



NEWSLETTER | ISSUE 1

INTRODUCING SOFAR

Welcome to the first edition of the **Southern African Research Capacity Network (SOFAR)** newsletter. We are thrilled to launch this space to share stories, milestones, and opportunities from the Southern Africa Research Capacity Network.

SOFAR is a regional initiative committed to building a strong pipeline of African researchers who can lead high-quality, locally relevant health research. With a focus on infectious diseases and health systems, the network supports MSc, PhD, and postdoctoral fellows through training, mentorship, and collaborative research across Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Mozambique—working closely with European partners.

At its core, SOFAR is about equity, excellence, and sustainability in African-led research. Through this newsletter, we hope to amplify voices from the region, spotlight emerging talent, and strengthen the bonds that make this network thrive.

Warmly,
SOFAR Communications

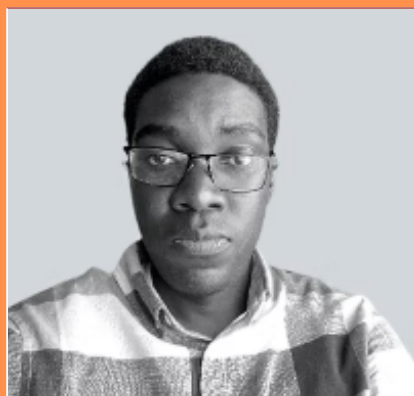
WELCOMING SIX NEW PHD SCHOLARS TO THE SOFAR NETWORK

We're excited to introduce the first cohort of PhD scholars recruited through the Southern Africa Research Capacity Network. These six outstanding early-career researchers, selected from across southern Africa, will pursue doctoral studies at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, tackling health challenges that matter most in our region.

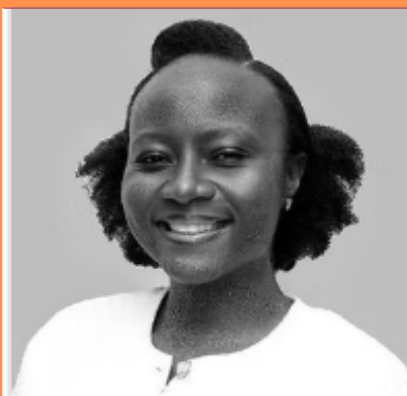
Their projects span a wide range of urgent issues—from maternal and neonatal health to infectious diseases and mental health—each grounded in real-world impact and responsive to local needs. Beyond their academic work, these scholars are joining a dynamic, cross-country network of mentors, peers, and institutions committed to transforming research ecosystems and building leadership for health equity.

At SOFAR, we believe that investing in young researchers is key to shifting power, centering African expertise, and fostering sustainable solutions from the ground up. This milestone marks more than individual success—it signals the beginning of a collective journey toward stronger, more resilient health systems powered by homegrown knowledge.

We'll be spotlighting each scholar and their research in future issues. For now, meet the newest members of our network



Richard Mwape (Zambart, Zambia)



Denise Milice (INS, Mozambique)



JayJay Karumazondo (THRU ZIM, Zimbabwe)



Emilia Juceline Eugénio de Carvalho Fumane (INS, Mozambique)



Fiona Gambanga (THRU ZIM, Zimbabwe)



Sombo Fwoloshi (Zambart, Zambia)

CONNECTING TEAMS ACROSS THE SOFAR NETWORK

Dr. Mikaela Coleman, SOFAR study coordinator, recently completed a series of site engagements with network partners Zambart in Zambia, INS in Mozambique, and BRTI in Zimbabwe. Her trip focused on connecting with PhD and MSc fellows, principal investigators, and administrative teams to strengthen inter-institutional collaboration across the Southern Africa research capacity-building network.

At INS in Mozambique, Mikaela met with PhD fellows Denise Milice and Emilia Fumane, who are finalizing their registrations with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and preparing to travel to London in September. Both bring extensive experience from Mozambique's public health system. The coordinator also engaged with MSc fellow Lina Zeca Mulhanga Muhate, who is implementing next-generation sequencing in her research, to discuss her academic goals and plans for her three-year distance learning programme.



