

ON SMU

FOCUS

Special Edition | Honouring SMU Women of Impact



The SHE edition

CELEBRATING SMU WOMEN REWRITING THE SCRIPT OF
WORK, LEADERSHIP, IMPACT, AND BELONGING.

Igama lamakhosikazi malibongwe

LET HER NAME BE PRAISED

[At Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), every woman's name carries weight.]

SHE IS THE ACADEMIC DEFINING GLOBAL HEALTH FRONTIERS.

SHE IS THE STUDENT WHO CHOOSES SCIENCE TO SERVE HER COMMUNITY.

SHE IS THE SURGEON, THE SCHOLAR, THE SECURITY GUARD, THE NURSE, THE ADMINISTRATOR, THE VOICE BEHIND THE RADIO, THE HAND THAT CLEANS, THE LEADER WHO LIGHTS THE WAY.

**FROM THE MOST SENIOR TO
THE NEWEST RECRUIT
FROM ALUMNI BLAZING TRAILS
TO STUDENTS BUILDING THEIR FIRST
DREAMS, THIS IS HER STORY.**

**SHE POWERS | SHE HEALS | SHE BUILDS | SHE LEADS
SHE NURTURES | SHE BELONGS | SHE RISES**

[*Her contributions are not always seen,
but their impact is always felt.*]

**HER WORK
IS NOT
BACKGROUND
— IT IS
FOUNDATION.**

**HER NAME
IS NOT JUST
RECORDED
— IT IS
REMEMBERED.**

**HER PRESENCE
IS NOT AN
EXCEPTION
— IT IS
A PROMISE.**

*In Every Corridor,
Every Ward, Every Lecture Hall,
Every Open Field, Every Office*
—HER NAME ECHOES AS A LEGACY IN MOTION.

At SMU, we honour the women who sustain this institution with **knowledge, care, service, and leadership.**

This edition is her tribute.
Her celebration.
Her rightful recognition.

LET HER NAME BE **PRAISED.**
IGAMA LAMAKHOSIKAZI MALIBONGWE.



CONTENTS

Special Edition | Honouring SMU Women of Impact

She leads

- 10** The woman leading Africa's surgical revolution
- 12** Leading in learning and life-saving innovation
- 14** Blazing a trail for women in mathematics
- 16** Rethinking financial leadership in higher education

She heals

- 20** Engineering equity, claiming new ground in nuclear medicine
- 22** Young virologist developing life-saving solutions
- 24** Healing bodies. Building brands. Changing lives.

She impacts

- 28** Leading change where science meets care
- 30** Rewriting public health's response to mental illness
- 32** A global voice and local heart redefining radiography
- 36** The voices leading Ga-Rankuwa ---ultimate prime time radio

She belongs

- 40** In her truth, others find courage
- 42** Pushing past limits others place on womanhood
- 44** Leading from the margins, advocating for change

She rises

- 48** A rare blend of intellectual brilliance and human compassion
- 50** Mark her name: her impact begins here
- 52** Building healthtech futures, one solution at a time
- 54** Breaking barriers, building data-driven futures

She nurtures

- 58** Honouring the hands that sustain campus
- 60** Women who work the land with pride
- 62** Breaking circuits and breaking barriers
- 64** Transforming security, one system at a time

“ editor's Note”



There are moments in an institution's life where the act of recognising its people becomes an act of redefining itself. This inaugural Women's Month Special "SHE Edition" is precisely that moment for Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU).

There is no single definition of power in a university. Sometimes, it speaks from podiums. Sometimes, it walks the corridors unseen, and at SMU, power often carries a woman's name.

This edition is built around that simple truth. In shaping **The SHE Edition**, we did not ask how women fit into the university's story, but how their work, intellect, and presence define it. In these pages, we do not simply profile women. We centre them as architects of change. Here, you will encounter women rewriting the narrative of what leadership, scholarship, and service look like. Not in abstraction, but in the day-to-day lifeblood of our university and our nation's health future.

You will meet **Professor Hyla Kluyts**, whose work in surgical equity positions South Africa as a continental leader in health systems reform. You will encounter **Professor Maggie Aphane**, whose pioneering leadership in mathematics breaks barriers both visible and unseen. And **Dr Dineo Tsabedze**, reimagining nuclear medicine not just as science, but as a tool for equity and healing.

Yet this edition reaches beyond the titles.

It is about women who work the land and clean the spaces, whose labour allows research to flourish and ideas to take root. It is about the assistant electrician who powers our campus. The voices on SMU FM shaping public discourse. The student innovators building Africa's healthtech future. The young virologist developing diagnostic tools to save lives in South Africa and beyond.

From the gardens to the boardrooms, this is their story.

It is also the story of SMU itself, a university that understands that institutional excellence demands more than infrastructure or research outputs. It demands that every person, in every role, is seen and celebrated as a contributor to its future.

This publication is anchored by the example of our leadership:

Dr Penny Moumakwa, Chancellor, whose corporate leadership symbolises the strength of visionary women.

Nontlaza Sizani, Chairperson of Council, a strategist and steward of the university's transformation journey.

Professor Tandi Matsha-Erasmus, our Vice-Chancellor, who is steering SMU toward becoming Africa's premier health sciences university.

Professor Dini Mawela, Acting DVC: Academic and Research, championing knowledge production and student success.

Odette Ramsingh, whose leadership in human resources unlocks pathways for women across all levels.

And **Fulufhelo Ntntsieni**, SRC Secretary-General, reminding us that student voices are not the future, they are the present.

Working on this issue was a lesson in perspective. As Chief Editor, I was reminded that the most extraordinary stories often begin in the most overlooked places.

To every woman who walks this campus, wears this university's colours, or builds its legacy from afar, this edition carries your name.

Let it be praised!

Tshimangadzo Mphaphuli
Chief Editor

LEADERSHIP
IS NOT ABOUT
POSITION.
It's about
PURPOSE.
AND HERS IS
undeniable.

SHE LEADS



CELEBRATING SMU WOMEN WHO ARE LEADING TRANSFORMATION AT NATIONAL, CONTINENTAL, AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVELS. THIS SECTION HONOURS LEADERSHIP THAT SHAPES PUBLIC HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.



THE WOMAN LEADING AFRICA'S SURGICAL REVOLUTION

- PROFESSOR HYLA KLUYTS -

The woman leading Africa's surgical revolution Professor Hyla Kluyts is spearheading one of the most ambitious health equity initiatives in South Africa. As Head of the Department of Anaesthesiology and Critical Care at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) and Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital, she recently launched the Bophelo Unit for Equity, Intelligence and Learning—a pioneering platform focused on embedding data into decision-making to improve perioperative care across under-resourced settings. Bophelo, meaning “life” or “health”, captures the unit's mission to turn clinical data into system-level intelligence that can drive equitable outcome.

In her leadership role at SMU, Kluyts embodies the university's mission to cultivate healthcare professionals who lead national conversations and innovations in health equity and systems transformation.

She is widely recognised for her leadership in anaesthesiology and for reshaping how surgical care is understood, delivered, and measured on the African continent. She is also the founder and Executive Director of Safe Surgery South Africa (SSSA), a non-profit company and public benefit organisation advancing the use of perioperative health data. In collaboration with the African Perioperative Research Group (APORG), she is creating a new research ecosystem that centres African voices and local evidence.

“Health equity cannot exist without data equity,” says Kluyts. “I've seen too many preventable deaths simply because no one was tracking outcomes.”

Appointed as South Africa's first full Professor in Anaesthesiology—and the first woman to reach this milestone—Kluyts's career has consistently broken new ground. Yet, she describes the achievement as “a lonely journey”, one that came after years of unrecognised effort. “If my experience helps clear the path for others, then it has been worthwhile. I hope to help build a culture where we celebrate each other's success sincerely and loudly.”

Her early clinical career included leading the development of the intensive care unit at Kalafong Hospital, deepening her commitment to patient-centred systems. Her move into academia followed a deeply personal loss—she returned to

“You belong in every room. Don't wait for permission. Step in - and stay.”

the field with renewed clarity after losing twins to HELLP syndrome at the age of 38. “That grief brought me back with a sharper sense of purpose,” she says. Today, she balances her professional commitments with her role as a mother to two daughters, candidly noting, “Some days, patience as a parent is harder than perseverance as a professional.”

Kluyts's leadership philosophy is grounded in presence, empathy and accountability. In high-pressure environments with limited resources, she believes that showing up—and truly listening—matters. “Trainees must learn, but they must also be protected. The system may be flawed, but people should never feel alone in it.”

