



# alliances

AFRICAN STUDIES CENTER • NEWSLETTER 2025



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- 3** Message from the Center
- 4** Thank you for supporting ASC!
- 5** Sudan Symposium
- 8** ASC Faculty & Staff Associates News
- 9** From the African Perspective Series
- 9** Nnimmo Bassey, 2024 Wallenberg medalist
- 10** ASC Initiatives & Seed Grants
- 11** Initiatives: New Seed Grants
- 12** Welcome to the 2025/2026 UMAPS Fellows
- 14** Reflection on the 2024/2025 UMAPS Cohort
- 16** Title VI at ASC
- 18** ASC Events Update
- 22** ASA Cultural Show and Activities
- 24** ABC Conference
- 26** African Languages at U-M
- 28** Student Funding Updates
- 30** MIRS Cohort
- 31** In Memoriam: Dr. Timothy Johnson

# MESSAGE FROM THE CENTER

The 2024–2025 academic year has been eventful for the ASC in many respects. Many of the activities featured in this issue of *Alliances* were organized by our Center in the Fall before ASC Director, Omolade Adunbi, proceeded on sabbatical leave. Stepping in as interim director

of the Center for the winter semester afforded me the opportunity to see up close the vital work that the ASC does as a Title VI National Resource Center (NRC). Serving in this role during such a tumultuous time in higher education has given me a real sense of what is at stake in the barrage of bad news hurled at American universities. It has also left me deeply grateful for the chance to work alongside our tremendous ASC staff, who in the face of great uncertainty have remained resolute in fulfilling our Center's mission to provide strategic guidance and coordination for Africa-related education, research, and training activities on campus, and promote opportunities for collaboration with African partners on the continent.

Our Title VI-funded programming ranges from promoting African languages through several important initiatives to fostering the dissemination of knowledge about Africa here in Ann Arbor and throughout the state of Michigan and beyond. The African Storytelling Project brings U-M's Swahili and Yoruba language instructors—Magdalyne Akiding, Gabriel Ayoola, and Marko Mwipopo—and our Fulbright-funded Foreign Language Teaching Assistants—Abiola Afolayan and Daudi Abuya—into area elementary schools to enrich their classroom curriculums. Our Yoruba and Swahili Virtual Language Exchange program allows our African language learners here on the UM-Ann Arbor campus to converse online with college students in Nigeria and Kenya, increasing their language proficiency while making friends and gaining insights into the lives of their counterparts on the continent. An exciting ASC initiative launched this spring is supporting our African languages team to develop Yoruba and Swahili web-based language instruction materials that will be used at U-M and will also be freely available online. This semester, alone, five of our University of Michigan African Presidential Scholars (UMAPS) visited three different regional educational institutions to share their research on subjects ranging from ancient grain preservation and community-based architecture to traditional African theatrical practices and sustainable water purification practices. This is just a small sampling of the consequential work that ASC is able to do with the support of our Title VI funding.

All of that is now in jeopardy because of the slew of recent programmatic and funding cuts to the U.S. Department of Education. Watching the real-life impact of national news headlines play themselves out on our campus, in our center, has been a sobering reminder that the permanency of African studies, just like other historically marginalized fields of knowledge production, should never be taken for granted.

The good news is that ASC is part of a wider NRC collective within the International Institute (II), and I have been heartened by how our intrepid ASC staff—Marwa Hassan, Teyei Pam, Marlotte De Jong, Anna Mayne, and William Bryan—and our Title VI colleagues have banded together to advocate for the transformative work that is funded through Title VI. While Title VI might very well be eviscerated, one thing is for sure: the African Studies Center at U-M will continue to support cutting edge research across the disciplines and will remain committed to the timely dissemination of that knowledge here in Michigan, the United States, and across the African continent and beyond. How we do that will have to be reimagined, but it is important to remember that ASC established itself as a hub for African studies over a decade before its designation as an NRC. With the continued support of the University of Michigan, our alumni, and other generous donors, we will weather this storm.

With this in view, it is all the more remarkable that ASC delivered a full slate of programming during the winter semester. We were joined by twelve outstanding UMAPS scholars from eight different African countries, who pursued a wide range of research projects and dazzled us with their Title VI-sponsored colloquium presentations that were followed by lively Q&As and dinner for the scholars and audience alike. Those needing to get home to family or other responsibilities were provided with boxed dinners, a thoughtful gesture from our ASC staff who recognize that our community members are often juggling many commitments. Working with the UMAPS scholars was a highlight of my interim directorship. During our biweekly meetings, game nights, publishing workshop, and other outings, I had the pleasure of getting to know them and watching their cohort develop into a community of scholars and friends.

We also hosted two phenomenal filmmakers, Idrissou Mora-Kpai and Kavena Hambira, for Title VI-funded screenings of their respective documentaries, *America Street* and *The People's Uncle*. Both films fostered conversations about race in America and the tender and sometimes tense ties that bind Africans and





African Americans together as they seek mutual understanding. Our AHHI, STEM-Africa, and ASRI initiatives were busy this winter selecting recipients of our Seed Grants, which fund research collaborations between U-M faculty and colleagues based at African universities. For a sense of the dynamic nature of the collaborative work the ASC supports through these initiatives check out the *Alliances* article on pages 10-11. ASC also sponsored several student conferences and cultural shows, including the African Student Associations 26th Annual Cultural show, and the African Business Club annual conference. This winter we also continued to support faculty and student research and career enhancement opportunities with 36 grants for conference travel. The ASC is also working diligently to establish partnerships with Ann Arbor Public Schools and looks forward to continuing these outreach efforts in the coming years.

As we look forward to the new academic year, I would like to welcome back our director, Omolade Adunbi and the new associate director, Pamela Jagger who replaces Massy Mutumba who has since left Michigan for other opportunities. I have enjoyed working with William Bryan, our center's business manager, on the revision of ASC's funding priorities document, which you can find in this edition of *Alliances*, and Anna Mayne, our administrative coordinator. I am happy to welcome Natasa Gruden-Alajbegovice, our new business manager, and Rosa Razami, our new administrative coordinator, to the ASC team. They will join our esteemed staff, academic program specialist, Marwa Hassan, and outreach and program coordinator, Teyei Pam, who truly are at the heart of everything we do at the ASC.

As we face the very real possibility that the final year of our Title VI grant will not be forthcoming and that the next application cycle will be cancelled, and as we enter a 10-year transition period for assuming sole responsibility for funding the UMAPS program, one of our greatest priorities will be fundraising. I hope that you'll take a look at our funding priorities and find one that you want to support. This issue of *Alliances* is full of stories that will give you deeper insights into the transformative work that you can be part of when you make a charitable gift to the African Studies Center.

## Carina Ray

Interim Director, African Studies Center  
A.M. and H.P. Bentley Chair in African History  
Associate Professor of History

# THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING ASC!

Thank you to all our sponsors and supporters for helping make this year's Giving Tuesday a success, in which we raised \$4,190. The funds raised this year are all going towards our upcoming **African Women's Film Festival** happening from November 5–8, 2026. The festival, featuring films by emerging female African filmmakers, aims to highlight talent from Africa and engage students and the community with influential African cinema.

## A Vision for Africa-Informed Scholarship

The center is home to the highly regarded **University of Michigan African Presidential Scholars (UMAPS)** program, its cornerstone initiative. Launched in 2008, UMAPS brings early-career African scholars to campus for a transformative five-month residential fellowship. Each year, 20 to 24 scholars engage in research, mentorship, and scholarly collaboration that continues long after they return home. Guided by a commitment to reciprocity, co-creation, and real-world impact, ASC supports a wide range of disciplines through UMAPS—from law to public health, engineering to the humanities—bridging academic knowledge with practical solutions to global challenges.

"The UMAPS program builds deep and enduring partnerships," says ASC interim director. "Alumni go on to lead major research projects, government initiatives, and academic departments across the continent—and they remain proudly connected to U-M."

## Investing in the Future of African Studies

To sustain its wide-reaching impact, ASC relies on a growing network of supporters. Donor gifts fuel faculty research, student internships, language instruction, and curriculum development—all critical components of the center's mission.

An endowed gift of **\$15 million** would **secure the UMAPS program for generations** to come, offering donors the opportunity to name this flagship initiative in their honor. Individual UMAPS fellowships can also be endowed with gifts of \$500,000, supporting travel, housing, and stipends for visiting African scholars.

**A sincere thank you to our generous donors for their continued support. Without you, our work would not be possible.**

Gifts of all sizes are welcomed, from **\$25,000 to name a new African Studies Center Endowed Fund**, to annual or endowed contributions supporting African language instructors, student research fellowships, or Africa-focused curriculum development across U-M's schools and colleges. With every contribution, donors help advance a future where African knowledge, languages, and leadership are central to solving global issues.

## Interested in making a planned gift to ASC?

Visit [ii.umich.edu/asc/donate](https://ii.umich.edu/asc/donate) or send us an email at [asc-contact@umich.edu](mailto:asc-contact@umich.edu).

## How does your gift help the center?

Gifts to ASC support initiatives that enhance the study of Africa at the University of Michigan and beyond, e.g., the UMAPS program, students' research/internships in/on Africa, advancement of African studies, faculty research, and multilateral partnerships between U-M and African partners.



# SUDAN: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

## A SYMPOSIUM ON CRISIS, RESISTANCE, AND HOPE

On November 18, 2024, ASC convened a landmark symposium titled *Sudan: In the Eye of the Storm*, in collaboration with the Weiser Diplomacy Center and the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies. Held at Weiser Hall in Ann Arbor, the day-long event brought together leading scholars, diplomats, and civil society leaders to grapple with the escalating crisis in Sudan and examine its wider geopolitical and humanitarian implications.

As civil war, political fragmentation, and displacement continue to upend the lives of millions in Sudan, the symposium provided a critical space for informed reflection, robust debate, and knowledge exchange. Across keynote speeches, roundtable discussions, and interactive panels, participants interrogated the drivers of the conflict, explored strategies for peacebuilding, and emphasized the vital importance of centering Sudanese voices and experiences.



Banjor Musa (in the fore)  
and Chris Tounsel

### Confronting an Unprecedented Crisis

The day opened with a keynote address by Khalid Medani, a Sudanese scholar and the Director of the McGill Institute of Islamic Studies. A leading voice on Sudanese politics and civil society, Medani framed the current war not as a singular event, but as part of a longer historical continuum marked by marginalization, militarism, and authoritarian rule.

"Sudan has experienced multiple wars since independence," Medani reminded the audience, "but this one is unprecedented in its scale, its destructiveness, and its erasure of the state's very fabric." He called on scholars and practitioners alike to not only document the atrocities unfolding, but to help interpret the political and social ruptures shaping this moment—and to amplify Sudanese demands for justice and democracy.

Medani's call for deeper engagement resonated throughout the symposium, where the urgency of understanding Sudan's complexity was matched by a shared commitment to action.



Yousif Hassan



Khalid Medani



## Panels of Purpose

### Exploring the Intersections of Conflict, Governance, and Culture

The symposium featured three main panels, each foregrounding a different aspect of Sudan's current realities.

**"We must treat this not as a moment but as the beginning of a movement that would inspire and build on these productive and insightful conversations—because the people of Sudan deserve more than fleeting attention."**

Omolade Adunbi  
ASC DIRECTOR



### Panel 1 / Deconstructing the War in the Sudan: Politics and Diplomacy at a Crossroad

Moderated by **Geoff Emberling**, associate research scientist at the Kelsey Museum, this panel delved into the political and diplomatic dimensions of the Sudanese conflict. Panelists included:

**Yousif Hassan**, assistant professor at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, whose research examines the social, economic, and political implications of emerging technologies, with a focus on race, digital technology, and technoscientific capitalism.

**Ambassador Susan D. Page**, professor of practice in international diplomacy at the Ford School and professor from practice at the University of Michigan Law School, who has served in senior roles across East, Central, and Southern Africa, including as the first U.S. ambassador to the Republic of South Sudan.

**Suliman Baldo**, executive director of the Sudan Transparency and Policy Tracker, who has previously served as a senior policy advisor for the Enough Project and directed the Sudan Democracy First Group, focusing on democratization and peace in Sudan.

