



2026 ACMHR-K Mentorship Program Report

Theme: *"Empowering Kenyan Women in Health Research, Career, and Leadership"*

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Executive Summary

The 2026 ACMHR-K Mentorship Program was a two-day online professional development initiative held on 3–4 June 2026, focused on empowering Kenyan women in health research, career advancement and leadership. Delivered via Zoom, the program brought together four accomplished women leaders and researchers from Australia, South Korea, the United States and Kenya, addressing two thematic areas: **Leadership, Confidence and Personal Branding** (Day 1) and **Building an International Career in Health Research** (Day 2).

The program received 40 applications, selected 25 participants, and achieved 100% completion. Through expert-led mentorship sessions, participants explored pathways in health research and medicine, strengthened leadership and professional development skills, and gained practical insights into navigating international research careers. The program was open to Kenyan women holding a minimum qualification of a Diploma in Health Sciences or a related field, and was provided free of charge to all participants.

Background and Rationale

Women constitute a significant proportion of frontline healthcare practitioners in Kenya, yet continue to face structural and systemic barriers to advancing into research, leadership and senior professional roles within the health sector. The Alliance for Cardio-Metabolic Health and Research–Kenya (ACMHR-K) recognises that addressing cardiometabolic health challenges in Kenya and across Africa requires the meaningful participation of women at all levels of research, healthcare practice and policy. The 2026 ACMHR-K Mentorship Program was

designed as a targeted initiative to provide Kenyan women, from those currently engaged in research to those aspiring to enter research and medical careers - with access to mentorship, professional guidance and practical insights from accomplished women leaders and researchers operating in diverse international settings. The program was built around a central principle: empowerment through knowledge, mentorship and connection for the 25 participants (Figure 1).

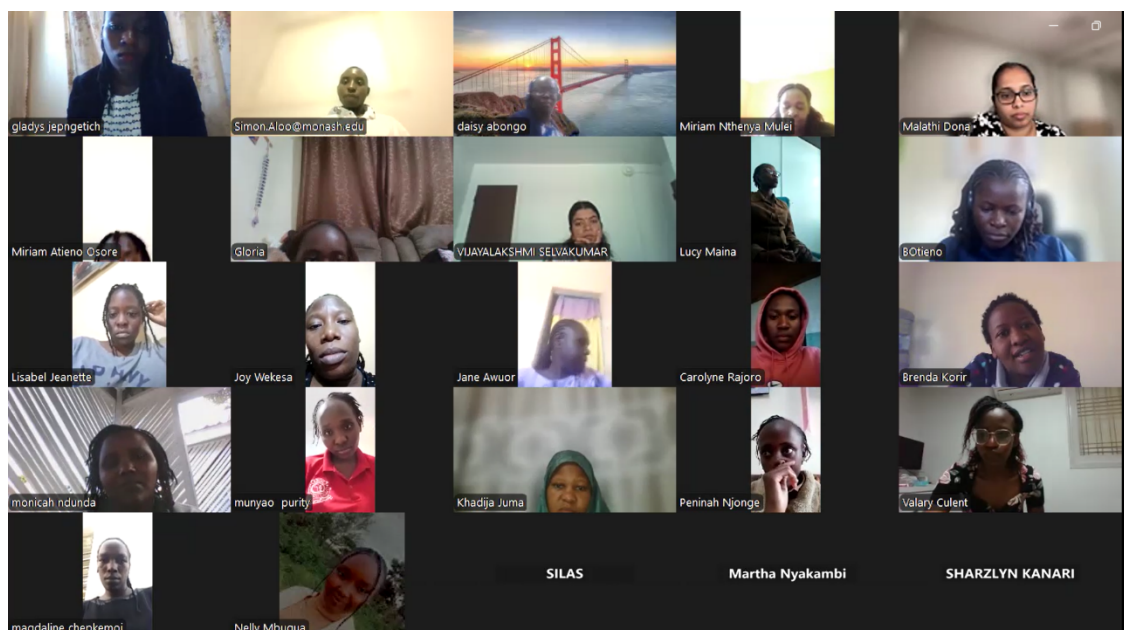


Figure 1: Photos of participants prior to commencement of session 1

Program Objectives

The 2026 ACMHR-K Mentorship Program was designed to:

