

PERSPECTIVE PAPER

Celebrating 5 years of African Science Frontiers Initiatives: scholars' experiences

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ABSTRACT

Initiatives from the African continent are welcome, particularly those aimed at fostering the development and capacity building of African scholars. This perspective paper presents the experiences of African scholars who have been members of the African Science Frontiers Initiatives (ASFI), describing their encounters and benefits derived from being part of ASFI and participating in its activities over the years. Furthermore, in celebrating five years of ASFI, the paper narrates African scholars' perspectives of ASFI leadership. The paper uses a combination of the four Foundations of being a leader and Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) as research methodologies to obtain the narratives from seven African scholars who have experienced ASFI over the years. The paper used content analysis to extract relevant themes. The findings revealed themes, in the words of the scholars, including: "The ASFI workshops, seminar series and annual conferences, especially from 2023, allowed us to be able to defend the values that ASFI stands for" (Dr. Dwayi, South Africa); "On January 2025, I received the Best Reviewer Award" (Dr. Mkwizu, Tanzania); "As the first pioneer President of ASFI General Assembly, I embraced the challenge to steer a nascent organization that symbolized hope and ambition for African science" (Dr. Fondze-Fombebe, Cameroon); "I decided to reach out directly to the convener, Prof. Bright Nwaru. It was a simple act of hope" (Dr. Onyedikachi, Nigeria); "Prof. Nwaru is a true leader and a great mentor" (Dr. Mwambi, Kenya); "As a woman of faith, my connection with ASFI can best be described as divine" (Dr. Ebenezer, Nigeria); and "Working with various researchers and scientists from different institutions and all parts of Africa has broadened my horizon on the gaps ASFI is filling in" (Dr. Oladejo, Nigeria). Implications and recommendations to direct ASFI to continue its great work are highlighted.

KEYWORDS:

Africa, African researchers, African Science Frontiers Initiatives, capacity building, collaboration, innovation, integrity, leadership, mentoring, networking, testimonials

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INTRODUCTION

Africa is a continent increasingly recognized not only for its rich cultural heritage and natural resources, but also for its growing intellectual contributions to global education and leadership discourse. African scholars and institutions are actively challenging dominant Western paradigms by offering contextually grounded, values-driven models of transformation that reflect indigenous epistemologies and cultural realities (Chitando and Kamaara¹; Gumede²). Five years into the African Science Frontiers Initiatives (ASFI), we sought, not merely to celebrate a milestone, but to interrogate the successes and impact of such a Pan-African movement is making on science and scholars in the continent. ASFI's emergence and evolution challenge the dominant narrative that institutional success in African science is driven primarily by structural reforms, funding, or policy. Instead, ASFI offers a compelling case of fore-grounds agency, values, and transformational leadership. This perspective paper draws on personal testimonials of African scholars and philosophical insights to explore ASFI's journey through the lens of social realism, anchored in critical realist philosophy.

As Dwayi³ argues, sustainable transformation in African institutions cannot be explained by structure alone. The Theory–Methodology–Practical Program Chain provides a scaffold for understanding how structure, culture, and agency interact to produce emergent change. This social realist explanatory program insists that we look beyond what is visible and interrogate the generative mechanisms that shape outcomes. Thus, suggesting ASFI not as a product of policy, but as a manifestation of leadership as being, of values lived, and of agency exercised. Central to this narrative, is the leadership of Prof. Bright Nwaru's vision for ASFI: to raise the new generation of African scientists competently equipped to drive the continent's transformation through innovative research, has been animated by the B.A.L Leadership Principles: Integrity, Authenticity, Being a Cause in the Matter, and Living for a Dream Bigger than Self (Erhard et al.)⁴. These principles are not abstract ideals; they are the lived commitments that have shaped ASFI's culture and inspired its scholars.