**Susan Lynn Clark**, a licensed psychotherapist working with underserved populations in Fort Worth, Texas, who has worked with immigrants and refugees in the U.S. since 1984, teaching language and survival skills and facilitating access to higher education.



Suliman Baldo

The panelists discussed the complex interplay of internal and external political forces, the challenges of diplomatic engagement, and the economic motivations of Sudan's warring parties and their international allies.

### Panel 2 / Sudan: A Long Ignored Catastrophic Humanitarian Crisis

Moderated by **Kelly Askew**, chair of the Department of Anthropology and Niara Sudarkasa Collegiate Professor of Anthropology and Afroamerican and African Studies, this panel highlighted the humanitarian dimensions of the conflict. Panelists included:

**Banjor Musa**, administrator at the Office of Global Michigan and founder of For Sudan, a nonprofit supporting Sudanese students and fundraising for hospitals, shared powerful testimony about the dire humanitarian conditions in Sudan.

**Anawar Mahagoub Ali Mohamed**, a Sudanese scholar and law graduate with interests in heritage and archaeology, focusing on local community representation and development.

**Nisrin Elamin**, assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Toronto, who has worked extensively as an educator, researcher, and organizer, focusing on issues of land, displacement, and resistance in Sudan.

**Sahra Benjamin**, whose work centers on community engagement and advocacy, particularly in the context of humanitarian crises.

**Amani El Jack**, former chair of the Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston, with expertise in global governance and human security.

The panelists underscored the resilience of the Sudanese people amid adversity and the importance of international support and awareness in addressing the humanitarian crisis.



Geoff Emberling and Susan Page



Kelly Askew



Mooketsi M. Molefi and Emmanuel Iyamuremye

### Panel 3 / Prolonged Conflict and Its Regional Implications

Moderated by **Martin Murray**, professor at the Taubman College of Urban Planning and the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies, this panel examined the broader regional impacts of the Sudanese conflict. Panelists included:

**Timothy Berke**, Ph.D. candidate at the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, whose research focuses on post-conflict development, forced migration, and public health, with extensive experience in South Sudan and other regions.

**Laura N. Beny**, Earl Warren DeLano Professor of Law at the University of Michigan, who teaches courses on corporate finance, international finance, and law and development, and has published extensively on political violence and fragmentation in Sudan.

**Chris Tounsel**, associate professor of history at the University of Washington, a historian of modern Sudan with a focus on race and religion as political tools, and author of *Chosen Peoples: Christianity and Political Imagination in South Sudan*.

**Husam Mahjoub**, co-founder of Sudan Bukra, an independent nonprofit TV channel, and a telecom professional and activist, who has published articles on politics, human rights, the economy, and international and cultural affairs.

The panelists discussed the geopolitical implications of the conflict, including its effects on neighboring countries, regional stability, and international relations.



Husam Mahjoub

### The Power of Testimony Sudanese Voices at the Forefront

A powerful moment of the symposium came from Banjor Musa, founder of For Sudan, a nonprofit that raises funds for hospitals and provides scholarships to Sudanese students. Speaking with palpable emotion, Musa shared firsthand accounts of displacement, loss, and perseverance.

“The hospitals are running out of everything—medicines, staff, power. And yet people continue to show up, to help each other, to resist,” Musa said. His words served as a reminder that behind every analysis lies a human story—one of survival, solidarity, and dignity in the face of unspeakable hardship.

Through Musa’s testimony, the symposium transcended the realm of policy discourse and became a space of witness and connection, where the personal and political merged.

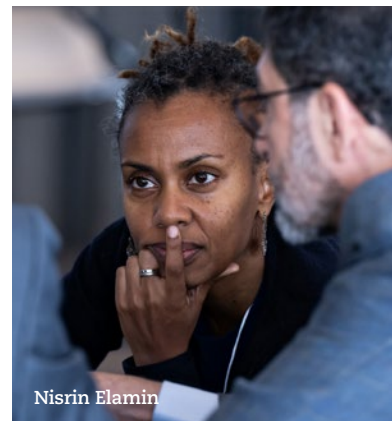
### Looking Ahead A Forum for Ongoing Engagement

In his closing remarks, ASC Director Omolade Adunbi emphasized the Center’s commitment to fostering sustained engagement with the crisis in Sudan. He expressed his hope that Sudan: In the Eye of the Storm would not be a one-off event but the beginning of an ongoing conversation.

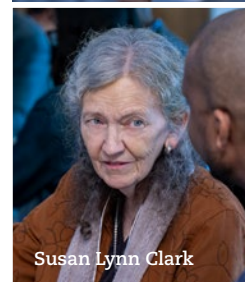
“We must treat this not as a moment, but as a movement,” he said. “We hope this will become an ongoing symposium series to build on these productive and insightful conversations—because the people of Sudan deserve more than fleeting attention.”

As the world’s gaze shifts rapidly from one crisis to another, the ASC’s symposium stood as a testament to the importance of deliberate, interdisciplinary dialogue. It underscored the role that academic institutions can—and must—play in deepening understanding, challenging silence, and supporting movements for justice.

In the eye of the storm, this symposium offered not only analysis, but also solidarity.



Nisrin Elamin



Susan Lynn Clark

**“The hospitals are running out of everything—medicines, staff, power. And yet people continue to show up, to help each other, to resist.”**

Banjor Musa



## ASC FACULTY & STAFF NEWS

Congratulations to all of our faculty and staff associates who received awards, promotions, and honors in the 2024–2025 academic year!

### U-M PROMOTIONS, AWARDS + HONORS

**Anna G. Sirota**, promoted to professor of architecture, A. Alfred Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning

**Bilal Butt**, promoted to professor of environment and sustainability, School for Environment and Sustainability

**Joyojeet K. Pal**, promoted to professor of information, School of Information

**Cheryl A. Moyer**, promoted to professor of learning health sciences, professor of obstetrics and gynecology, Medical School, and professor of health management and policy, School of Public Health

**Emma Lawrence**, promoted to clinical associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology, Medical School

**Brian Arbic** was named a 2025 Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, LSA and School of Engineering, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to undergraduate education. He was also elected an AAS Fellow by the African Academy of Sciences in the category of geological and space sciences, joining a cohort of 88 distinguished scientists and scholars. As founder and director of the Coastal Ocean Environment Summer School in Nigeria and Ghana, Arbic leads an international program that annually trains more than 150 African university students and provides research opportunities for U-M students.



**Jaclyn Goodrich**, research associate professor, School of Public Health, received the Research Faculty Achievement Award, in recognition of her work that has significantly impacted concepts, methods, technologies, or ways of thinking, with potential future effects on research, policy, creative practice, or societal outcomes. Her work aims to identify hazardous environmental factors and their health impacts in populations that are underrepresented in research efforts or are burdened by higher toxic exposure levels due to their occupation or the region where they live.



**Marwa Hassan**, ASC academic program specialist, received this year's International Institute Outstanding Advocate of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Award. This award celebrates staff members who consistently advance the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the International Institute.



## EXTERNAL RECOGNITION + HONORS

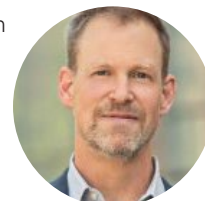


**Omolade Adunbi** received a 2024–2025 Fulbright Award and served as the Fulbright Visiting Professor in the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, where he taught courses such as culture and society and anthropology of globalization and development. While in Nigeria, his research focuses on energy and climate change, examining the intersection of technology, social media, environmental advocacy, infrastructural development, and China's role in Africa. The highlight of his Fulbright Fellowship is the establishment of the Students for Environment and Sustainability Club (SESClub), the first organization of its kind at the university. The club promotes climate change awareness and environmental sustainability through educational programs, and it organized the university's first World Earth Day celebration on April 22, 2025, featuring a seminar on recycling and environmental conservation.

**Gabriel Ayoola**, was elected president of the African Language Teachers Association (ALTA) during its 28th Annual Conference, held April 10–12, 2025, at the University of Pittsburgh. A longtime advocate for African language education, Ayoola brings deep expertise and leadership to the role. As president, he aims to expand ALTA's global presence by fostering educator collaboration, supporting instructors, and elevating the visibility of African languages in global education. His election reflects both his dedication to language pedagogy and his commitment to strengthening the role of African languages in academia and beyond.



**Paul Johnson**, is one of five University of Michigan professors selected for the 2025 class of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. A professor of history and Afroamerican and African studies in LSA, Johnson's research explores hybrid forms of agency in the Americas—especially in Brazil and the Caribbean—as well as the uses of secrecy in religion, law and the state.



**Martin Murray** received a 2025 Guggenheim Fellowship, one of the nation's most prestigious academic honors. A professor of urban planning and sociology and adjunct professor of Afroamerican and African studies, Murray's work explores global urbanism, informal settlements, and spatial inequality in urban Africa and post-industrial Detroit. His Guggenheim project continues this focus, examining “what happens to leftover spaces” in deindustrializing cities, especially Detroit.





## FROM THE **AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES** SERIES, 2024/25

Published by the University of Michigan Press, the African Perspectives series continues to highlight field-based, interdisciplinary research that challenges conventional Africanist scholarship. It includes work by both established and emerging scholars and spans disciplines such as anthropology, political science, public health, urban studies and literary criticism. Series editors Kelly Askew (University of Michigan), Laura Fair (Columbia University) and Pamila Gupta (University of the Free State, South Africa) are committed to supporting scholarship that is methodologically rigorous, theoretically grounded and engaged with contemporary issues on the continent.

### ***The Homeowner Ideology: Economic (F)Utility of Real Property Rights in Four African Cities*** by Singumbe Muyeba (March 2025)

This book challenges the belief that homeownership reduces poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. Drawing on research from Nairobi, Cape Town, Lusaka, and Luanda, Muyeba argues that formal property rights often produce “structured idle capital,” legally held assets with limited financial utility. Rather than empowering the urban poor, these rights can reinforce existing inequalities. The book examines cultural, familial, and state factors that uphold the homeownership model despite its shortcomings. By questioning dominant development frameworks, Muyeba offers a critical perspective on housing

policies and their implications for equitable urban development in Africa.

### ***Exit of a Hero*** by Okechukwu Nwafor (May 2026)

This book explores the cultural, political and socio-economic significance of photography in commemorative practices in southern Nigeria, from the nineteenth century to today. Through an analysis of funeral posters, memorial booklets and social media posts, Nwafor traces the evolution of the heroic image and its role in Igbo public life. He argues that visual canonization transforms the deceased into saintly figures who transcend personal flaws. In reclaiming these idealized images, social media helps reconstitute the Igbo public sphere as a space where heroic memory persists. Nwafor reveals how photographic memorialization expresses enduring aspirations and collective imagination.



Nnimmo Bassey delivers his Wallenberg speech at the Medal Presentation and Lecture.  
ANANYA KEDIA / DAILY

## Nnimmo Bassey Receives 2024 Wallenberg Medal for Environmental and Humanitarian Leadership

O n September 10, 2024, the University of Michigan honored Nigerian environmentalist, architect, and poet **Nnimmo Bassey** with the prestigious Wallenberg Medal. This award recognizes individuals whose humanitarian actions reflect the courage and commitment of Raoul Wallenberg, a U-M alumnus renowned for saving thousands of Jews during World War II. Bassey is the 29th recipient of the medal and the first Nigerian to receive this distinction.

The ceremony, held at the Ross School of Business’s Robertson Auditorium, featured Bassey’s lecture titled “We Are Relatives.” In his address, Bassey emphasized the interconnectedness of all life forms and the necessity of collective action to address global challenges. He spoke of a “polycrisis”—a convergence of environmental degradation, social injustice, and economic inequality—that disproportionately affects vulnerable communities, particularly in the Global South. Drawing from his experiences in the Niger Delta, Bassey highlighted the environmental and human costs of fossil fuel extraction.

Bassey’s multifaceted career includes serving as the executive director of the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) and participating in global networks such as Oilwatch International. His leadership in organizations such as Friends of the Earth International and his receipt of awards like the Right Livelihood Award and the Rafto Human Rights Prize underscore his commitment to environmental justice.

The Wallenberg Medal ceremony also featured remarks from Urban Ahlin, Ambassador of Sweden to the United States, who reflected on Wallenberg’s legacy and its relevance today. Laurie K. McCauley, U-M’s provost and executive vice president for academic affairs, presented the medal to Bassey, acknowledging his dedication to climate justice and human rights.

