

# A **MATRIX** Minute *with* Boitumelo Molefe



## About Boitumelo

Boitumelo Molefe is an aspiring early career scientist from Mahikeng, South Africa, with a dedicated commitment to advancing biomedical research and improving public health outcomes. She studied at the [University of South Africa](#) where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Life Sciences and is currently working toward a postgraduate diploma in Public Health at [University of Pretoria](#). She has been working at [The Aurum Institute](#) for more than five years as a Data Capturer within its HIV and Tuberculosis programs, capturing and analyzing data from individuals newly diagnosed with HIV and tracking adherence and viral suppression of those who are already receiving treatment. Boitumelo is one of MATRIX's Track 2 scholars who for seven months will be working as part of the [Design to Delivery \(D2D\) Pillar 2](#) team focused on the integration of socio-behavioral research in all MATRIX clinical trials. As a scholar, and under the mentorship of Cecilia Milford, Elizabeth Montgomery and Heeran Makkan, Boitumelo will contribute to the development of new research protocols and data collection tools, along with the analysis of data collected in MATRIX studies.

## What sparked your passion in the field of science and public health?

My passion for the field of science and public health was ignited by a deep-seated fascination with healthcare from a young age. Growing up, I was always captivated by the complexities of the human body and the intricate ways in which various systems throughout it interact to maintain its health. Witnessing the challenges faced by those who were ill stirred a profound empathy within me and sparked my imagination about a career dedicated to their recovery.

I often found myself fantasizing about being at the forefront of medical breakthroughs, envisioning a world where diseases, bacteria, and viruses that threaten human well-being were eradicated. The thought of contributing to the recovery processes of individuals, implementing preventive measures, and improving the overall health of communities was both inspiring and motivating. This childhood curiosity and compassion naturally evolved into a passion for science and public health, driving me to pursue a career where I could make a tangible difference in people's lives.

## What do you like about working in biomedical research?

Working in the field of biomedical research is profoundly fulfilling for me, as I find myself driven by the dynamic and impactful nature of this work. What I appreciate most is the opportunity to work with real data and contribute to current studies, which allows me to transform raw information into meaningful insights. This process of data analysis is exhilarating, as it helps advance our understanding of human health and disease.

Collaboration and innovation are central to this field, often involving interdisciplinary teamwork with scientists, clinicians, and healthcare professionals. This collaborative environment fosters the exchange of ideas and leads to innovative solutions to complex health problems. Being part of a community dedicated to improving health and alleviating suffering aligns with my core values and drives my passion for biomedical research.

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## Do you have any heroes or anyone who inspires you?

I have three heroes who inspire me deeply. First, my late maternal grandmother Mothogobeng Molefe, who played a crucial role in my upbringing alongside my mother. She was a very prayerful woman who always held onto hope, even in the bleakest situations. Her unwavering faith and resilience have profoundly influenced me.

Second, my mother, Matshepo Molefe who carried the baton and ensured that I never lacked much despite being a single parent. Her dedication and sacrifices have been a constant source of strength and motivation for me.

Third, Winnie Byanyima, the Executive Director of UNAIDS and an Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, inspires me with her passionate commitment to social justice and gender equality. She leads the global effort to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030, and her work embodies the impact I aspire to have in the field of public health.

## What is a fun fact about you?

A fun fact about me is that I love journalism. I love reporting on current affairs on my WhatsApp account so much that when I have not posted in a while, people call to check if I'm okay. Additionally, I have a passion for astrology and am fascinated by linking personalities to star signs.

## What do you like to do in your free time?

In my free time, I enjoy reading books, ranging from autobiographies and literature to fiction novels. I also find great pleasure in cooking and baking, constantly exploring new recipes online. Additionally, I cherish traveling to immerse myself in the beautiful scenery the world has to offer.

## What is the best advice you've either given or received?

The most impactful advice I have received was from my primary school teacher Mr. Van Reenen, who often emphasized the value of active participation for deeper learning. He frequently cited Benjamin Franklin's quote: "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." This philosophy underscores the importance of engagement and hands-on experience in the process of understanding and acquiring knowledge.

## Do you have any quotes that are meaningful to you?

One quote that has always stayed with me is from Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*: *"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view. until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."* This quote emphasizes empathy and the importance of understanding others' perspectives, which I believe is crucial in both personal and professional interactions.

## What would you say to someone who is considering this field of work?

The field of biomedical science research offers diverse career opportunities, spanning academia, industry, healthcare, and government sectors. Exploring these pathways allows researchers to find where their skills and passions align best, enabling them to make significant contributions to science and healthcare.

Entering the field of biomedical science research is a rewarding journey for those driven by passion, curiosity, and a desire to make a positive impact on human health and well-being. It requires dedication, intellectual curiosity, and a commitment to lifelong learning, making it a fulfilling career choice for aspiring scientists.

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