



## Tanzania Awaits: Where the Spirit of Africa Meets the Heart of Occupational Therapy

CONGRESS  
**Tanzania**  
**2025**  
OTARG

### Pack your bags and get ready!

Tanzania is calling, and it's calling loud!

From the majestic peak of Mount Kilimanjaro to the sweeping plains of the Serengeti, Tanzania is one of Africa's most captivating destinations. And in June 2025, it becomes the epicentre of occupational therapy in Africa as we gather for the 13th OTARG Congress in Arusha!

But this trip isn't just about workshops and keynotes (though we're bringing the best of those too). It's about being immersed in a land that pulses with rhythm, resilience, and community values at the very core of our profession.

Why You'll Fall in Love with Tanzania:

**Breathtaking Landscapes** – Want a morning view of Africa's tallest mountain? Or maybe a golden sunset over Ngorongoro Crater? Tanzania has it all—and then some.

**Wildlife Wonders** – Where else can you discuss community-based

rehabilitation in the morning and see the Big Five on safari in the afternoon? Only in Tanzania.

**Cultural Richness** – With over 120 ethnic groups, Tanzania's cultural mosaic is one of unity, warmth, and tradition. Arusha itself is a bustling hub with local markets, art, music, and the friendliest smiles you'll ever meet.

History in OT – Did you know Tanzania played a key role in the early growth of occupational therapy in Africa? It's where the first OT training programs in East Africa were birthed, and where passionate pioneers helped shape our profession on the continent.

**What Makes This Even More Special?**

This year's Congress theme, "Taking Stock: A Celebration of the Past, Present, and Future Practice of Occupational Therapy in Africa", hits differently in Tanzania. Here, you'll be walking the very soil where OT history was made—and where our next chapter will be co-written.

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- Farewell Messages from outgoing exco-members
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come ready to be inspired. Come ready to connect. Come ready to celebrate the magic of Tanzania—with all its beauty, heart, and hope. Karibu sana! So Welcome to Tanzania. You'll never forget it.

REGISTER for the OTARG Congress.

Please visit the [OTARG Congress Registration Page](https://www.otarg.org/congress/registration)

# Taking Stock: A Celebration of the Past, Present, and Future Practice of Occupational Therapy in Africa

As we gather for the OTARG Congress under the theme “Taking Stock: A celebration of the past, present and future practice of occupational therapy in Africa,” we are called to reflect on our journey – to celebrate how far our profession has come, to critically examine the gaps that remain, and to envision the road ahead. Taking stock in the African context means honouring the pioneers and milestones that built our profession, while also confronting today's realities of access and equity. It is a time for pride in our achievements and a time for honest appraisal and renewed commitment. In this short opinion piece, we look at our past, present, and future with equal parts gratitude and resolve – inspired by our history, grounded in the present challenges, and optimistic about a future we will shape together.

## Honouring Our Past: Milestones and Achievements

The story of occupational therapy in Africa is one of perseverance and growth against the odds. From humble beginnings in the mid-20th century, visionary therapists planted the seeds of a profession that would slowly spread across the continent. For instance, the first occupational therapy course in Africa was established in 1943 at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa – a bold initiative by pioneers who believed in OT's potential to change lives. In the decades that followed, these early efforts blossomed into national associations and training programs in various countries, laying a foundation for an African OT identity. By 1996, the formation of the Occupational Therapy Africa Regional Group (OTARG) provided a unifying platform for practitioners across sub-Saharan Africa to share knowledge and promote OT regionally. That inaugural OTARG Congress in 1999 was more than a meeting – it was a celebration of a fledgling community coming together despite geographic and resource barriers.

Today, we can proudly look back at numerous milestones. What started with a single country (South Africa) representing Africa in the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) in 1952 has grown into a broad pan-African presence. By 2020, twelve African nations held full WFOT membership (with others as associates), reflecting decades of persistent advocacy to gain international recognition. At the same time, OTARG's membership expanded to encompass 16 countries by the 2010s – and 17 by the current count – illustrating the widening reach of our profession. Perhaps most encouraging is the rise of home-grown educational programs: from only a handful of schools in the latter 20th century to about 30 occupational therapy training programs across Africa today (22 of them approved by WFOT). This growth in training capacity means more African-trained OTs entering the workforce than ever before, and a gradual strengthening of local expertise.