Her doctoral research focused on clinical risk prediction in surgical patients, reinforcing her belief that data-driven systems can improve both care and outcomes. She is a consultant to the Clinical Services Unit of CareConnectHIE, South Africa's first non-profit Health Information Exchange, and serves on the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists' Safety and Quality of Practice Committee.

For young women, particularly from underrepresented backgrounds, Kluyts offers a firm message: “You belong in every room. Don't wait for permission. Step in—and stay.” Her vision for South Africa's healthcare future is clear: “A system that is just, intelligent and humane—where excellence and equity are not mutually exclusive but deeply intertwined.”

By Dimakatso Modise

LEADING IN LEARNING AND LIFE-SAVING INNOVATION

In 2024, Specialist General Surgeon Dr Winnie Mathe made history by leading South Africa's first Trans-Oral Endoscopic Thyroidectomy Vestibular Approach (TOETVA) at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), under the mentorship of Professor Zack Koto. This minimally invasive, scarless surgery revolutionised thyroid treatment by using a natural orifice approach, avoiding traditional neck incisions. The procedure not only ensured faster recovery and reduced pain but also symbolised a decisive shift towards patient-centred innovation in the South African health system.

Since that groundbreaking moment, Mathe and her team at SMU, along with Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital, have continued to advance this technique. A case series documenting the outcomes of their TOETVA patients was completed after receiving ethics clearance and has been submitted to a peer-reviewed journal. "All our patients remain scarless and are doing well," says Mathe. "Now we're exploring how to expand access to this procedure within the public healthcare system, especially for those who cannot afford private surgical alternatives."

Mathe's personal and professional growth since the initial TOETVA success has been equally remarkable. In May 2025, she completed her Master of Medicine in Surgery. Her thesis, *The Effects of Bariatric Surgery on Weight Loss and Comorbidities*, adds to the growing body of work addressing non-communicable diseases in South Africa—especially obesity and its impact on public health.

Blending academic knowledge with clinical innovation, Mathe launched her private practice in 2025. There, she integrates her expertise in bariatric, head and neck, and endocrine surgery to deliver holistic surgical care. "My goal is to provide tailored, comprehensive treatment plans—especially for patients dealing with obesity-related conditions," she notes.

Her pursuit of excellence recently took her to Cairo, Egypt, where she completed an advanced training programme at ABC Hospital (Arabic Bariatric Centre of Excellence). Under the guidance of Professor Mohamed Diaa Sarhan, a global authority in bariatric surgery, Mathe received a certificate in Fast Track Bariatric Immersion. "This experience deepened my understanding of international best practices and reaffirmed my commitment to making high-quality surgical care more accessible at home," she reflects.

Mathe's work is not only changing lives in the operating theatre, but also redefining what it means to be a leader in South African medicine. Her focus on ethical practice, research, accessibility, and education makes her a vital force in the transformation of healthcare.

Mathe embodies a generation of women redefining medicine through service, innovation, and compassion. With each operation, thesis, and training milestone, she's building a healthier, more equitable South Africa—one patient at a time.

By Tumelo Moila

**MATHE'S WORK IS NOT ONLY
CHANGING LIVES IN THE
OPERATING THEATRE, BUT ALSO
REDEFINING WHAT IT MEANS TO
BE A LEADER IN
SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICINE.**



Dr Winnie Mathe



Blazing A Trail For WOMEN IN MATHEMATICS

Prof Maggie Aphone

Mathematics is a field where black women remain rare. Professor Maggie Aphone is rewriting that narrative. As Head of the Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), Aphone is transforming mathematics from a gatekeeper discipline into a platform for inclusion, leadership, and innovation. Recently appointed to the National Graduate Academy for Mathematical and Statistical Sciences (NGA-MaSS), she is shaping the future of mathematics both inside SMU and across South Africa.

Aphone holds a BSc, Honours, MSc, and PhD in Mathematics (Topology) from the University of South Africa (UNISA), where she became the first South African woman and only the second woman overall to earn a PhD in Mathematics from the institution. “I’ve often been the only black female present at international conferences,” she reflects. “That has only strengthened my resolve to break barriers and inspire others.”

Her fascination with mathematics began early, drawn by its logical precision and power to explain the world. Specialising in general topology, Aphone’s research supports fields such as data science, network analysis, and medical imaging. She also works in fixed point theory and graph theory, contributing to models used in drug development and disease transmission.

As Head of Department, she is actively reshaping the academic culture at SMU. “One of my central goals is to in-

crease the representation of women in mathematics,” she explained. “Diversity is not just a value, it’s essential to innovation.” Under her leadership, the department introduced a graph theory module to help students analyse real-world public health data. This forms part of a broader effort to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration with fields such as pharmacology and public health.

Previously known mainly for teaching, the department has transformed into a leading research hub. “We’ve gone from zero publications to being SMU’s highest publishing department,” she notes with pride. Despite the challenges of working in a male-dominated field, she credits her achievements to the mentorship of Professor Seithuti Moshokoa and the support of her family. “You need people who remind you of your goals when things get tough,” she says.

For this reason, mentorship lies at the core of her academic legacy. She has created safe, inclusive spaces for young women in science, offering scholarships, internships, and research opportunities. Her recent participation in the Megamaths Conference, alongside six female postgraduate students, reflects her hands-on and empowering approach.

Under her leadership, the department has raised over R15 million to support emerging researchers and tutors, produced its first PhD graduates, and seen a steady rise in postgraduate enrolments. She also secured the department’s first nGAP lecturer and welcomed two postdoctoral fellows, further strengthening its research profile.

At SMU, where mathematics now fuels both research output and interdisciplinary innovation, Aphone is building more than a department; she is building a legacy. “I hope to be remembered as someone who opened doors and built lasting foundations,” she says. “That would be my greatest legacy.” For South African mathematics, and for every young woman following in her footsteps, Professor Maggie Aphone is ensuring that legacy is already taking shape.

By Tumelo Moila

“ONE OF MY CENTRAL GOALS IS TO INCREASE THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN MATHEMATICS. DIVERSITY IS NOT JUST A VALUE, IT’S ESSENTIAL TO INNOVATION.”

RETHINKING FINANCIAL LEADERSHIP in higher education

Rhendani Mashila's leadership journey defies convention. A Chartered Accountant [CA(SA)] who built her career in auditing and governance, she now leads transformation in higher education, not through policy or advocacy, but through finance itself.

As the Head of Financial Aid at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), Mashila represents a new generation of women who are using their expertise to break down structural barriers and redefine access. In an industry where financial leadership has long been male-dominated, her role signals both personal achievement and institutional progress. At SMU, she is part of a growing cohort of women stepping into executive roles that shape the university's future.

Her professional grounding was shaped at the Office of the Auditor-General of South Africa, where she completed her articles and rose to become Audit Manager and Technical Manager. That experience, focused on accountability, governance, and public sector ethics, continues to shape her leadership.

"My time at the Auditor-General's office shaped my understanding of finance as a powerful tool for public good," she reflects. "It taught me that robust controls, ethical systems, and a commitment to transformation can truly improve people's lives." She adds, "That foundation, coupled with my passion for helping others, inspired me to pursue a career where finance serves a greater social purpose."

For Mashila, finance is no longer a back-office operation. It's a strategic instrument that can widen access, remove

barriers, and empower students from marginalised communities. At SMU, her mandate is clear: build student-centred financial systems that are accountable, efficient, and transformative. Financial aid should do more than pay tuition fees," Mashila says. "It must inspire hope, restore dignity, and create equal opportunities for students to thrive." Her vision centres on four key priorities: strengthening internal systems and controls for transparency and efficiency; digitising the student financial aid experience; expanding partnerships with funders; and developing a data-driven model to inform equitable, sustainable funding decisions. But for Mashila, the real goal is human: ensuring that no student is excluded from higher education because of financial barriers.

"Academic success starts long before a student steps into a lecture hall," she notes. "Financial security is foundational." Her appointment also speaks to the transformation of leadership spaces. In a profession where black women remain underrepresented, Mashila's presence is both symbolic and practical, proof that women can and should lead in financial governance roles traditionally closed to them. "Women don't need permission to lead in financial spaces," she says. "We step forward, we deliver, and we change systems."

At SMU, finance leadership is no longer solely the domain of systems and spreadsheets. Under Mashila's guidance, it is becoming a catalyst for student success and institutional transformation. Her work affirms a simple but profound truth: access to education is not a side issue; it is the mission, and at SMU, a woman is leading the way.

By Tumelo Moila

"Women don't need permission to lead in financial spaces. We step forward, we deliver, and we change systems."



