

BHP Hosts Joint End-of-Year Celebration and Tribute to Prof. Joseph Makhema



BHP Staff at the end of year event

The Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) hosted a combined End-of-Year Celebration and tribute ceremony for former BHP Chief Executive Officer, Professor Joseph Makhema, on 5th December 2025 at Botswana Craft. The annual gathering provided an opportunity for staff to reflect on the year's milestones and challenges while honouring one of the institution's longest-serving leader.

This year's event was organised under the theme "Celebrating Culture," encouraging attendees to showcase their diverse cultural identities. Botswana Craft provided a fitting backdrop, renowned for

its display of local artistry and traditional crafts. Staff members, from interns to consultants and National Health Laboratory (NHL) personnel, attended dressed in cultural attire, creating a vibrant and celebratory atmosphere.

Key speakers included Executive Director Dr Gaerolwe Masheto, who delivered the opening address; Mr Cornelius Gaetsaloe, who presented highlights of the year and invited several speakers from various departments to share affirmations; and Board Chairman, Prof Roger Shapiro, who closed the event with a vote of thanks.

Each staff member received a golf shirt and a Certificate of Appreciation as a small token of gratitude for their hard work and dedication.

In lieu of hired performers, staff volunteered their talents. The entertainment lineup featured poetry by Mr Tebogo Mosimanegape and Mr Bame Bame, music by the PEPFAR Choir, and a performance by NHL's Oitshepile Maithamako aka Squeezer, who travelled from Selebi-Phikwe to participate, demonstrating a selfless spirit and love for BHP. Cultural trivia, dance, and a DJ session kept the crowd energized throughout the day.

A central highlight of the event was the tribute ceremony for Prof. Makhema, who led BHP for 16 years before handing over leadership in August 2025. Now serving as a Research Associate, he continues to support clinical research activities at the partnership.

Tributes were delivered by Dr Gaerolwe Masheto on behalf of management, Dr Rebecca Lucket as Principal Investigators' representative, Ms Oganne Batlang representing Study Coordinators, Mr Tshupoyamodimo Mpolokang representing Support Services departments, and Board member Mr Chris Hughes.

A fireside chat with Prof Makhema, facilitated by Dr Karen Shambira, revealed a funnier, more personal side of him beyond the formal leadership role. He later received farewell gifts: a golf set and a paper mosaic portrait, presented by Dr Shahin Lockman, Dr Rebecca Zash and Ms Dineo Thebe.

A short video montage showcasing Prof Makhema's involvement in various BHP activities was screened during the event. BHP is also planning a mini-documentary documenting Prof Makhema's BHP journey, scheduled for recording next year, which will incorporate some of the tribute ceremony footage.

Despite financial constraints and tight preparation timelines, the 2025 End-of-Year Event was widely praised by staff for its organisation, lively programme, and successful blend of celebration and tribute. The occasion highlighted the resilience, unity, and cultural diversity that continue to define the BHP community.



BHP Executive Director, Dr Gaerolwe Masheto



Mr Chris Hughes



Dr Shahin Lockman



Prof Joseph Makhema and his golf set gift

BHP Ends a Turbulent Year on a Note of Defiant Hope



Mr Cornelius Gaetsaloe

The Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) closed out 2025 with an emotional blend of reflection, celebration and renewed hope as staff gathered at Botswana Craft for the organisation's End of Year Event on 5th December 2025. The occasion also served as a heartfelt tribute to former CEO, Prof Joseph Makhema, who has transitioned into the role of Research Associate after decades of leadership.

One of the most memorable moments of the day came from Mr Cornelius Gaetsaloe, BHP's Director of Business Development and Sponsored Awards, who delivered one of the most honest and stirring speeches in recent memory. Opening with a warm Setswana greeting, "Bagaetsho dumelang! Go Dezemba, go festive!" Gaetsaloe urged the audience to smile and recognise the simple achievement of making it through a difficult year.

He reflected on a period that tested the organisation's resilience in ways few could have anticipated. The sudden and severe cut to BHP's anchor CTU grant, which for years had been the institution's foundation, "shook the ground under our feet," he said.

This loss struck at a moment when BHP had entered 2025 with optimism, with an expanding grant portfolio

and thriving Principal Investigators. What began as a year of promise quickly turned into months filled with uncertainty, fear, fatigue and heartbreak. Yet through every blow, he repeated a phrase that echoed through the venue: "We are still standing."

