**Empowering Others - Championing Black Women in Leadership***By Prof Tivani Mashamba-Thompson, a Professor of Diagnostics Research and the current Deputy Dean of Research and Postgraduate Studies at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Pretoria.*

In a world where systemic barriers often hinder the progress of marginalised groups, the role of black female leaders transcends personal achievement. The journey to the top is fraught with challenges. While reaching leadership positions is a significant accomplishment, the true measure of success for black female leaders lies in their ability to empower others.

It's not enough to celebrate being the only black female or the first; the duty of a leader is to create pathways for others to follow. A prime example of this principle in action is the University of Pretoria’s [Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) Research Support Hub](https://www.up.ac.za/faculty-of-health-sciences-research/article/3161314/faculty-of-health-sciences-research-support-hub) and [Graduate Hub](https://www.up.ac.za/postgraduate-support/article/2848106/graduate-hub), both founded by visionary black female leaders committed to fostering an inclusive research environment for future leaders in research.

The FHS Research Support Hub, supported by the University of Pretoria’s [Department of Research and Innovation](https://www.up.ac.za/article/2749405/department-of-research-and-innovation), provides tailored research support to staff and students in the FHS. It also serves as a satellite for the University of Pretoria Graduate Hub.

Leadership, especially for black women in academia and research, carries a unique responsibility. The historical context of systemic racism and sexism has created significant hurdles, and those who break through these barriers must work to dismantle them for others. Celebrating being the only black female or the first can be a hollow victory if it does not translate into creating opportunities for the less fortunate. True leadership is about paving the way for future generations, providing mentorship, resources, and support to ensure that the success of one becomes the success of many.

The FHS Research Support Hub is a testament to the impact of inclusive leadership. Established by [Professor Tivani Mashamba-Thompson](https://www.up.ac.za/faculty-of-health-sciences-research/article/3020793/about-prof-tivani-mashamba-thompson) supported by Dr Carol Nonkwelo, the Hub exemplifies how a platform can be used to empower others, foster inclusivity, and enable previously disadvantaged population groups such as black researchers to thrive. The Hub provides a supportive environment where mentorship, professional development, and networking opportunities are prioritised. This approach ensures that emerging black researchers have the tools and guidance they need to navigate the challenges of academia and make significant contributions to their fields.

**Key Areas of Focus**

As presented in the [FHS’s Research Support Hub’s first report](https://www.up.ac.za/media/shared/538/Research%20services%20and%20support/Research%20Support%20Hub/research-support-hub_2024_final-draft-circulated.zp252433.pdf), the Hub focuses on several key areas to create an inclusive environment:

* **Mentorship and networking:** Recognizing the importance of guidance and support, the Hub facilitates mentorship programs where experienced researchers provide advice and support to early-career academics. Networking events are regularly organised to help researchers build connections, share knowledge, and collaborate on projects.
* **Professional development:** The Hub offers workshops and training sessions designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of researchers. These initiatives are crucial in helping all researchers advance in their careers.
* **Resource allocation:** By providing access to funding opportunities, research grants, and other resources such as top-up for conference attendance and article processing charges, the Hub ensures that all researchers have the financial support they need to pursue their projects and make impactful discoveries as well as disseminate the findings to the scientific and general community.
* **Advocacy and policy influence:** The Hub also plays a vital role in advocating for research policies and guidelines that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within the academic and research communities. This advocacy work helps to address systemic barriers and creates a more equitable landscape for all researchers.

**A Vision for the Future**

Tivani Mashamba-Thompson emphasises, "Asingapheli mandla," despite the persistence of systemic barriers, we continue to find ways to work around them. I remain focused on continuing to build a team dedicated to fostering an inclusive research environment where all researchers are provided with necessary resources to participate in research and contribute to our country’s knowledge economy. The hub has significantly impacted previously disadvantaged population groups who had limited access to research resources, offering hope to those who may have felt research was out of reach. Many of these researchers have successfully led evidence synthesis research projects and published their findings in high-impact journals—"Mintirho ya vulavula."

As we look to the future, our focus is on sustaining this support and continuing to work closely with the University of Pretoria’s Department of Research and Innovation. We invite donors and sponsors to join us in addressing systemic barriers and improving the representation of black women in research leadership. Together, we can create a more inclusive and equitable research environment for all.

The success of the Research Support Hub symbolises the profound impact that empowering leadership can have. By creating an environment where all researchers can thrive, the Hub not only helps individuals achieve their potential but also contributes to the broader goal of diversifying the research community. This, in turn, leads to a richer, more inclusive body of research that better addresses the needs of all populations. The legacy of a black female leader is built on the foundations of inclusivity, empowerment, and a commitment to dismantling systemic barriers that have long hindered the progress of marginalised communities.

--- END ---