The testimonial from Kamanga⁵, titled “Integrity: The Foundation That Holds Everything Together”, offers a powerful entry point into this discussion. Kamanga by drawing from Erhard et al⁴ reframes integrity not as a moral virtue, but as a law of nature, a condition for workability, trust, and performance. His assertion that “without integrity, nothing works” resonates deeply with ASFI's ethos and challenges us to rethink the foundations of leadership in African science. Kamanga's reflections, further drawn from years of engagement with African scientists and institutions, reveal that the continent's challenges are not merely technical or financial but are leadership challenges, rooted in a failure to honor commitments, take responsibility, and build trust.

This paper, therefore, proposes a new perspective that the transformation of African science requires more than strategy. It requires leaders who embody integrity, institutions that cultivate authenticity, and communities that live for a dream bigger than self. Besides, it emphasizes that influence in science is not about positional authority but about emotional intelligence, strategic communication, and authentic engagement—qualities that resonate deeply with ASFI's ethos and Prof. Bright Nwaru's leadership style (Peterson and Onyedikachi)⁶. Transformative Leadership, transcends positional authority and becomes a dynamic interplay of influence, authenticity, and relational depth as someone who carves a niche in the lives of others through persuasive communication, referent power, and systemic methodology. This aligns with Kamanga's emphasis on leadership as meaning-making, rooted in purpose and cultural relevance, then from a critical realist framing, which situates leadership within the interplays of structure, culture, and agency (Dwayi)³. In addition, the testifying act adds a lived dimension, showing leadership as validated through impact and resilience in this perspective paper. Together, these voices converge to portray leadership not merely as a function of strategy or hierarchy, but as a narrative of transformation that animates the journey of a science leader who lives for a dream bigger than self.

In celebrating ASFI's fifth anniversary, this paper does more than commemorate—it interrogates. It asks: What does it truly mean to lead transformation in

African science? How do personal values and collective agency shape institutional futures? And how can testimonials serve as rigorous data for understanding social change? This paper invites readers to move beyond the textbook view of institutional success and engage with the human story of leadership, agency, and vision that defines ASFI's first five years. This paper avails a series of personal testimonials and thematic reflections that explores how ASFI has become a site of emergent change, where values-based leadership is not an aspiration but a lived reality.

METHODS

The methods involved in this section are adopted from the four Foundations of Being a Leader (BAL) by Erhard et al.⁴ and Kamanga⁵. The four Foundations delve on: 1) Integrity, 2) Authenticity, 3) Being a Cause in the Matter: The Power of Taking a Stand on The Matter, and 4) Living for a Dream that is Bigger than self (Erhard et al.,⁴ ; Kamanga⁴). This paper also uses the Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) approach to capture the experiences of seven African scholars in celebrating ASFI's five years of existence and operation. Past scholars, such as Mkwizu⁷ applied SPN when conducting a study on Alumni experiences during the 30 years celebration of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) at The Open University of Tanzania (OUT). Similarly, this paper adopts SPN to present narratives based on the testimonies of African scholars in celebrating five years of ASFI. Finally, the paper uses content analysis to reveal emerged themes relevant to answer the study's specific questions highlighted in the introduction section. Similar studies like Kleinheksel et al.⁸ have applied content analysis to avail emerged themes from experiences of pharmacy education researchers.

RESULTS

The findings in terms of testimonies from the seven African scholars are presented and further elaborated in the discussion section.

TESTIMONY BY DR. VALINDAWO V. M. DWAYI

“For me, the relevance of this event is in terms of time and space. It is taking place when I have just arrived home from Colombia on the Glo-South Project. The project is about the value of collaborative international research projects in promoting the Latin-African solidarities. This project fully subscribes to the values that ASFI stands for.”



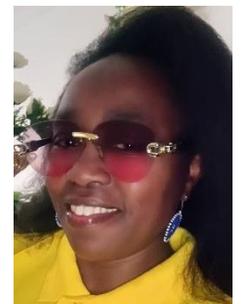
“I joined ASFI in 2021. Soon in that year, Prof. Bright Nwaru asked me to make a presentation on the topic, "The role of NGOs in expanding the research frontiers". The discussion during the presentation highlighted how and what can appear as development can be a subject of power dynamics.”