Gaetsaloe reminded the audience that even in the darkest moments, the year carried flashes of brilliance. Principal Investigators rallied day and night to protect the organisation. Colleagues held each other up and worked in unity. Slowly, funds began to flow again and glimmers of stability reappeared.

He celebrated extraordinary achievements across the team, honouring individuals such as Dr Sims (Simani Gaseitsiwe), who was named SANTHE's Best Mentor of the Year, and Prof Khei (Catherine Koofhethile), who received the Best Contributor of the Year award. He recognised Dr Wonderful Choga for winning SANTHE's Achievement of the Year Award and applauded Mr Bame Bame's recognition by the Old Naledi Clinic for his service to the community.

He highlighted critical new funding secured by researchers including Prof Koofhethile, Prof Chelsea Morroni and Dr Kate Powis, whose grants will shape BHP's future. He celebrated pioneering research by Dr

Unoda Chakalisa, whose menopause project promises to transform women's health in Botswana. He paid tribute to leaders such as Dr Gaerolwe Masheto, Prof Joseph Makhema, Prof Roger Shapiro and Prof Shahin Lockman for guiding BHP through turbulent waters.

In a powerful moment of unity, Gaetsaloe invited various groups to rise; award winners, trailblazing scientists, Presidential Honour recipients, leaders of audits, IT teams, lab teams, financial teams, off-site project leaders, founding members and ultimately every staff member in the room. The crowd rose to their feet, turning the venue into a living portrait of resilience. It was a reminder that beyond grants, structures and reports, BHP remains a community built on people, each one carrying a part of the organisation's story.

"I know we took a beating. I know how hard it has been. I know how tired you are. I know we are not yet out of danger, but I do not want you to ever forget how amazing, how brilliant, how important you all are," he said, offering comfort. The speech also carried moments of humour and lightness, a reminder that even on heavy

days, joy still has a place at BHP.

As the organisation prepared to bid farewell to Prof Makhema, Gaetsaloe's tone deepened with gratitude. He acknowledged Makhema's steady hand during a difficult period and celebrated his continued presence in a new role. He closed with words that served as both a blessing and a challenge: "I love you. I believe in you. I trust you to keep BHP going." It was a message delivered not as an administrator, but as a colleague speaking to a family that has weathered storms together.

If BHP's 2025 story was one of storms survived, Gaetsaloe's address turned the final page with a promise that the organisation's strength lies not in perfect circumstances, but in its people who keep the engine turning. As the music swelled and applause filled Botswana Craft, one truth rang clear: BHP is still standing and ready for tomorrow.

"Come on now..." he egged on the staff, urging them to lift their heads and march on in celebration of their collective strength as a united Team BHP.

Old Naledi Clinic Appreciates Bame Bame



Mr Bame Bame receiving a certificate of appreciation from Hon. Gopolang Montsho Old Naledi South Ward Councillor

At its annual Staff Appreciation Event on 3rd of December 2025, held at Tshwaragano Primary School, Old Naledi Clinic honoured Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) Study Nurse Coordinator Bame Bame for his outstanding contribution and support to the clinic.

Although not a staff member of Old Naledi Clinic, Bame Bame works closely with the clinic through his role at the Botswana Sexual and Reproductive Health Initiative (BSRHI) under BHP. His consistent collaboration, support, and dedication to improving community health services made him a standout figure deserving of recognition. In

the official invitation, Kenaope Majo, Chairperson of the Old Naledi Clinic Ward Health Committee, commended Bame's exceptional commitment.

"Bame Bame is one of the employees who has worked tirelessly to achieve our goals, and we would like to show appreciation for his dedication and hard work. This helps boost staff morale, motivation, and overall job satisfaction," Majo said.

Professor Chelsea Morroni, Director of BSRHI, praised the honour bestowed on Bame: "This is so well-deserved and amazing, a testament not only to Bame's individual excellence but also to the entire team for the supportive, trusting, and collaborative relationships with clinics and clinic staff that have been built and sustained over time."

Old Naledi Clinic is one of the key sites where BHP recruits study participants. Through this partnership, BHP staff regularly conduct educational sessions at the

clinic, share information about ongoing studies, and recruit eligible participants.

