

BHP Meets Vice President Gaolathe



BHP entourage pose for a picture with Vice President Ndaba Gaolathe

On April 9, 2025, the Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) leadership paid a courtesy visit to His Honour the Vice President of Botswana, Mr Ndaba Gaolathe, who also serves as Minister of Finance. The engagement aimed to strengthen collaboration between government and the research community in advancing health research, capacity building, and evidence-based policymaking. The meeting took place at the Vice President's office at the Ministry of Finance.

Leading the BHP delegation was Chief Executive Officer Dr Joseph Makhema, who highlighted BHP's central role in conducting medical research and translating findings into policies and practices that bolster Botswana's and global health systems. "Our mandate is to generate

evidence through scientific research to inform health policy and improve health care delivery," Dr Makhema said.

BHP Deputy CEO, Dr Gaerolwe Masheto, provided an overview of the organization's ongoing clinical trials and their impact on health outcomes in the country. He also outlined BHP's contributions to capacity building, including partnerships with U.S. based institutions to host programs such as the Internal Medicine capacity building initiative at Scottish Livingstone Hospital in Molepolole and Obstetrics & Gynaecology, and Anaesthesia programs at Princess Marina Hospital in Gaborone. He indicated these programs not only offer critical training for the doctors but also provide additional clinical support to local hospitals.

BHP Laboratory Director and renowned virologist Prof. Sikhulile Moyo elaborated on BHP's training initiatives aimed at nurturing the next generation of scientists. He noted that BHP, in collaboration with local and regional universities, supports Master's and PhD students through various training and capacity-building grants.

"Capacity building is core to our mission. We want to ensure Botswana and the region have the scientific leadership required to tackle current and emerging health challenges," said Prof. Moyo.

Chief of Operations at BHP also briefed the Vice President on the institute's funding model, noting the heavy reliance on highly competitive international research grants, a model that poses sustainability

challenges.

In response, Vice President Gaolathe expressed appreciation for BHP's longstanding contribution to Botswana's health landscape and acknowledged the importance of such partnerships in shaping national development.

"It is imperative that institutions like BHP and government work together to leverage each other's strengths and shared resources for greater impact. Your work is vital, and we are committed to supporting efforts that enhance the health and well-being of our people," the Vice President said.

The Vice President further noted that the meeting underscored the importance of continued collaboration between BHP and the government to ensure health innovations translate into tangible improvements for all Botswana.



Vice President Ndaba Gaolathe

BHP Committed to Research and Training Excellence Amid NIH Policy Changes



Joseph Makhema, BHP CEO

The Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) has moved swiftly to manage potential risks following news of a major funding freeze by the United States Government (USG) to [Harvard University](#). The United States Government (USG) has reportedly frozen at least [\\$2.2 billion in funding to Harvard University](#) including the [Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health](#)

which has sub-awards to the BHP. Through various funding mechanisms BHP relies on USG funding for approximately 60% of its total budget, thus the ripple effects of the funding freeze to Harvard University is significant and negatively impacts BHP operations.

The development, which disrupts critical grant funding streams from HSPH to BHP has formally been shared with the staff through a series of meetings and memos issued by BHP Chief Executive Officer, Dr Joseph Makhema, the latest meeting being on the 7th May followed by a memo on the 8th May.

The above development has been reinforced by the issuance of a notice <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-25-104.html> from the National Institutes of Health which effected 1st May 2025 prohibiting disbursement of funds from USG funded institutions to overseas sub-awardees.

"Funding from the USG, primarily through direct grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and subcontracts through Harvard, supports a wide range of research, training, and administrative activities at BHP". Said Dr Makhema addressing the staff. " After

careful consideration and consultation with relevant BHP structures including the board of directors, management has decided to evoke Section 3 of the contract between BHP and its staff: "As stipulated in the contract of employment, the 'position is grant funded and is contingent on continued grant funding and requirements'. Regrettably, due to the cessation of this funding, affected staff have been informed that their employment with Botswana Harvard Partnership will be terminated, **effective 9th May 2025** and they shall transition to serving notice. This termination clause states 'The Employer or Employee shall give the other party one, two or three month notice, or one, two, or three months base salary in lieu of notice, dependent on the length of the contract in the event of early termination of the contract.