Equally noteworthy are the diverse arenas in which African OTs have made their mark. Occupational therapists on the continent have adapted their skills to meet African realities, working in hospitals and rehabilitation centres, as well as in far-reaching community settings. They have become key contributors in community-based rehabilitation, primary health clinics, mental health programs, schools for children with disabilities, and outreach projects for HIV/AIDS and palliative care. In regions affected by conflict or displacement, OTs have helped trauma survivors rebuild their lives and regain a sense of purpose. In rural villages, they have introduced simple assistive devices and creative solutions tailored to local materials.

These achievements may not have always made headlines, but collectively, they have positively changed countless lives. We celebrate the trailblazers who established our national associations, the educators who built curricula from scratch, and the clinicians who proved the value of OT one client at a time. Each success – whether it's a new clinic opening, a policy that includes OT services, or a graduate class of OTs in a country that has never had them – is a building block in our shared history. Taking stock of the past, we find much to be proud of: a profession that has taken root in African soil, grown in depth and breadth, and maintained a focus on enabling people to participate

in meaningful life activities despite illness or disability. These proud milestones remind us of what is possible when dedication and vision come together.

### **Present Realities: Progress and Persistent Challenges**

In 2025, we see a profession that is more connected and empowered than ever before. The camaraderie and knowledge sharing evident at our OTARG congresses reflect genuine progress. Regional collaboration through OTARG and other networks has strengthened solidarity; we now speak with a more unified voice about the importance of occupational therapy in African healthcare. New training programs in countries like Rwanda and Malawi have recently produced their first cohorts of local OTs, expanding services into previously underserved areas. Many African governments are beginning to recognise the role of rehabilitation in addressing the burden of disease and disability. Indeed, occupational therapy is gradually gaining visibility as an essential health service for improving quality of life and community inclusion.

All these signs underscore forward momentum – proof that the investments and advocacy of earlier years are bearing fruit. And yet, taking stock also illuminates the stark challenges that persist. Access to occupational therapy remains uneven and inadequate in much of Africa. There are simply not enough therapists to meet the vast needs: more than half of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa still do not have any OT training program, and the number of qualified OTs is “insufficient to meet the demand for rehabilitation services” across the region. In many communities – especially rural areas and low-income urban settlements – OT services are scarce or non-existent, leaving people with disabilities without support. This inequity is compounded by limited resources and infrastructure. Minimal government funding for rehabilitation means that even where OTs are present, they often lack the tools, facilities, or multidisciplinary teams needed to deliver effective interventions. The result is that too many Africans who could benefit from occupational therapy are not yet being reached. Issues of equity and inclusion also remain front and center.

While some countries (for example, South Africa or Kenya) have hundreds of therapists and more established services, others may have only a handful or none at all. Francophone and Arabic-speaking African countries lag in OT development compared to Anglophone countries, reflecting historical imbalances that we have yet to fully address. Within countries, services tend to cluster in major cities. Therapists working in remote or underserved areas face unique logistical challenges – as one account noted, even basic assistive equipment may fail to reach distant villages due to breakdowns in delivery channels. Poverty and low health literacy in certain parts of our population add further complexity, requiring OT practitioners to adjust their interventions to fit the socioeconomic context. Additionally, our clients often confront stigma and cultural misconceptions about disability, which means occupational therapists must spend considerable effort on public education and advocacy alongside therapy. A critical challenge in the present is gaining recognition and support for occupational therapy at the policy and system levels. Despite progress, the profession remains poorly understood by many policymakers, healthcare administrators, and the general public. In some African countries, occupational therapy posts in hospitals or schools are not yet part of the standard staffing, or they exist on paper but remain vacant.

OTs frequently have to explain their role and value to advocate for their profession due to limited awareness and understanding. Where this awareness is lacking, funding is limited, and job opportunities are few, leading to frustration for new graduates. Sadly, brain drain is a reality: talented African therapists often emigrate to places where their skills are more recognised and remunerated. Every therapist lost this way is a loss for our continent's health workforce. Taking stock, then, we must frankly acknowledge that our progress to date, while significant, is not yet enough. Access to OT is still a privilege of the few; equity across regions and communities is far from achieved; our training capacity and workforce remain underpowered relative to Africa's immense needs. These gaps are our call to action. The achievements of the past provide a sturdy platform, and the unmet needs of the present give us a clear mandate: to do more and to do better.