In conjunction with the medal presentation, Bassey participated in “Let the Earth Breathe,” a photo exhibition and poetry reading sponsored by the Wallenberg Medal and Lecture, the African Studies Center, and the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies. This event further showcased his artistic contributions and advocacy for environmental sustainability.

Bassey’s recognition with the Wallenberg Medal underscores the vital intersection of environmental activism and human rights advocacy, inspiring continued efforts toward a more equitable and sustainable world.



Fieldwork in Benue State, Nigeria

Juba, South Sudan

## ASC INITIATIVES & SEED GRANTS

The African Studies Center (ASC) annually awards seed grants through its three disciplinary initiatives to support collaborative research between U-M researchers and colleagues from the continent. Below, the recipients of past ASC seed grants share their updates.

### African Social Research Initiative (ASRI)

#### Return Intentions and Staying-Put Practices Among Internally Displaced Farming Communities

**U-M Research Lead:** Korede Ajogbeje

**African Research Lead:** Oludayo Tade

**Location:** Benue State, Nigeria

In response to the deepening crisis of displacement in North Central Nigeria, *Return Intentions and Staying-Put Practices Among Internally Displaced Farming Communities in Benue State* explores how internally displaced persons (IDPs) navigate the idea—and reality—of returning home. Led by Korede Ajogbeje and Dr. Oludayo Tade, the project centers the voices of those displaced by conflict between indigenous farming communities and pastoral herders.

Supported by an ASC Seed Grant, the team conducted fieldwork in two IDP camps—one in Makurdi, the other in Guma—using in-depth interviews, key informant sessions, and a 431-person survey. The goal: to understand how displaced people imagine return, what conditions shape their decisions, and how they pursue return in practice.

Findings reveal that returning home is more than a logistical decision—it's a reclamation of dignity, identity, and autonomy. IDPs spoke of the indignities of camp life—hunger, poor sanitation, and dependency—and how these hardships fueled a longing for justice and self-recovery. Many monitored security conditions closely and returned only when they sensed a genuine opportunity for safety.

Return strategies ranged from quiet, individual departures to gradual, group-led efforts. Across all cases, going back was seen as an act of resilience, a way to reassert belonging in the face of systemic neglect.

This study challenges policymakers to think beyond security when planning return interventions. Sustainable reintegration requires rebuilding infrastructure—especially clinics and schools—and addressing the same structural issues that drive displacement.

Currently under peer review, the research is part of a larger vision to expand the study across Nigeria and deepen analysis of gendered displacement. As the team seeks further funding, their work adds vital nuance to the global conversation on internal displacement and recovery.

### African Heritage and Humanities Initiative (AHHI)

#### Navigating New Beginnings: How City Services Shape Lives in Juba, South Sudan

**U-M Research Lead:** Timothy Berke and Larissa Larsen

**Location:** Juba, South Sudan

In the bustling city of Juba, the capital of South Sudan, diverse groups of people converge, each carrying unique stories of displacement, survival, and hope for a better future. Amid such diversity, a pressing question emerges: how do city services impact internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, and the local residents who host them?

Juba, a city rapidly growing since South Sudan's independence in 2011, serves as a beacon of possibility for many fleeing the country's ongoing conflicts. With over two million displaced individuals, it's a melting pot where the dreams of IDPs and returnees intermingle with those of long-term residents. Here, the basic amenities and services that some take for granted become crucial elements in rebuilding fractured lives.

The research conducted by urban



planners Timothy Berke and Larissa Larsen explores how different groups perceive and prioritize city services. Through household surveys across various neighborhoods, they unveiled key insights into the needs of hosts, IDPs, and returnees.

**Safety First:** For everyone—be they hosts, IDPs, or returnees—the sense of safety is paramount. It's not just about security from crimes but also stability to rebuild lives disrupted by turmoil.

**Water and Electricity Matter:** Access to clean water and electricity emerged as essential needs, but their availability varies by neighborhood. Many households pay high prices to bring water to their homes, while others face days without electricity.

**Transportation as a Lifeline:** The call for affordable transportation echoes through Juba. For market vendors and job seekers, easier access to markets and workplaces can unlock economic opportunities just beyond their reach.

Juba's choice as a study site was anything but random. The city's struggle to meet the needs of its expanding population—amidst infrastructure challenges—made it an ideal case to investigate urban living for displaced communities. With a low Human Development Index (HDI) score, Juba exemplifies how rapidly urbanizing areas face significant hurdles in serving their communities equally.

By analyzing survey responses and interviewing local leaders, the researchers discovered a shared desire for practical solutions: markets for income opportunities, schools for education access, and public parks for recreation.

While the study focused on Juba, its findings offer lessons for similarly placed cities across the globe. A flexible, inclusive approach to urban planning—one that recognizes the distinct priorities of displaced people while fostering connections with host communities—is crucial. The authors recommend that humanitarian agencies work with local governments to ensure that the immediate and long-term needs of displaced persons are met.

As cities like Juba continue to grow and evolve, their ability to support and empower all residents will shape the trajectory of communities in recovery and their journey toward thriving. Understanding and addressing the specific needs of displaced populations alongside host residents can turn cities into spaces of opportunity and hope.

## ASC SUPPORTS NEW COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH THROUGH SEED GRANTS



The African Studies Center's disciplinary initiatives—African Humanities and Heritage Initiative, African Social Research Initiative, and STEM-Africa—annually award seed grants to support research conducted collaboratively between U-M researchers and colleagues from institutions on the continent. For the 2025/26 academic year, we are supporting three projects that reflect bold, interdisciplinary approaches to community belonging, gender equity, and refugee health across the continent. This year's projects span the continent with projects based in Nigeria, Uganda, and Kenya. Congratulations to the research teams who secured support for their important work!

### African Humanities and Heritage Initiative

**Theatre for Development in the Building of Coalitions, Gender Parity and Environmental Justice**

**Michigan-Based Research Lead:** Karin Waidley

**Africa-Based Research Lead:** Jackson John Kitetu (Kabarak University)

**Location:** Turkana, Kenya

In drought-affected Turkana, Karin Waidley and her team use Theatre for Development (TfD) to address gender-based violence linked to environmental stress. Through arts-based workshops and public performances, women dramatize how climate change threatens their safety and well-being. These events spark community dialogue, mobilize support, and inform future interventions in partnership with environmental scientist Jackson Kitetu and the Canaan Morning Star theatre collective.

### African Social Research Initiative

**Voices of Ibadan: Assessing Community Belonging and Wellbeing through Mixed-Methods Research**

**Michigan-Based Research Lead:** Feyi Adunbi and Yatesha Robinson

**Africa-Based Research Lead:** Babajide Ololajulo (University of Ibadan)

**Location:** Ibadan, Nigeria

In Ibadan, the *Voices of Ibadan* project investigates how social belonging and mental well-being are evolving in the Sabo community—a historically Hausa migrant settlement now experiencing cultural shifts and intergenerational tensions. Through focus groups, surveys, and local partnerships, the team is gathering data on how community identity affects psychological health and what supports are needed to foster resilience and connection in a rapidly changing urban environment.

### Stem-Africa Initiative

**Urukundo Rwacu ('Our Love'): Enhancing Family Planning Through Male Engagement—Piloting an Intervention for African Refugee Couples in Uganda**

**Michigan-Based Research Lead:** Haeun Lee

**Africa-Based Research Lead:** Doreen Asimire (Bishop Stuart University)

**Location:** Nakivale Refugee Settlement, Uganda

In Uganda's Nakivale refugee settlement, *Urukundo Rwacu* ("Our Love") is piloting a postpartum family planning intervention for African refugee couples. By engaging men through peer groups and couples counseling, the project promotes joint decision-making and reproductive autonomy. With support from local refugee researchers, the study is assessing feasibility and laying the groundwork for future scale-up.

# WELCOME TO THE 2025/2026 UMAPS SCHOLARS

We are very excited to welcome the 21st and 22nd cohorts of the University of Michigan African Presidential Scholars (UMAPS) program to campus in the 2025–2026 academic year! The invaluable contributions of our UMAPS scholars to social and academic life, during their tenure on campus and beyond, are central to U-M's Africa program.

## FALL 2025 COHORT

**Nuniyat Kifle Abebe** is a lecturer and AI researcher at Addis Ababa University,



specializing in natural language processing. With a bachelor's degree in

computer science from the University of Gondar and a master's in information science and systems from Addis Ababa University, she is dedicated to advancing technology and empowering others through teaching. At U-M, she aims to mature her research skills by participating in seminars, workshops, and collaborative environments.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Yousif Hassan**, Ford School of Public Policy

**Molebogeng Bodiba** is a PhD student and lecturer at Sefako



Makgatho Health Sciences University in Ga-Rankuwa, South Africa. Her research

focuses on diabetic neuropathy and the possible ameliorative effects of indigenous African medicinal plants. She also composes and conducts choral music and plays several percussion instruments. At U-M, she plans to deepen

her research and engage with interdisciplinary perspectives.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Anuska Andjelkovic-Zochowska**, Medical School, Department of Pathology and Neurosurgery

**Jonathan David Chong** is a lecturer in the Department of Architecture at the University of Jos, Nigeria, specializing in African architecture and sustainability. He holds a



master's degree in architecture and serves as secretary of the Nigerian Institute of Architects Plateau Chapter. At U-M, he aims to enhance his research and promote sustainable architectural education in Africa.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Kuukuwa Manful**, Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning

**Charles Gafita** is an assistant lecturer at the University of Rwanda. He brings experience



in health and hospital management, curriculum development, and advocacy. At U-M, he plans to

strengthen his expertise in evidence-based healthcare research and teaching.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Andrew Jones**, School of Public Health

**Christian Kwisanga** is a senior lecturer in physics at the University of Rwanda and holds a PhD in Electronics Engineering. He led the creation of Rwanda's BSc in nuclear science and works with the International Atomic Energy



Agency (IAEA) on nuclear education initiatives. At U-M, he will expand his

research on nuclear science as a green energy alternative.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Kim Kearfott** (primary), **Denia Djokic** (secondary), College of Engineering

**Simangele Mashazi** is a junior lecturer in the Department of General Linguistics at Stellenbosch University. She earned her MA in general



linguistics in 2020. At U-M, she will continue her linguistic research in a global setting.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Webb Keane**, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

**Robel Mulat Asmamaw**

is an assistant professor in the Department of Social Anthropology at Dilla University. His research explores indigenous



knowledge in development, urbanization, and youth economic engagement.

At U-M, he aims to expand the reach of his anthropological research.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Geoff Emberling**, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

**Alecia Ndlovu** is a senior lecturer in political studies at the University of Cape Town. She specializes in mineral resource governance, political economy, and quantitative methods. At U-M, she will



continue her research on mining accountability and development in Africa.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Anne Pitcher** and **Omolade Adunbi**, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

**Folakemi Ogungbe** is a faculty member in the Department of Film and Multimedia at Pan-Atlantic University, Nigeria.



She holds a PhD in film studies and has served as media director,

festival juror, and academic editor. At U-M, she will research sustainable creative economies in African cinema.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Swapnil Rai**, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

**Funmilola Mabel Ojo** is a lecturer at Olusegun Agagu University of Science and Technology in Nigeria. She



holds a PhD in Botany and has expertise in plant anatomy, genetics, and

phytochemistry. At U-M, she will deepen her research on *Andropogon* species and their genetic diversity.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Erik Nielsen**, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

**Birki Gurmessa Toba** is a PASET RSIF PhD Scholar at Bayero University, Nigeria, and faculty at Borana University,



Ethiopia. Her work focuses on rural development, agricultural extension, and climate

change. At U-M, she will advance her research in sustainable livelihoods and environmental resilience.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Bilal Butt**, School for Environment and Sustainability



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## WINTER 2026 COHORT

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### Ajayeoba Yetunde Ajoke

is a lecturer at Osun State University, Nigeria, specializing



in energy and solid-state physics. Her research explores two-dimensional materials

for flexible optoelectronics.