BHP was represented at the event by Ms Dineo Thebe, Operations Director; Ernest Moseki, Community and Stakeholder Engagement Coordinator; Topo Mosinyi, Communications Officer; the award recipient Bame Bame; and members of the BSRHI team. The event was graced by Mayor Oarabile Motlaleng of the Gaborone City Council, along with other invited health stakeholders.

The appreciation ceremony highlighted the strength of long-standing partnerships between community clinics and research institutions, and celebrated individuals whose contributions continue to enhance health outcomes in local communities.

BHP Commemorates World AIDS Day



BHP Community Engagement Coordinator Mr Ernest Moseki (in white) interacting with the community

The Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) joined Princess Marina Hospital in commemorating World AIDS Day on 1 December 2025 under the theme "Overcoming Disruptions, Transforming the AIDS Response." As a health research institute with a strong focus on HIV research, BHP joined the global community in remembering those who have lost their lives to HIV/AIDS and reflecting on the progress made over the years in reducing the HIV burden.

BHP hosted a stall at the event, held on the grounds of Princess Marina Hospital, as a way of reaffirming its commitment to advancing research, strengthening care, and driving a future free from HIV.

As a responsible partner and key stakeholder in HIV research and healthcare, BHP recognised the importance of collaborating with other stakeholders in this commemoration. BHP Principal Research Scientist

and Training & Development Manager, Prof Catherine Koofhethile, delivered a keynote address at the Gambling Authority's World AIDS Day event. Her talk focused on this year's theme and highlighted current progress in global HIV cure research.

Prof Koofhethile is the Principal Investigator of the Phodiso Study, an HIV cure research initiative. The study explores why HIV persists in the body despite long-term antiretroviral therapy (ART) among adolescents on treatment, with the goal of generating insights that

may contribute to future strategies for HIV remission or cure.

She was accompanied by the Phodiso Study Team, providing them with valuable exposure to the deliberations and discussions, and allowing them to actively participate in the event. The discussions emphasized the importance of collaboration and innovation in advancing HIV prevention, treatment, and cure research.



Phodiso Study Team

SHARE-CM Reveals Hospitals Still Use Long-Course CM Treatment Despite Shift to Short-Course Regimens

Hospitals across Botswana continue to prescribe long-course treatment regimens for cryptococcal meningitis (CM), despite the national shift to more safer World Health Organization (WHO)-preferred short-course therapies. This was revealed by Dr Tshepo Leeme, SHARE-CM Project Coordinator, during a national health stakeholders meeting held at Blue Tree on 25 November 2025.

Opening the meeting, BHP Operations Director Dineo Thebe underscored that stakeholders had gathered not for a routine check-in but to jointly assess real-world progress in implementing the optimized short-course

CM treatment regimen in line with national guidelines and SHARE-CM objectives. She highlighted major national achievements, noting that the WHO-preferred Liposomal Amphotericin B-based regimen is now fully integrated into Botswana's treatment guidelines and that the successful registration of both Liposomal Amphotericin and Flucytosine has removed one of the biggest barriers to delivering the highest standard of CM care.

Thebe further pointed to the significant decline in CM incidence between 2015 and 2022, attributed to Botswana's strong national Antiretroviral Therapy

(ART) Programme and strengthened advanced HIV disease management strategies. While celebrating this progress, she cautioned that persistent health-system challenges continue to undermine consistent and equitable delivery of the new standard of care, urging regulators, clinicians, implementing partners, and community advocates to engage openly in tackling remaining barriers.

Presenting the SHARE-CM progress update, Dr Leeme reiterated the urgency of fully adopting the short-course treatment, highlighting that several surveyed facilities still rely on use of longer-course regimens. The SHARE-CM project, now in its fifth year, aims to scale up effective cryptococcal meningitis treatment across Sub-Saharan Africa by leveraging evidence from the Advancing Cryptococcal Meningitis Treatment for Africa (ACTA) and AMBIsome Therapy In Cryptococcal Meningitis (AMBITION-cm) trials. Its work includes building clinical capacity, improving drug access, strengthening community literacy, and providing ongoing technical support and mentorship to healthcare workers.

