

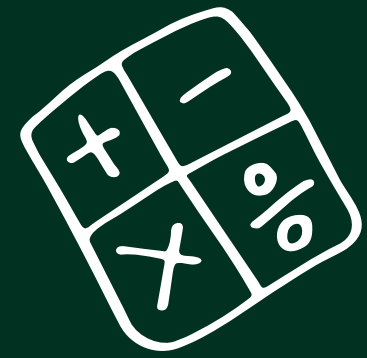
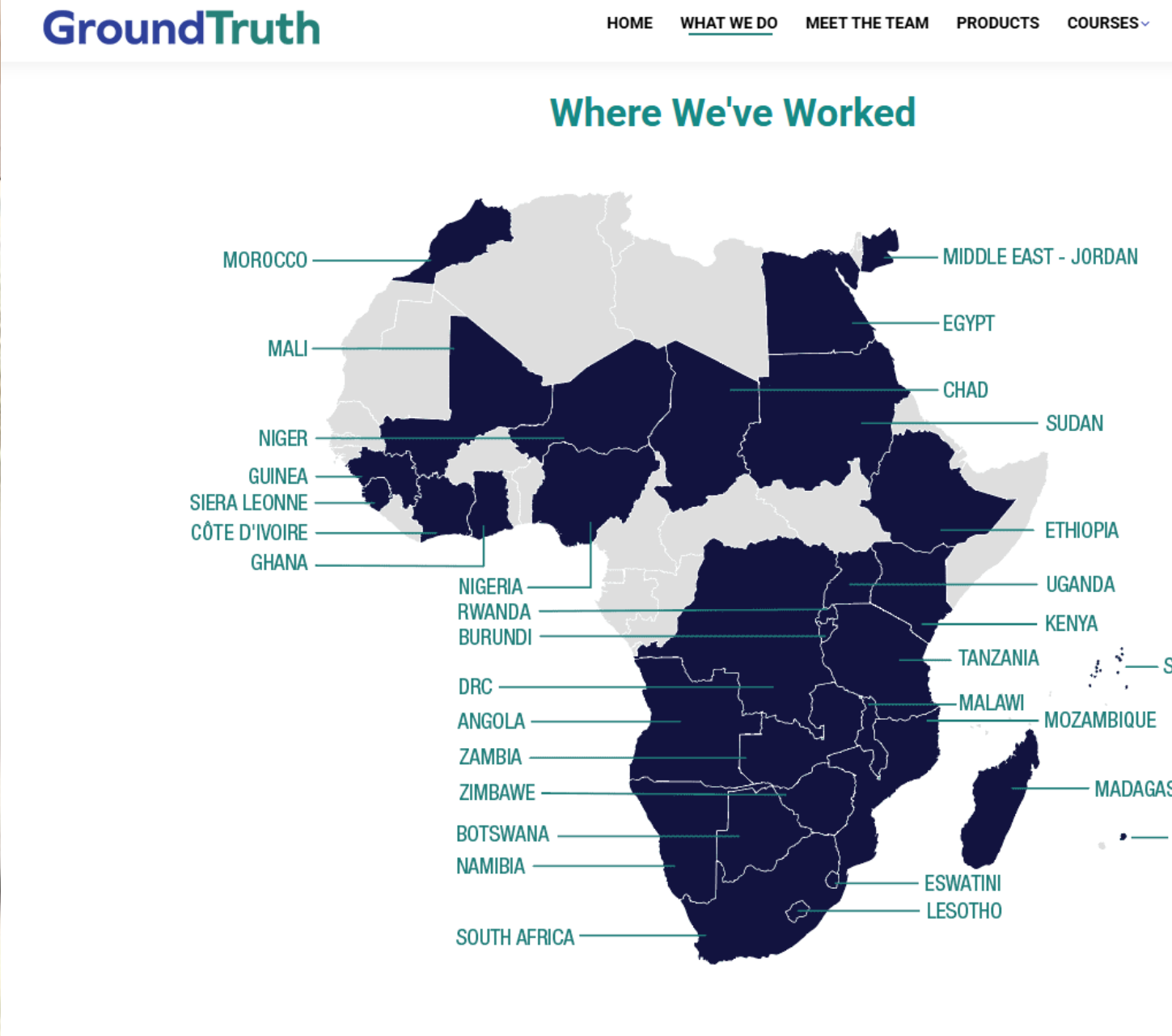
Ubuntu for Interdisciplinary Research