"On behalf of the Board of Directors, management is undertaking the above measures with a view to balancing the interests of employees and the long-term viability and survival of BHP while the situation and plans in consultation with study sponsors and respective Principal Investigators are being mapped out on the availability of resources to continue with the completion of research aims for each study that may be affected. In some cases, this may involve transfer of an NIH research grant from a U.S. institution to BHP. In other cases, study sponsors are seeking exemptions from the policy until the new funding mechanism is rolled out.

Ultimately it is hoped that a significant number of BHP staff may be subsequently re-engaged on new terms compliant to the new policy. Meanwhile, be assured that you will be appraised of developments in real time as much as possible," said Dr Makhema.

Meanwhile BHP management and its Board of Directors are implementing several measures aimed at safeguarding operations and ensuring the organisation's survival and sustainability beyond the crisis. These include traditional cost reduction measures; deferred CAPEX, moratorium on new hires/promotions/ increments, Introduction of 36 hr week, and plans for Proportionate Project staff and cost reduction. In addition, management, the Board and Principal Investigators are engaging on an extensive philanthropic drive to fund key areas of BHP scientific, training and administrative operations.

Despite the funding freeze and interruption, BHP is indebted to USG for its contribution towards its development as a premiere clinical, laboratory research and capacity building institute which has generated research outcomes that have strengthened global public health and saved innumerable lives. We at the BHP are confident that the institution shall emerge from this crisis more robust, agile and reconfigured to meet its mandate of being a clinical research and training center of excellence.

FLOURISH Study Reveals Gaps in HIV Testing Among Breastfeeding Mothers

The FLOURISH study has revealed that many breastfeeding mothers who tested HIV-negative during pregnancy are not receiving follow-up HIV testing as recommended by national guidelines. Mothers enrolled in the [FLOURISH study](#), formally titled "Following Longitudinal Outcomes to Understand, Report, Intervene, and Sustain Health for Infants, Children, and Adolescents who are HIV-Exposed but Uninfected," were interviewed once every three months after the birth of their infant and, among other things reporting on whether they were breast or formula feeding their infant since the last study interview, as well as whether or not they had engaged in HIV testing since the last study contact.

The national policy promoting HIV testing every

three months among women who have tested HIV sero-negative in pregnancy and who elect to breastfeed represents a policy designed to ensure that breastfeeding mothers know their HIV status and, in the event of sero-conversion, that infant HIV testing and prophylaxis, and maternal ART is offered in a timely manner. The findings were presented by Samuel W. Kgoale, Head Nurse for the FLOURISH Study, during a poster presentation at the 15th International Workshop on Women and HIV, held in Barcelona, Spain, on April 4–5, 2025.

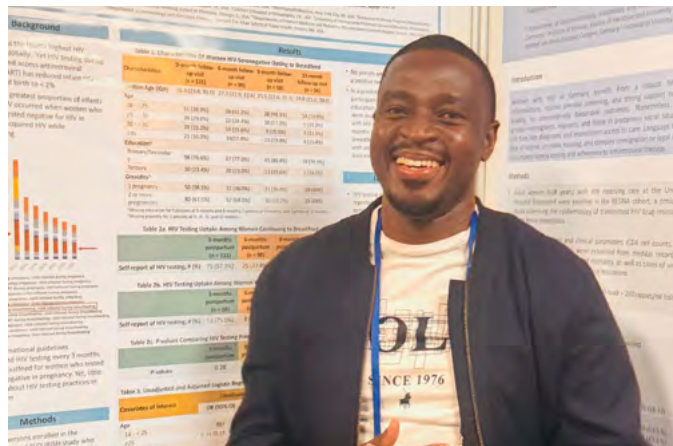
The study tracked 147 pregnant women who initially tested HIV-negative and followed mother-infant pairs up to 12 months postpartum. While 89% of the women were still breastfeeding at three months, only

57% reported having undergone HIV testing during that period. By 12 months, testing had dropped to just 19%, with no significant difference in HIV testing uptake between breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding mothers.

HIV testing uptake was highest around the six-week postpartum health visit, with testing declining sharply thereafter. The study found that none of the demographic characteristics examined, such as age, marital status, or number of pregnancies, were significantly associated with regular HIV testing while breastfeeding. This uptake of HIV testing suggests that many mothers may not perceive themselves to be at ongoing risk of HIV acquisition, or may face challenges in accessing testing services.

None of the women who were tested during the study were found to have a sero-conversion event. However, among those who breastfed for at least six

months, only six adhered to the national guideline of testing every three months. The study calls for more inclusive and responsive strategies that engage mothers in identifying convenient and acceptable ways to encourage consistent HIV testing throughout the postpartum and breastfeeding period.



