what they do... We wanted to know about the crazy, the betrayals, the anxieties, the furies that these women went through, not the sanitised and characterised version of history that's passed on to us."

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# Beryl Oywer

Country Manager, NABU





**People keep telling me to stop saying that I'm a former journalist.** I'm still a journalist, even though I'm in the Ed-tech space. I simply transitioned from reporting about the problem to being part of the solution.



**I have always been the black sheep of our family.** My brothers topped their classes, while I struggled, floating in the middle. I was the one making the family lag. What I didn't know was that I wasn't lazy or stupid, I just had a different reading style. I discovered this in high school...rather, my aunt, a teacher, discovered it. One day she handed me a chemistry book and said, "Just read ahead, then tomorrow we will discuss what you have read." I was in Form One. I read the book, but I didn't understand a thing. When we met, she asked me what I remembered, key words, concepts. She said, "To retain you have to read ahead and prepare." I learned from her; some students listen to a teacher and will retain, others will listen and take notes and retain, and some have to read more about a topic after class. Other people, like me, have

to read before the class to retain. So, for me, education is an opportunity to help people harness the power that they already have. Because it's just building on your skills. Learning and education are not one size fits all.

**When I graduated from Daystar, I knew I wanted to report on education.** I did my internship at Royal Media, then I got a job at Radio Africa, where I worked for seven years, mostly covering education. I rose from reporter to editor and newsreader. I read news for the better part of my career. But really, my passion was education. I covered strikes by teachers. I loved those strikes because they were a reason for me to be out of the office the whole day!

**Eventually, your career hits a plateau. Mine was during Covid-19.** It was time to

move. I had started my master's in Digital Journalism and I moved into Educational Technology while doing my studies. The networks that I was able to develop at AKU have trickled into the work that I'm doing and are helping me advance.

**If I had a magic wand to fix the education system in Kenya, I'd first create more magic wands and then I'd use them to empower teachers.** Our human resources are our best resource. So, our teachers need to receive the lion's share of resources. That's where we need to invest the most. We need a system to increase the number of teachers. A good teacher's motivation is not for any student

to fail. Teachers want all their pupils to be at their best. If we can employ enough teachers and we can lift them to a point where they're not feeling like they are the least in society, then we will see a transformative change.

**The course that I remember best from my master's programme was Media Leadership in Action.** It helped me be more critical and to look at leadership differently, in a transformative way. For me, before, leadership was having a title. I never looked at it as something that I could practise for myself.

When I moved to NABU, I was placed in a leadership position; it was not negotiable. I learned about collaboration, analysis, and

critical thinking. Now I understand why CEOs are paid good money and they're given a corner office, a big desk, and a swivel chair to think strategically! I realise it's a higher calling. You can't be 'the someone' who takes the organisation to the next phase if you're myopic.

**I'm not giving up on being a journalist.** I may not be practising in a media house, or in a newsroom, but I still want to tell stories. I still want to be a communicator in the media space, just in a different way. The skills I've learned, everything I've gained from this exposure, these are things I'm going to take to the next job.



"Our teachers need to be our biggest resource. A good teacher's motivation is not for any student to fail. Teachers want all their pupils to be at their best. So if we can employ enough teachers and we can lift them to a point where they're not feeling like they are the least in society, then we will see a transformative change."







# Bella Twine

Founder, Debunk Media Initiative



# The Cat and His Bulletproof Hat

Word on the streets is that during the war in Uganda, President Museveni would turn into a cat to evade his enemies. His famous signature hat is also said to be bulletproof, which gives him superpowers. If you know anything about the streets, they come with their own mythology. "When I think of disinformation and misinformation, I think of these two myths peddled about the president when I was growing up in the village," says Bella. "That's how I explain to my grandmother what I do for a living; debunk false information."



Debunk Media Initiative focuses on fact-checking to enable young Africans to make informed decisions. To date, the team has trained 250 journalists in fact-checking at different universities in Uganda. In 2022, the organisation was offered a grant from the Graduate School of Media and Communication's Innovation Centre. "For small organisations struggling to get off the ground, grants like the one AKU offered us go a long way in sustaining passion, like what we have for dispelling falsehoods in the media," Bella says. In turn, the AKU grant allowed Debunk

Media Initiative to diversify and to work with local radio stations across the country.