“Thirdly, ASFI workshops, seminar series and annual conferences, especially from 2023, allowed us to be able to defend the values that ASFI stands for, especially in consideration of transformation, quality and impact that scholarship must be known for. My Group 3 were among the first to publish in the ASFI Journal in 2025.”

“Therefore, in Prof. Bright Nwaru, I see the classical case of contemporary leadership, of the power of agency in raising the next generation of African scholars.”

TESTIMONY BY DR. KEZIA H. MKWIZU

“Congratulations for celebrating five years of ASFI to Prof. Bright Nwaru and his entire team. Under Prof. Bright Nwaru's leadership skills, ASFI has grown from strength to strength. It has been an honor to be part of ASFI for these five years and I am thankful for the many achievements along the way including the ones listed below:”



- I received the ASFI membership award for 2024 emanating from winning a Concept Note presentation along with other scholars in Group 4

during a presentation at ASFI virtual multidisciplinary conference and boot camp in 2023.

- In January 2025, I received the Best Reviewer Award for peer-reviewing papers for ASFI Research Journal in 2024.
- The opportunity to contribute a discussion on grants for research during one of ASFI's monthly seminars
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bmb-KYN3H5A>)
- Many thanks for featuring me among others on ASFI 2024 Women's Week celebrated during the International Women's Day, where the featured ASFI women were celebrated for their academic achievements.
- The opportunity to participate in ASFI annual conferences and collaborate with ASFI members.
- Therefore, I am grateful and thank you. I wish ASFI many more years of growth and excellence.

TESTIMONY BY DR. EUNICE F. FONDZE-FOMBELE

“Testimonial for the African Science Frontiers Initiative (ASFI) by the Pioneer President of the ASFI General Assembly.”



“A Journey Rooted in Purpose:

My scientific path began with a deep curiosity about the world and an unwavering belief in Africa's potential to lead in research and innovation. Yet, like many African scientists, I faced the familiar challenges of limited resources, fragmented networks, and the struggle for global recognition. It was within this context that ASFI emerged—not just as an organization, but as a beacon for those who dared to dream of a stronger, united scientific community.”

“As the First Pioneer President of ASFI: As the first pioneer President of the ASFI General Assembly, I embraced the challenge to steer a nascent organization that symbolized hope and ambition for African science. I was driven by the vision of a united scientific community—one that could overcome the challenges of limited resources, fragmented networks, and

inadequate global recognition. It was an honor to help lay the foundation for a vibrant platform where African researchers could come together to share knowledge, support one another, and showcase their achievements on the world stage.”

“Working with the First ASFI General Assembly Leadership Team:

Collaborating with the inaugural ASFI General Assembly leadership team was a defining experience in my scientific and leadership journey. Together, we shaped ASFI's core pillars—mentorship programs, focused training workshops, and dynamic networking opportunities—that set the stage for empowering African scientists. Our collective vision and dedication transformed ASFI from a concept into a thriving community, united by a commitment to excellence and collaboration. Leading this team taught me the essential value of teamwork, shared purpose, and mutual support, which remain central to ASFI's ongoing success.”

“Interactions with the General Assembly:

Working closely with the General Assembly members was both inspiring and humbling. I witnessed extraordinary dedication, creativity, and resilience among our scientists, many of whom faced systemic barriers yet remained committed to advancing African science. These interactions deepened my appreciation for ASFI's role as a catalyst for connection and progress, fostering an environment where emerging scientists develop critical skills and build lasting professional relationships. It was rewarding to see many young scientists evolve from feeling uncertain about their scientific careers into confident innovators and leaders capable of influencing policy and driving technological advances.”

“The Impact: Growth, Connection, and Transformation:

One of ASFI's greatest strengths lies in its capacity-building initiatives. Through a series of tailored courses, workshops, and hands-on projects, I have witnessed a remarkable transformation in the skill sets and confidence of participating scientists. ASFI's educational programs are designed not just to impart knowledge but also to nurture critical thinking, leadership, and problem-solving abilities. These initiatives have equipped countless African researchers with tools to excel in their fields, pursue cutting-edge

research, and contribute meaningfully to addressing the continent's most urgent scientific and societal challenges.”