Samuel W. Kgole FLOURISH Nurse Coordinator

Tuelo Presents Doctoral Thesis in Harare



Tuelo Mogashoa

Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) TAGENDI PhD Fellow, Tuelo Mogashoa recently presented her doctoral research at the TAGENDI Coordinators' and Fellows Workshop held from April 3–4, 2025, at the Pandhari Hotel in Harare, Zimbabwe. TAGENDI—short for TESA Addressing Gender and Diversity Regional Gaps in Clinical Research Capacity, was launched in August 2021 under the broader TESA III initiative. Its goal is to close gender gaps in research leadership by supporting female PhD candidates with mentorship, training, and financial support.

Tuelo's presentation was an update of her PhD thesis

titled *"Whole Genome Sequencing-Based Profiling of Rifampicin-Resistant Mycobacterium tuberculosis Strains by HIV Status in Botswana."* The research aims to use whole genome sequencing (WGS) to characterize rifampicin-resistant tuberculosis (RR-TB) strains and assess the impact of HIV co-infection.

Tuelo highlighted that the dual burden of RR-TB and HIV co-infection poses a significant public health challenge, especially in regions like Botswana with high prevalence rates of both diseases. She emphasized the importance of adopting advanced diagnostic tools such as WGS, which can detect drug resistance mutations that conventional diagnostics may miss. "Implementation of new strategies like WGS is critical for improving global TB control," she noted, "as it can guide more precise and effective treatment strategies."

The workshop was hosted by the Biomedical Research and Training Institute (BRTI) and brought together TAGENDI PhD fellows and coordinators from across Southern Africa. It served as a platform to assess progress under the first phase of the TAGENDI project, strengthen collaboration among partner sites, and prepare for the upcoming TAGENDI II phase.

"This workshop is not just about reviewing progress, it is about reinforcing our commitment to empowering women in science," said Dr. Junior Mutsvangwa, BRTI

Site Principal Investigator. “By providing dedicated support and mentorship to female PhD candidates, we are investing in the future leadership of African health research.”

To date, TAGENDI has recruited eight female PhD candidates from partner countries, offering them personalized support to navigate their doctoral studies and build long-term research careers.

Day two of the workshop featured presentations from fellows, who shared their research topics, challenges, proposed solutions, and key lessons learned. The interactive format allowed for valuable feedback from

TAGENDI Coordinators and Principal Investigators (PIs). Coordinators and PIs also facilitated sessions on manuscript development, covering journal selection, structuring scientific papers, and responding to peer review, as well as operational guidance on communication, fund disbursement, and project execution.

“We want to ensure these brilliant researchers are not only conducting impactful studies, but also equipped with the skills to disseminate their work widely,” said Rodrigues Matcheve, TESA Project Coordinator from Mozambique.

Refresher Training Strengthens Compliance and Efficiency at BHP



Refresher training attendees

On April 27, 2024, the Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) held an all-day hybrid refresher training that brought together staff from across all BHP departments, both in person and virtually, with the goal of strengthening compliance, promoting interdepartmental understanding, and enhancing operational efficiency. The session was led by the Finance, Grants, Human Resources (HR), Procurement, and Communications departments, who

presented key processes and best practices to support the broader BHP team.

In his opening remarks, BHP Chief Operations Officer Cornelius Gaetsaloe commended the initiative and stressed the importance of cross-functional understanding for smoother operations. “Understanding one another’s processes promotes collaboration and brings about efficiency in the workplace,” he said,

encouraging full participation throughout the day.

Grants Officer Doreen Machete provided an overview of the Grants Department's role, focusing particularly on post-award processes. She guided attendees through critical documentation, including the Purchase Requisition Form, Credit Card Authorisation Form, and US Government Awards Travel Exception Form. "Staying compliant creates an ongoing relationship with the awarding institution, which increases the chances of securing future grants," she emphasized.

Procurement Officer, Lorato Bakwadi, representing the Procurement Department, presented on the importance of compliance in procurement processes and walked the team through the documentation required to procure goods and services. She shared that the department, is working to streamline and improve procurement systems.

Finance Department representative, Accountant Karabo Kooreng, reinforced the department's role in ensuring financial accountability and walked staff through finance protocols. From Human Resources, HR Officer Gape Gobuiwang explained the department's responsibilities, including recruitment, employee relations, policy implementation, staff welfare, compensation and benefits administration, HR systems, and insurance schemes. She also highlighted the correct use of HR forms when accessing various services.