- Empower Kenyan women with the knowledge, skills and confidence required to advance their careers in research and other professional fields.
- Strengthen research and leadership capacity by providing mentorship, guidance and practical insights from experienced researchers and women leaders.
- Promote networking and professional development by creating opportunities for collaboration, career growth and peer support among participants.
- Advance gender equity in research by exploring strategies for increasing the representation and advancement of women in research and healthcare.

- Expose participants to international research career pathways and the lived experiences of women working in global research environments.
- Create a supportive and inspiring environment in which participants could reflect on their own professional goals and potential.

Program Design

The program was delivered over two days, structured around two interconnected thematic areas each explored through expert mentorship sessions, interactive discussions and Q&A. Online delivery via Zoom removed geographic and financial barriers, enabling participation from across Kenya at no cost.

Day 1 — Leadership, Confidence and Personal Branding: Addressed the personal and professional foundations required for women to advance in research and healthcare settings, including leadership development, building confidence and cultivating a professional identity.

Day 2 — Building an International Career in Health Research: Focused on the practical dimensions of pursuing and advancing a career in health research at an international level, drawing on the lived experiences of researchers working across multiple countries and disciplines.

Program Feature	Description
Theme	Empowering Kenyan Women in Health Research, Career, and Leadership
Program Duration	2 days
Workshop Dates	3–4 June 2026
Mode of Delivery	Online, via Zoom
Number of Sessions	2 thematic sessions across 2 days
Target Participants	Kenyan women in or aspiring to join careers in health research and healthcare
Minimum Qualification	Diploma in Health Sciences or related field
Training Approach	Expert mentorship, interactive discussions, Q&A, international career perspectives
Number of Speakers	4
Cost to Participants	Free
Applications Received	40
Participants Selected	25
Completion Rate	100% (all 25 participants completed both days)

Key Capacity Areas

Research and career development,
leadership, personal branding,
networking

Program Selection and Participation

The program was open to Kenyan women with a minimum qualification of a Diploma in Health Sciences or a related field, and a demonstrated interest in health research, healthcare, career development or leadership. Selected participants committed to actively engaging in both days of the workshop, interacting with mentors and peers, and contributing to the advancement of women's participation in health research and leadership. Of 40 applicants, 25 were selected; all 25 completed the full two-day program.

No.	Participant Name
1	Gloria Nyakio Wambura
2	Daisy Anyango Abong'o
3	Lucy Wanjiku Maina
4	Lisabel Jeanette Mboya
5	Carolyne Awinja
6	Jane Awuor
7	Rajoro Carolyne Atieno
8	Joyce Wairimu Wanjohi
9	Atieno Valary Culent
10	Korir J. Brenda
11	Lucy Mwendu Paul
12	Miriam Atieno Osore
13	Peninah Wanjiru Njonge
14	Belinda Akinyi Otieno
15	Purity Mutindi Munyao
16	Sharzlyn Kanari
17	Miriam Nthenya Mulei
18	Jane Christine Murugi Njue
19	Nyakambi Martha Nyairabu
20	Effie Achieng' Mboya
21	Mary Akoth Odhiambo
22	Jacinta Wayua Muindi
23	Nelly Nyakarago Mbugua
24	Gladys Jepngetich
25	Magdaline Chepkemai

Session-by-Session Program

The program featured an internationally diverse panel of four expert speakers spanning education leadership, educational technology, bioinformatics, cardiovascular research, microbiology, immunology and cancer biology. Their perspectives — drawn from Australia, South Korea, the United States and Kenya — enriched the mentorship experience and exposed participants to varied models of building a career in health research and leadership.



