

August, 2025

FALF LEADERSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT

As we end the month of August, FALF has exciting news about new leadership to take the organisation to the next level!



THE NEW FALF CEO

Dr. Xolelwa Zulu-Magwenyane, who holds a PhD in Chemistry from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and a Master of Science in Technology and Innovation Management from the University of Pretoria will be taking over as **CEO of FALF effective from 1st September 2025.**

Dr. Zulu-Magwenyane brings her passion for advancing STEAM, women empowerment, and community engagement. She discovered her love for Chemistry in Grade 9 and pursued it to PhD level. Her curious mind and love for research and innovation led her to pursue and obtain an MSc in Technology and Innovation Management after her PhD. In alignment with FALF's vision, her focus has always been on fostering inclusive leadership and driving strategic research initiatives that can create lasting impact.

She's a Regional Partnerships Director at STEM for Development (SFD), a U.S.-based non-profit organisation aimed at increasing the accessibility to world-class graduate degree programs (Master's, PhD) to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) students in developing countries. She is also an Executive Committee member of Organisation for Women in Science in the Developing World (OWSD), the South African National Chapter and the Head of Connect Education, an initiative of Seat At the Table. She is an active mentor to young women through the Young Leaders Connect IDEAL Program (an initiative of the International Women's Forum of South Africa), WomHub, and the OWSD.

She was the Deputy Chair of the Locally Engaged Staff Association at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the British Government while working as a Science and

Innovation Attaché, a Black Women in Science (BWIS -SA) Fellow for 2019/2020, and is an alumnus of the South African Brightest Young Minds Initiative. She is a member of the Institute of Directors South Africa (IoDSA), and the Southern Africa Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA).

She shared her motivation for her pursuit of inclusion; *“the participation of Black women in science and leadership is a non-negotiable essential for progress and an equitable society. It involves creating an inclusive environment where Black women scientists are intentionally supported, valued, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and expertise. This includes increasing representation in STEAM fields, addressing systemic biases, and providing mentorship and opportunities for growth. This takes deliberate leadership that considers that exclusion of Black Women from STEAM and leadership in general was by design. To reverse the severe impact of that, it would require the same vigour if not more, to deliberately include Black women in the entire STEAM value-chain from researchers to decision-makers on investment decisions.”*

The Founder and Chairperson of FALF, Dr. Judy Dlamini, had this to say about the incoming CEO; *“Dr. Xolelwa could not have come at a better time in the life of FALF. In the first five years, a solid foundation has been laid for someone of her calibre to take over the reins and elevate FALF to the next level. Her passion and energy are infectious. As the Board, we are excited about the future and look forward to supporting the CEO!”*

FALF’s Commitment to a Better South Africa

FALF will be launching two Research Chairs in the last quarter of 2025. We are emboldened by the support received from our donors and partner universities. As we work with them, not only to develop a pipeline of Black female academic leaders but also to tackle the challenges that our country faces through research in priority areas, namely, Gender Based Violence and Femicide, social and economic inclusion.

The FALF/NRF/Wits Research Chair in Gender Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF)

The GBVF Research Chair will be launched on 31 October 2025. FALF is indebted to the National Research Foundation (NRF) and Ford Foundation, the funders of the Chair, our partner Wits University, Faculty of Humanities where the Chair will be hosted and an outstanding scholar, Prof Relebohile Moletsane, the holder of the Chair.

Prof Moletsane is passionate about rural community equal participation, social cohesion, and gender equality. In recognition of her pioneering work on addressing poverty in rural communities, Moletsane was the 2012 winner of the Distinguished Women in Science (Humanities) Award presented by the then Department of Science and Technology. In 2014, she was an Echidna Global Scholar at Brookings Institutions' Centre for Universal



Education, where she completed a research report: *The Need for Quality Sexual and Reproductive Health Education to Address Barriers to Girls' Educational Outcomes in South Africa*. Washington, DC: Centre for Universal Education, The Brookings Institution. She is Pro Vice Chancellor (Social Cohesion), a Full Professor and was the JL Dube Chair in Rural Education in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. As part of her Chair in rural education, she worked in South African rural schools and communities, focusing on Gender and Feminist Studies in Education, particularly teacher development around such issues as poverty alleviation, HIV & AIDS, gender inequality and gender-based violence as barriers to education and development for girls. Moletsane's current work focuses on working with girls and young women to address sexual violence in rural communities. As part of this, she is co-PI with Claudia Mitchell, of an IPaSS grant: Networks for change and well-being: Girl-led 'from the ground up' approaches to addressing sexual violence in Canada and South Africa. Informed by the work of Claudia Mitchell in South Africa and other sub-Saharan countries, the project uses participatory visual methods to engage

girls and young women in understanding sexual violence and developing strategies for addressing it. FALF welcomes Prof Moletsane to the FALF family.



The FALF/FREF/NMU Research Chair in Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion

This Chair is funded by the FirstRand Empowerment Foundation and is hosted at the Nelson Mandela University (NMU). The Chairholder, **Prof. Keo Motaung**, is a distinguished Biomedical Scientist, Full Professor, and Founder & CEO of Global Health Biotech, with over 25 years of experience in Higher Education. She has organised national and international conferences and has represented South Africa as part of ministerial delegations in the signing of bilateral agreements with international partners.

Prof. Motaung has established herself as a trailblazing leader in teaching and learning, research, innovation, entrepreneurship, and the commercialisation of research. She is deeply passionate about capacity building, having successfully supervised and mentored numerous postgraduate students and emerging researchers. Her work with the Department of Science and Innovation often involves strengthening international collaborations and advancing the role of women in STEAMi (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics & Innovation) research.

Her entrepreneurial drive is evident through the commercialisation of her patented plant-derived technology, which led to the development of **La-Africa Soother** a natural anti-inflammatory ointment that has reached the market as Global Health Biotech's first product. This success demonstrates her ability to translate cutting-edge scientific research into tangible, accessible healthcare solutions.

As both a scientist and an entrepreneur, Prof. Motaung trains her postgraduate students not only to conduct rigorous research but also to think entrepreneurially, equipping them to create jobs and contribute to the economy in a context where unemployment remains high.

Prof Stella Nkomo, the Chairperson of the FALF Board subcommittee for Research Chairs, Nominations, HR & Leadership, had the following to say on calibre of leaders that will take FALF to the next level, “...*The successful recruitment of Professors Moletsane and Motaung, who possess outstanding knowledge and experience in their respective disciplines, along with a passion to make a difference, is crucial for advancing research and producing high-quality postgraduate students. The work of their Chairs will not only build the research capacity of our nation but will also directly address critical social and economic issues. Their appointments are a testimony to FALF’s vision of gender and race diversity in academic leadership.*

FALF believes in the power of diversity and inclusion in leadership, the creation of an enabling environment for research and the importance of all forms of science in solving societal problems. FALF CEO adds, “... *science is the pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the world around us at a molecular level. It is a systematic approach to inquiry that has led to incredible breakthroughs and innovations. I admire the curiosity, rigour, and collaboration inherent in scientific exploration. I am motivated that at the core of societal challenges, be it poverty, climate change, healthcare there is a potential scientific approach and solution that can be scaled to address most of these challenges, provided there are enabling support mechanisms to scientific searches.*”