### **Looking Ahead: A Call for Visionary Leadership and Action**

If the past has taught us anything, it is that the African OT community thrives when we rise to our challenges with creativity and unity. Our predecessors overcame colonial-era hardships, resource scarcity, and isolation through sheer passion and collaboration. Now it is our turn to take ownership of the future of occupational therapy in Africa.

## Taking Stock: A Celebration of the Past, Present, and Future Practice of Occupational Therapy in Africa - Continued

“Taking stock” must not become an exercise in self-congratulation or despair, but rather a springboard for bold action. The next chapter of our story depends on what we do today. Across Africa, a new generation of occupational therapists – energetic, tech-savvy, and globally connected – is emerging, eager to innovate and make a difference. We must empower and harness this energy with a shared vision. In particular, this congress issues a clarion call to every occupational therapist in Africa: step forward as a leader and change agent in your sphere. Regardless of how small or large your circle of influence, you play a role in shaping the future. Here and now, we rededicate ourselves to several key actions for the road ahead:



**Innovate:** Develop creative, contextually relevant solutions to expand OT’s reach. This means adapting interventions to local realities (e.g., using low-cost materials or telehealth to serve remote areas) and embracing emerging practice areas. African therapists have long proven adept at “navigating new horizons” and thinking outside the box – now we must push innovation further, whether in assistive technology design, community-based rehabilitation models, or integrating traditional healing concepts with OT practice. Our interventions and research should challenge the status quo and be tailored to Africa’s unique cultural and socioeconomic contexts. By innovating, we demonstrate that occupational therapy can thrive in any environment and address even the most entrenched problems.



**Advocate:** Raise our collective voice for the recognition and support of occupational therapy. We need to engage proactively with policymakers, health ministries, and international agencies to ensure that rehabilitation and occupational therapy are included in health policies, budgets, and development programs. Advocacy also means public education – spreading awareness about what OT is and the impact it has, so that communities themselves demand these services. African OTs must be bold in lobbying for clients’ rights (for example, accessible transportation or inclusive education) and for the profession’s rightful place in the health and social care system. The more we show our value through evidence and stories, the harder it will be to ignore. Through persistent advocacy, we can secure funding, create more jobs, and integrate OT into primary healthcare and social services where it can benefit millions.



**Mentor and Build Capacity:** Invest in the next generation and in each other. To sustain our growth, experienced therapists should mentor newer graduates, sharing skills and experience, especially in countries where OT is still emerging. We must also strengthen academic and research capacity – supporting African OT schools, encouraging advanced training (so that more of us gain Master’s and PhDs to become educators and experts), and collaborating on research that addresses African priorities. Currently, only a few countries offer postgraduate OT training, but through mentoring and knowledge exchange, we can gradually elevate the level of practice continent-wide. Let us establish strong mentorship networks, north-south and south-south partnerships, and leadership development programs through OTARG and national associations. When each of us actively nurtures others, we multiply our impact and ensure continuity.



**Collaborate Boldly:** Forge stronger links both within Africa and globally. The challenges we face – from workforce shortages to lack of resources – are too great to tackle in isolation. Collaboration is our strength: between OTs of different countries, between OT and other professions, between our associations and government or NGO stakeholders. We should intensify regional collaboration through platforms like OTARG, so that no country in Africa feels left behind. This could mean sharing curricula, translating resources into French or Arabic to break language barriers, or pooling expertise for cross-border projects. Internationally, we can partner with the WFOT and allies abroad not in a dependent way, but in a spirit of mutual exchange, sharing African insights (such as community-based practice models) even as we receive technical support. By collaborating, we present a united front and learn from one another’s successes and failures. In the African philosophy of ubuntu, we find the idea that our strength lies in our togetherness and mutual support. Truly, “I am because we are.” The future of OT in Africa will be secured by an Ubuntu mindset – working as one big community of professionals committed to inclusion, dignity, and shared prosperity.

In answering this call to action, we honour the past and transform it into fuel for the future. It is inspiring to realise that we are the leaders we have been waiting for. The torch passed on by the founders of our profession now burns in our hands. Let us keep it aloft. We celebrate the pioneers who brought us here not by resting on their accomplishments, but by daring to dream even bigger for tomorrow. Envision an Africa where every person who needs occupational therapy can access it – in a clinic, in a school, in their home village – and receive care that respects their culture, context, and aspirations. This vision can become a reality if we collectively commit to it.