L-R: Sombo Folwoshi, Chama Kapatamoyo, Mikaela Coleman and Jeanette Hedstrom. On screen is Richard Mwape, Zambart, Zambia

At Zambart, SOFAR PhD fellows Sombo Fwoloshi and Richard Mwape are seeking ways to build their implementation science skillset as they prepare for their careers as infectious disease research leaders in Zambia. Sombo and Richard are planning to launch an Implementation Science exchange to build implementation research capacity across the SOFAR network, within their home institutions and amongst their colleagues. Zambart also prepares to host the SOFAR Annual Meeting in Zambia in November 2025, when all of our fellows, PIs and Supervisors will meet to consolidate our cross-country and cross-continent capacity building network

At BRTI in Zimbabwe, the visit provided a valuable opportunity to meet with PhD fellows and learn more about their research areas and progress. Fellows Jayjay Karumazondo and Fiona Gambanga shared insights into their work on adolescent and youth health in Zimbabwe, which draws on both social science and epidemiological approaches.



INS PI, Administrative and fellows in Mozambique

As the SOFAR network continues to grow, these site visits highlight the importance of personal connection, mutual learning, and collaboration.

SOFAR PARTNERS SHINE AT THE EUROPEAN & DEVELOPING COUNTRIES CLINICAL TRIALS PARTNERSHIP (EDCTP) 2025 MEETING

We are thrilled to share that SOFAR partners from ZAMBART and BRTI were among the distinguished recipients of the European & Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) 2025 Prizes, awarded at the Twelfth EDCTP Forum held in Kigali Rwanda in June 2025. These prestigious awards recognise individuals and institutions making outstanding contributions to health research in sub-Saharan Africa. This year, SOFAR partners were recognised across multiple categories:

Outstanding Research Team Prize – Dr. Kwame Shanaube and the ZAMBART team

Honoured for their high-impact research on TB and HIV, and their leadership in implementing innovative, community-based health solutions in Zambia.

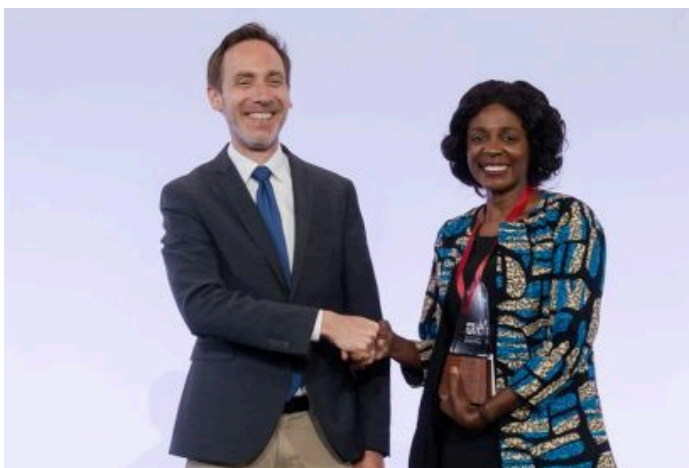
Outstanding Female Scientist Prize – Professor Rashida Ferrand,-BRTI

Recognised for her groundbreaking work on adolescent health and HIV, and for mentoring the next generation of African scientists.

Scientific Leadership Prize for a European Woman – Professor. Katharina Kranzer -BRTI

Celebrated for her longstanding collaborative work across Africa, including leadership within the SOFAR programme, and her commitment to strengthening diagnostic research and capacity building.

Congratulations Rashida, Kwame and Katharina



BUILDING COLLABORATIONS WITH THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

The SOFAR team in Zimbabwe, comprising Dr. Constance Mackworth-Young and Prof. Katharina Kranzer, recently met with Dr. Thenjiwe Sisimayi and Precious Paidamoyo Andifasi from the World Health Organization (WHO) to discuss potential collaborations that could enhance the impact of the SOFAR project

"Collaboration is the key to transforming research into actionable policy that drives real change in health outcomes." — Dr. Constance Mackworth-Young

During the meeting, the team shared the SOFAR project's vision and introduced the work of two PhD fellows whose research will contribute to national health priorities. The discussion unveiled several exciting opportunities for collaboration, including the possibility of placing SOFAR fellows within the WHO country office to gain practical experience in policy and implementation. The team also explored the involvement of SOFAR fellows in the National Public Health Institute (NPHI) steering committee to deepen their engagement with national health policy dialogues.

Additionally, the potential for collaborating to co-supervise SOFAR fellows, enriching both their academic and practical experiences.

The meeting also touched on the inclusion of WHO colleagues and partners in some of the courses that The Health Research Unit Zimbabwe (THRU ZIM) runs, such as supervisor training and geospatial mapping.

ZAMBART MEETS AFRICA CDC IN LUSAKA

In March 2025, Zambart leadership met with the Africa CDC Southern Africa Regional Office in Lusaka to discuss collaboration under the SOFAR programme. The meeting aimed to strengthen ties and boost research capacity in the region.