Communications Coordinator Tapela Morapedi addressed brand compliance, emphasizing the correct and consistent use of the BHP logo across all platforms and materials. He announced that the Communications Department is reviewing the BHP brand manual, which will be shared with staff for reference. "Proper brand representation helps maintain a unified and professional BHP identity," he stated.

Delivering the vote of thanks, Director of Finance and Grants Dineo Thebe expressed gratitude to all staff who made time to attend, whether in person or online. "BHP has consistently received clean, unqualified audits, and that is a reflection of your commitment to compliance," she said. "You are the ones who implement our policies and processes, and for that, we thank you."

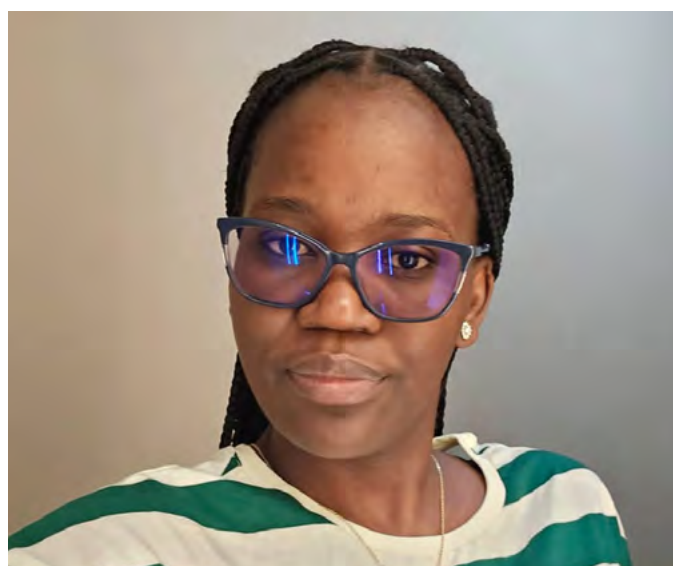
Dineo expressed that the refresher training was a meaningful step toward strengthening collaboration, improving institutional knowledge, and reinforcing BHP's ongoing commitment to excellence and compliance.



Doreen Machete



Lorato Bakwadi



Karabo Kooreng

BHP Participates in Diacore Gaborone Marathon



BHP Team

The Botswana Harvard AIDS Institute Partnership (BHP) proudly participated in the Diacore Gaborone Marathon for the first time on May 4, 2024, marking a significant milestone in the organisation's commitment to staff wellness and team building. The marathon, held at the Grand Palm, brought together thousands of runners, with Team BHP making its debut in style.

A total of 60 BHP staff members registered for the event, with the majority participating in the 10km race. Among the runners were BHP Chief Executive Officer Dr. Joseph Makhema and Board Members Mr Modise Modise and Mr Chris Hughes, who joined colleagues in demonstrating unity, wellness, and institutional pride.

BHP supported the team by covering registration fees for all participants and providing each registered runner with a branded BHP T-shirt, enhancing the organisation's visibility at the event. The team also hosted a refreshments stall, offering drinks and snacks to keep runners energised throughout the morning.

Staff members expressed excitement and appreciation for the opportunity to take part in the event, highlighting the positive impact of the organisation's investment in employee wellbeing. The event not only promoted physical health but also strengthened camaraderie across departments.

"Participating in the Diacore Gaborone Marathon was not just about running a race," said Dr Joseph Makhema, BHP Chief Executive Officer. "It was about promoting wellness, building a sense of unity among our team, and reinforcing our values as an organisation committed to the wellbeing of our people."

Encouraged by the successful turnout, BHP staff have proposed the formation of a running club that will continue to participate in upcoming races to promote fitness. The initiative is expected to promote long-term wellness and foster a culture of teamwork and mutual support within the organisation.

This debut participation aligns with BHP's broader commitment to fostering a healthy and motivated workforce, while also raising public awareness of the organisation's brand and mission.



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VISION

To Be a World-Renowned Public Health Institute.

MISSION

To Fight HIV/AIDS and Emerging Public Health Challenges Through Innovative Research, Education, and Capacity Building That Impacts Policy and Practice.

CORE VALUES

BENEFICENCE
INNOVATION
COLLABORATION
EXCELLENCE
BOTHO

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