



Click on the picture to enlarge. Salome is a technician in the molecular laboratory in Kastanienbaum. But she is not only a blessing for Eawag in the laboratory, but also in field work in East Africa, as she speaks the local language and knows how differently things work in Africa to how they work in Europe. (Photo: Christian Dinkel)

Portrait series - Salome Mwaiko

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Salome is a mother of three and comes from the Kilimanjaro region of Tanzania. She has many stories to tell, and always with a lot of laughter. She grew up in a very traditional environment, where women married early and took care of the children and the household. Nevertheless, from a very young age, Salome wanted to go to university.

Her relatives thought this was brave on the one hand, but on the other, there was a lack of understanding. However, her father was a secondary school teacher who had studied in England, and he was very keen to see his daughter get an education. "I'm incredibly grateful for my father's attitude towards equality in education", says Salome.

She not only had to overcome cultural barriers, but also state ones. At the time, those who wanted to go to university in Tanzania had to complete one year's military service. And so, at the age of 20, Salome spent 360 days in a military camp on the border of Mozambique, armed and dressed in camouflage.

She completed her bachelor's degree in zoology and marine biology at the University of Dar es Salaam in 1984, and managed to get a job at the National Fisheries Institute, where she worked on sustainability projects for fishing in the Indian Ocean. Four years later, she received a scholarship to study fish resources and fishery management at the University of Bergen in Norway.

After working for a couple more years in Tanzania, she received a scholarship to study for her doctorate in the UK, researching the taxonomy of haploid cichlids at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland.

By then a mother of three, she thus emigrated with her children to Europe. Since her husband wasn't happy there, Salome was soon having to fend for herself—in a new country, a new culture, with three school-age children and a PhD to finish, which began to look very elusive as her supervisor in the UK died only a few months after Salome arrived in the country.

“I was very close to giving it all up and going back to Tanzania”, says Salome. But then, by a stroke of good fortune, she got to know Ole Seehausen, who took over as her supervisor and eventually brought her to Eawag.

For her family, this meant getting to know yet another country. “My children hated me when they realised that they were going to have to learn German”, says Salome, with a hearty laugh. Although her oldest daughter has now returned to Tanzania, she and her other two daughters feel very much at home after 15 years in Switzerland—and she has no desire to go back to Tanzania.

International portraits



We at Eawag are particularly proud of the international composition of our employees. Dübendorf and Kastanienbaum are home to researchers, technicians, administrators and apprentices from over 40 different nations. We portray this diversity of cultures, languages and countries in a series.

The series was created as part of a photojournalism course that Christian Dinkel is taking at the MAZ in Lucerne. While in the first part we portray people from KB, next year employees from DD will follow.

<https://www.eawag.ch/en/info/portal/news/news-archive/archive-detail/portrait-series-salome-mwaiko-1>