At U-M, she will study energy band and plasticity modulations in MoS<sub>2</sub>/Ga<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> heterostructures.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Ted Goodson**, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

**Bello Zainab** is a lecturer in industrial design at Ahmadu

Bello University, Nigeria. Her research focuses on indigenous textile design and its adaptation to contemporary fabrics. At U-M, she will expand her doctoral research on textile

and fashion innovation.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Anya Sirota**, Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning

**Masauso Chirwa** is a researcher and lecturer at the University of Zambia. He has



expertise in environmental science, development, and research methodology.

At U-M, he

will engage in policy-relevant research concerning vulnerable communities and education.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Ashley Cureton**, School of Social Work and School of Education

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### Tata Gnire Safiatou Coulibaly

is a virologist and cancer genetics researcher at the Pasteur Institute of Côte d'Ivoire. She coordinates the Genetics and Cancer



Laboratory, working on mutations related to colorectal and prostate cancers. At

U-M, she will collaborate on precision medicine in West Africa.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Simpa Salami**, School of Medicine

**Bahati Charles Kayaga** is an assistant lecturer at St. John's University of Tanzania. Her



expertise includes environmental studies and renewable energy initiatives.

At U-M, she will contribute to projects focused on mobilizing social assets for productive renewable energy use.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Kelly Askew**, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

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### Iheanacho Chukwuemeka

**Metuonu** is a philosopher and ethics scholar at the University of Medical Sciences Ondo, Nigeria. He specializes in applied ethics, metaphysics, and culture. At U-M, he will continue his interdisciplinary research on ethics and development.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Ekow Yankah**, Michigan Law School



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### Kefilwe Vanessa Mokwebo

is an electroanalytical chemist with a PhD and a background in water research and materials



science. She also manages laboratory operations and research teams. At U-M, she will further her work in advanced electroanalytical methods.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Pierre Poudeu-Poudeu**, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

**Janet Munakamwe** is a senior lecturer and researcher from the University of the Witwatersrand, South



Africa. She specializes in migration, labor, gender, and development. At U-M, she

will continue her work on sociopolitical transformation through interdisciplinary research.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Brian Klein**, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

**Gebeyehu Jalu Negassa** is a senior marketing lecturer at Mekelle University, Ethiopia. His research includes entrepreneurship, economic



resilience, and post-conflict livelihood recovery. At U-M, he will work

on research advancing income generation and poverty alleviation strategies.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Ravi Anupindi**, Stephen M. Ross School of Business

**Kassim Tawiah** is a lecturer in statistics at the University of Energy and Natural Resources, Ghana. His work involves mixed models, biostatistics, and overdispersed models in public health. At U-M, he will develop extended trivariate



Poisson regression models for maternal and child mortality data.

U-M FACULTY HOST: **Kerby Shedden**, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts



# UMAPS PROGRAM SCHOLARS SHOWCASE WORK IN RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM SERIES

The University of Michigan African Presidential Scholars (UMAPS) Research Colloquium Series has been a tradition since the inception of the UMAPS Program 16 years ago. The series features UMAPS Program fellows from various institutions across Africa and their scholarly work. The talks prepared and presented by each visiting scholar promote dialogue across disciplines and give the scholars the opportunity to contribute to the U-M and larger Ann Arbor community by sharing their research.

The Fall 2024 UMAPS Colloquium opened with the first October session celebrating the multidisciplinary work of three UMAPS scholars. Mooketsi Molefi presented his research on "Adaptation and Evaluation of a Multisectoral Concussion Management Framework in Diverse African Setting." Ayisha Baffoe-Ashun shared her analysis of "Socio-Spatial Dynamics of Green Infrastructure in Ghanaian Cities Through Precolonial, Colonial, Contemporary Epochs: Based on Case Studies in Accra and Kumasi." Atilola Abidemi-Iromini shared her work on, "Allelopathic Potential of Aquatic Macrophytes in Cyanobacteria Inhibition and Ammonium Uptake for Freshwater Purification."

A second October session of the Fall colloquium session continued to impress audiences with the depth and breadth of UMAPS research. Oluwanifemi Bamidele-Nelly introduced the audience to her work on "Liminal Identities: Biracialism and Female Body Image in Selected Nigerian Novels." Richard Nsengiyumva kept the audience intrigued with his work on "Prevalence & Determinants of Preconception Health and Behavioral Risks Amidst Engaged Couples in Rwanda." Faith Benson followed up her UMAPS colleagues by presenting her research on "Identifying Predictors of Poor Early Childhood Development in Low-Resource Settings of Kenya Using Machine Learning." Martin Oswald wrapped

The UMAPS Fall 2024 cohort takes advantage of the slow start to the semester and explores Ann Arbor.



The Fall 2024 Cohort at the International Institute.



Fall 2024 cohort present their research to a broader U-M audience

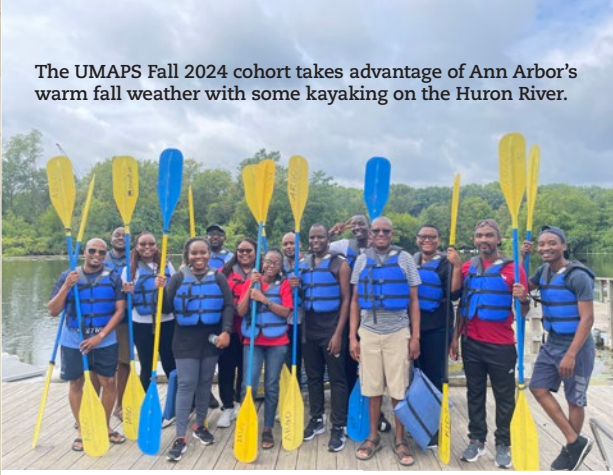


The UMAPS Fall 2024 cohort meets for a welcome breakfast with their faculty hosts





The UMAPS Fall 2024 cohort takes advantage of Ann Arbor's warm fall weather with some kayaking on the Huron River.



The UMAPS Winter 2025 cohort welcome breakfast

UMAPS Winter 2025 cohort relaxes together with an evening of games.



Members of the UMAPS Winter 2025 cohort share their research with the wider U-M community



Ice skating was a new experience for many members of the UMAPS Winter 2025 cohort



A visit to the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, MI

up the session by demonstrating "Why Do Women Vote Less, and What Influences Their [Non]-Voting? An Empirical Examination of Socio-Demographic Predictors of Women's Electoral Participation in Tanzania's 2010-2020 Elections."

The final session of the Fall colloquium session was held in November with the final three scholars of the semester. Anatoli Lwassampijja shared his research on "Faith and Nation Building at Crossroads: The Religio-political Significance of the 1969 Pope Paul VI's Visit to Uganda." Stella Antwiwaa continued the session by presenting her work on "Can the Subaltern Be Heard? Women and Rhetoric in Selected Euripidean and Ghanaian Plays." The final presentation of the semester was done by Emmanuel Iyamuremye. He shared his work on "Boosting Student Learning Motivation in Mathematics" with the audience.

The Winter 2025 cohort exhibited their wide range of disciplinary expertise through three colloquium session held in March and April. Yilkal Hunegnaw shared his work on "Treatment seeking behavior and barriers in services utilization for sexually transmitted infections among female sex workers in Hawassa city, Ethiopia: a mixed method study." Followed by Hailu Azerefegn Demsash who presented his research on "Self-assessment of Completion of first-trimester Abortion at St. Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College: a cross-sectional study." Dorcas Mwigigeri followed him in the session by sharing her research on "Leveraging High-Performance Computing And Machine Learning For Early Prediction Of Healthcare Workers' Mental Health. Norah Aziamin Asongu concluded the event by presenting her work on "Food Culture and Malnutrition in Cameroon: An Anthropological Perspective."

In the second Winter session, Michael Dziwornu presented his work on "Planning, Power and Sugar: Ghana's Troubled Sugar Factory and Rural Transformations." Jean Paul Nsabimana shared his research on "Dynamic Programming Approach for African Financial Markets." Desta Gebeyehu introduced the audience to his work on "Experimental investigation on biodiesel and skin care oil production potential of black soldier fly larvae and comparing bioethanol gel fuel properties as an alternative fuel and waste management." Mary Ajala concluded the event by presenting her work on "Column Adsorption of Heavy Metals Using Synthesized Silver Immobilized Titanium Oxide Nanocomposites Supported on Clay."

The last colloquium session of the year, on April 16, 2025, saw Bukola Ochei present her work on "The Religious, Cultural, Social, Criminal And Human Rights Dimensions Of Cross-Dressing In Nigeria." Arlette Bessomo shares her research on "The Aesthetics of African Ritual Theater: Theoretical Construction." Victor Gwande presented his analysis of his research titled, "Under the crisis, a new country is emerging: the rise of the 'small man' and new livelihoods in Zimbabwe since the 2000s." Clint Abrahams concluded the presentations of the semester with his immersive session titled, "Reauthoring: Building People that Can Shape their City."





## EXPANDING HORIZONS: TITLE VI PROGRAMMING AT THE AFRICAN STUDIES CENTER

The African Studies Center (ASC) at the University of Michigan continues to demonstrate the transformative power of Title VI National Resource Center (NRC) funding through a diverse array of initiatives that deepen public engagement, support African scholarship, and foster global and intercultural understanding. In 2024-2025, ASC's Title VI programming spanned academic, artistic, and professional spheres—bringing African and diaspora-centered knowledge into conversation with students, educators, researchers, and the broader public.

### 1 Bridging Campuses: UMAPS Outreach in Ann Arbor, Flint, and Kalamazoo

A signature component of ASC's Title VI work is its support of the University of Michigan African Presidential Scholars (UMAPS) program. In Winter 2025, ASC collaborated with the Department of Africana Studies at the University of Michigan–Flint to bring two UMAPS scholars to campus. Arlette Bessomo's presentation, "The Aesthetics of African Ritual Theater: Theoretical Construction," and Clint Abrahams' talk, "Reauthoring: Building People that Can Shape their City," sparked deep engagement among students, igniting discussions about performance, identity, and urban transformation.

The commitment to accessibility and outreach extended beyond Ann Arbor and Flint. In partnership with the Midwest Institute for International-Intercultural Education (MIIE), ASC organized UMAPS-led talks at Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC). Delivered on separate dates to encourage focused interaction, these presentations tackled topics such as Zimbabwe's informal economies, food culture, and malnutrition in Cameroon, Ghana's development challenges, and participatory urbanism in South Africa. KVCC students and faculty responded with curiosity and enthusiasm, underscoring the importance of community college engagement in advancing Title VI's mission of international and area studies education.

### 2 Showcasing African Scholarship: UMAPS Research Colloquium Series

Another cornerstone of ASC's Title VI efforts was the Winter 2025 UMAPS Research Colloquium Series. Spanning three thematic sessions on global health, sustainable development, and cultural dynamics and social transformation, the series showcased cutting-edge research from African scholars across disciplines and regions.



Topics ranged from community health strategies and renewable energy innovations to artistic expression and resilience. Each session fostered vibrant dialogue between scholars, students, and community members, modeling the cross-disciplinary collaboration and global exchange that Title VI seeks to promote.

### Spotlighting Film as a Tool for Public Engagement and Diasporic Dialogue

Film screenings and public conversations played a pivotal role in ASC's Title VI programming. On February 24, 2025, ASC hosted a powerful screening of *America Street* at the State Theatre in Ann Arbor. The film, directed by Idrissou Mora-Kpai, offers a searing portrait of racial injustice and resistance in Charleston, South Carolina. A lively post-screening discussion, moderated by ASC Interim Director Professor Carina Ray, encouraged reflection on the parallels and entanglements of African and African American experiences.

A month later, on March 17, ASC held an intimate fireside chat with Namibian-American filmmaker Kavena Hambira following a screening of *The People's Uncle*, which chronicles diasporic memory, struggle, and solidarity through the story of Uncle Bobby. Featuring Beatrice X Johnson and Cephus X—who inspired the film—the conversation resonated deeply with attendees, spotlighting storytelling as a powerful mode of political engagement across the Black Atlantic.