“ASFI has been much more than a professional platform; it has been a profound source of personal growth. Through its network, I have engaged with brilliant minds from every corner of the continent, exchanged ideas that have enriched my research, and forged partnerships that continue to yield groundbreaking results. The visibility and support provided by ASFI have opened doors to international platforms, amplifying African voices in global scientific discourse. But beyond personal achievements, what fills me with the greatest pride is witnessing the ripple effect of ASFI's work. The initiative has become a nurturing ground for the next generation of African scientific leaders, individuals who are not only advancing knowledge but also inspiring hope and progress within their communities.”

“A Heartfelt Tribute and a Call to Action: As we celebrate ASFI's 5th anniversary, I am filled with gratitude for the journey we have shared. I thank every mentor, collaborator, and visionary who has contributed to this remarkable story. ASFI is more than a professional network; it is a family bound by a commitment to excellence, integrity, and the belief that African science can—and will—change the world.”

“To my fellow African scientists: I urge you to embrace the opportunities that ASFI offers. Engage fully, share your insights, and let your aspirations soar. Together, we are building a legacy of innovation, resilience, and unity that will inspire generations to come. Let us continue to dream boldly, work tirelessly, and lift each other as we advance the frontiers of Africa.”

TESTIMONY BY DR. UCHECHI B. ONYEDIKACHI

“A journey of reawakening through what I learnt and exposure in ASFI.”

“Before ASFI: A Search for Anchoring in a Time of Drift: My journey with ASFI



began at a time of emotional and professional unclarity. Having just completed my PhD, I was navigating the postdoctoral void, an uncertain season compounded by the trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic and an almost year-long academic strike in Nigeria. I felt stalled, unsure of my direction, and desperately in need of mentorship, structure, and clarity.”

“I was not searching for opportunities; I was searching for mentorship and guidance. And then, I found ASFI.”

“A Different Kind of Encounter: The Beginning of My ASFI Story: In late 2022, I applied for ASFI's free course on Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis. When the results were released in November, I was not selected. Disheartened but not defeated, I decided to reach out directly to the convener, Prof. Bright Nwaru. It was a simple act of hope.”

“What happened next changed everything. Unlike the typical experience! where one might expect silence or a formal letter, he replied. He placed me on a waitlist with the assurance that I would be contacted if a spot opened up. That acknowledgment alone sparked a shift in me.”

“When the opportunity finally came, I poured myself into the course. And it became the foundation for something far greater.”

“Emergence: From Participation to Purpose: What began as a course evolved into a calling. I started volunteering every time the opportunity arose. By 2023, I became a full member. I applied for the Communication and Public Engagement position within the ASFI Members' General Assembly, not fully knowing what it would demand—but I said yes anyway.”

“That “yes” became a launching pad.”

“I found my voice more amplified. I started craving my purpose and that birthed my quest for personal branding.”

“I found my impact ignited, as I learnt, got trained and grew.”

“Through the insights from ASFI, I won grants and awards I had once only dreamed of; I hosted capacity-building webinars for students, multiplying my knowledge. I presented papers that illuminated others, even as they deepened my understanding. I acquired leadership skills, serving as a bootcamp subcommittee lead, group project coordinator, and a mentor within the General Assembly.”

“A New Mindset, A New Horizon: One of the most pivotal moments came during an ASFI program on intellectual property, commercialization, and innovation. It was a paradigm shift. I reached out to the guest speaker, Dr. Abiodun Ilori, and we developed my idea further.”

“Today: I have a product, I have been accepted into innovation hubs, I am building my personal brand, I have clarity about my niche and a blueprint for creating lasting impact.”