Rhendani Mashila

Her hands
do more than
treat.
*They restore
hope.*

SHE HEALS



DEDICATED TO WOMEN ADVANCING HEALTHCARE, CLINICAL SCIENCE, AND PATIENT-CENTRED INNOVATION. THIS SECTION EMBODIES SMU'S ROLE AS A PREMIER HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY CULTIVATING WOMEN WHO HEAL, BUILD, AND TRANSFORM HEALTH OUTCOMES ACROSS AFRICA.



Dr Dineo Tsabedze

ENGINEERING EQUITY, Claiming New Ground IN NUCLEAR MEDICINE

In a field where women remain underrepresented, Dr Dineo Tsabedze is charting her own course and building new pathways for others. Recently appointed as Academic and Clinical Head of the Department of Nuclear Medicine at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) and Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital (DGMAH), Tsabedze embodies a new era of leadership: one that merges cutting-edge science with inclusive, community-centred healthcare.

A nuclear medicine specialist and accomplished academic, Tsabedze's ascent reflects more than personal success. Her work signals a shift in South African healthcare leadership, where women are not just participating but defining the future of advanced medicine. From global collaborations to local outreach, she is expanding access to specialised diagnostics and championing a healthcare system where excellence and equity are not mutually exclusive.

Her journey is marked by a series of recent milestones that reinforce her growing influence in medicine. In 2024, she was admitted as a Fellow of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC), a prestigious international recognition that affirms her contributions to cardiovascular medicine. "It's a humbling honour," says Tsabedze. "It reflects years of dedication to cardiovascular research."

She also serves as President of the Female Academic Leaders Fellowship Alumnae Association, an organisation committed to developing a strong pipeline of female academic leaders across South Africa. "Academic leadership must reflect the diversity of our society," she says. "We need more women at the decision-making table in higher education."

In addition to her leadership roles, Tsabedze was recently awarded a competitive fellowship to collaborate with the University of

Oxford. This opportunity allows her to contribute to international research while also enhancing the profile of South African scholarship. "The Oxford collaboration is more than academic. It is about exchanging knowledge, building networks and raising the standard of care at home," she notes.

Her academic record speaks volumes. With 29 peer-reviewed publications and 280 citations, Tsabedze has made notable contributions to nuclear medicine and cardiovascular research. Her work is frequently presented at international conferences, positioning her as a respected voice in global scientific circles.

Tsabedze's impact extends well beyond academia. She is currently leading two community-based initiatives aimed at expanding access to nuclear medicine diagnostics and treatment in underserved areas. "Too often, advanced technologies are reserved for the privileged," she remarks. "These projects aim to reverse that by bringing quality care to the marginalised."

At SMU and DGMAH, where her leadership bridges academic excellence and clinical service, Tsabedze is positioning nuclear medicine as a driver of innovation and accessibility. Under her guidance, the department is embracing precision medicine and exploring the use of artificial intelligence in diagnostic imaging. "The future of nuclear medicine lies in personalisation and innovation," she explains. Yet her vision extends beyond technology. Whether mentoring young women, leading international research, or transforming care models, her focus remains

constant: opening doors for others. "I have mentors who opened doors for me. Now it's my turn to do the same for others."

For Tsabedze, leadership is not defined by position; it's measured by impact, and in her leadership, both SMU and South African healthcare are finding new possibilities.

By Tumelo Moila



"I have mentors who opened doors for me. Now it's my turn to do the same for others."

YOUNG VIROLOGIST

DEVELOPING LIFE-SAVING SOLUTIONS

Nondumiso Nkosi, a Master's student in Medical Virology at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), is making waves in biomedical innovation with a pioneering diagnostic assay for Hepatitis B. Developed in collaboration with Nagoya City University Hospital in Japan, her assay addresses a long-standing gap in accessible and efficient Hepatitis B diagnosis—particularly in regions where the disease is most prevalent.

The innovation holds immense promise for transforming public health outcomes in Africa. With millions affected by chronic Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) infections that often lead to liver disease, cirrhosis, or hepatocellular carcinoma, early diagnosis is critical. Nkosi's diagnostic tool is designed for low-resource settings, offering a potentially life-saving solution where conventional diagnostic infrastructure is either limited or absent.

Her work has already earned national attention. In 2023, Nkosi presented the innovation at the Bio Africa Convention, where she was awarded runner-up in the innovation showcase. "That moment changed everything for me," Nkosi reflects. "It made me realise the magnitude and potential impact of my work."

With the mentorship of Dr Omphile Simani, and support from the SMU Technology Transfer Office (TTO), Nkosi's innovation is now on the path toward commercialisation. "We are working with Nkosi and Simani to identify industry partners for scaling the assay," says Mohlatlego Sebola of the TTO. The Office has also played a key role in securing intellectual property protection for her work, positioning her as a rising figure in South Africa's intellectual property landscape.

SMU Vice-Chancellor, Professor Tandi Matsha-Erasmus, underscores the broader significance: "Our commitment at SMU is clear—we nurture innovation, excellence, and community service. Nkosi's work is a shining example of this mission in action."

But Nkosi's story begins far from the laboratories and conferences. Raised by a single mother in Mpumalanga, she speaks openly about the challenges that shaped her. "My mother taught me strength, resilience and the value of education—no matter the odds," she shares. "Those lessons carried me from the classroom, where I first discovered biology, to the lab, where I found my passion for medical virology."

Navigating the complex world of science as a young woman, Nkosi faced the familiar struggle of balancing multiple roles. "Women are often expected to be everything at once—caregivers, professionals, daughters, partners, scholars," she says. "At times, I felt pulled in every direction, but it was in those moments that my purpose became clear."

Her determination culminated in a patented innovation, a rare and remarkable achievement for a young scientist. "To have my name on a patent is more than professional validation; it's a statement that women belong at the forefront of scientific discovery."

Nkosi's journey is far from over, but her message is already resonating with many. "Your background doesn't define your limits," she says to young women pursuing careers in science. "You belong. Your resilience and your voice matter."

By Dimakatso Modise



"TO HAVE MY NAME ON A PATENT IS MORE THAN PROFESSIONAL VALIDATION; IT'S A STATEMENT THAT WOMEN BELONG AT THE FOREFRONT OF SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY."

Nondumiso Nkosi

A portrait of Dr Andile Molokomme, a Black woman with her hair pulled back, wearing a black dress and large pearl earrings. She is smiling and looking towards the camera.

**HEALING BODIES.
BUILDING BRANDS.
CHANGING LIVES.**

Dr Andile Molokomme

Not many people can claim “doctor,” “pastor,” “entrepreneur,” and “philanthropist” on the same curriculum vitae—let alone before the age of 30. But for Dr Andile Molokomme, a Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) alumna, these roles aren’t separate; they’re woven into one mission: to lead with purpose and impact lives.

Now 29, Molokomme is the founder of Dr Andie Family Practice in Pretoria North, a primary care clinic that’s redefining community health. “It’s not just about treatment, it’s about early screening, patient education, and empowering people to take charge of their health,” she explains.

But that’s only part of the story. With a passion for wellness that goes beyond the stethoscope, she launched AndiBeauty—a cosmetics brand rooted in empowerment. That vision has since evolved into the AndiBeauty Spa, which now offers medical aesthetic services led by Molokomme herself. She recently completed her Postgraduate Diploma in Advanced Medical Aesthetics at FPD—graduating Cum Laude. “I didn’t want to create another beauty brand,” she says. “I wanted to build something that inspires confidence and blends inner health with outer care.”

Whether behind a clinic desk or in front of a camera, Molokomme commands her platforms with clarity and compassion. As the host of Medical Insights on LoveWorld SAT, and a regular voice on Power FM, Thobela FM, and Ga-Rankuwa FM, she’s bringing health literacy to the mainstream. “If people don’t understand their health, they can’t manage it. That’s why communication matters.”

Still, for all her titles and accolades, her proudest work is what she’s done for the next generation. At just 17, she founded the Phenomenal Young Persons NPO (181-231)—long before earning her medical degree, developing business plans, or making broadcast appearances. “Before I was a doctor or entrepreneur, I was a philanthropist,” she says.

The organisation has since reached over 45,000 young people across 10 institutions, offering mentorship, academic awards, and entrepreneurship training. In May 2025, she took 130 learners from her former school, Lethabong Secondary, to the SMU Open Day. “Exposure breeds aspiration,” she insists. “When you show kids what’s possible,

they begin to believe they belong in those spaces.”

The NPO is now preparing to launch an online entrepreneurship course and expand across five African countries. At the same time, Molokomme is building AndiBeauty Spa into a leading wellness brand, combining aesthetics with purpose. “Right now, I’m growing the clinic, scaling the spa, mentoring students, and building a digital education platform,” she says. “Leadership is not about being busy—it’s about being impactful. I wake up every day to live that mission.” As an SMU alumna, Molokomme embodies the university’s mission to produce graduates who lead with purpose and redefine healthcare and wellness on the continent.