### 3 Fostering Global Connections: Rwanda Collaboration

Title VI resources also enabled ASC to support strategic international partnerships through the UMAPS Global Alumni Network. In May 2025, ASC affiliates from the University of Michigan–Flint—Dauda Abubakar (Professor of Political Science and Africana Studies) and Christian Vannier (Lecturer in Africana Studies and in Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice)—undertook exploratory travel to Rwanda with the goal of establishing institutional ties with the University of Rwanda. The African Studies Center played a key role in facilitating this connection, introducing the Flint faculty to UMAPS Rwanda coordinators Jean de Dieu Niyigena and Jean Pierre Ngendahayo, both of whom completed part of their graduate studies at the University of Michigan and now serve as lecturers in mathematics at the University of Rwanda.

The success of the visit was due in no small part to Jean de Dieu and Jean Pierre's cultural expertise, logistical support, and





deep institutional knowledge. They arranged high-level meetings with university administrators, coordinated site visits to genocide memorials and cultural institutions, and provided essential context for understanding contemporary Rwandan society. The visit culminated in a promising meeting with the Director of the University of Rwanda's Center for Conflict Management (CCM), where all parties agreed to pursue a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two universities.

This first step has laid the groundwork for a long-term partnership rooted in student engagement, joint faculty research, and mutual learning. Plans are already underway for Abubakar and Vannier to return with students in 2026 for a study program focused on how Rwandan society has confronted its history of violence, rebuilt its institutions, and forged a hopeful, inclusive future. The collaboration with CCM will center on post-genocide reconstruction, reconciliation, and the social dynamics of contemporary Rwanda—underscoring how academic diplomacy, nurtured through personal networks and supported by Title VI infrastructure, can seed impactful, transnational exchange.

#### 4 Africa in the Global Marketplace: Ross Africa Business Conference

ASC also played a central role in the 2025 Ross Africa Business Conference, themed "Doing Business in Africa: Opportunities, Challenges, and Strategies for Success." Drawing over 80 participants, the conference created a vital space for business leaders, entrepreneurs, and students to explore Africa's dynamic economic landscape. Sessions tackled topics from infrastructure and fintech to renewable energy and localized innovation. The ASC-sponsored "Osagyefo" Experience highlighted the cultural dimensions of African entrepreneurship, while a bustling Business Expo and networking reception cultivated new cross-sector connections. The event affirmed ASC's commitment to broadening professional pathways for engagement with Africa.

#### 5 K-12 Educator Training: WHaLI Workshop

ASC's Title VI commitment to K-16 education was further realized through its participation in the 2025 World History and Literature Initiative (WHaLI) teacher workshop. Hosted by the International Institute in collaboration with the Marsal Family School of Education, the workshop provided educators with tools to integrate African

perspectives into their classrooms. Teachers explored literature, history, and pedagogy that disrupt singular narratives and foster a more global curriculum—an investment in future generations' intercultural competence.

#### 6 Swahili and Yoruba Education: Kenya and Nigeria Virtual Exchange

ASC's purpose of enriching language studies at U-M goes beyond the campus with virtual exchanges between institutions, the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and KCA University, Kenya. Current Yoruba FLTA, Abiola Afolayan shares, "I looked forward to observing how well my [U-M] students interacted with their partners who were native speakers of Yoruba. It made me proud to see how much they had learned and grown under our guidance. I also appreciated the opportunity to learn more about American culture and the U.S. academic system. Attending classes and completing assignments gave me deeper insight into how things operate academically in the U.S., which was quite different from what I was used to back home."

#### Global Collaboration:

#### 7 African Studies Association Conference

The Fall 2024 UMAPS cohort participated in the African Studies Association Annual Meeting in Chicago, sharing original research and strengthening scholarly networks across disciplines and continents. Supported by ASC Title VI funding, the African Studies Center co-hosted the Dr. Pritchett Memorial Roundtable with peer National Resource Center African Studies Centers, featuring panelists Dr. Phiwohukhe Mnyandu, Dr. Nimi Wariboko, Dr. Christopher Daniels, Dr. Leo Zulu, and Dr. Benjamin Talton. Moderated by ASC Director Dr. Omolade Adunbi, the discussion explored the evolving landscape of African and African American Studies, the role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and the power of cross-institutional collaboration in shaping the field's future.

Together, these initiatives illustrate the wide-ranging impact of Title VI NRC funding in expanding African studies, deepening global partnerships, and fostering equity-oriented education at all levels. Through cross-campus collaboration, international engagement, public humanities programming, and community outreach, the African Studies Center continues to advance its mission: to promote inclusive, globally engaged scholarship that amplifies African voices and reimagines the possibilities of intercultural understanding.

# A YEAR OF ENGAGEMENT: ASC EVENTS 2024/25

Each year, the African Studies Center (ASC) partners with units across the University of Michigan to support a dynamic slate of Africa-focused events on campus. The 2024/25 academic year was no exception. From public lectures and interdisciplinary workshops to film screenings and performances, ASC brought together scholars, artists, and practitioners from across the continent and around the world to engage with African issues, ideas, and communities.

## Let the Earth Breathe: Photo Exhibition and Poetry Reading

In collaboration with DAAS, ASC launched the 2024/25 academic year with “Let the Earth Breathe,” a powerful photo exhibition and poetry reading that spotlighted the environmental and human toll of oil extraction in Nigeria’s Niger Delta. Co-presented by 2024 Wallenberg Medalist Nnimmo Bassey, a renowned Nigerian environmental activist, architect, and poet, and Omolade Adunbi, ASC director, the month-long exhibition ran from September 9 to October 11 across two gallery spaces on campus.

The exhibition offered a rare and visceral glimpse into life within an oil extractive enclave. Featuring photographs curated around two sub-themes, “People, Crossings, and the Dangers of Oil Pollution”



at the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies Gallery, and “Living, Community, and Polluted Environment” at the International Institute Gallery—the exhibit captured the everyday realities of communities living alongside pipelines, flow stations, and polluted waterways. These evocative images chronicled both the devastation wrought by decades of oil extraction and the resilience of those who continue to call the Niger Delta home.

The exhibition’s opening event featured a moving poetry reading that deepened the emotional resonance of the photographs. Poet Diepreye Amanah read *May I Not Return the Same Way I Came* alongside *Remember* by U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo. Nnimmo Bassey shared a selection of his poems, including *Mother Earth Our Teacher, Choked by Convenience, I Came from the Future*, and *We Thought It Was Oil ... but It Was Blood*, weaving together environmental justice, grief, and defiant hope.

## ASC Film Screenings

Continuing its commitment to highlighting African and diasporic narratives through film, the center hosted a series of thought-provoking screenings and discussions during the 2024/25 academic year. These events offered opportunities for



critical engagement with contemporary issues, while fostering dialogue between filmmakers, scholars, students, and the broader community.

The year began with a screening of *Brief Tender Light*, a documentary by Ukrainian-born Ghanaian filmmaker and MIT alum Arthur Musah. The film follows the journeys of four African students as they navigate the challenges of studying at MIT and wrestle with questions of identity, purpose, and the relationship between home and diaspora. Spanning a decade and two continents, the documentary offers an intimate look into the lives of young people striving to become agents of change in their home countries—Tanzania, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe—while adapting to life in the United States. The screening was followed by a discussion with the filmmaker, offering audience members







a unique behind-the-scenes perspective on the making of the film and the lives it chronicles.

In February, ASC co-hosted a screening of *America Street*, a powerful documentary set in Charleston, South Carolina. The film centers on Joe, a small corner store owner, as he grapples with the daily realities of gentrification and racial violence in his community. Shot in the wake of the police killing of Walter Scott and the Mother Emanuel Church massacre, *America Street* captures both the resilience and vulnerability of a neighborhood under siege. A post-screening discussion was moderated by Carina Ray, professor of history and ASC interim director, and was followed by a reception in the State Theatre Lobby.

The final screening of the year featured *The People's Uncle*, a compelling portrait of Cephus "Uncle Bobby" Johnson, whose activism was catalyzed by the 2009 police killing of his nephew, Oscar Grant. Directed by Kavena Hambira, a Namibian filmmaker based in the United States, the film highlights Johnson's work supporting families affected by police violence and situates his activism within a broader diasporic struggle for justice. Hambira's storytelling bridges African and African American experiences, shedding light on the enduring connections between the continent and its diaspora. The event concluded with an engaging fireside chat between the filmmaker and Ray, which explored themes of solidarity, resilience, and diasporic political activism.



### DAAS Africa Workshop

ASC collaborated with the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies (DAAS) to co-host a dynamic series of workshops throughout the 2024/25 academic year, featuring scholars and artists engaging critical themes of security, urban displacement, spiritual practice, political imagination, and decolonial thought.

The series began in September with Samar Al-Bulushi (UC-Irvine), whose talk "War-Making as Worldmaking" examined Kenya's growing role in global security interventions, questioning how Pan-African rhetoric is mobilized to justify militarized statecraft across the Global South.

In October, Zachary Levenson (Florida International University) presented insights from his book *Delivery as Dispossession*, exploring how post-apartheid South African housing policy criminalizes informal settlements and how residents' perceptions of the state shape their vulnerability to eviction.

November's event featured Kyama Mugambi (Yale Divinity School) with "Spirit, Movement, and the Religious Imagination," a talk highlighting how African Pentecostal worship functions as a decolonial and imaginative response to social and spiritual challenges in urban life.

In January, the workshop series included a screening of *Waiting for Valdez*, a poignant film by South African filmmaker Teddy Mattera, exploring childhood, segregation, and the power of storytelling under apartheid. The screening was followed by a Q&A with the director.

In March, Ben Machava (Yale) returned to U-M to deliver "The Road Not Taken," examining post-independence reeducation camps in Mozambique and the moral-political visions that shaped early socialist experiments.

The series concluded in April with Sean Jacobs (The New School), founder of Africa Is a Country, whose talk "South Africa and the Question of the Global South" reflected on post-apartheid politics, media, and the evolving meanings of solidarity in a global context.

Together, these events fostered rich interdisciplinary dialogue and affirmed the importance of critical scholarship on Africa and its diasporas.

### Halaloween: A Muslim Horror Film Festival

ASC was proud to again co-sponsor "Halaloween: A Muslim Horror Film Festival," an annual event hosted by the Global Islamic Studies Center at the University of Michigan. This unique festival explores the question, "What scares Muslim audiences?" by showcasing horror films from around the world that are made by, for, or about Muslims. The 2024 lineup featured a mix of virtual screenings and in-person events, including films from Palestine, Morocco, Jordan, and Azerbaijan. Highlights included a special collaboration with the Palestine Fiction Council and screenings at Ann Arbor's State Theatre on



October 24 and 31. In addition to ASC, the festival was co-sponsored by numerous U-M units, including the Department of Middle East Studies, Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies, Department of Afroamerican and African Studies, Department of Film, Television, and Media, American Culture, Arab and Muslim American Studies, Center for South Asian Studies, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Digital Islamic Studies Curriculum, Asian Languages and Cultures, Center for Arab American Studies at UM-Dearborn, Institute for Research on Women & Gender, University of Michigan Library, and the International Institute.

### ASC Career Development Workshops

During the 2024–25 academic year, ASC continued its commitment to fostering academic and professional development through a series of targeted workshops.

In October 2024, ASC Director Omolade Adunbi and Vineet Kamat, director of graduate degree programs at the U-M College of Engineering, co-hosted a virtual

session titled “Applying to the University of Michigan Graduate Programs.” The workshop provided prospective graduate students, particularly those from African universities, with comprehensive insights into the application process, program offerings, eligibility criteria, and available funding opportunities at U-M. The session aimed to demystify the admissions process and encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds to pursue advanced degrees at the university.

In November 2024, ASC co-sponsored two information sessions on the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship, a U.S. Department of Education-funded program that offers tuition support and stipends to students studying designated foreign languages in combination with area or international studies. These sessions, led by Dan Cameron, FLAS Coordinator at the International Institute, detailed the application process, eligibility requirements, and benefits of the fellowship. The FLAS Fellowship supports the study of less commonly taught languages, including Swahili, Yoruba, Portuguese, and Arabic, and is open to U.S. citizens and permanent residents.