In the past 12 months, the project has trained over 200 healthcare workers nationwide through collaborations with the MoH (ART program) and the Botswana–University of Maryland Health Initiative (Bummi) under its Advanced HIV Classroom Initiative, delivered on-demand in-service lectures at several hospitals and

provided continuous technical and clinical guidance on the use of Liposomal Amphotericin B and Flucytosine. Community engagement has also expanded through an operational Community Advisory Board, patient-facing educational materials piloted in Gaborone, and the training of community health workers from various civil society organisations. She added that cryptococcal meningitis training has also been developed on the World Health Organization (WHO) Academy learning platform, accessible at: https://whoacademy.org/coursewares/course-v1:WHOAcademy-Hosted+H0112EN+2025_Q1.

A facility survey conducted at 12 hospitals, including tertiary, district, and primary facilities, revealed inconsistent application of the new treatment guidelines. Data collected from clinicians, pharmacy teams, ARV coordinators, and laboratory staff showed uneven drug availability and continued use of long-course regimens. Patient-level monitoring and evaluation is ongoing to assess in-hospital mortality and treatment patterns.

Dr Leeme emphasised that while Botswana has made major strides in policy, drug availability, and community engagement, achieving meaningful reductions in CM mortality requires full adherence to the optimized short-course regimen across all health facilities. The meeting closed with a shared commitment from stakeholders to accelerate adoption, strengthen coordination, and ensure that scientific advances translate into lives saved.



Meeting Attendees

Role of Community Advisory Board Spotlighted at National Stakeholder Meeting



Bonosi Kgotslaetsile (Middle) alongside fellow community advisory board members

The critical role of Community Advisory Boards (CABs) in improving healthcare delivery and strengthening medical research was brought into sharp focus at a national stakeholder meeting held on 25 November 2025 at Blue Tree. The meeting, convened to discuss progress in implementing short-course treatment regimens for HIV-associated Cryptococcal (CM), brought together key players from across Botswana's health sector.

Addressing the gathering, Ms Bonosi Kgotslaetsile, Chairperson of the SHARE-CM project's CAB, delivered a heartfelt appeal for greater recognition and support for community voices in the country's health programmes. "Community Advisory Boards are not a side element in research or healthcare; they are the backbone that connects scientific work to the realities faced by our people," Kgotslaetsile said. "We bring lived experiences, we educate, we address fears, we bring hope, and we ensure cultural understanding is incorporated into healthcare. Our work deserves to be acknowledged and properly supported."

The meeting brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including the Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP), Ministry of Health, NAPHA, CDC-Botswana, PEPFAR, BOMRA, Princess Marina & Nyangabgwe Referral Hospitals, FHI 360, BUMMHI, and civil society organisations.

Kgotslaetsile outlined the broad composition of the SHARE-CM CAB, which includes people living with HIV,

community organisations, CM patients, and healthcare workers. She explained that their unified mandate is to ensure community voices are heard and valued in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of CM.

"We bridge the gap between the clinic and the community. We advocate, we educate, and we hold the system accountable. That is our role, and it is essential," she emphasised.

She highlighted the CAB's ongoing activities, which range from community mobilisation and awareness campaigns to co-designing educational materials and strengthening health system pathways. One of the most impactful initiatives, she noted, has been the training of community health workers on CM awareness, treatment literacy, and stigma reduction training that drew participants from a variety of community based organisations.

The CAB has also been instrumental in the production of accessible educational materials on CM, aimed at encouraging early testing and increasing clinic attendance among people living with HIV. These materials were piloted in health facilities, where CAB members also collected feedback to refine messages and improve future health talks.

On the regional front, the CAB has collaborated with partner countries on CM awareness campaigns, co-developing patient-centred messages and engaging directly with healthcare workers and CM survivors to

share lived experiences. According to Kgotlaetsile, these interactions have been invaluable.

“Our work has already shown measurable impact like improved awareness, better patient experiences, and more informed health-seeking behaviour. But we are still confronted by major challenges,” she said. She cited lack of sustainable funding, persistent stigma, and health system limitations as the most pressing obstacles.

Kgotlaetsile concluded her presentation by underscoring the indispensability of CABs in shaping CM

responses. “Community-led initiatives are not optional. They save lives. If we truly want to reduce deaths from Cryptococcal Meningitis, we must invest in community voices and community-driven action,” she urged.

The SHARE-CM project, now in its five-year implementation period, seeks to leverage global experience with ACTA and AMBITION short-course regimens to scale up effective CM treatment in Sub Saharan Africa. Its overarching goal is to reduce CM-related mortality in real-world settings, an aspiration that, as Kgotlaetsile emphasised, cannot be achieved without meaningful community involvement.

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