By Dimakatso Modise

*“LEADERSHIP
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Impact
*isn't measured
in accolades.
It's in the
lives she's
changed.*

SHE IMPACTS



**HONOURING WOMEN WHOSE WORK DRIVES SYSTEMS
CHANGE, SOCIAL INNOVATION, AND COMMUNITY
TRANSFORMATION. THIS SECTION REFLECTS SMU'S
COMMITMENT TO KNOWLEDGE THAT SERVES SOCIETY
AND ADVANCES HEALTHCARE LEADERSHIP.**

LEADING change where **SCIENCE** MEETS CARE

Dr Ramokone Maphoto, Senior Pathologist in Virology at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) and the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS), stands as a key figure in South Africa's ongoing battle against HIV/AIDS. With a career built on scientific excellence and a commitment to public health, Maphoto is making significant contributions to diagnostics, research, and community empowerment.

Based within SMU's Department of Virology, Maphoto's work spans cutting-edge laboratory science and practical healthcare solutions. She currently leads the Clinical Virology Research Unit, a newly established facility dedicated to advancing the understanding of viral infections. The unit's mandate focuses on diagnostics, treatment, prevention, and innovative research that integrates laboratory findings with clinical application.

"Science is not only about discovery but about making a real impact on people's lives," says Maphoto. "At SMU, we're uniquely positioned to bridge laboratory research and frontline healthcare, especially in addressing HIV/AIDS challenges."

Her role also extends to academic leadership as an active member of the Departmental Research Committee, where she serves as Deputy Chair on rotation. This involvement allows her to influence the strategic direction of virology research and foster collaboration among researchers and clinicians.

SMU's Virology Department plays a critical role in South Africa's health system, providing essential HIV testing and

treatment monitoring services to vulnerable communities. Under Maphoto's guidance, the laboratory operates around the clock, utilising advanced automated HIV testing technologies to increase capacity and deliver timely, accurate results.

"Timely viral load testing is essential for managing treatment effectively," explains Maphoto. "It helps detect treatment failure early, ensuring patients receive appropriate care to suppress the virus and reduce transmission." Beyond the lab, Maphoto is passionate about education and capacity building. She mentors and trains medical registrars, honours, and master's students, nurturing the next generation of virologists who will continue to strengthen South Africa's HIV response.

However, Maphoto recognises that the fight against HIV/AIDS is about more than medicine and technology. Stigma remains a significant barrier to care, and she is dedicated to community outreach and education initiatives that challenge misconceptions and encourage people to seek testing and treatment.

"Breaking down stigma is critical," she asserts. "Education empowers people to make informed decisions and access the healthcare they need without fear or shame."

Maphoto's work exemplifies the integration of scientific innovation, public health commitment, and compassionate leadership. Her efforts not only enhance diagnostic services but also shape policy and practice, supporting South Africa's goal of ending the HIV epidemic.

"At SMU, we believe in health equity as a responsibility," she says. "I'm proud to contribute to this mission by advancing research and ensuring every patient's right to quality care is respected."

In a country grappling with the world's largest HIV epidemic, access to reliable testing and treatment is more critical than ever. At the heart of this fight is SMU, where science, research, and compassion converge to tackle the HIV/AIDS crisis head-on.

By Dimakatso Modise

“AT SMU, WE BELIEVE IN HEALTH EQUITY AS A RESPONSIBILITY. I'M PROUD TO CONTRIBUTE TO THIS MISSION BY ADVANCING RESEARCH AND ENSURING EVERY PATIENT'S RIGHT TO QUALITY CARE IS RESPECTED.”



Dr Ramokone Maphoto

REWRITING PUBLIC HEALTH'S RESPONSE TO MENTAL HEALTH

In a field often dominated by complex statistics and siloed disciplines, Professor Kebogile Mokwena, South Africa's first National Research Foundation (NRF) Research Chair at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), has emerged as a leading force reshaping the nation's public health response to mental illness and substance abuse. With more than 120 postgraduate students supervised across multiple health disciplines, Mokwena's work is not only academically rigorous but deeply grounded in the real-world challenges facing South African communities.

Her passion for public health and population mental health research was ignited early in her career. "I was always inspired to serve and work with people," she says. After obtaining her doctorate in Public Health Education from the University of South Carolina, with specialisations in curriculum development and health promotion, Mokwena found her research calling in tackling the emergence of nyaope—a highly addictive street drug devastating communities across the country.

Since then, she has become one of the country's foremost researchers on substance abuse and mental health, forming collaborations with institutions such as the University of Cape Town, Walter Sisulu University, the University of Johannesburg, and the South African Medical Research Council. Her studies estimate the burden of depression and anxiety among underserved populations, confirming a high prevalence of undiagnosed conditions often linked to broader societal issues, including crime and substance use.

Her appointment as SMU's first NRF Research Chair has allowed her to expand her research portfolio while strengthening collaborations within and beyond the university.

"I had to jump several hurdles before I was awarded the grant," she recalls. "But the role has enabled me to plan long-term, mentor others, and broaden the institution's research footprint."

Mokwena's academic influence spans disciplines and schools. She has supervised students in pharmacy, physiotherapy, nursing, and medicine, covering fields as varied as surgery, paediatrics, and obstetrics. She embraces interdisciplinary supervision, often initiating partnerships when public health questions intersect with clinical concerns. "All involved learn something new," she notes.

Beyond academia, she serves on several boards and advisory committees, including the Vista Psychiatric Hospital Board, the Gauteng Substance Abuse Forum, and the SANCA Advisory Committee. These roles keep her connected to the practical implications of her research, informing policy and service delivery at multiple levels.

Despite facing gender-based assumptions in academia, Mokwena has remained steadfast. "People sometimes don't expect to see a woman in my position," she admits. "But I've learned to let my work speak for itself."

Her advice to young women aspiring to make an impact in public health is bold: "Be brave enough to ask difficult questions. Be authentic. Work hard and enjoy what you do."

Reflecting on her legacy, Mokwena hopes to be remembered not only for pioneering research but for advancing solutions that serve society: "My research lives in communities, churches, schools, and prisons. That is the impact I want to leave behind."

By Tumelo Moila



"Be brave enough to ask difficult questions. Be authentic. Work hard and enjoy what you do."



Prof Kebogile Mokwena

“Support doesn't always come from policy. Sometimes it comes from people choosing to care.”



Khomotso Paulina Motiang

A GLOBAL VOICE AND LOCAL HEART REDEFINING RADIOGRAPHY

In the evolving world of healthcare education, few stories capture both global leadership and local impact as powerfully as that of Khomotso Paulina Motiang, a Lecturer in the Department of Radiography at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU). From global forums to SMU lecture halls, Motiang is redefining what it means to lead in radiography, using her platform to inspire change, develop young professionals, and advance MRI education in South Africa and beyond.

With a clinical career spanning public and private sectors, international experience, and more than five years in academia, her greatest influence is now felt in academia, where she nurtures future radiographers to lead with both skill and compassion. “We must remain human while striving for excellence,” she reflects, a principle that shapes every dimension of her work.

In 2024, Motiang’s commitment to transformation was recognised when she was awarded the International Society of Magnetic Resonance Radiographers and Technologists (ISMRT) Future Leaders Fellowship, an initiative developed in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This prestigious global fellowship positions her at the forefront of MRI education advancement in underserved regions. For South Africa’s radiography community, it is a milestone: Motiang is not only representing the country on global platforms but bringing global innovation back home.

Through the Fellowship, she is establishing the ISMRT South African Division, creating a national knowledge-sharing hub for MRI safety and best practice. “This Fellowship is not just personal, it’s a resource for the profession and a tool to empower others,” Motiang says.

At SMU, her teaching philosophy is equally progressive. She champions interprofessional education and collaborative

practice (IPECP), believing that modern radiographers must operate beyond their specialisation and work as collaborative healthcare leaders. Her supervision of undergraduate research projects in forensic imaging and AI in diagnostics demonstrates her commitment to producing forward-thinking graduates ready for global healthcare environments.

Her leadership extends to national structures: from 2025 to 2029, she will serve as the Gauteng Provincial Representative for the Society of Radiographers of South Africa (SORSA), shaping national policy and professional development. Internationally, she continues to advocate for MRI safety and education through her Fellowship, and as a Fellow of the ISMRT.

Yet, Motiang’s leadership philosophy remains rooted in human connection. Beyond accolades and fellowships, she quietly donates food parcels to students in need and mentors first-generation university entrants. “Support doesn’t always come from policy. Sometimes it comes from people choosing to care.”