“The Community: Bonds Beyond Borders: ASFI has also given me a tribe. People I have never met in person have become like brothers and sisters. We collaborate, co-author papers, brainstorm ideas, and uplift one another. This is more than a professional network. It is a place for mutual growth.”

“From the Lens of Critical Realism: Why This Matters: My journey exemplifies what Critical Realism teaches us: that beneath empirical experiences lie deep mechanisms of hope, mentorship, and structure that trigger transformation.”

“In ASFI, I found not just a program, but a generative structure one that fostered agency, nurtured purpose, and activated hidden potential. The leadership of Prof. Bright Nwaru created an environment where cultural values (authenticity, service, impact) and agentic choices (volunteering, leading, innovating) merged into meaningful, transformative action.”

“Conclusion: ASFI has not just been a platform. It has been my turning point. A space of learning, clarity, growth, and transformation. A place where vision meets opportunity—and becomes reality.”

TESTIMONY BY DR. JERITA J. MWAMBI

“I am very excited to share my testimonial about what I have achieved at ASFI under the leadership of Prof. Bright Nwaru. I heard about ASFI through my colleague, who shared a poster about the research funding and grant writing course with me in



March 2022. I attended the course and many other courses thereafter. Prof. Bright Nwaru is a true leader and a great mentor. One great achievement after the grant writing course in 2022 was that I was able to organize three of my colleagues and we came up with a proposal for a grant call, which was successful. The impact of the course on my confidence was unbelievable. Again, last year in 2024, we won an institutional research fund with my three other colleagues. All this I attribute to the skills that I learnt from Prof. Bright Nwaru, a great teacher and a role model.”

“In November 2022, Prof. Bright Nwaru invited me to participate in the ASFI monthly science seminar series as a panelist to discuss how bandwidth, electricity and power are giant disruptors and how they impact African scientists' output. This was a great opportunity for me to participate in such a platform.”

“In 2023, I was among the top three winners of the ASFI Impact Essay competition and was awarded a free ASFI course and ASFI membership for 2024. I have also gained the skill of peer reviewing. This year, 2025, our group in ASFI published a paper in ASFI Research Journal after undergoing rigorous peer review. ASFI has mentored me into leadership, and I am currently serving as the Assistant Secretary-General in the ASFI Members' General Assembly. ASFI is a place for growth for everyone irrespective of their gender, religion, nationality, academic qualifications, etc. Prof. Bright Nwaru is a true leader of integrity.”

“I want to encourage especially young African scientists to continue attending the courses and participate fully in all ASFI activities. Thank you, Prof. Bright Nwaru, for coming up with such an initiative. ASFI is a movement,

and we will continue to support you and amplify ASFI in our countries. Long Live ASFI. Thank you.”

TESTIMONY BY DR. PHARM. UCHENNA EBENEZER

“Networking: I first heard about ASFI through a link a colleague shared with me. At first, I thought it was just the regular networking platform scattered all over the place. However, with my knowledge of the benefits of networking and based on my experience working with various international development organizations, I decided to click the link. To my amazement, it was beyond a regular networking platform. Now, through ASFI’s robust and dynamic networking, I have interacted with many fellow African scholars out of whom I have only seen one person physically, but the daily and weekly communication seems so real because of the human face ASFI bears. The emerging relationships are currently being nurtured across diverse areas of existing and emerging interest.”



“Skills and Leadership Development: As a woman of faith, my connection with ASFI could be best described as *‘divine’*. It came at a time when I was undergoing self-learning on how to conduct a **systematic review**. The expectations from my end were high and boom the second ASFI course I enrolled in was on systematic reviews. Prof. Bright Nwaru’s sessions provided the answers to the puzzles I had. His *elementary* style of facilitation was *unique, unassuming* and *unwavering*. In fact, my confidence grew tremendously, and I progressed rapidly in my personal work.”

“Furthermore, the opportunity to participate in the systematic review course birthed my involvement in the current **umbrella review** project being undertaken by a small group of like-minded African scholars led by Prof. Bright Nwaru. This was an entirely new learning process for me and his disposition towards impacting knowledge comes from a man with the mission to contribute to the emergence of highly skilled researchers and industry experts across the nook and crannies of Africa.”

