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Chairman's Message

Pandemic disease, racism and injustice have scarred this year irredeemably and left many of us feeling despondent, angry and frustrated. One beacon of hope that shines through the gloom is the potential for radical change driven by education. Insight, empathy, and understanding grow as education takes root. I hope that the accounts that you will read below of the extraordinary work done by TEST for Africa Scholars will lift your spirits. Their dedication and achievements are inspiring. Our work to advance education is critical to the scientific, social, and economic progress that is necessary to improve livelihoods and reduce barriers between people so we can move forward together. I thank you for your continuing support in this mission.



Diana Atwijuka, DMLT, BMLS, is a TEST for Uganda scholar and alumna from the Mbarara University of Science and Technology where she earned her Bachelor's degree in Medical Laboratory Science (2016–2018). She currently works with the Uganda National Health Laboratory Services, Ministry of Health, as a Medical Laboratory Scientist.

Background

TEST 4 Uganda (T4U) came to the aid of Diana after she had been long-stranded with raising funds to support her undergraduate education for a bachelors in Medical Laboratory Science after her Diploma in Medical Laboratory Technology education in 2011. After the Diploma, she took up different jobs as a laboratory assistant in the

financial demands as the salary was not enough to cover her housekeeping bills. Therefore, the news of being selected for the T4U scholarship made her teary, for God had answered her prayer for financial support and her undergraduate education dream.

She had zealously secured admission letters for a university degree for the years; 2014, 2015 and 2016 but her savings were never enough to cover her tuition. As she desperately walked on the streets of Makerere University in the mid-year of 2016, she chanced on the T4U scholarship advert calling for prospective students to apply which she did immediately. Within a few months, she received the good news of having emerged among the few selected applicants by T4U select committee for the academic year of 2016/2017 which rekindled the candle of her career.

Contribution to the current COVID-19 pandemic

A few months in the same year of 2016 before she reported to the Mbarara University for the Bachelors in Medical Laboratory Science, she decided to volunteer at the National Health Laboratory- a branch of Ministry of Health during the weekday as she was a part-time student so her lectures took place on the weekend. While at the National Health Laboratory, she was selected to join the National trainers and mentors cohort which is responsible for System Strengthening and Monitoring of other Quality improvement indicators in the integrated health care system.

In 2018, she was later appointed as the Program Officer- Safety in the national Bio-risk Management coordination office at the National Health Laboratory Services. In this work, she was responsible for coordinating and managing the Biosafety Biosecurity training, mentorships and the annual audits in the Ministry of Health- Uganda. In this work, she was directly responsible for managing 35 and 25 national Biorisk management Trainers and Auditors respectively. She also carried out communications to different implementing partners that supports the Ministry of Health in their operations. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, her work position placed her as a frontline health worker task with helping to combat the disease. She coordinates a team of Biosafety experts who are in charge of training health workers in safety and infection prevention and control in the areas which have been gazetted to carry out testing for COVID-19 disease.

Conclusion



Najjuma Gloria Mukisa is a Ugandan TEST scholar who graduated from the College of Health Sciences, Makerere University with a Bachelor's degree in Optometry in January 2020. Having sat for her final examination in May 2019, she began her internship in July 2019 with the Makerere University Hospital Academic Vision Center, the Mengo Hospital Eye Clinic and the Medoptics Optical Laboratory on a rotation basis. This is a

severe eye problems. For every patient that walks in, a comprehensive ocular examination is undertaken to ensure the quality management of the patient. She undertook similar activities at the Mengo Hospital Eye Clinic, within their special clinic facility.

Gloria has been instrumental in providing quality eye services to patients at the Makerere University community for the past 9 months and counting, as an intern. On 20th March 2020, Gloria and her colleagues were briefed by their medical supervisor to go home following the COVID-19 pandemic. This was around the time that the Ugandan president in consultation with the Ministry of Health introduced different measures to help curb the spread of the virus. Most hospitals advised their workers to go home, with the exception of a few who were on call to attend to medical emergencies. Gloria has been using her time at home since the Covid-19 pandemic to study the relationship between COVID-19 and ocular health to assist her post-COVID-19 practice. It has been noted for example that some of the COVID-19 cases have an early presentation of Keratoconjunctivitis. Keratoconjunctivitis is simply an irritation of the front surface of the eye that causes the eye to be pink/red, a very common presentation in the eye clinic. Gloria anticipates the post-COVID-19 health environment would require a keen history taken from patients with such conditions and critical care and precaution observed in the management regimens. As her profession requires regular contact with patients' eye during an examination, Gloria sees the current pandemic as presenting an opportunity and a critical reminder to tighten the infection control measures at the eye clinics in an effort to reduce either contracting or contributing to the spread of the virus from a second wave in the post-COVID-19 situation.

Huge thanks to TEST for Uganda for all the support during my undergraduate education.