### Sudan Symposium, “Sudan: In The Eye of the Storm”

On November 18, 2024, ASC in collaboration with the Weiser Diplomacy Center and the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies, hosted a day-long symposium titled “Sudan: In the Eye of the Storm.” Held at Weiser Hall, the event convened scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to examine Sudan’s ongoing political, humanitarian, and cultural challenges. The symposium featured

a keynote address by Khalid Medani of McGill University, who emphasized the unprecedented nature of Sudan’s current conflict and the necessity for scholarly and public engagement. Panel discussions throughout the day addressed topics such as the political roots of the conflict, humanitarian crises, and the regional implications of prolonged instability. Speakers included experts like Ambassador Susan D. Page, Yousif Hassan, Suliman Baldo, and Nisrin Elamin, among others. In his closing remarks, ASC Director Omolade Adunbi expressed hope that this symposium would serve as the beginning of an ongoing series to foster continued dialogue and collaboration on Sudan’s future.

### Fall 2024 UMAPS Research Colloquium Showcases Interdisciplinary African Scholarship

ASC proudly concluded Fall 2024 with the University of Michigan African Presidential Scholars (UMAPS) Research Colloquium Series, a dynamic showcase of emerging research from across the African continent. This semester’s series featured ten scholars from diverse academic backgrounds and institutions throughout Africa, highlighting the strength of interdisciplinary scholarship and the power of transnational intellectual exchange.

Organized into three engaging sessions, the colloquium reflected the wide-ranging interests and expertise of this year’s UMAPS cohort. Presentations spanned topics such as concussion management in sports medicine, green infrastructure for sustainable development, and the role of aquatic macrophytes in inhibiting cyanobacteria. Other sessions

explored machine learning applications, women’s electoral participation, public health challenges, and the sociocultural significance of liminal beings. The final session tackled questions of religiosity, subaltern experiences, and mathematical learning outcomes in African educational contexts.

Each session encouraged active dialogue, incorporating Q&A periods that facilitated real-time feedback and exchange between presenters, University of Michigan faculty, students, and community members. These conversations not only deepened engagement with the research but also fostered cross-disciplinary insights that extended beyond the presentations themselves.



### STS 25<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary Conference Keynote, “Inside-Out Earth”

In March 2025, ASC co-sponsored the University of Michigan’s Science, Technology, and Society (STS) Program’s



25th Anniversary Conference. The event featured a keynote address by Stanford historian Gabrielle Hecht, titled “Inside-Out Earth.” Hecht explored how

new energy systems often overlay existing ones, leading to compounded environmental waste. She highlighted the experiences of communities in Abidjan (Côte d’Ivoire), Mpumalanga (South Africa), and Chile’s Atacama Desert, emphasizing the importance of incorporating local environmental justice priorities into global energy transitions. The conference included panels on extraction economies, medical marginalization, environmental crises, and data politics.

### The Geopolitics of Critical Minerals: Balancing Security, Sustainability, and Growth

On March 20, 2025, ASC co-sponsored a timely panel discussion titled “The Geopolitics of Critical Minerals: Balancing Security, Sustainability, and Growth,” hosted by the Weiser Diplomacy Center at the University of Michigan’s Ford School of Public Policy. This event brought together experts to examine the escalating global competition over essential minerals such as cobalt, lithium, and rare earth elements—







resources vital to clean energy technologies and digital infrastructure.

Moderated by Ambassador Susan D. Page, Professor of Practice in International Diplomacy at the Ford School, the discussion featured Boubacar Bocoum, a leading expert in extractive industries. The conversation delved into the geopolitical tensions surrounding mineral supply chains, the environmental and social challenges of extraction, and the imperative of ensuring that resource-rich countries, particularly in Africa, benefit equitably from their natural wealth. The event highlighted the critical need for policies that promote transparency, sustainability, and shared prosperity in the global race for critical minerals.

## African Languages Day!

In March, ASC and DAAS co-hosted African Languages Day at the Trotter Multicultural Center. The event featured vibrant presentations and performances by students studying Swahili and Yoruba, celebrating the richness of African linguistic and cultural heritage. Attendees experienced poetry, music, and storytelling that highlighted the importance of language in connecting communities across the African continent and its diaspora. Professors Kelly Askew, Derek R. Peterson, and Thad A. Polk, Collegiate Professorship Inaugural Lecture

On March 12, 2025, ASC co-sponsored a Collegiate Professorship Inaugural Lecture featuring Professors Kelly Askew, Derek R. Peterson, and Thad A. Polk. Held at Weiser Hall, the event showcased interdisciplinary scholarship across African studies, history, anthropology, and psychology. Professor Askew, the Niara Sudarkasa Collegiate Professor of Anthropology and Afroamerican & African Studies, presented "Art in Adversity: Swahili Poetry, Philosophy & Political Action," exploring Swahili poetry as a form of political expression in East Africa. Professor Peterson, the Ali Mazrui Collegiate Professor of History and African Studies, delivered "A Popular History of Idi Amin's Uganda," analyzing the regime's transformation of governance into a

populist movement. Professor Polk, the Samuel D. Epstein Collegiate Professor of Psychology, discussed "The Aging Brain: Age-related Changes in Neurochemistry, Neural Activity, and Behavior," highlighting research on cognitive aging and brain function. The event underscored the University of Michigan's commitment to interdisciplinary research and the global impact of its faculty's work.

## Winter 2025 UMAPS Colloquium Series Highlights Innovations in Health, Development, and Culture

The Winter 2025 UMAPS Research Colloquium continued to spotlight cutting-edge scholarship from across Africa, with three sessions held in March and April under themes ranging from global health to sustainable development and cultural transformation.

The first session, *Innovative Approaches to Overcoming Barriers in Global Health*, explored intersections of behavior, technology, and public health. Presentations addressed mental health among healthcare workers, STI treatment-seeking behavior, abortion self-assessment practices, and the role of food culture in malnutrition, revealing both local complexities and broader global implications. Session two, *Innovations and Transformations in Sustainable Development*, featured research on Ghana's sugar industry, African financial markets, renewable energy alternatives, and environmental remediation using nanocomposites. These talks highlighted creative, interdisciplinary solutions to some of the continent's most pressing environmental and economic challenges. The final session, *Cultural Dynamics and Social Transformation*, brought forward bold perspectives on identity, ritual, and resilience. Scholars explored themes such as the criminalization of cross-dressing in Nigeria, African ritual theater, post-crisis livelihoods in Zimbabwe, and participatory urban design in South Africa.

Together, the Winter 2025 presentations showcased the UMAPS program's continued commitment to fostering research that is rooted in local contexts while offering insights with global relevance.

## 2025 International Institute Graduation and Reception Ceremony

On May 1, 2025, ASC joined the University of Michigan's International Institute in celebrating the achievements of its graduates at the annual International

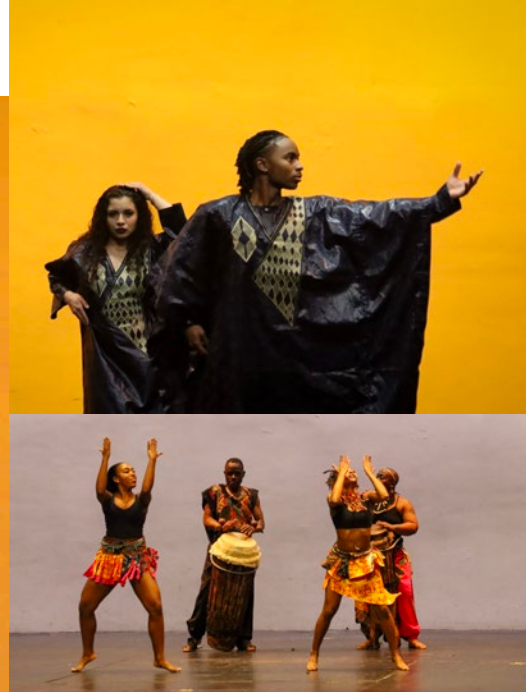


Institute Graduation and Reception Ceremony. Held at the historic Michigan Theater in downtown Ann Arbor, the event honored students completing degrees and certificates in Fall 2024, Winter 2025, and Summer 2025. The ceremony recognized graduates from the undergraduate Program in International and Comparative Studies (PICS), the Masters in International and Regional Studies (MIRS), and area studies programs affiliated with the International Institute, including ASC. The evening featured a reception followed by a formal ceremony, celebrating the diverse academic accomplishments and global perspectives of the graduating cohort.

## Global Health Summer Institute 2025: Innovate Global Health: Technology and Transformation

In May 2025, ASC co-sponsored the University of Michigan School of Nursing's Global Health Summer Institute, themed "Innovate Global Health: Technology and Transformation." This two-day virtual event, held on May 12 and 13, brought together global health professionals, researchers, and advocates to explore the intersection of innovation, technology, and health equity. Participants engaged in interdisciplinary keynotes, breakout sessions tailored to clinical practice and policy, and flash presentations highlighting innovative ideas. The institute emphasized skill-building in program development, evaluation, and advocacy, fostering a collaborative environment for networking across disciplines and regions. Real-time captions were provided in multiple languages, enhancing accessibility for a diverse international audience. Attendees also had the opportunity to earn up to 7.0 Nursing Contact Hours for Continuing Professional Development and received a Certificate of Attendance from the School of Nursing. ASC's involvement underscored its commitment to advancing global health initiatives and promoting interdisciplinary collaboration.

# REFLECTION OF THE AFRICAN STUDENTS ASSOCIATION'S 2024/2025 ACADEMIC SCHOOL YEAR



The University of Michigan's African Students Association (ASA) had an impactful year filled with exciting, informative, and immersive programming heavily featuring themes centering around community-building for students. The 26th Annual Culture Show, *Journey Through Africa*, was a vibrant celebration of diverse African heritages and culture through the use of storytelling, fashion, dance, and music. Held at Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre, the show offered a rich, immersive experience that educated and entertained a wide, diverse audience. In collaboration with EnspiRED, ASA hosted the Final Flame: Summer Send-Off Bonfire, a relaxed gathering that encouraged networking connections among students. To promote unity between the different schools, ASA collaborated with MSU's African Student Union for Afrorollerama, a roller-skating event that gave students a chance to unwind and build friendships outside of their own school community. ASA also received a public shout-out from Umar Johnson, Special Education Consultant, FDMG CEO, who endorsed their culture show and helped elevate its visibility. In the days leading up to the performance, ASA and the East African Students Association co-hosted Eating with ASA x EASA,

offering students a chance to enjoy traditional foods and connect. Each of these events reflected ASA's commitment to fostering cultural pride and inclusivity on campus. Through creativity, collaboration, and community, ASA has successfully brought many different African cultures to the forefront within the running of their organization in order to share them with the wider school community. Their accomplishments this year have set a strong foundation for future impact, which they intend to work hard on preserving this coming academic year.

## **ASA 26th Annual Culture Show: *Journey Through Africa***

The 26th annual ASA Culture Show, titled "*Journey Through Africa*," brings the richness of the African continent and its diaspora to life through theatrical storytelling, vibrant traditional and modern fashion showcases, dynamic dance, and live musical performances. Hosted at the Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre on Sunday, February 23rd, 2025, the event offered attendees an immersive experience highlighting diverse African heritage and creative expression across centuries of the continent's existence. Through this celebration, ASA aimed to foster greater cultural understanding and appreciation of various African Cultures within the continent's many regions.





### ASA x Enspired Final Flame: Summer Send-Off Bonfire

The Final Flame: Summer Send-Off Bonfire was a collaboration bonfire event hosted by the African Students Association and Enspired, a fashion organization here at the University of Michigan, on Saturday September 7th, 2024. The event was a relaxed, end-of-summer gathering held at The Standard Apartment Clubhouse that featured a cozy bonfire where students can connect with their peers, meet some new friends, unwind, and celebrate the close of the summer season from 6–10 p.m.



### U-M ASA x MSU ASU Present: Afrorollerama Roller Skating Party

As a way to de-stress from Midterms, the U-M African Students Association (ASA) collaborated with the African Student Union (ASU) of Michigan State University to organize the Afrorollerama Roller Skating that took place at the Rollerama Skating Center on Saturday November 9, 2024 from 10 PM-12 AM. Students from both organizations took part to connect with each other, skate, enjoy some music, and had a chance to unwind from school for a bit!







### ASA Annual Culture Show: Celebrity Endorsement From Dr. Umar

On February 4, 2025, some of the E-Board members from ASA attended a Dr. Umar Event in which afterwards, were able to receive a picture with Dr. Umar who freely promoted the upcoming Culture Show at the time to encourage more people to attend the Journey Through Africa Event!