Figure 2: Dr. Malathi Dona of Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute engaging participants during a workshop session

Day 1: Leadership, Confidence and Personal Branding

Speaker 1 — Dr. Grace Misere, PhD *Deputy Principal, Senior Specialist School, Australia*

Dr. Grace Misere is a mathematician, educator and leader with over 16 years of experience across secondary and tertiary education in Kenya and Australia. A graduate of Moi University, AIMS Kenya, the University of Ghana and La Trobe University (PhD, Mathematics), Dr. Misere currently serves as Deputy Principal at a senior specialist school in Australia, where she provides strategic leadership, supports inclusive education and champions student wellbeing and academic success.

Speaker 2 — Ms. Violet Goro PhD Candidate, Ewha Womans University, South Korea

Ms. Violet Goro is an education specialist and development practitioner with expertise in educational technology, curriculum innovation, research and development cooperation. She holds a Bachelor of Education (Arts) with First Class Honours from Kenyatta University and a Master of Education Technology, and is currently pursuing a PhD in Development Cooperation from Ewha Womans University, South Korea. Her work focuses on leveraging technology and innovative educational approaches to improve learning outcomes and promote sustainable development.

Session Outcomes - Participants gained:

- A practical understanding of leadership in professional and research contexts.
- Strategies for building personal confidence and professional visibility.
- Insight into personal branding and how to cultivate a distinctive professional identity.
- Inspiration from the speakers' journeys as Kenyan women building successful international careers.
- Practical guidance on navigating career development in research and academic environments.
- Greater appreciation of the importance of continuous learning, adaptability and resilience.
- Encouragement to consider international opportunities for career growth.

Day 2: Building an International Career in Health Research

Speaker 1 - Dr. Malathi Dona, PhD *Senior Research Officer, Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute, Australia*

Dr. Malathi Dona holds a PhD in Statistics from La Trobe University (2018) and has built a distinguished career in bioinformatics and cardiovascular research at the Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute in Melbourne, Australia. Her research focuses on developing advanced bioinformatics pipelines to study complex cardiovascular tissues, and integrating single-cell omics technologies with large-scale population-level biobank data to gain deeper insights into cardiovascular disease.

Speaker 2 - Dr. Vijayalakshmi Selvakumar, PhD *Postdoctoral Associate, University of Rochester, United States*

Dr. Vijayalakshmi Selvakumar is a multidisciplinary researcher with over 10 years of international research and teaching experience across the United States, South Korea and India, specialising in microbiology, immunology and cancer biology. She is currently a Postdoctoral Associate at the University of Rochester, advancing research in cancer biology and microbiome science. She has authored over 48 peer-reviewed publications in high-impact international journals, contributed to multiple book chapters, and serves as Review Editor for *Frontiers in Microbiology* and Associate Editor for the *Journal of Agriculture, Food and Environment*.

Session Outcomes - Participants gained:

- Understanding of pathways into international health research careers.
- Appreciation of the role of quantitative skills, including biostatistics and bioinformatics, in health research.



Figure 3: Workshop Speakers

- Insight into how researchers navigate career transitions across institutions and countries.
- Greater understanding of multidisciplinary research and its relevance to cardiometabolic and biomedical health.
- Awareness of publishing, peer review and research dissemination as essential components of a research career.
- Practical guidance on pursuing postdoctoral positions and building an international research network.
- Motivation and encouragement to pursue research leadership with confidence.

Participant Experience and Testimonials

The value of the program extended beyond formal mentorship sessions. Participants were exposed to diverse professional journeys, career pathways and research perspectives from accomplished women working across Australia, South Korea, the United States and Kenya. The program created an environment for participants to connect with peers who share interests in health research, career development, leadership and professional growth.

Selected Testimonials:

Magdaline Chepkemai “The workshop was truly an eye-opener, especially on the various scholarship opportunities available. I sincerely thank the facilitators for sharing their valuable knowledge and insights. Special appreciation to the organizer, Dr. Simon Aloo, for making this impactful workshop possible.”