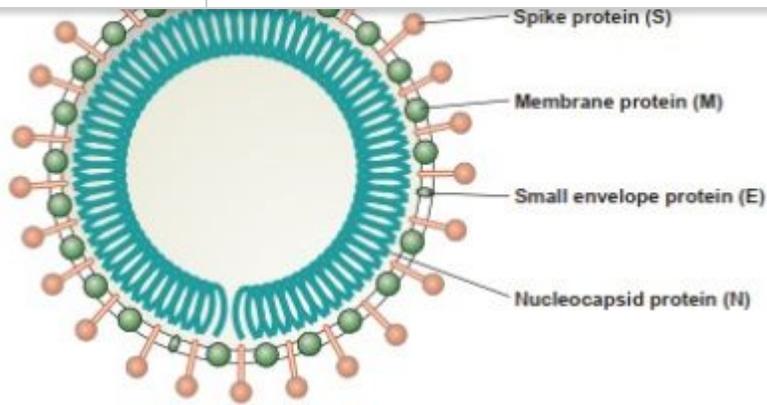
Jane (left) and Shamma (right) are among the first seven TEST for Tanzania (T4T) graduates. Both graduated from the University of Dar es Salaam in November 2019. Jane's field is Molecular Biology and Biotechnology while Shamma's is Microbiology. In this article, the two young scientists reflect on their knowledge of viruses and shed some light on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 as a pandemic as it had spread to 18 countries with four countries reporting human-to-human transmissions. The novel Coronavirus, first reported in Wuhan City in the Peoples Republic of China in December 2019, quickly spread like wildfire to engulf almost all countries in the world. Different countries have since advanced different measures to control the spread of the virus: from complete lockdown to seemingly less stringent measures such as social distancing and adherence to sanitary practices. By 4th May 2020, Africa had recorded 40,635 infections and 1,619 deaths. Virologists the world over are currently busy searching for a vaccine against COVID-19.

Coronaviruses

Corona is the Latin word for a crown, in reference to the spikes projecting from the envelope of the virus (see Figure). The virions are spherical enveloped particles studded with clubbed spikes. Within the envelope of a virion is the coiled helical nucleocapsid shell which has linear single positive-stranded RNA.



An electron micrograph of negatively stained coronavirus (murine hepatitis) virions shows spikes protruding from the envelope, providing its crown-like appearance

Coronaviruses belong to a family of viruses that are known to cause illness, ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Coronavirus which was first reported in Asia in 2003, and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) Coronavirus which was first reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012.

The Case of Tanzania

Tanzania reported its first COVID-19 case on 16th March 2020, and by the end of April, the number had risen to 480. A Google search carried out on 12th May 2020 for updates on coronavirus infections among the six East African Community countries (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan) shows that Tanzania is No. 2 in the scoreboard (see Table)

Table: COVID-19 Cases in the East African Community Countries (12.5.2020)

Country	Confirmed Cases	Recovered	Deaths
Kenya	700	251	33
Tanzania	509	183	21
Rwanda	285	150	0
South Sudan	156	2	0
Uganda	121	55	0
Burundi	15	7	1

The Tanzanian Government closed all academic institutions, banned all events involving public gatherings, and enforced social distancing, sanitary measures, and the wearing of a mask at public places. There are designated hospitals across the country that attend to COVID-19 patients.

Impact of the pandemic

The pandemic has affected every sector of the economy in Tanzania. The education sector has been the hardest hit. The closure by the Government of all educational institutions in the country and the uncertainty as to when they will reopen has completely thrown the education system in disarray. With its rudimentary IT infrastructure and unreliable power supply and internet connectivity, online distance teaching and learning is not an option for most academic institutions and their students. Most truck drivers that move from Tanzania, sending goods to neighbouring countries contribute a lot in the spread of the viral disease. There have been many reports of these truck drivers testing positive for COVID-19.

Way forward

Given that there is no cure for viral diseases, it is vital that governments focus on prevention and control methods. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is a wake-up call to all governments to be prepared at all times for any outbreak. Longstanding commitments in the Abuja declaration in 2001 by African governments to invest about 15% of their annual budget in the health sector should be honoured. This can bolster the ability of their health facilities to cope in the event of an outbreak by ensuring the availability of trained medical staff and medical facilities for such emergencies. However, once an outbreak is detected, measures should immediately be taken to raise awareness of the disease and its effects among its citizens as well as promote standard norms of public health for communicable diseases, including adhering to sanitary measures, isolating those infected, enforcing social. Investment in vaccine research and development in Tanzania and other African countries is strongly encouraged.



Nabaasa Racheal Evidence is a proud TEST for Uganda alumnus and currently a professional nurse practising in Uganda's capital city, Kampala. She is the firstborn of five hailing from a rural district called Rukiga in the Southwestern part of Uganda where she attained her pre-university education amidst toil and uncertainty with barely any hope of ever completing her education. In 2014, she enrolled at Mbarara University of Science and Technology. It was a real struggle as she missed several exams over tuition delays and was at the verge of dropping out. She considered applying for a dead year with the hope that something would change.

Around July 2015, she remembers with joy receiving a "miracle" call from one Prof. Fred Babwetera asking me if she'd want to receive some financial support from Test for Uganda. Although uncertain where the difference in the financial support would come from, she joyously responded, yes! yes! yes! She reminisces her response as follows: That one call changed my life! Her dreams received new strength and the rest is history.

She has worked with several hospitals among which is Kitovu Hospital and Mulago National Referral Hospital. She is currently working with MTN Ayo Uganda. The current global pandemic has not only paralyzed health systems but mostly the economic

people and understand the dynamism of their situation better. She hopes to start a non-governmental organisation in the future with the objective to help such victims especially the children whose innocent lives are often wrecked and need rehabilitation.

Thank you, TEST for Uganda, all the trustees and everyone that puts in the little they can to help someone realize their vision. It is priceless! A candle never loses its light by lighting others and we are passing on the light until the whole world is lit. Am forever grateful!



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