The organisation has also launched a Debunk Fact-Checking bot permitting young people to access information for themselves. The bot prompts users to engage directly with experts on human rights, democracy, education, health, and gender. For all her success, Bella remains passionate about the ongoing need for her organisation's work. "Information is a powerful tool," she reminds us. "Misinformation as a tool can be very dangerous."

“For small organisations struggling to get off the ground, grants like the one AKU offered us go a long way in sustaining passion, like what we have for dispelling falsehoods in the media.”





# Martin Wachira

Managing Director - NairobiLeo.co.ke







The digital space is like the Sperm Whale's colon. It's complex and convoluted, with a surprising efficiency. Completing the metaphor, liken Martin to Jonah from the Good Book. After graduating from Chuka University with a bachelor's degree in communication, Martin jumped straight into the belly of the big fish. "Way back in 2014, they were foretelling of the imminent death of newspapers," he says. During this time, in addition to his studies, Martin was an avid sports blogger, focusing on the sport he loved most -- football. (For the record, he's a Manchester United fan). While writing many a bristling match analysis, he felt a shift in the wind. "And now it's come to pass, legacy media has hit a plateau," Martin opines. "Viewership and readership in Kenyan media are stagnating or declining, compared to previous years. Digital media has been gaining prominence, even if some quarters of the industry refuse to recognise this fact."

After university, Martin interned at Thika News Agency. His journey into the digital space took off when he joined *Pulse Live*, a digital news and entertainment platform. "We went out in the streets and stuck microphones under people's chins and did a lot of vox pops," he says. "We knew what people wanted to consume, and we packaged it well for online consumption. Numbers ballooned." Martin was made Editor-in-Chief of *Pulse Live*, with a team of about 45 on the ground. "In the digital space, there is a perception that visibility equals money," Martin asserts. "Truth is, most digital platforms fold after a year, so my study was based on the success of platforms like *Tuko*, *Pulse Live*, and *Kenyans.co.ke*, where I had worked as a journalist. How did these platforms sustain



themselves and what challenges did they encounter?"

People started to notice the *Live Pulse* platform's work, including Aga Khan University, which invited Martin as a guest speaker on digital journalism. He remembers "This event was pivotal in my career, because I learned that AKU was offering a Master of Arts programme in Digital Journalism." Curious about audience growth and the challenges of monetization, he enrolled.

Most pressing, was Martin's self-imposed deadline of five years before he quit his job. "I never intended to do a master's and then go back to employment. Because then, why specialise?" he poses. "This is a challenge I see in the media. Why do your master's then go back to the same position, same desk, same, same building, with maybe a small increment on your salary? It seemed pointless to me." So, before graduating from AKU in 2021, Martin resigned from *Pulse Live* and focused on launching his platform, *Nairobileo.com*.

Unlike Jonah, Martin was armed with tools to delve deeper into the belly of this beast. "I knew how to create content that attracts people, how to monetize, and what kind of journalists to employ." In two and a half short years, Martin's website has grown in what can only be described as leaps and bounds; 4,000 followers on X, 344,000 on Facebook,

12,000 on Instagram, and 7,000 on TikTok. The website has a monthly readership of 18 million people.

"We are not there yet," he insists. "Digital platforms like ours in Europe have an insane readership. I want to grow to about 25 digital journalists and build one of the best digital platforms in the region."

"I never intended to do a masters and then go back to employment. Why do your masters, then go back to the same position, same desk, same building, maybe even a small increment of your salary? It seemed pointless to me."



## FACULTY

# George Nyabuga

Associate Dean, GSMC

Journalism is the one profession that successfully intersects and connects disciplines like politics, medicine, sociology, and economics. Journalism explains and offers a global and comprehensive view of things. It offers an understanding of life and its events.

I started out as a reporter and sub-editor, rose to a managing editor at *Standard* newspaper. I helped set up a radio station. I handled the convergence of media; newspaper, radio, and digital media. I am truly passionate about teaching. I joined AKU from the University of Nairobi, where I spent about 14 years teaching media and journalism.