An African philosophy for interdisciplinary, ethical and collaborative practice

Gugulethu Tshabalala



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The Changing Nature of Work (20th → 21st Century)

- The world of work has changed
- Young people are entering a very different workplace
- Shift from manual and routine labour
- To knowledge and digital work (technology as a key driver)
- Over 85% of organisations identify technology adoption and digital access as the main drivers of transformation (World Economic Forum, 2023)
- Employers increasingly require a combination of cognitive and social-emotional skills,
- Linked to better employment outcomes, job performance, and career progression (OECD, 2025)

Globalisation and Mobility

- Work is increasingly
 - International,
 - Collaborative, and
 - Multicultural
- Increasing collaboration across borders
 - Knowledge-intensive fields
 - University and research
- Growing need for communication across cultures and disciplines
- Employers increasingly value
 - Social and emotional skills
 - Alongside technical expertise

Mentimeter Qs

1. Have you worked in a multi-cultural environment (Yes or No)?
2. What technical skills do you think are important?
3. Which of these technical skills do you think are important?
 - 3.1 Data collection and analysis
 - 3.2 Research methods
 - 3.3 Modelling and statistics
 - 3.4 Field techniques
 - 3.5 Report writing
4. What kind of skills do you need that complement technical skills?
5. Which of these soft skills do you think are important?
 - 5.1 Emotional intelligence
 - 5.2 Ethical judgement
 - 5.3 Constructive feedback skills
 - 5.4 Clear communication skills across disciplines

My Background & Experience

Multicultural Experiences



Any questions?

Mentimeter Q

1. Which word best resonates with you right now?

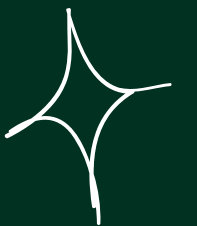
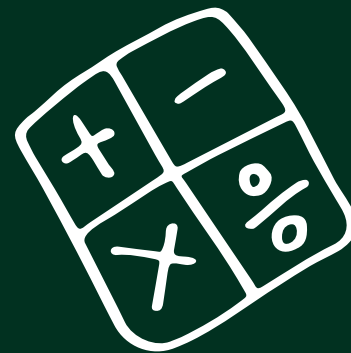
1.1 Belonging

1.2 Responsibility

1.3 Respect

1.4 Interdependency

1.5 Community



Ubuntu and Professional Practice

Ubuntu is often expressed as: umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu
“A human being is a human being through (or because of) other human beings”

- Shared humanity
- Interdependence
- Compassion and dignity
- Collective responsibility

Gość w dom, Bóg w dom

Ubuntu in African Knowledge Traditions

Ubuntu in academia

Knowledge is not only produced individually – it is co-created

- Learning through participation
- Knowledge is relational
- Accountability to community
- Respect across differences (race, age, position, discipline)

Ubuntu and Global Leadership

Ubuntu gained global visibility through

- South Africa's democratic transition
- Leaders such as Nelson Mandela
- Truth, reconciliation and restorative justice approaches

Ubuntu asks you us rethink:

- Competition vs collaboration
- Individual success vs collective contribution
- Expertise vs humility

Developing Strong Soft Skills

Professional and research life also requires:

- Emotional intelligence
- Ethical judgement
- Constructive feedback skills
- Clear communication across disciplines

Capacities Ubuntu Helps Cultivate

Ubuntu supports:

- Respect in academic discipline
- Listening before responding
- Giving and receiving critique with care
- Communicating science accessibly
- A sense of shared responsibility for learning

Learning with and From Others

Ubuntu views learning as:

- Social
 - Peer learning groups
 - Writing circles
 - Shared fieldwork and labs
 - Cross-disciplinary collaboration

Tension and Realities

Ubuntu does not ignore:

- Hierarchies (supervisor-student)
- Publish-or-perish cultures
- Time and funding pressures
- Competition for recognition

Ubuntu asks instead:

How do we remain human, ethical, and relational
within these systems?