“Another layer of ASFI’s ability to identify ASFI members with passion to drive the ASFI goals was seen during the **2024 ASFI Virtual Conference and Boot Camp**. He seamlessly matched each selected individual in perfect roles to host a successful event. In my quiet moments of **leadership** reflections, this came to me as a leader who is objective, unbiased and willing to bridge every boundary. No wonder the 2025 Multidisciplinary Conference and Boot Camp is tagged as **Beyond Boundaries.**”

“Character Building: In my extensive professional experience, I discovered early enough the great potential embedded in developing the character of patience in a multi-cultural and multi-skilled environment. In addition, my early career research experience has also buttressed the importance of patience as a virtue. However, my involvement with ASFI has deepened my understanding of the virtue of patience in the global research and public health development space. Prof. Bright Nwaru’s strong display of patience in dealing with hundreds of multi-faced, multi-cultural, multi-national and multi-skilled individuals involved in ASFI is self-fulfilling and worth emulating.”

TESTIMONY BY DR. AJIBOLA F. OLADEJO

“The power of volunteering:

I started my journey with ASFI as a volunteer. I needed a place to serve and sharpen my skills. I needed clarity on many things. Volunteering for ASFI allowed me to understand my skill sets and categorize them into areas of strength and weakness. ASFI gave me a platform to make good use of my strengths while finding ways to improve my weak areas by constant learning. My desire for learning, serving and volunteering paved the way to getting my skills polished and gaining clarity.”



“Working with Prof. Bright Nwaru: I have the privilege of working directly with the Visionary leader, Prof. Bright Nwaru. I have witnessed how passion, dedication, discipline, work ethic, principles and sacrifices for the

vision and mission of ASFI have made this organization what it is today.”

“Working with ASFI: Working with various researchers and scientists from different institutions and all parts of Africa has broadened my horizon on the gaps ASFI is filling in. The platform has been built for capacity building. As many scholars are willing to put in the work, they get numerous rewards and progression in making impactful science and an enormous contribution to their society. Working at ASFI has sharpened my interpersonal skills. It has allowed me to effectively interact with African scientists across all levels and academic positions, and at the same time, find ways to ensure that I use my office to make things seamless and easy for people.”

“Capacity building: I have a social science background, and the course taught in the week I started my volunteering journey was “Reproducibility in Scientific Research”. This was my first-time hearing about this in research, and I thought it was more science-oriented, but I kept telling myself, “You are learning something new.” At the end of this particular course, I learnt new things I now employ in my research. In the long run, I realized that all ASFI courses, seminars, workshops, and programs cut across disciplines. Since then, I have had the opportunity to attend the courses, trainings, seminars, and mentorship that ASFI offers, which has helped my research capacity and productivity. Learning from ASFI programs has allowed me to understand that continuous learning is critical for any African scientist, and this ensures development in all spheres. This has a multiplier effect in society and will help Africa to overcome its developmental challenges.”

“Personal development: ASFI has helped shaped the way I see life and also what a career really means especially in the academics. It has taught me that I have to be able to mentor and groom every student that passes through me. Their way of doing science must change and they must be able to do academics and research with integrity. Being with ASFI has taught me to always do everything with impact. It has provided a space to freely collaborate not only with researchers in my discipline but also across all disciplines. ASFI is a place to meet with other Africans and share our

perspectives on the way forward for Africa’s development. It is a place where I have made lots of friends, and a place to freely express myself and be who I am. I thank ASFI for giving me a platform to gradually grow, while deepening my roots, rebuilding my foundations, finding my path and at same time being authentic and genuine.”

“Life Development: ASFI is helping to shape people’s minds and the future of science in Africa, and I am happy to be part of this process.”

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings from the content analysis of testimonials, highlighting the key themes that emerged in relation to leadership. The themes of leadership as integrity (Kamanga)⁵, authenticity, taking a stand, and living for a vision bigger than self (Erhard et al)⁴ provide a rich understanding of what constitutes effective leadership.