Her work embodies SMU’s vision: health sciences education that is both locally relevant and globally competitive. As a reviewer for the African Journal of Health Professions Education, Motiang advocates for African research that reflects the continent’s realities while contributing to global knowledge. From global MRI forums to the students she mentors daily, Motiang is a leader of substance, one who proves that advancing healthcare is not just about technology and systems, but about people, compassion, and vision.

A global voice and a local heart, she is redefining radiography leadership for South Africa and for the world.

By Tumelo Moila

The SHE edition

Power. Presence. Purpose



Featuring:

- **KHOMOTSO PAULINA MOTIANG**
Lecturer, Department of Radiography
- **ROSE MOREKI**
SMU FM Presenter
- **THATO LEDWABA**
SMU FM Presenter
- **PROFESSOR HYLA KLUYTS**
Head of Department: Anaesthesiology
- **NONDUMISO NKOSI**
Master's Student, Department of Virology
- **THANDI CAROLINE SEBOLA**
SMU FM Presenter

THE VOICES LEADING GA-RANKUWA'S ULTIMATE PRIME TIME RADIO



Rose Moreki, Thato Ledwaba and
Thandi Caroline Sebola

In the fast-paced world of broadcasting, prime-time radio is more than a slot; it's a platform of influence. At SMU FM, three women are turning microphones into megaphones for change. From early-morning power talks to drive-time debates and sports commentary, Thato Ledwaba, Rose Moreki, and Thandi Caroline Sebola are setting the tone, not only for the station but for the Ga-Rankuwa community at large.

Each presenter leads one of SMU FM's top shows: The Morning Brew, The Soulful Lounge, SMU Sports, and The Ultimate Drive, bringing their unique voices to conversations that matter.

Thato Ledwaba, host of The Morning Brew, carved her path through passion and persistence. "I started small, volunteering, learning, and consistently showing up. Over time, my voice found its place, and so did I," she says. For her, being a woman in prime time is deeply personal. "It's about representation and breaking barriers. It's reminding young women that they belong in powerful spaces too."

She uses her platform to drive real conversations. "We talk about mental health, identity, relationships, social justice — the things students are actually dealing with," she explains. Her goal? "To inform, uplift and remind the SMU community of its power."

Rose Moreki, who commands the mic on both The Soulful Lounge and SMU Sports, came into radio with a love for storytelling and sports. "When I left Ga-Rankuwa FM, I wanted to be part of another great station that holds its listeners at heart," she says. To Moreki, hosting prime-time shows isn't just about air-time; it's about reshaping what leadership sounds like. "I

don't just report scores, I explore themes like youth development, gender equality in sport, and community wellness."

Through her soulful segment, she brings healing and pride to the airwaves. "My voice becomes a connector between lived experience and shared growth." In both shows, Moreki is driven by a sense of service.

"Leadership is about preparing when no one sees you, showing up when it's hard, and creating opportunities for others. You don't need permission to lead."

Thandi Caroline Sebola, host of The Ultimate Drive, entered radio with what she calls divine timing.

"Purpose, purpose, purpose! That's how I found myself behind the mic," she says. For her, the microphone is not just a tool — it's a chariot. "I

use it to unpack campus issues, celebrate youth wins, and spotlight mental health. I make space for truth, even when it's uncomfortable."

Her leadership is grounded in faith and authenticity. "It's not about position, it's about presence," she shares. "I want young women to know they don't need to shrink to fit. The media needs their voice. Leadership looks like them."

Together, Ledwaba, Moreki, and Sebola represent more than SMU FM's prime-time line-up. They are the sound of a university shaping leaders who think critically, speak boldly, and serve their communities.

At SMU, the airwaves are a platform that amplifies not only music and news but the future voices of African leadership. And here, in prime time, women lead.

By Dimakatso Modise

"I want young women to know they don't need to shrink to fit. The media needs their voice. Leadership looks like them."

In a world
THAT QUESTIONED
HER PLACE,
she made it
hers.

SHE BELONGS



SHE BELONGS CELEBRATES VOICES OF ADVOCACY,
INCLUSION, AND IDENTITY. THESE ARE STORIES
OF WOMEN WHO CLAIM SPACE,
SHAPE NARRATIVE, AND AFFIRM SMU AS A PLACE
WHERE EVERY WOMAN BELONGS.

IN HER TRUTH, OTHERS FIND COURAGE

Leadership doesn't always look like authority; sometimes, it looks like authenticity. For Kelebogile Nonkwelo, living openly as a queer woman living with HIV is more than personal truth; it's a form of leadership that empowers others to believe in their worth. From her rural childhood in Ngqeleni to her role as Senior Health HIV/AIDS Officer at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), her journey is one of visibility, compassion, and creating spaces where others no longer have to hide. In her truth, others find courage.

Originally from Ngqeleni in the Nyandeni District of the Eastern Cape, Nonkwelo's rural upbringing shaped her passion for public health and social justice. "Growing up, I witnessed the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS. Not just the illness, but the silence and shame surrounding it. I knew I had to be part of the change," she reflects.

Diagnosed with HIV 22 years ago, Nonkwelo draws strength from her journey and channels it into her work. "Living with HIV has taught me empathy. I don't just see people's conditions, I see their pain, strength, and stories," she says. While she occasionally conducts HIV counselling in a colleague's absence, her primary role focuses on broader health promotion and support, including awareness campaigns, peer educator programmes, and implementation of the Higher-Health mandate.

Her work spans ten key focus areas, ranging from gender-based violence and mental wellness to sexual reproductive health and LGBTQIA+ inclusion. "No two days are the same," she shares. "But each one reminds me why this work matters." Nonkwelo's impact reaches far beyond her formal job description. As a queer woman living with HIV,

she openly shares her story to empower others facing similar challenges. "Disclosing my status was one of the hardest things I've ever done. But it allowed others to see that healing, growth, and success are still possible," she says. Her journey from a rural village to a leadership position at one of South Africa's premier medical universities is a source of pride. "From where I come from, girls weren't expected to lead or even dream big. I'm here to say: rural girls have power too."

Navigating dual marginalisation, both as a queer woman and someone living with HIV, has not been easy. "People

“FROM WHERE I COME FROM, GIRLS WEREN'T EXPECTED TO LEAD OR EVEN DREAM BIG. I'M HERE TO SAY: RURAL GIRLS HAVE POWER TOO.”

judged me for where I came from and what I live with. But I never let that define my worth or derail my mission," she says. Nonkwelo believes visibility is a powerful form of healing. "Representation matters. When students see someone like them in a leadership role, thriving and unafraid, it permits them to do the same."

She applauds SMU's strides toward diversity and inclusion, particularly the work done by the Advocacy and Diversity unit under Student Affairs. However, she urges contin-

uous progress: "Policy must always translate into everyday practice."

She asserts that SMU is more than a workplace; it's the platform where she shows up, fully seen, and where her presence tells a story of possibility. Each day, in counselling rooms, awareness campaigns, and quiet conversations, she offers a message that transcends HIV, gender, and identity: "You are not broken. You are whole. You are worthy." In her truth, others find courage. And in her visibility, they find permission to lead.

By Tumelo Moila



Kelebogile Nonkwelo



PUSHING PAST LIMITS OTHERS PLACE ON WOMANHOOD

Mukhethwa Managa

Mukhethwa Managa never set out to be anyone's role model. Yet, by choosing to live boldly and unapologetically, she has become just that—a quiet symbol of courage in spaces where difference is often met with silence.

A double-degree graduate from Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), Managa's story is not about fitting in. It's about belonging on her own terms. "Coming out was painful, but necessary," she recalls. "I wasn't trying to prove anything. I just wanted to be free."

Known to many by her stage name Alpha Art, the 27-year-old from Tshidzini village in Venda grew up navigating a world that offered few reflections of herself. As a proud member of the LGBTIQ+ community, she knew early that her identity would challenge expectations. University, however, was where her fight for authenticity took shape.

At SMU, she earned not just academic degrees—a Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry and Physiology, and a professional qualification in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology, but something far more important: her voice. "At SMU, I found spaces that accepted me and spaces that didn't," she says. "But the LGBTQIA+ student organisation changed everything. It showed me that being myself wasn't something to apologise for."

Support from peers and mentors gave her the courage to be visible in a community where invisibility often felt safer. From lecture halls to football fields, Managa began to live out loud. Her leadership shows itself in many forms. As a rapper, sketch artist, and soccer player, she pushes past the limits others place on womanhood.