Ubuntu in Research



SAEON technician Siphwe Mfeka facilitating discussions on catchment management and what participants identified as good and bad practices for their situation (Photo: Ruby Head)

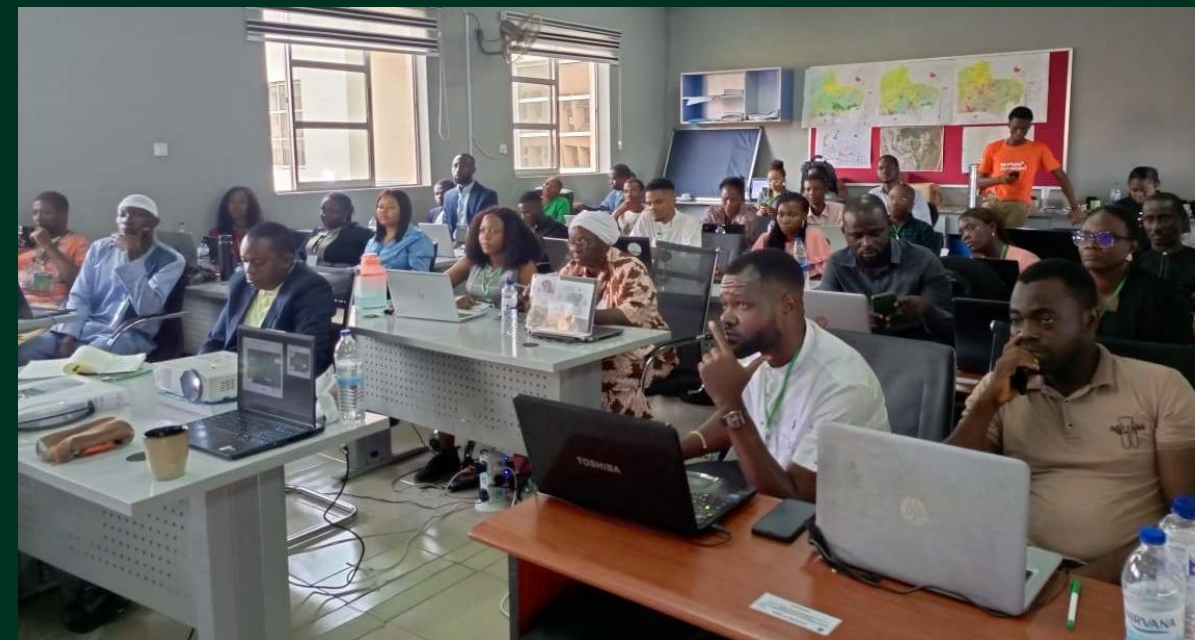


Siphwe used the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) *Windows on our World* poster to discuss positive and negative land use practices and their impact on water resources (Photo: Sue J Van Rensburg)



and what
d)





SWS Africa 3-day Wetlands Course

Introduction to wetlands and the assessment of their ecological condition and ecosystem services

7-9 October 2024, University of Lagos, Nigeria



SWS Africa investment
This course is 70% subsidized by the [Society for Wetland Scientists: Africa Region \(SWS Africa\)](#). This means that each registration fee is cut by 70%, meaning that this course is extremely good value for money.