Our School offers students the opportunity to understand media as

a business, but also media as an institution that is critical to society's survival, including democracy and the institutions that support democracy. I am the Associate Dean at the school. I teach people in top media leadership how to address the challenges that they are facing and how to find solutions to those challenges. Many have been promoted to positions of leadership without media management skills. They need project management, financial management, branding, and even people management knowledge.

My aim is to get students to apply the solutions they learn at AKU in their various workplaces. This is how we can ensure that a free and fair media survives, excels, and continues to serve the public interest.





THANKS TO ALL GSMC'S  
FACULTY & STAFF

STORIES OF CHANGE  
INSPIRING STORIES FROM OUR ALUMNI

We couldn't  
do it **Without**  
you!

**From Left to Right:** Grace Njuguna, Benson Mutahi, Augustine Gitonga, Sanday Ogesa, Hesbon Hansen, Dr. Caroline Kiarie, Daniel Gachungu, Regina Komi, Joe Nyaga, Simon Riitho, Clare Mogere



# GSMC ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES

## MASTER OF ARTS IN DIGITAL JOURNALISM

Our MA in Digital Journalism (MADJ) combines real-life practice with academic rigour to position early and mid-career journalists as leaders in their field. You will develop the knowledge, skills and professional qualities for success at the highest levels of your profession. You will work with world-renowned journalists and scholars as you blend practice, reflection and theory in your coursework. The programme is taught in state-of-the-art facilities and progressively builds expertise in multiplatform storytelling, specialist reporting and editorial leadership.

The culmination of the programme will be a specialist reporting project and research thesis. By focusing on regional issues and drawing on local and global trends, our graduates will develop the creativity, critical thinking and professional skills required to lead East Africa's media in the 21st century.

## EXECUTIVE MASTERS IN MEDIA LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION

The educational needs of media organisations today are broad-ranging. They require relevant and transformational learning experiences that will empower stakeholders to reimagine the media ecosystem.

The Executive Masters in Media Leadership and Innovation (EMMLI), is a 24-month MBA styled programme designed to develop leadership skills to advance and convey vision, and strategy. EMMLI fosters innovation and entrepreneurship and empowers the students with skills and competencies to start new businesses, or transform existing workspaces.

The programme is anchored on the following pillars:

1. Strategic thinking
2. Creative and responsible leadership
3. Innovation and constructive change
4. Sustainable enterprise

## MASTER OF ARTS IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS


Our Master of Arts in Strategic Communications is designed to address evolving and complex communication challenges facing professionals across various sectors in a rapidly changing world.

Rooted in the belief that communications must respond to the pressing issues facing the world, the programme recognises the growing role of communications in every sector and elevates it from a tactical to strategic functions.

The programme combines practice and theory to give you a comprehensive understanding of the changing means and tenor of communication in an increasingly mediated and networked world. You will study the different forms of strategic communications in government, across markets and civil society, and explore how communication creates and influences narratives and practices within organizations, as well as its broader impact on society.


## Hallmarks of an AKU Graduate

-  Critical and Creative Thinking
-  Socially & Environmentally Aware Citizenship
-  Evidence-based Decision Making
-  Lifelong Learning
-  Ethical Global Leadership
-  Specialist Knowledge to bring Change
-  Effective Communication



“Allow me to conclude by mentioning one other word that I trust will permeate everything we undertake at this School - and that is the word “quality.” Above all else, when people think in years to come about the Aga Khan University’s Graduate School of Media and Communications, I would like them to think of its dedication to uncompromising quality”

— His Highness, the Aga Khan IV



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTIVE EDUCATION (PDEE)

In this era of unrelenting change, the lines between personal and professional development have blurred. That’s why we offer a range of short courses designed to empower professionals at all stages of their careers with cutting-edge knowledge and immediately applicable skills. All our programs are led by industry experts and renowned scholars who focus on blending theory and practice. By completing any of these courses, you’ll enhance your capabilities, expand your network, gain broader perspectives, and cultivate a lifelong learning mindset.