"I've learned that womanhood looks different for everyone," she explains. "Some women are feminine, others masculine. All of us deserve to belong." For Managa, belonging is not just about visibility, it's about using visibility as a platform for others. "When people see me walking boldly across campus or on stage as Alpha Art, I want them to know they can be themselves, too. That's leadership."



"I've learned that womanhood looks different for everyone. Some women are feminine, others masculine. All of us deserve to belong."

She hopes that SMU and institutions like it will continue expanding spaces where diverse identities of womanhood are celebrated, not merely tolerated. "Institutions need to stop thinking of inclusion as optional. It's essential to developing real leaders."

Managa's journey isn't framed by awards or titles. Her legacy is quieter but no less powerful: showing others that strength lies in living truthfully. Her advice to those navigating identity in spaces that weren't built for them? "Live out loud. You don't need permission to be yourself."

Today, as a qualified healthcare professional, an artist, and a woman rewriting her own definition of strength, Managa is proof that leadership begins with authenticity. And at SMU, her story and her voice found room to grow.

By Tumelo Moila

LEADING FROM the margins ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

Nontobeko Khoza is redefining what leadership looks like from spaces society too often overlooks. At 19 and as a second-year Bachelor of Audiology student at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), she is proving that leadership doesn't require a title; it starts with presence, advocacy, and purpose. Living with a physical disability, Khoza stands as a quiet yet powerful advocate for inclusion, not only within health sciences but across every space where voices like hers have long been absent.

Her choice to study audiology is more than academic; it's personal. "In rural areas, people living with hearing loss are often ignored or misunderstood. Many believe it's witchcraft, or they simply don't have access to help," she explains. "I want to be the voice that changes that." For Khoza, leadership means advocacy. Every step she takes, every classroom she enters, is a statement: she belongs. "My disability isn't a limitation. It's my reason to lead. It gives me purpose."

At SMU, Khoza found more than education; she found a platform. The university's commitment to inclusivity and transformation has provided her not only with practical tools but also a sense of belonging. A specialised wheelchair and clinical assistant have helped her navigate physical spaces, while her presence

**"YOU ARE NOT DEFINED
BY THE LIMITS OTHERS
PLACE ON YOU.
YOU CAN LEAD FROM
WHEREVER YOU STAND."**

Yet her advocacy is grounded not in personal triumph, but in the belief that change must be collective. "I don't want to be an exception. I want to open the way for others." As South Africa celebrates Women's Month, Khoza challenges the nation to widen the lens: "It's not just about gender equity, it's about real inclusion. We need to be part of the conversation, not an afterthought." She adds,

"Women with disabilities aren't just part of the conversation. We deserve to lead it." Her message to young women like herself is simple but radical: "You are not defined by the limits others place on you. You can lead from wherever you stand."

With every lecture attended, every conversation started, and every barrier crossed, Khoza is not asking for inclusion; she's demonstrating it. At SMU, she's not just learning to heal others; she's teaching a university and a nation what real inclusion looks like. In the margins where others tried to place her, she is leading the way and she is advocating for change.

By Tumelo Moila

within the university community challenges long-standing perceptions of who belongs in healthcare leadership.

Khoza's message is clear: "Inclusion isn't about being accommodated. It's about being counted." Her leadership voice grew louder when she was invited to share her journey at a university staff conference, an experience that shifted her perspective. "It reminded me that my voice matters, and that there's power in sharing my journey." She draws strength from her faith, guided by the verse: "I can do all things through Him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).



Nontobeko Khoza

She rose
NOT BECAUSE
she had to,
BUT BECAUSE
she was
called to

SHE RISES



At just 22 years old, Andile Moloi, a medical student from Tembisa, Gauteng, is already making waves far beyond the classroom. Currently in her fifth year of the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) programme at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), Moloi is a rising star in health sciences, youth leadership, and innovation.

Moloi's journey began early. At age 10, she was elected Chairperson of Soul Buddyz, a school programme addressing social issues. By 12, she led an anti-drug campaign through the Youth Citizens Action Programme, winning first place in Gauteng and ranking nationally in the top three. "I've always believed leadership means serving others," she reflects.

Her academic excellence in mathematics, science, and technology saw her participate in various Olympiads and lead a carbon dioxide reduction project that placed top ten provincially. Through Nkathuto Edu Propeller, a non-profit promoting STEM and entrepreneurship in disadvantaged communities, Moloi advanced as Academic Officer and became the first Chairperson of its Alumni Community—a network of young innovators.

Moloi's dedication attracted partnerships with prestigious bodies including the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), National Research Foundation (NRF), and SAASTA, and involvement in United Nations youth science programmes.

Despite a broad scientific interest, Moloi's heart lies in medicine, particularly surgery and neuroscience. A personal tragedy during her second year, when her father passed away following emergency brain surgery, profoundly shaped her focus. "That moment changed everything," she says. "It inspired me to pursue medicine with empathy and purpose."

Moloi's academic achievements earned her a Gauteng City Region Academy scholarship as one of the top three public school matriculants in the province, enabling her studies at SMU. At university, she tutors chemistry, anatomy, biophysics, and pathology and mentors first-year students. In 2023, she was named one of South Africa's Top 100 Most Promising students by GradStar and featured in the Mail & Guardian for her leadership.



"I represent millions of underrepresented youth who are creative and brilliant but lack opportunities..."

Professor Risenga Frank Chauke, Dean of SMU's School of Medicine, praises her as "a rare blend of intellectual brilliance and human compassion." He adds, "Moloi exemplifies servant leadership, and her commitment suggests a future not only as a medical professional but a job creator who will uplift the economy."

Beyond academics, Moloi is an innovator. She leads projects developing sustainable alternative charging solutions aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This work earned her selection as a South African delegate to the largest African entrepreneurship and innovation summit, scheduled for May 2025 in Sierra Leone.

Her leadership at SMU is extensive, including roles as Community Outreach Officer for the Surgical Society, Social Media Officer for the Diagnostic Society, Finance Officer for Medics on Motion, and ambassador for the Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice (IPECP) programme.

Moloi credits her journey to mentors and supporters, including her late father, mother, teachers, and university leaders. "I represent millions of underrepresented youth who are creative and brilliant but lack opportunities," she said as keynote speaker at the Youth Indaba on Research Commercialisation and Entrepreneurship. "I spoke about the education gap in science, technology, and health, the challenges women face, and the urgent need for mentorship from an early age."

As she nears graduation, she is focused on specialising in neurosurgery while continuing to lead innovations that transform healthcare and society.

By Dimakatso Modise

A Rare Blend

OF INTELLECTUAL
BRILLIANCE
AND HUMAN
COMPASSION



Andile Moloi

Mark Her Name HER IMPACT BEGINS HERE



Tsakane Pearl Nghonyama, Bonolo Malema, Rolivhuwa Rasilingani and Mbali Ndamase.

At Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), every young woman in a lab coat or scrubs carries more than textbooks and ambition; she carries legacy in the making. From lecture halls to clinical spaces, young women at SMU are building futures that will shape healthcare across South Africa and the continent. Each has a reason for choosing this path, a role model who inspired her, and a vision for the professional—and the woman—she is becoming.

Together, they are more than students. They are future doctors, scientists, and healthcare leaders. Each one: a name worth remembering.

SMU, as South Africa’s leading dedicated health sciences university, is where these women step onto a path of purpose. Here, education is more than lectures; it is a commitment to community, to excellence, and to producing healthcare professionals who will shape the systems of tomorrow.

For **Mbali Ndamase**, a second-year Bachelor of Science in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology student, her calling began with the simplest human need: communication. “I’ve seen how communication and hearing disorders can isolate people,” she says. “At SMU, I’m being shaped into a healthcare professional who not only treats but empowers people to reconnect with the world.”

Bonolo Malema, a third-year Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery student, describes her journey into medicine as both a personal mission and a shared responsibility. “Becoming a doctor isn’t about the title—it’s about healing, about making people’s lives better. SMU gives me the skills, but also the sisterhood and the inspiration to believe I can make a difference.”

Malema believes SMU’s women are rewriting the future of medicine. “Here, we’re not just learning how to treat illnesses, we’re learning how to lead.”

Rolivhuwa Rasilingani, a third-year Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) student, echoes that sentiment: “I’ve always wanted to be part of something greater than myself, something that brings change and serves the community. SMU provides the space for me to grow, learn, and empower others through knowledge and service,” she shares. “Being a Brand Ambassador also means representing more than just the university; it means being an example of leadership, excellence, and resilience.”

Tsakane Pearl Nghonyama, a third-year BSc Mathematical Sciences student, is proof that healthcare’s future depends not only on clinicians but also on data scientists. “At SMU, I don’t have to choose between logic and compassion. I’m training to be both a Data Analyst and a Paediatrician. One saves lives now; the other shapes the systems that will save lives tomorrow.”