Introduction to Wetland Assessment Course, University of Lagos, Nigeria





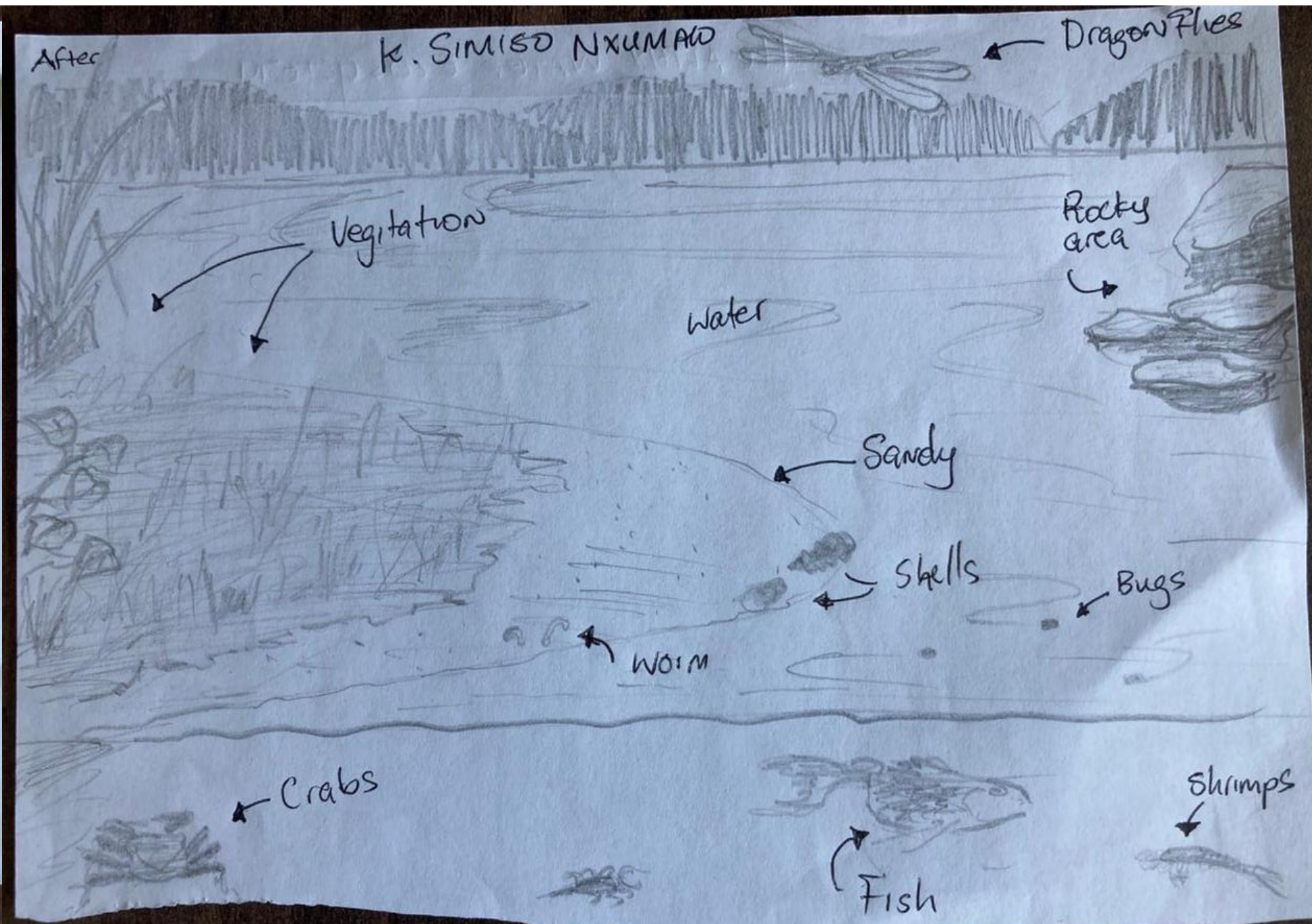
Pre and post course assessment

- Participants were tasked with drawing or writing up their own interpretation of a healthy water ecosystem before and after the course.

Before



After



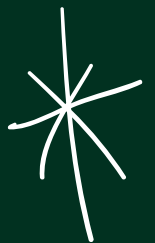
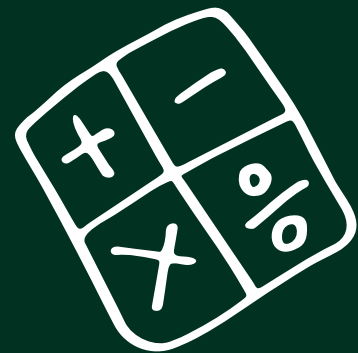
Ubuntu and Future Professional Life

Ubuntu supports:

- Ethical leadership
- Interdisciplinary teamwork
- Communication that is accessible
- Long-term professional relationship

These capacities are vital in academia, policy, industry, and community-based science

Example of Ubuntu



**What is one
small change
you could make
this week to
practice ubuntu
in your PhD
journey?**

Any questions?