Rhoda Willy “I am a beneficiary of ACMHR-K, having been trained as an ambassador in cardiometabolic health and gut health, as well as participating in the organisation’s workshops. The program was an eye-opener for me as a health worker. It has strengthened my knowledge and skills in supporting individuals, families, and communities on matters related to cardiometabolic health. Thus, the training has enhanced my ability to contribute to better health outcomes in my community.”

Jane Awuor “This was so inspiring and highly collaborative women workshop which brought on board leading Scholars who empowered women on how to pursue and also to break barriers that limit women on Education Advocacy Research and Innovation” .

Program Outcomes

Although the mentorship program was primarily a capacity-building and empowerment initiative, several important outcomes emerged across six areas.

Expanded Knowledge and Career Awareness Participants were exposed to multiple dimensions of health research careers, including research pathways, academic career progression, postdoctoral opportunities and international research environments.

Leadership and Personal Development The program provided practical tools and perspectives for participants to develop confidence, define their professional identity and strengthen their capacity for leadership in research and healthcare settings.

International Research Exposure Participants gained direct insight into how researchers build careers across different countries and institutions, through engagement with mentors working in Australia, South Korea and the United States.

Professional Networking The program created meaningful opportunities for participants to connect with experienced researchers and professionals, as well as with peers sharing similar interests and aspirations.

Gender Equity in Research Participants explored strategies for increasing the representation and advancement of women in research and healthcare, strengthening their ability to advocate for gender equity in their professional environments.

Foundation for a Women's Research Network The 2026 Mentorship Program established the foundation for a growing community of Kenyan women in health research, careers and leadership, contributing to ACMHR-K's broader mission of strengthening capacity in cardiometabolic health across Kenya.

Program Funding

The 2026 ACMHR-K Mentorship Program was funded by the Alliance for Cardio-Metabolic Health and Research–Kenya (ACMHR-K) as part of its commitment to investing in the professional development and capacity-building of Kenyan women in health research and leadership. The program was provided free of charge to all participants. The budget covered certificate preparations and learning materials.

Looking Ahead

The completion of the 2026 ACMHR-K Mentorship Program marks an important milestone in ACMHR-K's commitment to investing in the professional development, empowerment and future leadership of Kenyan women in health. Going forward, ACMHR-K aims to continue strengthening its mentorship and capacity-building initiatives as platforms for professional development, research engagement, health advocacy, gender equity and community impact. The organisation looks forward to building on the momentum of this inaugural program and expanding its reach to benefit an increasing number of Kenyan women in health research and related careers.

Conclusion

The 2026 ACMHR-K Mentorship Program represented a meaningful investment in the professional development and empowerment of Kenyan women in health research, career advancement and leadership. Across two days of expert mentorship sessions, participants engaged with accomplished women leaders and researchers from Australia, South Korea, the United States and Kenya, gaining exposure to diverse career pathways, research perspectives and leadership insights.

The program demonstrated the value of bringing together experienced mentors and aspiring health professionals around a shared commitment to empowerment, equity and professional growth. It created a space in which participants could build confidence, expand their networks and develop a clearer sense of their own potential as future leaders and researchers in health.

ACMHR-K is proud to have delivered this program as part of its ongoing mission to strengthen cardiometabolic health research, practice and capacity in Kenya, and remains committed to creating further opportunities for the professional development and mentorship of Kenyan women in health and research.

Acknowledgements

ACMHR-K expresses its sincere appreciation to everyone who contributed to the success of the 2026 Mentorship Program.

- We thank our four expert mentors — **Dr. Grace Misere, Ms. Violet Goro, Dr. Malathi Dona** and **Dr. Vijayalakshmi Selvakumar** — for generously sharing their knowledge, expertise, experiences and encouragement with participants. Their commitment to empowering the next generation of women in health research made this program possible.
- We acknowledge the ACMHR-K team and all individuals who contributed to program coordination, communication, participant engagement, technical support and documentation.
- We congratulate all 25 participants who completed the 2026 ACMHR-K Mentorship Program. Their engagement, enthusiasm and commitment to their own professional development were central to the success of the workshop.

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