Their stories and ambitions reflect SMU’s mission to educate and empower African women who will lead health innovation, drive community care, and transform systems that for too long have left women’s voices unheard. “We are part of a sisterhood here,” says Malema. “A sisterhood that believes in service, in leadership, and in changing lives.”

At SMU, these young women’s stories begin—but their impact will be felt far beyond its gates. They are not just studying for degrees. They are preparing for legacies built on service, strength, and the unstoppable power of a woman’s voice in African healthcare. Mark their names. Their futures are just beginning.

By **Dimakatso Modise**

“We are part of a sisterhood here. A sisterhood that believes in service, in leadership, and in changing lives.”

Innovation, leadership, and purpose converge in the work of Khanyisa Faith Mokgolobotho—a postgraduate student at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) whose vision is reshaping the future of healthcare technology in South Africa. As co-founder of TechMed Connect, a pioneering healthtech startup, she is not just innovating, she's breaking barriers as a student leader, proving that courage, creativity, and determination can transform both industries and lives.

Mokgolobotho's journey into technology and entrepreneurship began with a spark of determination and a passion for addressing real-world healthcare challenges. In 2023, she and her co-founder Rosemary Erawemen joined the competitive I'M IN Women's Ideation Programme, supported by Telkom, JP Morgan, and the Embassy of Ireland. Their healthtech concept, TechMed Connect, was selected among the top 15 nationally, marking a significant milestone that propelled their startup from an idea to a nationally recognised innovation. "This opportunity was a turning point for us," she reflects. "It gave TechMed Connect the platform and resources to develop a solution that can truly make a difference in healthcare delivery."

Since then, TechMed Connect has garnered numerous accolades and funding, including victories at the Enactus MTN Innovation Challenge, the Hult Prize South Africa National Showcase, and various hackathons. The app is currently in the testing and compliance phase, moving closer to real-world implementation. Her role as a visionary and problem-solver has earned her recognition beyond the university, proving that young innovators from SMU can compete on the national stage. "Every achievement is a testament to what is possible when passion meets opportunity," she says.

Her passion for technology was further ignited by her success at the 2022 CSIR DIRISA Datathon, where she was named Best Female Student Participant. This achievement came with a bursary that fully funded her undergraduate and honours studies, allowing her to focus on mastering artificial intelligence, machine learning, and cloud infrastructure. "My goal is to become a leading AI engineer, developing solutions that can transform healthcare," Mokgolobotho explains. "SMU has been instrumental in equipping me with the skills and experience I need."

Her impact is not limited to technology and innovation. She is also a dedicated student leader, having served as the Interim Student Governance Structure Residence Officer in 2023/24. Through this role, she advocated for improved student experiences and demonstrated leadership rooted in empathy and service. "Leadership is not just about titles but about making a tangible impact," she notes.

As Chairperson of the Geekulcha Student Society at SMU, Mokgolobotho is building a vibrant tech community that aims to position the university as a HealthTech Innovation Hub. Her vision is to foster collaboration between technology and health sciences disciplines, preparing students to drive the future of healthcare innovation. "By bringing students together, we're building a movement that embraces innovation and drives real change," she says.

Mokgolobotho's journey is defined by resilience, faith, and an unwavering commitment to uplift others. "Everything I do is rooted in a desire to build a better future and empower those around me," she shares. Balancing her honours studies in Computer Science with her work as a Graduate Software Engineer, she exemplifies academic resilience and lifelong learning.

Mokgolobotho is a beacon of possibility, an innovator, a leader, and a young woman whose determination is transforming healthcare and inspiring future generations.

By Dimakatso Modise

“My goal is to become a leading AI engineer, developing solutions that can transform healthcare.”

BUILDING HEALTHCARE FUTURES ONE SOLUTION AT A TIME



Khanyisa Faith Mokgolobotho



“I want to help amplify women’s leadership in research and science.”

Nomathamsanqa Nomithandazo Bonga

Breaking barriers, building **DATA-DRIVEN FUTURES.**

She’s not just breaking barriers — she’s building blueprints. From the quiet village of Muhlava in Tzaneen to the data-driven corridors of Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), Thami Nomathamsanqa Nomithandazo Bonga is redefining what it means to be a young, black woman in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Focused, fearless, and driven by purpose, she is harnessing the power of numbers to shape a future where African women lead innovation, influence policy, and make every digit count.

Now in her third year of studying Mathematical Sciences, specialising in Statistics, at SMU, Bonga is the first woman in her family to graduate in a science field — and she wears that title with pride. “This milestone means I’ve broken generational trends,” she explains. “It reflects the work of all the women who raised me, and it sends a message to other girls that they too can break boundaries and define their own futures.”

Drawn to numbers from a young age, Bonga is passionate about the real-world impact of data, particularly in the fields of public health and finance. “Statistics is more than numbers, it’s about using evidence to solve complex problems and improve lives,” she says. “As a researcher and analyst, I want to publish my work and share knowledge that helps communities understand issues that are often overlooked.”

Her journey, however, hasn’t been without struggle. Like many students, she battled distractions, including social media, and faced mental health challenges — quietly wrestling with depression. The turning point came when she opened up to friends and family. “Speaking about what I was going through made all the difference,” she reflects. “It taught me that vulnerability is not weakness — it’s strength.”

Through hard work and determination, Bonga developed

strong study habits and academic focus, eventually earning 95% in one of her most challenging modules. “SMU became more than a university, it became a place where I built my confidence, found a community, and realised that leadership doesn’t always have to be loud. It can also be about impact.”

While she may not have held formal leadership positions yet, Bonga is already leading through mentorship. She has been guiding young girls, particularly those in rural areas, and hopes to expand her outreach in her home village. “Many learners don’t know what’s out there. I want to show them what’s possible and introduce them to the opportunities within STEM fields,” she says. “I want young women to see themselves not just as students of science, but as future researchers, analysts, and policy shapers.”

Looking ahead, Bonga hopes to pursue a career as a data analyst and dreams of continuing her studies abroad to sharpen her research and technical skills. But her mission remains firmly rooted in Africa: to contribute to data-led solutions that advance health systems, drive financial equity, and empower marginalised communities.

She draws inspiration from trailblazers like Dr Flavia Senkubuge, the first black woman to serve as President of the Colleges of Medicine of South Africa. “Women like her have already begun reshaping Africa’s healthcare landscape. I want to follow in their footsteps and help amplify women’s leadership in research and science.”

Her message to the next generation of African women is powerful and precise: “Know your strengths. Take the risk. Your background does not define your potential — it’s only the beginning. You carry something the world hasn’t seen yet. Trust it, grow it, and let it shine.”

By Dimakatso Modise

IN EVERY ACT
of care,
SHE BUILDS
the future.

SHE NURTURES



OFTEN INVISIBLE YET ESSENTIAL, SHE NURTURES
CELEBRATES SMU WOMEN IN OPERATIONAL
AND SUPPORT ROLES WHOSE DAILY WORK SUSTAINS
THE UNIVERSITY. FROM GARDENS
TO POWER CIRCUITS, THESE WOMEN BUILD THE
FOUNDATIONS OF A THRIVING INSTITUTION.

HONOURING THE HANDS THAT SUSTAIN CAMPUS

Every day at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), while future doctors, nurses, and scientists fill lecture halls and hospitals, there is another kind of leadership quietly at work. It is found in the hands that scrub, sweep, and sanitise—the hands that uphold the dignity of the campus and the safety of everyone who enters its gates. Among these is Rachel Molly Thongo, Acting Head of Cleaning Services, whose story represents not just her own but the countless women who sustain campus life through care and service.

Born in Soshanguve and raised by a single mother, Thongo's journey to leadership was shaped by resilience, humility, and purpose. "We were raised with love and respect," she recalls. These values now underpin her management style, where compassion meets accountability, and every task, no matter how routine, is treated as essential.

Her professional story at SMU began in the campus cafeteria under a private catering provider. When SMU insourced its staff, Thongo joined the university officially, later transitioning to the Cleaning Services Department, a move she once resisted but has since embraced with pride. "At first, I struggled to accept it," she admits. "But then I realised: without cleaning services, nothing else works."

Today, as Acting Head of the Department, Thongo oversees scheduling, health and safety compliance, and operations across SMU's expansive campus. Her leadership ensures that learning spaces, residences, and clinical areas remain clean, hygienic, and ready for the university's daily life to unfold.