As we reflect on the past, present, and future of occupational therapy in Africa, the message is one of hope tempered by urgency. Yes, we have come a long way – from a single training program in 1940s South Africa to a continent-wide movement that touches millions of lives. But we cannot simply admire yesterday's trophies when so many of our people still lack the services we provide. This congress is a celebration, but it is also a council of war – a time to strategise how to conquer the unmet needs that surround us. The challenges of access, equity, training, and recognition are great, but our collective will is greater. By innovating, advocating, mentoring, and collaborating, African occupational therapists will rise to these challenges.

We will craft solutions rooted in our values and knowledge – for example, embracing ubuntu and other home-grown principles to enrich our practice – and we will not wait for others to shape our destiny. In taking stock, we also take charge. Let us move forward from this celebration with renewed confidence and purpose, knowing that the future of occupational therapy in Africa is our responsibility to lead. Together, we can ensure that the next time we “take stock,” we will be able to report not only growth, but true transformation – a future where occupational therapy is accessible, valued, and thriving in every corner of Africa. Onwards, with vision and determination!

#ExploreArusha



# Register for the 2025 OTARG Congress Event

**Click To Register Now**

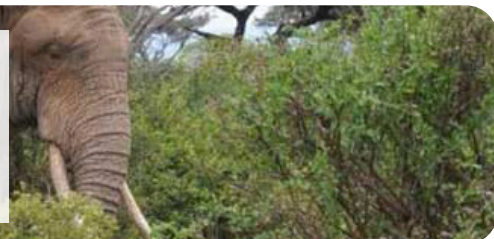
## Exploring Arusha: Your Guide Beyond the Congress

Whether you're a first-time visitor or a returning traveller, Arusha offers a vibrant mix of culture, adventure, and natural beauty. As we gather for the OTARG Congress, why not take some time to explore the treasures this region has to offer? Here are 10 things to do in and around Arusha to enrich your stay.

1

### Visit Arusha National Park

Whether you're a first-time visitor or a returning traveller, Arusha offers a vibrant mix of culture, adventure, and natural beauty. As we gather for the OTARG Congress, why not take some time to explore the treasures this region



2

### Tour a Coffee Plantation

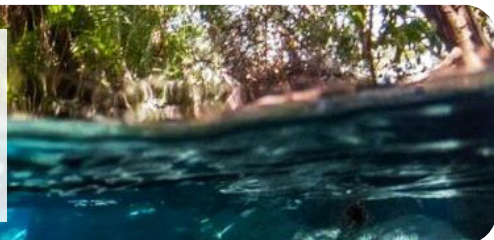
Learn about Tanzania's rich coffee-growing heritage with a hands-on tour from bean to cup—and enjoy a fresh brew while you're at it!



3

### Swim in Chemka Hot Springs

Relax in this crystal-clear geothermal oasis surrounded by lush greenery—perfect for a refreshing dip and a day out of town.



4

### Explore the Cultural Heritage Centre

Discover art, artefacts, and crafts from over 120 African tribes, and pick up souvenirs that tell the story of the continent.



5

### Experience Local Cuisine

Taste traditional Tanzanian dishes like ugali, nyama choma (grilled meat), and pilau at local favourites such as Khan's BBQ or Uzunguni City Park.



## #ExploreArusha

6

### Hike Mount Meru

For adventure seekers, trek Tanzania's second-highest mountain for stunning views and diverse wildlife—an excellent alternative to Kilimanjaro.

7

### Shop at the Maasai Market

Immerse yourself in the vibrant energy of local craft markets, where you can buy handmade jewellery, textiles, and beadwork.

8

### Take a Day Trip to Tarangire National Park

Famous for its large elephant herds and baobab trees, this park offers unforgettable wildlife sightings just a few hours away.

9

### Support Local Artisans at Shanga

Visit this social enterprise where people with disabilities produce beautiful recycled glassware, jewellery, and textiles.

10

### Relax at Lake Duluti

Escape the city and enjoy canoeing or birdwatching at this serene crater lake nestled in a lush forest.