Leadership as Integrity:

Integrity is the basic principle that holds everything together. In simple language, when the integrity of the messenger is in question, no one will believe the message! The testimonials given above reveal that integrity is a fundamental aspect of leadership. Leaders who demonstrate integrity are transparent, trustworthy, and consistent in their words and actions. This theme is consistent with previous research that highlights the importance of integrity in building trust and credibility with followers (Kouzes & Posner)⁹. The testimonials suggest that leaders who operate with integrity are more likely to foster a positive and productive work environment and there is no better way where this principle was explained other than the keynote speech presented on ASFI’s fifth anniversary (Kamanga)⁵.

Leadership as Authenticity:

Authenticity emerged as another key theme in the testimonials. Leaders who are authentic are true to themselves and their values, and they inspire others to do the same. This theme aligns with the concept of authentic leadership, which emphasizes the importance of leaders being genuine and transparent (Walumbwa et al.)¹⁰. The testimonials suggest that authentic leaders are more likely to build strong

relationships with their followers and create a sense of community.

The very amount of engagement from workshops to seminars and lunch events including conferences attests to how Prof. Bright Nwaru lives up to this principle. The testimony from Ajibola shows that while Prof. Bright Nwaru brought a number of speakers to cover pertinent issues, namely, innovation in research Prof. Bright Nwaru single handedly presented a range of seminars, and workshops. In that regard, there is no better way to demonstrate the integrity value than what is evidenced by the testimonials.

Towards this, Erhard et al⁴ declare that;

“Being authentic is being and acting consistent with who you hold yourself out to be for others (including who you allow others to hold you to be), and who you hold yourself to be for yourself” (p.104)

Prof. Bright Nwaru's presentations tended to come out naturally about him. He seemed to leave the audience with no questions about his depth and breadth of knowledge about the topic, and thus no issues of legitimacy, credibility, and reputation which would thus border on what could be argued as antithetical to authenticity.

Leadership as the Power of Taking a Stand on the Matter:

The testimonials also highlighted the importance of leaders taking a stand on matters that matter. Leaders who are willing to take a stand demonstrate courage, conviction, and a commitment to their values. This theme is consistent with research on courageous leadership, which suggests that leaders who take risks and challenge the status quo can drive positive change (Detert and Bruno)¹¹. The testimonials suggest that leaders who take a stand can inspire others to do the same and create a sense of momentum and purpose.

In explaining this Leadership value, Erhard et al.⁴ stated that;

“Without this foundation for being a leader, while you may be given the role of a leader and even have the title, and perhaps even the

authority and decision rights, you can forget about actually being a leader and exercising leadership effectively” (p.82)

ASFI, as led by Prof. Bright Nwaru, took a stand in the matter of research under-development in Africa, and thus a matter of life. It was not due to the circumstances of under-development about research, which, when not enacted, would cause apathy.

Leadership as the Value of Living for a Vision that is Bigger than Yourself:

Finally, the testimonials revealed that leaders who live for a vision bigger than themselves are more likely to inspire and motivate others. This theme aligns with research on transformational leadership, which emphasizes the importance of leaders having a clear vision and inspiring others to work towards a common goal (Bass)¹² but also supports another study by Mkwizu¹³ which cited the existence of transformational leadership style in transforming higher education institutions in Africa. The testimonials suggest that leaders who are driven by a sense of purpose and meaning are more likely to create a sense of collective purpose and drive positive change. As evidenced in Dwayi, Ajibola and in Eunice, for example, it was unimaginable about how ASFI would grow when ASFI first started in 2021. It was during the COVID-19 pandemic and no clear picture about how the future would unfold. The idea about ASFI could have been overwhelmed by the challenges of the time as the pandemic introduced untested solutions on how to manage social life. Prof. Bright Nwaru did not allow such a situation to dwarf him into oblivion.