### Eating with ASA x EASA

In gearing up excitement for Culture Show, ASA collaborated with the East African Students Association to host an Eating with ASA x EASA event where all students were welcomed to enjoy various dishes from the African Diaspora. The event took place Wednesday February 19, 2026 at the Afro-American Ambantana Lounge in South Quad. The event served as a relaxed space for students to try a variety of foods, connect and meet new people, and take a nice and tasteful break from school.



## ROSS AFRICA BUSINESS CONFERENCE 2025: SPOTLIGHTING INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY IN AFRICA'S BUSINESS LANDSCAPE



On February 2, 2025, the Ross School of Business hosted the Africa Business Conference, bringing together over 80 entrepreneurs, investors, students, and professionals from across the University of Michigan and peer institutions nationwide. Organized under the theme “Doing Business in Africa: Opportunities, Challenges, and Strategies for Success,” the conference offered a dynamic platform to explore Africa’s economic future, the realities of operating in diverse markets across the continent, and the global significance of African-led innovation.

The day opened with powerful keynote addresses by Zeynab Diakite, regional lead for Mastercard’s Middle East and Africa division, and Aaron Aboagye, managing partner at McKinsey & Company. Both speakers shared personal insights and strategic reflections on navigating Africa’s fast-changing business environment, stressing the importance of inclusive growth, digital transformation, and context-specific solutions.

Four thought-provoking panel discussions followed, each delving into a key sector driving Africa’s development. In “Building the Foundations,” panelists examined the role of infrastructure investment, enabling policy, and community-centered approaches in promoting long-term economic stability. “Easing Business Operations” highlighted the rapid transformation of Africa’s





The session ‘Localized Solutions for Global Challenges’ featured African entrepreneurs who challenged dominant local and global narratives and emphasized the importance of culturally grounded business models tailored to African realities.



financial systems, with innovations in mobile payments and digital finance creating new pathways for economic inclusion.

The “Energy Now & Next” panel focused on Africa’s renewable energy potential, spotlighting ESG-driven strategies and the continent’s leadership in decentralized, clean energy solutions. Perhaps the most compelling session of the day, “Localized Solutions for Global Challenges,” featured African entrepreneurs who have launched successful ventures addressing both local and global problems. Their stories challenged dominant narratives and emphasized the importance of culturally grounded business models tailored to African realities.

In addition to panel discussions, the conference featured a vibrant Business Expo, showcasing startups redefining sectors from agriculture to fintech. The Osagyefo’ Experience, a storytelling session inspired by African oral traditions, offered a powerful reflection on how heritage and identity shape business practices, reinforcing the cultural dimensions of entrepreneurship.

The day concluded with a Networking Cocktail Reception, where students, business leaders, and speakers connected over shared interests and sparked new collaborations. Feedback from attendees reflected the event’s depth and resonance, with many noting the practical insights and fresh perspectives they gained on investing and innovating in Africa.

The African Studies Center (ASC) at the University of Michigan was instrumental in making the conference a success, providing critical funding and logistical support. This collaboration underscored ASC’s commitment to fostering meaningful academic and professional engagement with Africa and to supporting initiatives that elevate African voices, expertise, and enterprise on the global stage.

The 2025 Ross Africa Business Conference served not only as a forum for dialogue and exchange, but as a catalyst for action—encouraging attendees to rethink conventional approaches, build equitable partnerships, and recognize Africa as a driver of innovation, growth, and global relevance.



# REFLECTIONS FROM THE 2025 ALTA CONFERENCE



The 2025 African Language Teachers Association (ALTA) Conference, held April 10–12, 2025, at the University of Pittsburgh, brought together educators, scholars, and language practitioners from across the globe. Among the attendees were several representatives from the University of Michigan, including faculty and Fulbright Language Teaching Assistants (FLTAs). Their experiences at the conference reflect the value of this gathering not only as a professional development opportunity, but as a site for community-building, innovation, and celebration.

## LEADERSHIP AND VISION GABRIEL AYOOLA

For Professor Gabriel Ayoola, the conference was a culmination of leadership, collaboration, and strategic thinking. As a presenter, he shared his expertise on Yoruba language pedagogy, translation, and the future of African literature. As co-chair of the conference planning committee and vice president of ALTA, he played a central role in shaping the event's direction. "I witnessed firsthand the collective energy and collaboration that brought the event to life," Ayoola shared. The closing dinner was a particularly proud moment, as he was officially inaugurated as President of ALTA. "I left Pittsburgh inspired by the work of my colleagues and newly committed to advancing visibility and excellence in the teaching of African languages."

## PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATIONS AND COLLABORATION MAGDALYNE AKIDING

Professor Magdalyn Akiding found the conference especially meaningful for its focus on current trends in language pedagogy. She highlighted a compelling opening workshop on technology in language teaching, where discussions around gamification and AI offered fresh ideas for the classroom. Throughout the sessions, she gained insight into both instructional strategies and

the lived experiences of newer educators, including Fulbright FLTAs. A standout moment was seeing Ayoola assume the ALTA's presidency.

"We are very proud that the president is now from our institution," she said, noting hopes to host a future ALTA conference at U-M with support from ASC and DAAS.

She extended gratitude to ASC and DAAS for their logistical and financial support, which made participation seamless and impactful.

## BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND COMMUNITY DAUDI AKAMA

For Swahili FLTA Daudi Akama, this was his first time attending the ALTA conference, and it proved both affirming and instructional. "I had a chance to meet university lecturers and professors teaching Swahili at different universities inside and outside the United States," he reflected. From the sessions he attended, he took away valuable teaching techniques emphasizing student engagement—such as pair discussions, music, and active listening. He also appreciated discussions about leveraging cognates and multilingual roots of Swahili to ease language learning. Daudi expressed appreciation to DAAS and ASC for supporting FLTA inclusion, recommending future FLTAs take advantage of the opportunity.



## STUDENT PERSPECTIVES AND RENEWED PURPOSE ABIOLA OYEDEJI

Fellow Yoruba FLTA Abiola Oyedeji described the conference as "a truly enlightening experience." A highlight for her was the student panel session, which offered a rare glimpse into learner expectations. "It prompted me to reflect deeply on how to better support my students," she said. In addition to pedagogical insights, the conference doubled as a reunion for many FLTAs from across the country, offering space for personal connection and professional networking.

## Looking Ahead: A Community Strengthened

Though each participant brought their own unique perspective, what united the group's reflections was a shared sense of purpose and inspiration. As Ayoola steps into his new role as ALTA President, and as conversations continue about hosting a future conference at Michigan, the momentum from Pittsburgh continues to ripple outward. With support from the African Studies Center and the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies, the University of Michigan continues to play an active role in shaping the future of African language education.



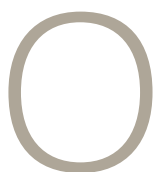
From the top: Daudi Akama, Magdalyn Akiding, and Gabriel Ayoola



The teaching team from African Language Day (from left to right): Daudi Akama, Marko Mwipopo, Abiola Oyedeji, Gabriel Ayoola, and Magdalayne Akiding



## CELEBRATING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE: AFRICA DAY 2025 AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



On March 28, 2025, the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies (DAAS), in partnership with the African Studies Center (ASC), Language Resource Center

(LRC), and student groups ASA and AGSA, hosted the annual Africa Day celebration at the Trotter Multicultural Center. The event brought together language students, faculty, and community members to honor the richness of African cultures and languages through a vibrant program of performances, speeches, and food.

Planning for the event involved months of collaboration among faculty, staff, and students. Led by instructors Magdalayne Akiding, Marko Mwipopo, Gabriel Ayoola, and Elsa Olander—with coordination support from Marwa Hassan—the program featured over a dozen student performances in Swahili and Yoruba, including poetry, skits, cultural fashion showcases, and recorded presentations. Special remarks were offered by faculty and invited guests, with recognition extended to the many individuals and units that support African language instruction at U-M.



The celebration concluded with a communal meal of Mozambican cuisine and a moment of connection, reflection, and appreciation for African languages and the communities that sustain them.

**What an amazing celebration of culture and language! It was such a joy to see our students bring African languages to life through powerful skits and heartfelt songs. Their energy, creativity, and pride made African Language Day truly unforgettable!**

**Gabriel Ayoola**, Yoruba Instructor

**The beauty of African Languages Day is that students not only get to showcase their language skills but also get to watch their peers do the same, and I believe that bolsters their confidence as language learners because they can see that they are not doing it alone.**

**Magdalayne Akiding**, Yoruba Instructor

Swahili instructor Marko Mwipopo and FLTA Daudi Akama, dressed in vibrant African attire, pose with Swahili students as they prepare to perform their skits.

**Another memorable part of my experience was African Day—a vibrant celebration of African heritage and cultural diversity hosted at the African Study center and the Department of Afro American and African Studies. I had the wonderful opportunity of guiding students in showcasing East African cultures through music, dance, fashion, and drama. This cultural immersion allowed me to introduce the richness of Swahili culture to a broader audience while also learning about the traditions and values of other African communities represented on campus. Being part of this vibrant academic community at the University of Michigan has reinforced my dedication to teaching and my passion for promoting global citizenship through intercultural exchange.**

**Daudi Akama**, Swahili FLTA

# STUDENT SUPPORT

The African Studies Center (ASC) is proud to offer financial support for its students to pursue enriching academic endeavors including studying African languages, conducting research projects in Africa, and attending conferences.

## FLAS Funding

Thanks to the generous support of the US Department of Education's Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) program, more and more U-M students are able to receive federal funding to study Swahili, Yoruba, and other African languages. Administered by ASC as part of the Department of Education's Title VI programs, these generous fellowships have enabled U-M to expand and promote the study of African languages on campus. FLAS recipients are able to dedicate significant time in their undergraduate or graduate school careers to the study of less commonly taught languages and their associated regional histories, cultures, and literary traditions. This year, ASC was able to grant eight new FLAS fellowships for the 2025–2026 year. Congratulations to all new FLAS awardees!

## Undergraduate Students

### Annika Heflin

ECONOMICS, SWAHILI

### Riley Sischo

AFRO-AMERICAN AND AFRICAN STUDIES, SWAHILI

### Alexandra Odunuga

POLITICAL SCIENCE, YORUBA ACADEMIC YEAR AND SUMMER PROGRAM

## Graduate Students

### Annissa Kebede

MIRS PROGRAM, SWAHILI

### James Johnson

MIRS PROGRAM, ARABIC

### John McNeil

MIRS PROGRAM, PORTUGUESE

### Gathesha Kambi, PhD

ARABIC SUMMER PROGRAM

## IISF Funding

In the 2024–2025 academic year, ASC awarded a total of \$30,798.40 to 8 students through the International Research & Internship Opportunities program within the international institute. These competitive grants help fund student research and i

nternships abroad. In 2024–2025, students traveled to seven countries, representing four U-M schools and colleges and a wide diversity of research topics.

The funded projects are as follows:

### Timilehin Ayelagbe

PHD PRE-CANDIDATE, LSA ANTHROPOLOGY

*Project Title:* Commerce, Environment, and Sociopolitical Dynamics: A Preliminary Archaeological Investigation of the Udo Moat within the Benin Moat System

### Moses Cheyaden

MASTER'S STUDENT: TAUBMAN URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING

*Project Title:* The Role of the Built Environment in Conflict and Coexistence: A Study of Rwanda

### Norah Langat

PHD PRE-CANDIDATE: LSA HISTORY

*Project Title:* Exiled Laibons, Dispossessed Squatters: The Kipsigis Land Question 1930–1980

### Aberdeen Leary

MASTER'S STUDENT: ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY- ECOSYSTEM SCIENCE & MANAGEMENT; ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

*Project Title:* Impacts of artisanal and small-scale gold mining on human-wildlife relationships in Ghana.