**ARUSHA  
HERE WE  
COME !**

**GET  
READY**

## Farewell Messages from outgoing OTARG Exco-Members

### Reflections from the President



**Matumo Ramafikeng:**  
**OTARG President 2019 - 2025**

Reflecting on my six years as President of OTARG (2019-2025) as my term draws to a close, I'm filled with gratitude for the opportunity to lead our profession across the continent. My deepest appreciation goes to the exceptional EXCO team that I was privileged to work with. Your dedication and unwavering support was the key to achieving our goals. We also made history as the first committee with two vice-presidents and a social media coordinator, and all members actively serving their full terms, a testament to our collective commitment to the growth and development of occupational therapy in Africa. The voluntary nature of OTARG work presented us with various challenges, especially the ever-present threat of fatigue, prioritising OTARG work, different communication styles and having regular meetings with members across time zones, but we remained focused on the vision and achieved our objectives to various degrees.

The support from our member countries, through their Presidents and OTARG representatives, was also deeply valued and felt from some associations than others. This was evident among others in inconsistent renewal of membership to OTARG, variable support of OTARG's events and activities, like submissions to the newsletter and overall communication about OT in various countries. Consistency, therefore, remains an area of improvement to maximise OTARG's visibility and impact. The demands placed upon the EXCO often exceeded the level of active support received, highlighting the need for stronger collective participation from the whole Occupational Therapy community on the continent. To grow our profession and its impact in Africa, we need to be collectively accountable to ourselves and the profession.

Leading OTARG was an intense period of balancing multiple responsibilities, such as managing family, a full-time job, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of established reporting and archiving systems and processes to support roles performance across portfolios, especially the absence of handover reports, historical records of activities, and standardised templates, minutes, letterheads and reports, was a significant hurdle at the beginning of my term. The first step was to build these resources from scratch, and this required extensive research and consultation on my part, and was time-consuming, but it was a powerful learning experience; I gained invaluable knowledge and skills in organisational leadership and people management.

In addition to building systems, I had to navigate diverse personalities and

communication styles of fellow EXCO members, the majority without prior familiarity. This whole term became a journey of discovery about those I led, but more profoundly about myself. I gained a deeper understanding of myself and the leader I wanted to become. I even discovered personal strengths that I was not aware of, so to all Exco members that I served with; I appreciate you, I am a better leader today because of our interactions.

### The goals

Reflecting on the goals, I am incredibly proud of our achievements across all areas. To name a few; the number and quality of newsletters produced, the increased visibility on social media, the standard of conference that we hosted and the work that went into it, our new look website and the partnerships we forged and maintained throughout my term. These achievements required extensive groundwork that started with a process of establishing a sense of direction for the team in the absence of a strategic plan. I have come to realise that this is a recurring challenge that OTARG executive committees face as a result of poor archiving and handover. To ensure success in the future, I would strongly recommend that future presidents prioritise comprehensive record-keeping practices. They could continue with some of those that we established, such as records of meetings and agendas, using standardised templates. I acknowledge that the absence of a secretariat and the exclusive reliance on volunteerism without employed staff is a major challenge for OTARG's growth and development, and this requires careful consideration by the

OT community in Africa. Continuity from one executive committee to another is key in progressing the work.

### **So, how did I do it?**

I started with portfolio holders familiarising themselves with the Constitution and drawing their own strategic plan to achieve what was set out for their respective portfolios in the Constitution. For new portfolios, I embarked on research on similar portfolios in other organisations and drafted responsibilities and then in consultation with portfolio holders, we finalised the responsibilities. This is one of the additions that we are proposing for inclusion in the Constitution. Recognising the need for accountability, we implemented a structured reporting system, making portfolio reports a standing agenda item. My recommendation to future presidents would be to ensure that all portfolio holders are well-versed in the Constitution and what is expected of their portfolios. We

have consistently drawn remained cognisant of the Constitution in all our endeavours. The rest is history. Well done, team!

With a clear plan, we worked on developing and nurturing partnerships. Among others, our partnership with the WFOT proved transformative, resulting in remarkable growth and development of the OT profession in Africa. For instance, the work we did with the Elizabeth Casson Trust, with its offering of the International Development Award, has had a significant impact on the further development of OT in the East African region. Other achievements are captured in the portfolio reports that will be shared with member countries.

The most rewarding aspect of my team was witnessing their personal development. We actively cultivated a supportive culture within Exco, enabling several members to achieve

important academic milestones, including completion of doctoral, Masters and Bachelors studies.