Zambart presented SOFAR, receiving strong interest from Africa CDC, which committed to supporting research capacity and offering internships to SOFAR fellows. Africa CDC also agreed to join the SOFAR Scientific Advisory Board.

The AMPHUES: Scalable technological infrastructure to support genomics-based HIV intervention strategies in Africa project, funded by the Gates Foundation and focused on novel HIV testing technologies, was highlighted. Africa CDC plans to visit the AMPHUES laboratory in June 2025.

This partnership is a key step in advancing African research leadership and practical health solutions.



Zambart team at Africa CDC office in Zambia

SOFAR TEAM AT THE EDCTP3 FINANCE & PROJECT MANAGEMENT TRAINING

In April, representatives from the SOFAR network finance teams in Zambia and Zimbabwe, along with the Principal Investigator and Study Coordinator from Zimbabwe, attended the EDCTP3 Finance & Project Management Training held in Johannesburg.

"Training equips teams to deliver excellence in research management amid shifting global funding landscapes."

Nchimunya Miyoba, Ivan Chigonde, Dr. Rudo Chingono, and Dr. Mikaela Coleman had the opportunity to meet the organisers of the EDCTP3 Foundation and connect with more than 40 fellow participants leading projects and networks funded by EDCTP3 and the European Union.

The finance and coordination teams play a key role in supporting these emerging African research leaders who are set to advance equity, excellence, and impact in global health.



From left to right Mikaela, Ivan, Nchimunya and Rudo in Johannesburg South Africa

NEW ANTHROPOLOGY LIBRARY AT THRU-ZIM IN HARARE

As part of SOFAR's commitment to strengthening institutional capacity for social science research in Zimbabwe, we're delighted to share that we are establishing an anthropology library at The Health Research Unit in Zimbabwe. This new library will serve as a dedicated resource for qualitative researchers, social scientists, and anthropologists in Zimbabwe. The first collection of engaging and thought-provoking books has already been purchased, and a borrowing system is being set up under the leadership of SOFAR fellow Jayjay Karumazondo.

The aim is to support learning, critical thinking, and collaborative research by providing access to key texts in anthropology and qualitative inquiry. The library will be open to the research community, with plans to expand its collection based on user suggestions and donations.



First titles in the new anthropology library

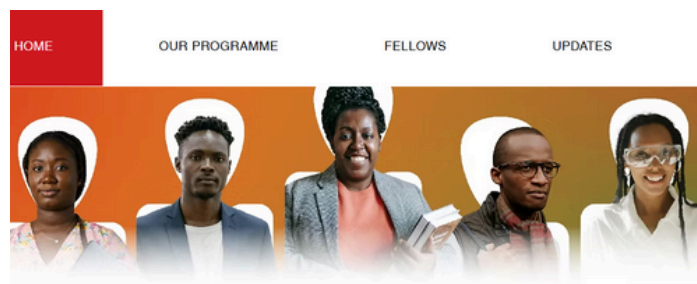
EXPLORE THE NEW SOFAR WEBSITE

We are excited to announce the official launch of the **SOFAR website** – www.sofarafrica.org


The website provides a central platform to learn more about SOFAR's mission, program, and partners.

It also highlights how SOFAR is:

- Promoting equity and inclusion in research environments
- Building research capacity through interdisciplinary training and mentorship
- Facilitating South-South and South-North collaboration to advance global health



SOUTHERN AFRICA RESEARCH CAPACITY NETWORK



The Southern Africa Research Capacity Network (SOFAR) is a collaborative initiative aimed at developing skilled, innovative, and resilient African researchers to address significant health challenges, particularly infectious diseases. This

The overarching goal of the SOFAR program is to develop researchers capable of reshaping the global health research program aims to:

Promote Equity and Inclusion: By integrating values of equity and inclusion into all aspects of the program, SOFAR seeks to foster an inclusive research culture.

Enhance Research Capacity: Through comprehensive training.

TEAM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:



Dr. Kwame Shanaube

Meet **Dr. Kwame Shanaube**, SOFAR's Mentorship Co-Lead and a driving force in public health research in southern Africa. With over 17 years of experience, Dr. Shanaube brings a wealth of expertise in TB/HIV epidemiology, adolescent health, and community-based research. She currently serves as the Executive Director at Zambart, a leading multidisciplinary research organisation in Zambia.

A clinician by training, Dr. Shanaube holds a BSc, MBChB, MPH, and PhD in TB Clinical Epidemiology, and is also an Honorary Lecturer at the University of Zambia's School of Public Health. Her leadership has been instrumental in large-scale research efforts, including serving as Principal Investigator for the TREATS and TREATS-COVID studies, and previously managing the landmark HPTN 071/PopART trial—the largest HIV prevention trial of its kind.

