

Obituary of Naomi Luchera Shitemi



Our dear colleague, teacher and friend, Prof. Dr. Naomi Shitemi passed away in Nairobi on Saturday morning. It was a shock for us to hear that finally she succumbed to the illness that she had bravely fought against for more than two years. She had just come back from India where she got some intensive medical care that finally seemed to make her recover. Despite the exhausting treatment, she was full of optimism and new plans in New Delhi, as she seemed to head back towards normal life. But the journey back to Kenya was obviously too much for her weakened body. When she arrived in Kenya, she was immediately taken to Nairobi Hospital, where she died very early on Saturday morning.

Her much too early death means a big loss to us in Kenya, East Africa as well as in Bayreuth. First of all, she was one of the most dedicated scholars of Swahili language and literature in East Africa. Most probably, Naomi Shitemi was also the first female full professor of this discipline in Kenya or even East Africa. Her scholarly contributions in many different fields (literature, sociolinguistics, translation, gender studies etc.) earned her respect not only in Kenya but also in the international academia. Her essential role in the department of Kiswahili and other African languages at Moi University which she ran for many years is probably best summarized by the words of one of the acting DVCs at Moi University, Prof. Nathan Ogechi: "We as a department have lost our mother."

Naomi Shitemi was also an esteemed colleague and dear friend to many in Bayreuth. She first came to Bayreuth to the annual Swahili Colloquium, but she soon also played essential roles in other fields. Certainly, she was one of the most active persons regarding the partnership between the University of Bayreuth and Moi University. She played a vital role in shaping BIGSAS, its structure, contents and

discussions from its very beginning. In both the initial and prolongation round, she not only contributed to the proposal for the Excellence Initiative but was even part of the delegation that successfully defended it in Bonn and Berlin. She also substantially contributed to other projects born out of the partnership between UBT and Moi University, like the SEED project on New ICT strategies or the alumni network. She had an interest in higher education in Africa, believed in improving research and education through international cooperation and also served international organizations, like UNESCO, the African Union, ACALAN as well as DAAD, as consultant on matters of research, higher education and (African) languages.

Apart from her scholarly contributions, we will miss her because of her positive and warm-hearted nature. She was an upright character who would not easily give in but who was not hard-headed either. She had an open ear for everyone and many sought her advice because she shared her opinions honestly and had a good intuition.

The entire Bigsas community wishes Naomi's soul to rest in peace! Buriani mwalimu, mama na dada yetu mpendwa!

Clarissa Vierke & Magdaline Wafula