### Kabelo Sandile Motsoeneng

PHD PRE-CANDIDATE: LSA ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

*Project Title:* Staging Memory & Remembrance in South African Street Art, Museums, and Literature

### Rowan Sherwood

PHD CANDIDATE: LSA ANTHROPOLOGY

*Project Title:* A 3D Geometric Morphometric Approach to Quantifying Limb Integration: Implications for Ape Evolution

### Hanae Soma

PHD PRE-CANDIDATE: TAUBMAN URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING

*Project Title:* Power Rich or Power Poor? Women in Informal Settlements and Gendered Experiences in Property Governance of Urban Ghana

### Eliza Steinberg

MASTER'S STUDENT: ENGINEERING - DESIGN SCIENCE

*Project Title:* Developing a device for quantifying uterine blood loss for the diagnosis of postpartum hemorrhage in Ghana—A Participatory Approach

## Kelly Askew African Language Scholarship

As U-M has expanded its African language programs in recent years, students have jumped at the opportunity to study Swahili and Yoruba from world-class instructors on campus. To aid in their efforts, the Kelly Askew Language Scholarship offers financial support for undergraduate and graduate students to study an African language for a whole academic year. Each awardee receives \$1,000 conditional on the successful completion of two semesters of language study. The scholarship is named for Kelly Askew, chair of the U-M anthropology department and former director of ASC, whose enthusiasm for African studies and skill in the Swahili language have inspired students throughout her career.

Below are the sixteen students awarded a Kelly Askew Language Scholarship for the 2024–2025 academic year:

### Swahili

Arice Burton  
Chila Greenlee  
Daisy Robertson  
Gabrielle Kiminyo  
James Johnson  
Marthe Djilo Kamga  
Mela Binford  
Rachel Rubanguka Hoops  
Serafin Taber  
Sohair Holman  
Yajie Xu  
Ajia Riley Gunn  
Eric Yeung

### Yoruba

Esther Olayade  
Josephine Amakye  
Leah Ankutse  
Oluwatosin Oyelade



## Conference Travel Grant

ASC is proud to support students as they share their Africa-related research with broader audiences across the country and around the world. This year, ASC awarded \$11,000 to 21 students to present their work at academic conferences. These students represented 14 disciplines and areas of study, including Health Infrastructures and Learning Systems, School of Information, Anthropology, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Medicine, FTVM, Design Science, Romance Languages and Literatures, School for Environment and Sustainability, Musicology, Linguistics, Middle East Studies, LSA, Ross Business School. They attended important professional conferences in the US, Canada, France, Australia, Portugal, and South Africa. Here are some outcomes shared by those students

### HONORS STUDENT

#### Charlotte Manning

Attending the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) was a truly unique experience that allowed me to engage with Indigenous leaders, advocates, and representatives from around the world. Participating in both the main forum sessions and side events, I gained first hand exposure to the materials, testimonies, and advocacy strategies shared by Indigenous communities. These interactions broadened my understanding of the common struggles Indigenous peoples face, such as the defense of sovereignty, sacred lands, and cultural heritage, while also highlighting the diverse approaches they employ in their resistance and resilience.

This experience directly enriched my advocacy work with the Violations Against Indigenous Africa research team at the University of Michigan. It offered a rare opportunity to speak with representatives from communities affected by the very human rights violations we study. Attending the forum strengthened my understanding of the role international institutions can play in amplifying Indigenous voices, an especially important task in the digital 21st century.

**Charlotte Manning (left) and Ashley Smith (right) at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.**

### LSA ANTHROPOLOGY STUDENT

#### Ashley Smith

Receiving ASC funding to attend the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in New York City was a transformative experience that significantly shaped my academic and professional trajectory. The opportunity allowed me to engage directly with African Indigenous leaders from across the continent, gaining first hand insight into their lived experiences, advocacy efforts, and the systemic challenges they face. These conversations deepened my understanding of Indigenous struggles beyond what is taught in the classroom and reinforced the importance of amplifying marginalized voices in global policy discussions. Attending the UNPFII with the support of ASC not only expanded my global network but also solidified my commitment to a career in international studies and human rights. It was a rare and powerful space where theory met practice, where the research I had conducted as part of my academic work intersected with real-world advocacy. This experience sharpened my sense of purpose and clarified my role in promoting equity and justice on an international scale. The impact of the conference continues to shape my academic pursuits and my dedication to representing communities that are too often left out of global conversations.



### FILM, TELEVISION AND MEDIA STUDENT

#### Egor Korneev

This summer, thanks to the generous support of the African Studies Center, I traveled to Cape Town, South Africa, to present at the biennial conference of the International Association for Media and History (iAMHIST), held from June 30 to July 2, 2025. Titled "Decentering Media Histories and Practices," the conference brought together leading media historians from Southern Africa, Europe, North America, South America, and Asia. It offered a dynamic platform to share my research on television drama and Islamic history in modern Egypt—a topic that sits at the intersection of mass media, cultural memory, and historical imagination in the Middle East.

My presentation focused on the genre of Islamic historical drama (*musalsalat diniyya tarikhiyya*) and its role in shaping collective understandings of the Arab-Islamic past in 20th-century Egypt. These dramas, which aired widely during the month of Ramadan between the 1960s and 2000s, became key vehicles for presenting a mass-mediated vision of Islamic history, sparking public debate about religion, identity, and historical representation. At the conference, I shared my preliminary findings on the origins, development, and reception of this genre with scholars working on media histories from around the world. The feedback I received during the panel and afterward was incredibly thoughtful and encouraging—reminding me of how resonant and relevant this topic is within broader conversations about media and society.

Beyond presenting, attending iAMHIST allowed me to connect with scholars whose research intersects with mine in surprising and exciting ways. I had rich discussions with colleagues working on underexplored media traditions, who introduced me to new theoretical approaches and even pointed me to archival sources I had not previously encountered. These exchanges were intellectually invigorating and have already begun to shape the next phase of my project. Without the ASC's support, I wouldn't have been able to attend this international gathering. I'm truly grateful for the opportunity to share my work, gain fresh insights, and build a network of collaborators committed to rethinking global media histories.





## CONGRATULATIONS TO 2025 MIRS: AFRICAN SPECIALIZATION GRADUATE **OMOWUMI BANJO**

Omowumi Banjo graduated from the Masters in International and Regional Studies Program (MIRS) specializing in African Studies. While in the MIRS program, she received funding to travel to Nigeria for her research on gender-based domestic violence: media intervention in conflict settlement.” She also received the Lester Monts Scholarship honorable mention for her paper on “Rites of Passage: Yoruba Kingship Coronation.”

As she completed her U-M master’s degree, Banjo reflected on an intellectually transformative journey rooted in interdisciplinary scholarship and a deepening commitment to African studies.

Drawn to the MIRS program for its integration of theory and practice, Banjo sought an environment where she could engage deeply with global and regional issues from multiple perspectives. “The University of Michigan stood out,” she shared, “because of its strong academic reputation, diverse faculty expertise, and a wealth of resources. I knew I would be challenged—and supported—to grow as both a scholar and a practitioner.”

Throughout the program, Banjo immersed herself in coursework and research that offered a rich, nuanced understanding of Africa’s histories, politics, cultures, and development trajectories. She credits the program with honing her critical thinking and expanding her ability to engage directly with African contexts through archival research, fieldwork, political analysis, and cross-cultural dialogue.

In particular, she valued the opportunity to work closely with faculty affiliated with the African Studies Center and the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies, participate in seminars and collaborative projects, and explore African social movements and economic transformations in a global perspective. These experiences sparked her aspiration to pursue doctoral studies focused on domestic violence and trauma management in Africa.

Banjo also expressed deep appreciation for the supportive community at U-M, including ASC, MIRS, DAAS, and the South Africa Initiative Office. She noted the important role of the Heleniak-Carstarphen Graduate Student Scholars Fund in making her academic journey possible. “I am truly grateful for the unwavering support I received,” she said. “This program has not only prepared me for the next stage of my academic path but has shaped the way I approach knowledge, advocacy, and global engagement.”

## INCOMING MIRS COHORT **NYANKOOR TIMOTHY**

I’m Nyankoor Timothy and from Lincoln, Nebraska. I recently graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a BA in political science.

Growing up, my parents instilled a love for education, culture, and reading in me. During college, my professors instilled a passion for research, human rights, and service learning in me. I was drawn to the MIRS program and African studies for those same reasons. The faculty are amazing professionals who’ve worked in fields that I plan to pursue: law, research, education, and policy.

In academia, I noticed that the history of South Sudanese either begins at the Sudanese Civil Wars,

the mass refugee resettlement initiatives, or on and after July 9, 2011. As a researcher, it was frustrating to find data or information I could include, which prompted me to pursue a master’s degree. Our history didn’t begin at these points; we have always been around. I would like to address



these gaps with storytelling from community members, leaders, and the diaspora and U-M can help develop the skills to do so. Hopefully, 20 years from now, researchers can have a simpler time with our history.

I believe it’s my responsibility to hold the door open for the next person after I’ve walked through. From 2020-2024, I served as the founding director of ROSS Leaders Lincoln chapter by providing programs and events to the local community through academic support, career exploration, cultural engagement, and health & wellness. I plan on continuing community advocacy, just through a different avenue.





IN MEMORIAM

## TIMOTHY R.B. JOHNSON

1954–2025

Dr. Timothy Robert Bradley Johnson, whose visionary career bridged continents and disciplines, passed away on May 27, 2025. A dedicated leader in obstetrics, gynecology, and global health, he leaves behind a legacy of transformative impact, particularly across sub-Saharan Africa.

### Global Champion for Women's Health & Leadership in Medicine

Dr. Johnson served as chair of obstetrics and gynecology and Bates Professor of Diseases of Women and Children at the University of Michigan from 1993 to 2017. He later held the title of Arthur F. Thurnau Distinguished Teaching Professor and held faculty positions in women's and gender studies and at the Center for Human Growth and Development. From 1981 to 1985, he also served as a Major in the U.S. Air Force Medical Corps and was honored as an honorary nurse midwife by the USAF Nurse Midwifery Programme in 1985.

As a global advocate for women's reproductive health, Johnson played integral roles at the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO). He was Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* from 2007 to 2014, later contributing to FIGO's Safe Abortion Committee, and earned the organization's Distinguished Merit Award.

### Architect of Global Health Education & Systems Strengthening

Johnson's efforts echo around the world. He launched groundbreaking academic partnerships in Ghana and Ethiopia, dramatically reducing maternal mortality by training local OB-GYNs and reinforcing healthcare infrastructures. Michigan Medicine noted,

"Generations...owe their health and well-being today to [Dr. Johnson]...matched only by his devotion to helping young health workers grow."

His conceptual framework at the University of Michigan—based on trust, sustainability, mutual respect, and accountability—made it a model of ethical, equitable global engagement. Cheryl Moyer, Global REACH's associate director, shared how he would "list people the student should connect with, sending emails and making phone calls... putting his stamp of approval on projects to guarantee their success."

Dr. Johnson also guided hundreds of trainees—undergraduates, med students, residents, and fellows—in the U.S. and Ghana. Many continue his vision as faculty, multiplying his impact through their own leadership.

### A Legacy of Mentorship & Compassionate Leadership

Colleagues and mentees recall him as "a true visionary who made the world a better place for women" and "a terrific mentor and human being." Ed Goldman, MD, shared how Johnson recruited him to Michigan's OB-GYN department and set him on the path to reproductive justice, ultimately launching international collaborations. Many remember him as a gentle scholar who always asked after family and work, and whose presence was a blessing to those around him.

Reflecting on his philosophy, Johnson said: "I've been able to teach and I've been able to train people to become teachers. So this is a story about the multiplier effect."

### A Continuing Beacon of Inspiration

For over four decades, Dr. Johnson embodied a lifelong devotion: "medical excellence...matched only by his devotion to helping young health workers grow to provide the care that any mother needs, no matter their postal code or wallet size" ([linkedin.com](#)). His influence stretches across borders, eras, and disciplines, inspiring a generation of global health leaders to carry forward his values of mentorship, equity, and excellence.



Among his many recognitions, Johnson received the Association of Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics (APGO) Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012 in Orlando.



## AFRICAN STUDIES CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

500 Church Street, Suite 500  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1042  
[asc-contact@umich.edu](mailto:asc-contact@umich.edu)  
[ii.umich.edu/asc](http://ii.umich.edu/asc)

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*Alliances* is produced annually by the African Studies Center (ASC). It features ASC's activities of the previous year, news about the center's initiatives, ASC associates and their research, ASC-funded student projects and internships, and collaborative partnerships related to Africa and the Michigan impact.

If you wish to receive a printed copy, please send a request to:  
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