To explain such a case as Being a Leader, Erhard et al⁴ declared that “heroes are ordinary people who are given being and action by something bigger than themselves”. In this way, ASFI has managed to remain enduring despite the challenges of post COVID-19 pandemic. Transformative leadership practices have sustained the ASFI efforts when it could have been the transformational (structural arrangement) and even transactional (reproductive) about what ASFI had originally sought to address as research capacity for human advancement. Therefore, the testimonials provided offer a rich insight into the impact of ASFI on

its members. Here are some key themes that emerged from the testimonials:

Impact on Members:

Capacity Building: ASFI has provided its members and the larger African scientists with opportunities for capacity building through various courses, workshops, and mentorship programs. Participants have reported significant improvements in their research skills, grant writing abilities, and leadership capacities.

Networking and Collaboration: ASFI has facilitated networking and collaboration among its members, creating a community of scholars who can share knowledge, resources, and expertise. Members have reported forming meaningful relationships and collaborations with other researchers.

Personal Growth and Development: ASFI has had a profound impact on the personal growth and development of its members. Members have reported increased confidence, improved time management skills, and a sense of purpose and direction.

Leadership and Mentorship:

Prof. Bright Nwaru's Leadership: The testimonials highlight Prof. Bright Nwaru's exceptional leadership and mentorship skills. He is described as a visionary leader who has created an environment that fosters growth, collaboration, and innovation.

Mentorship and Guidance: ASFI's mentorship programs have provided members with guidance and support, helping them navigate their research careers and achieve their goals.

Community and Belonging:

Sense of Community: ASFI has created a sense of community among its members, who feel supported, valued, and connected.

Belonging and Identity: Members have reported feeling a sense of belonging and identity with ASFI, which has helped them develop their professional identities and build their confidence.

Impact on Research and Science:

Research Capacity: ASFI has helped its members develop their research capacity, enabling them to conduct high-quality research and publish their work in reputable journals.

Innovation and Impact: ASFI's focus on innovation and impact has inspired its members to think creatively and develop solutions that can address real-world problems.

Overall, the testimonials suggest that ASFI has had a profound impact on its members, providing them with opportunities for growth, development, and networking. The organization's focus on capacity building, mentorship, and community has created a supportive environment that enables its members to thrive and make meaningful contributions to science and society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings from this study highlight the importance of integrity, authenticity, taking a stand, and living for a vision bigger than self in leadership. These themes provide a rich understanding of what constitutes effective leadership and offer insights for leaders who seek to inspire and motivate others. By embracing these themes, leaders can create a positive and productive work environment, build strong relationships with their followers, and drive positive change.

Implications of this Paper:

The findings from this study have implications for leadership practice. Leaders who seek to inspire and motivate others should prioritize integrity, authenticity, taking a stand, and living for a vision bigger than self. This may involve:

Developing a clear sense of purpose and meaning: Leaders should reflect on their values, and passions and develop a clear sense of purpose and meaning.

Building trust and credibility: Leaders should prioritize building trust and credibility with their followers by being transparent, trustworthy, and consistent in their words and actions.

Taking risks and challenging the status quo: Leaders should be willing to take risks and challenge the status quo to drive positive change.

Inspiring and motivating others: Leaders should seek to inspire and motivate others by communicating a clear vision and sense of purpose.

By embracing these practices, leaders can create a positive and productive work environment and drive positive change.

Suggestions for future research:

More research work may be explored by future studies, in reference to the power of a social realist explanatory account as anchored on the critical realist philosophy: How the actors' testimonials could be delineated into a model, and further how reflexive models could emerge over time from the state of reproductive outcomes, where there was no possibility of research improvement to where there is strong evidence of improved research activities.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

VVMD: Literature, testimonial, discussion and conclusion. KHM: Title, abstract, literature, testimonial, paper structure/organization, methodology, conclusion, references, editing, reviewing and proof reading. EFFF: Testimonial and introduction. UBO: Literature, testimonial and introduction. JJM: Testimonial and findings. UE: Testimonial. AFO: Testimonial and findings.

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