Thank you
Ngiyabonga
Dziękuję 😊



POLISH NATIONAL AGENCY
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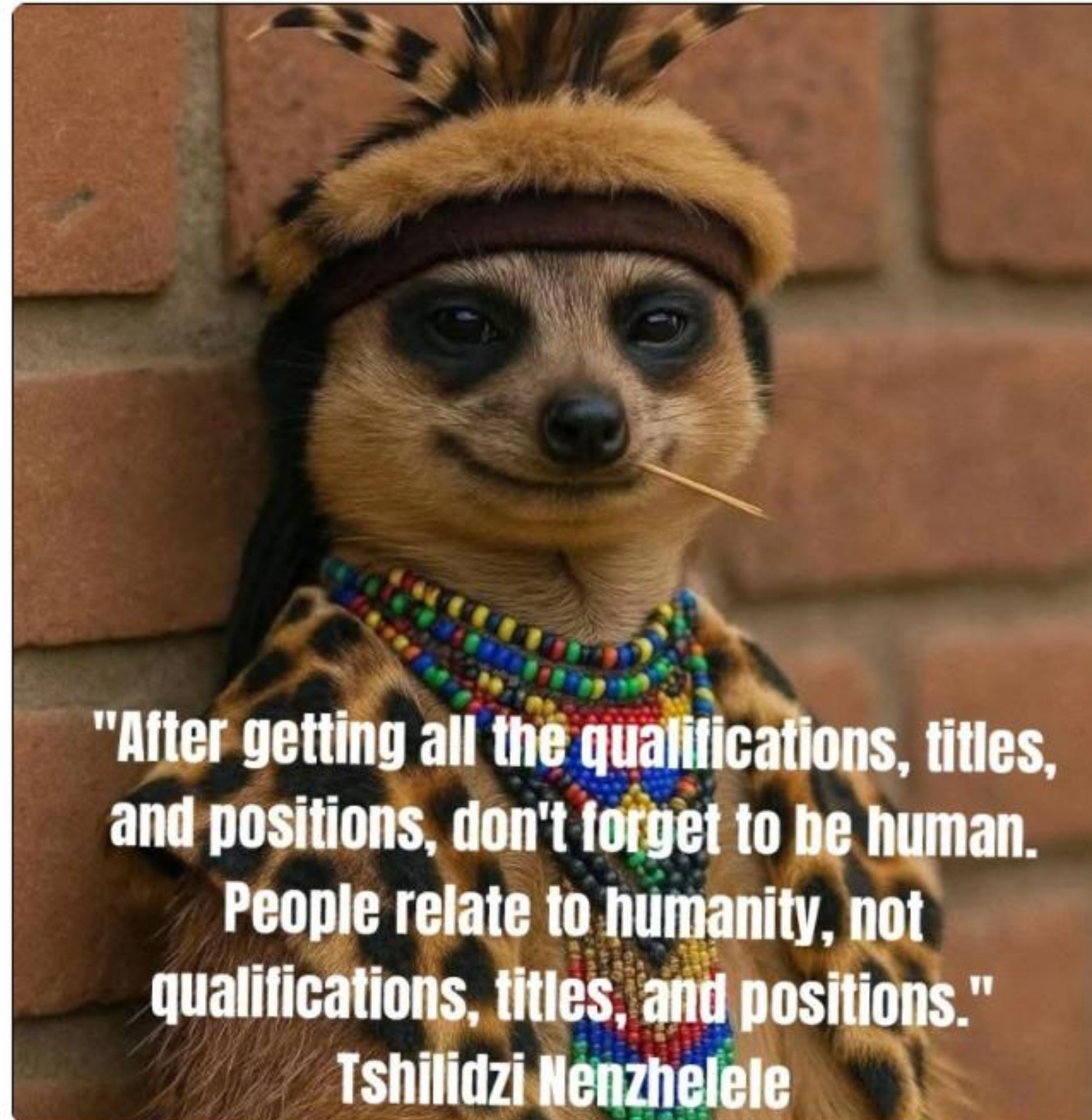
DOCTORAL
SCHOOL



Tshilidzi Nenzhelele يليليهزنين رحمة • 2nd
Professor and Director of School of Public and Operations ...
2d • Edited •

+ Follow

On a serious note: Be humble, selfless, and human 🙏



**"After getting all the qualifications, titles,
and positions, don't forget to be human.
People relate to humanity, not
qualifications, titles, and positions."
Tshilidzi Nenzhelele**