In her role at SOFAR, Dr. Shanaube is committed to nurturing the next generation of African researchers through intentional mentorship and creating supportive spaces for learning and growth. Her passion for impactful research and capacity building continues to inspire and shape the future of health research in the region.



NEW BEGINNINGS:

Congratulations to Fiona Gambanga and Jayjay Karumazondo, who have begun PhD studies in Epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine as SOFAR Fellows with BRTI.



Fiona Gambanga

Fiona Gambanga's research focuses on understanding the role of Hypertensive Disorders of Pregnancy (HDP) in the development of chronic hypertension among young adult women in Zimbabwe. Her study, linked to the *Significance of Hypertension in Early Adulthood Research in Zimbabwe study (SHEAR Zim)* project, will explore pregnancy-related risk factors and long-term cardiovascular outcomes in young women.

"I'm very grateful for this opportunity to advance my epidemiology and research skills, while working in my home country. I'm so excited and can't wait to see where this new chapter takes me."-Fiona



Jayjay Karumazondo

Jayjay Karumazondo's ethnographic study explores what wellbeing or 'feeling good' means to adolescents in the rural community of Tsakare, Zimbabwe. Through participant observation, interviews, and focus group discussions, the study aims to deepen understanding of adolescent wellbeing within cultural and social contexts—and inform more responsive interventions.

"I believe meaningful change starts with listening. This research gives voice to young people's lived experiences of wellbeing in their own words and communities."-Jayjay

We look forward to the insights their work will bring for health and wellbeing in Zimbabwe and beyond.

HEALTH GIS TRAINING AT BRTI STRENGTHENS REGIONAL CAPACITY IN SPATIAL ANALYSIS

The Biomedical Research and Training Institute (BRTI) in Zimbabwe will host the course "Introduction to Health Geographic Information Systems (GIS)" from 20 to 24 October 2025, targeting public health professionals, epidemiologists, and researchers from the region.

Facilitated by Dr Daniela Koller from Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, this training is part of a 2–3-year initiative under the Southern Africa Research Capacity Network (SOFAR), aiming to build local capacity for future in-country delivery through a train-the-trainer approach.

This advanced module provides a comprehensive introduction to the principles and applications of GIS in global health contexts. Participants will gain theoretical knowledge in health geography and spatial epidemiology, along with practical skills in GPS data collection, geospatial mapping, and statistical analysis using GIS software.

The course highlights the strategic role of spatial thinking in health systems research, planning, and policy, equipping participants to integrate GIS into activities such as surveillance, outbreak investigation, and effective resource allocation.



Dr. Daniela Koller
Ludwig Maximilian University Munich

SOFAR PROPOSES SUPERVISOR TRAINING ACROSS PARTNER INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

As part of its capacity-building mandate, the SOFAR programme (Southern Africa Research Capacity Network) is planning supervisor training initiatives for its affiliated institutions: INS (Mozambique), BRTI (Zimbabwe), and Zambart (Zambia).

The programme coordinator, in collaboration with Training Lead Rashida Ferrand and Lead Investigator Katharina Kranzer, is exploring a partnership with a supervisor training team based at a fellow Southern African institution. This team, led by Dr Nompilo Tshuma and Dr Liezl Frick at the University of Stellenbosch, brings valuable regional experience and will support efforts to strengthen cross-country collaboration.

The proposed activities include:

- A half-day supervisor training session to be held on 7 November 2025 during the SOFAR Annual Meeting in Zambia (Lusaka or Livingstone);
- Tailored 2- to 3-day in-person training sessions to be delivered locally at the partner institutions, led by SOFAR Principal Investigators Celso Khosa (INS), Rudo Chingono (BRTI), and Kwame Shanaube (Zambart).

This initiative aims to strengthen supervision and mentorship skills across the SOFAR network, ensuring a high-quality training environment for the next generation of health researchers in Southern Africa.

SOFAR ANNUAL MEETING CONFIRMED FOR NOVEMBER 2025

The first Annual Meeting of the SOFAR programme has been scheduled for 6 and 7 November 2025, at Chaminuka Lodge in Zambia.

Logistical coordination and updates for the event will be kindly supported by the Zambart team, one of the consortium's partner institutions.

The meeting will bring together fellows, supervisors, and principal investigators from across member countries, fostering the exchange of experiences, research outcomes, and strategic plans for scientific capacity building in the region.



Elephant sighting near Chaminuka Lodge

Share your news, publications, pictures, announcements: sofarprogramme@gmail.com

THANK YOU!