

Undefined scholar

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Abstract

An academic career takes years to develop. I share below some experiences on how my perception and the meaning of a PhD was altered through a chance encounter with Freeman Dyson's story in physics and impacts on my contributions to science and agriculture in Africa.



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RAYMOND ERICK ZVAVANYANGE¹

1. Women's University in Africa

ABSTRACT

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I have always wanted to be a scholar. To be precise, a scientist with a “PhD”. An academic who is committed to education. I have even written down **principles** and **advice** on how to become a scientist. That narrow view for an academic was radically altered when I stumbled across an interesting figure in physics, the English-born American **Freeman Dyson**. Freeman Dyson is on record for **not having completed his PhD degree** and elsewhere, is quoted as having said, “With or without a PhD, there are big and important problems for you to solve”. From Dyson's story, one does not need a PhD in order to think and act as an academic, though acquiring the qualification does certainly open windows of opportunities in scholarship. Suddenly, it was not just the PhD that had the final say in an academic career. I have discovered that among other things, it is what is in a “PhD” that counts – in the world and in academia. A lot more value of education is being uncovered even as we traverse the digital economy. I could through attempts and guidance learn of the methods and techniques critical to bringing up quality scientists. I could actually “apply” these methods and techniques and still be a part of the network of scientists – people solving problems in a methodical manner. It is eight years now since my first **online article** on practical animal husbandry whilst an undergraduate in agriculture and natural resources. I later took lots of graduate courses in a **distant** institution of higher learning and remember, **giving credit to my advisor** then at the time. As I write, I am enrolled in a local institution of higher learning.

A scholarship career takes years to develop. It is a career track with **dots that need to be connected**, research that needs to be **leveraged** in global platforms even as one develops to become a **thought leader** and subject matter specialist. The intellect needs to be sharpened using all available tools, including through **digital education**. Focus, too is all important because it sustain a researcher especially in periods of doubt in one's work – untangling oneself bad company, contradictions within the profession, cognitive biases, and pressing on after failed experiments and tests. I have had the privilege to learn and be inspired through direct conversations with great researchers and scientists. There are generous institutions and organizations that have invested immensely in my skills and knowledge capabilities. One such organization is the **Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network**, based in Pretoria, South Africa. As one of FANRPAN's **climate smart agriculture champions**, I now fully appreciate the theory and practice **in climate change policy and adaptation programmes** in Africa. “Pursue one great decisive aim with force and determination”, says Carl von Clausewitz. I am committed to pursuing knowledge as a scholar. I am proud to share in the stories and success of many youths from all over the world – **as an emerging voices in ICTs and**

agriculture, civic engagement, innovation and entrepreneurship, sharing insights on reversing youth migration, and as a regular contributor to World Farmers Organization F@RMLETTER. In one of a youth-speaker competition entries, I focused on **Youth and Agriculture: The Next Frontier**, which highlighted to centrality of agriculture in Africa and the role of young people.

Education should teach us to intelligently address the tensions found within individuals and society. This is what education is for. It is ideas that motivate and sustain my career as a scholar. In another achievement I was the best of the 3 **essay winners** of the Youth For Fish Program (YFFP) who brought their ideas to the Think Tank Event on Science and Policy Dialogue on Climate Change and Fisheries in Africa held at Sun N Sand Holiday Resort, Mangochi – Malawi, 27-29 November 2013. The award reminds me that it takes courage to think aloud and have your ideas critiqued for rigor and substance.

Science communication has opened many ways of improving on my scholarly contributions, at conferences, workshops and **social networking events** in science and agriculture. The 21st century is a knowledge-based economy. Scholars and communicators are more than ever needed to address this challenge. I am proud that as a **social reporter** I joined other enthusiastic communicators to share in the latest research and knowledge in conservation agriculture during the 1st Congress on Conservation Agriculture in Lusaka, Zambia. As a continuation to the work in Zambia, I proceeded to work on a **book** which was successfully published. My published book re-assures me that young academics can excel in science and agriculture provided one is willing to work hard and smarter. In Professor Mandivamba Rukuni's words, "Knowledge exists only at the point of action". I am glad that I'm taking part in the "action" and most importantly, making my voice heard in science and agriculture. This is indeed a dream come true.