"We uphold SMU's hygiene standards, and that directly supports its public image as a leading health sciences university," she explains. "Our work keeps students, staff, and patients safe." But beyond logistics, Thongo's leadership is human. She believes in nurturing the people who sustain the university's spaces. "A thank you, a half-day off—small things matter to people who work hard," she says. Her approach was affirmed when she was selected by SMU's Skills Development Office to attend supervisory training at the University of the Witwatersrand. "That made me feel seen," she reflects softly.

Like many women in operational leadership, Thongo navigates daily challenges, from resource constraints to managing team dynamics. Yet, her loyalty to SMU remains firm. "This institution takes care of its people," she says. "From study benefits to supporting our families—SMU offers more than a job. It offers dignity."

Her message to other women in service roles is clear: "What we do matters. Without us, the university wouldn't function." Thongo's story is not only her own. It is a tribute to every woman who arrives before dawn and leaves after dark to ensure that SMU remains a place of healing, learning, and progress. Together, they sustain the university—not with titles or accolades, but through their daily, often unseen, acts of care. At SMU, theirs are the hands that sustain campus. And they deserve to be honoured.

By Tumelo Moila



Rachel Molly Thongo

THE LAND WITH PRIDE



Margaret Kedibone Chiloane

With a grass cutter in hand and a heart full of purpose, Margaret Kedibone Chiloane is helping shape the gardens and the spirit of Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU). As a Machine Operator in the Garden Services unit, she is part of a vital yet often overlooked workforce keeping the university clean, green, and welcoming. Her story is one of transformation; from contract worker to permanent staff, from limited recognition to pride and visibility, and it reflects the quiet strength of women thriving in roles once reserved for men.

Chiloane has been part of the SMU family since 2016, when the university insourced its gardening services from a private company. “Before SMU, I was working on contract,” she says. “Becoming a permanent employee changed my life. It gave me stability and hope.”

Her daily tasks may seem routine; cutting grass, blowing leaves—but to her, every detail matters. “It might seem small, but every corner of this campus counts,” she says. Among her favourite spots is the university’s main entrance. “When people drive in and see a beautiful, clean space, it gives them a good impression. That makes me happy.” Chiloane’s passion for her work is clear: “I love gardening,” she says simply. “Gone are the days when certain jobs were just for men. I believe I belong here.”

Though the job comes with physical demands, especially in larger areas of the campus, she says teamwork keeps them going. “Some parts really need more manpower, but we help each other,” she adds. As a woman working

with machinery in a male-dominated field, Chiloane often receives surprised but positive reactions. “Students tell us they didn’t expect to see women doing this kind of work. They say, ‘Well done, ladies,’ and it makes me proud,” she says with a smile.

Women’s Month carries personal significance for her, both as a single mother and as a woman balancing home and work responsibilities. “It’s a time to reflect on my strength and how far I’ve come. I celebrate myself through my independence,” she says.

Looking back over her time at SMU, she takes pride in the transformation of the campus gardens. “They’ve changed so much for the better,” she says. “And management supports us; they check on us and value our input.” Importantly, Chiloane feels her work is seen. “People notice. Even students compliment the gardens. That motivates me.”

To other women in service roles, she offers this message: “Don’t be afraid of hard work. There’s dignity in what we do. We help the university grow, just like we help the plants grow.” For Chiloane, SMU is more than a workplace; it’s a place that gave her a voice, a skill, and a sense of belonging. “It’s a place where my hands do the talking,” she says proudly.

Through her hands, SMU’s gardens bloom. But hers is not a solitary story. It is the story of every woman who picks up a spade, starts a machine, and works the land with pride; quietly nurturing the university’s beauty, one day at a time.

By Tumelo Moila

“Chiloane’s passion for her work is clear: *“I love gardening. Gone are the days when certain jobs were just for men. I believe I belong here.”*”

Breaking Circuits & BREAKING BARRIERS

Every current that flows and every light that glows at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) bears the signature of Nomsa Mngomezulu. As an Assistant Electrician in the university's Department of Built Environment, she maintains electrical systems and shapes perceptions of where women belong in technical work.

Her journey is both practical and profound: from general worker to electrical specialist, Mngomezulu's story is powered by determination, skill, and a refusal to be limited by traditional gender roles. "I've been working as an electrician for nine years," she says. "In 2019, I decided to formalise my skills by studying Electrical Engineering. I earned my National N3 certificate and submitted it to HR, and now here I am."

Today, Mngomezulu is the force behind much of what keeps SMU functional. Her tasks range from repairing pump stations and classroom lighting to upgrading distribution boards and fault-finding across the campus. Her work is largely unseen, but the campus depends on it. "Most of our work happens behind the scenes," she explains. "It's not glamorous; it's dusty, it's in ceilings and underground ducts. But it keeps the university running."

Her technical journey was supported by mentorship from Willie Chabangu, a seasoned electrician at SMU. "He taught me how to fix pump stations and upgrade distribution boards. I learnt so much from him. Today, I can confidently say I'm a professional."

For Mngomezulu, professionalism includes a rigorous approach to safety. She follows strict lockout/tagout procedures and adheres to the National Electrical Code. "Safety is everything, especially where people rely on the systems we maintain." Yet for all its technical complexity, her work has always been more than wires and circuits. "This place allows me to grow, to learn, and to contribute. People may not see us, but they feel our impact every day."

Her progression from trainee to technical professional reflects both her commitment to learning and the structured mentorship she received at SMU. She credits experienced colleagues with shaping her practical skills, but it is her own drive and precision that have earned her professional respect in a traditionally male-dominated team.

Attention to detail and an uncompromising approach to safety define Mngomezulu's work. Every task, from repairing pump stations to managing high-voltage systems, is performed with strict adherence to safety protocols. She understands that the campus community relies on the systems she maintains and takes personal responsibility for ensuring they function safely and reliably.

As SMU modernises its infrastructure and technical systems, Mngomezulu is committed to growing alongside it. Her ambitions include mastering new technologies and further expanding her qualifications. Her message to young women is as direct as her approach to fault-finding: "Don't let old ideas tell you where you belong. Women can lead anywhere—even in the circuits."

By Tumelo Moila



Nomsa Mngomezulu



Patience Mabunda

TRANSFORMING SECURITY, *One System* AT A TIME

At Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), the future of security doesn't rest solely in patrols and gates; it's being quietly redefined by women like Patience Mabunda, who are transforming campus safety from within its systems. As an Administrative Officer in the Department of Security Services, Mabunda is at the forefront of modernising the operations that keep the university safe, efficient, and inclusive, one upgrade at a time.

Mabunda joined SMU in 2021, bringing with her over a decade of experience in administration from the Department of Justice, South African Weather Services, and the Department of Labour. Now in her fourth year at the university, she supports one of the institution's most vital components: campus security.

Her duties span the full spectrum of administrative coordination. "I handle procurement, manage access control, and oversee biometric enrolments for students, staff, and contractors," she explains. "I also ensure that both in-house and outsourced security teams are properly deployed, all through compliant supply chain processes."

Mabunda's journey into the university environment began during her experiential learning at varsity. "That exposure helped me realise how dynamic and fulfilling a university setting can be. It pushed me to continue learning and to enrol in an LLB, which I'm currently pursuing in my third year," she says. She believes her legal studies complement her security role and will further strengthen her professional capabilities.

Among her proudest contributions to SMU is the creation of a weekly activity reporting system. Initially developed in Excel, the tool tracked progress in operations, investigations,

and administration. "It was later converted into an online document by the technical team, and it's now a central part of how we work. It has improved transparency, efficiency, and accountability," she notes.

Each day at SMU begins with structure and intention. "I live by the motto: 'People who plan their days get most of their work done.' It helps me manage multiple demands without becoming overwhelmed."

Her efforts are especially vital in a 24-hour operation like campus security. "Working under pressure is normal here, but our management team is responsive and solutions-focused. When issues arise, they're addressed quickly because we function as a unit," she says.

Mabunda has witnessed major strides in modernising security on campus. "We've moved from outdated access cards to biometric and facial recognition systems. It's exciting to be part of that transformation." Passionate about women's empowerment and mental health, she sees her work as a platform for broader impact.

Her message to the SMU community is simple but powerful: "Success begins when you commit to excellence." Looking ahead, she hopes to contribute even more to SMU's progress: "I want to keep modernising our systems, transforming security, one solution at a time."

At SMU, operational excellence is no longer gendered; women like Mabunda are leading critical support functions, proving that transformation reaches every part of the institution.

By Tumelo Moila

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Across faculties, wards, labs and boardrooms, the women of SMU are breaking barriers and redrawing the blueprint of what leadership, healing, and scholarship mean in a transforming South Africa. This edition bears witness to a truth long known within these walls: SMU is not just home to future-ready professionals. It is shaped and propelled by women whose impact will echo far beyond these pages.