### Offerings include:

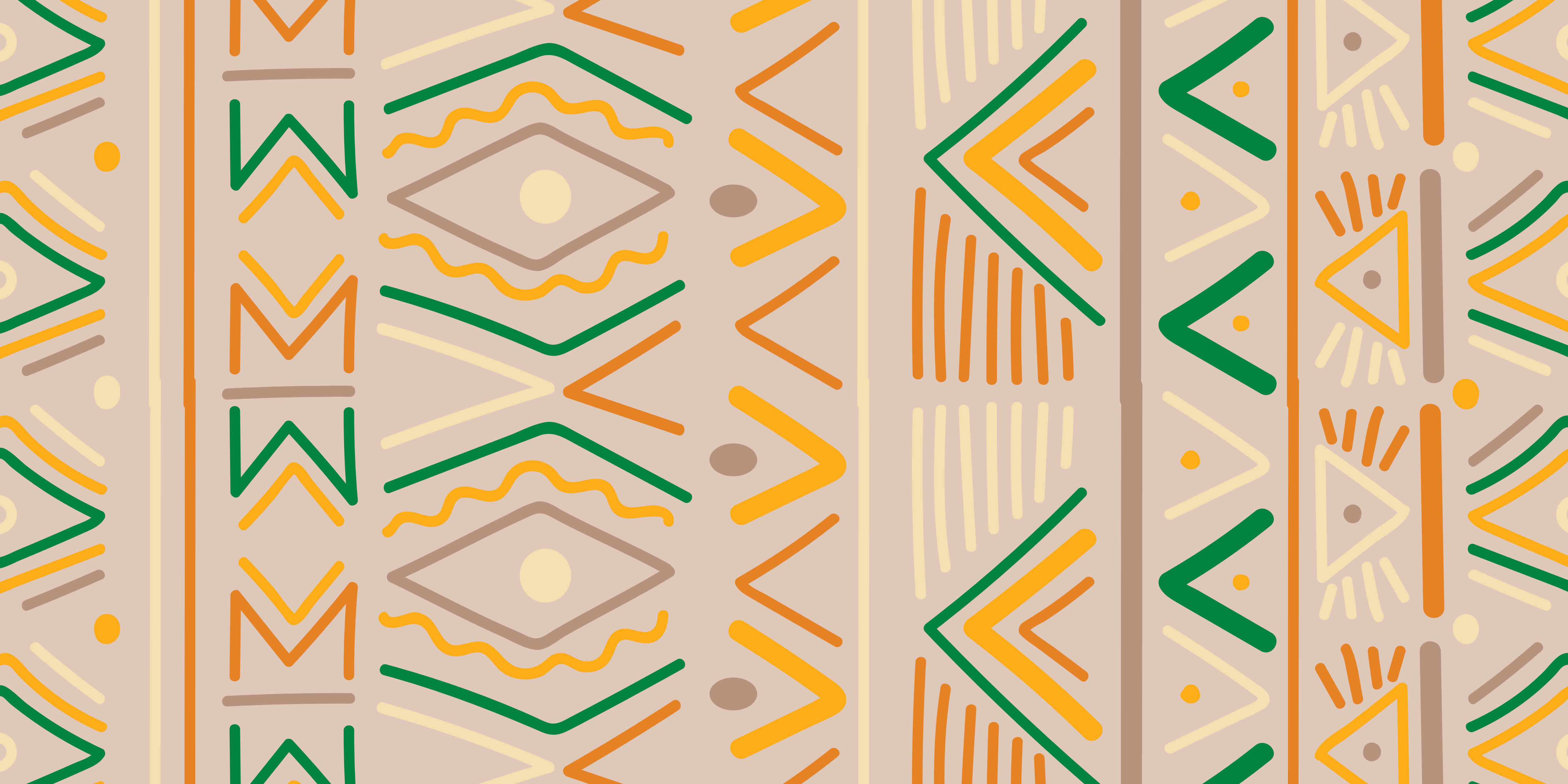
- Strategic Digital Communications
- Podcasting Masterclass
- Gender Responsive Reporting and Communication
- Data Journalism
- Climate Reporting
- Health Communication
- Mobile Storytelling
- Managing Conflict in Today’s Newsroom
- Transforming Leadership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Africa















**THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY**  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

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