There were times where across portfolios, members different Exco members stepped in to assist each other during hectic study periods. This is a testament to leadership that fosters and promotes both personal and professional development. Communication was key, and developing meaningful relationships with each portfolio holder and applying some OT principles to support and encourage the achievement of goals. It was a truly remarkable term and an honour to have served OTARG. I will continue to reflect on my leadership and areas of improvement. Writing this piece is timely as I have just enrolled on the Personal Leadership Programme offered by the Elizabeth Casson Trust, where I have the opportunity for reflection, thinking and further development as a leader. It is an amazing programme.

## **Insights from the Secretary**



**Erastus Shuma: OTARG Secretary (2023-2025); Vice President of Marketing and Fundraising (2019-2023)**

As Secretary and Vice President of Marketing and Fundraising for

the Occupational Therapy Africa Regional group from 2019 to 2025, I made significant contributions to the organisation's growth and success. In my role as secretary, I was responsible for maintaining detailed records of all meetings, events, and activities, ensuring seamless communication and coordination within the group. I played a pivotal part in organising and facilitating regular meetings, preparing agendas, and documenting important decisions and action items.

Additionally, as the vice president of marketing and fundraising, I spearheaded various initiatives to promote the group's mission and secure the necessary resources to support its congress operations. I developed and implemented

effective marketing strategies, promotional materials, and targeted outreach to raise awareness about the group's initiatives and achievements. Furthermore, I led successful fundraising efforts, securing both financial and in-kind donations from stakeholders, which enabled the group to expand its congress activities in Namibia 2023. Throughout my tenure, I demonstrated strong leadership, excellent organisational skills, and a deep commitment to the Occupational Therapy Africa Regional group's objectives. My contributions have been instrumental in strengthening the group's presence and impact within the regional occupational therapy community.

# Farewell Messages from outgoing OTARG Exco-Members - Continued

## Message from the Treasurer



**Munira Hoosain: OTARG Treasurer 2019 – 2025**

Serving on the Executive Committee of OTARG has been one of the highlights of my career to date. It has been such a wonderful opportunity to meet like-minded occupational therapists across the

African continent and serve the profession by connecting people and growing our African footprint. As OTARG Treasurer, one of my first tasks was to confirm OTARG's non-profit status, which was thankfully fairly easy. I then investigated various options for facilitating online payments of member registration fees and congress registration fees. This was trickier. Through months of fact-finding and consultation with OTARG committee members, we were able to establish an online payment portal, which was used by the majority of delegates at the 2023 OTARG Congress in Namibia. Facilitating payment before the start of the congress rather than accepting cash payments on the first day of the congress meant that catering, welcome packs, and other arrangements could be organised beforehand with less risk of waste, over- or under-catering. This also

facilitated the payment of deposits for congress expenses, which needed to be covered prior to the event. We were able to provide detailed financial reporting on the 2023 Congress income and expenses, which made planning for the 2025 Congress in Tanzania much easier.

One pressing issue for the incoming OTARG Treasurer to address is to reevaluate the current membership structure, which requires both countries/organisations and individual members to register and pay fees. The new Treasurer will also be responsible for financial reporting on the 2025 Congress and planning for the 2027 OTARG Congress. I highly recommend this position to any occupational therapist who wants to build networks with other African occupational therapists.

## Message from the Newsletter Editor

When OTARG was formally launched in 1996 in Durban, South Africa, it marked more than just the birth of a regional group; it ignited a vision for connection, collaboration, and community among occupational therapists across sub-Saharan Africa. Supported by WFOT and championed by pioneering leaders like Justine Nanyonjo, Jacqueline Laurent, Rosemary Crouch, and many others, OTARG emerged as a bold response to the need for African representation, leadership, and training in the field of occupational therapy.

Among the early decisions made by the founding members was to create a newsletter, entrusting Judith

van der Veen of Tanzania with the task of developing a platform that would inform, inspire, and unite OT practitioners across the continent. From the outset, the OTARG Newsletter was envisioned as a bridge spanning countries, cultures, and diverse experiences. Nearly three decades later, it has been my absolute honour to carry forward that legacy.

Since 2019, I've served as OTARG's Newsletter Editor, producing newsletters that reflect our shared journey through growth, challenge, and transformation. These newsletters have featured voices from across Africa, spotlighted community-led initiatives, and



**Joana Nana Serwaa Akrofi: OTARG Newsletter Editor 2019-2025**

offered a space for reflection, research, and recognition.

But producing the newsletter has also revealed much about our collective responsibility.

It is not enough to have a platform—we must all contribute to keeping it alive. Throughout my time in this role, one of the most persistent challenges has been the difficulty in collecting articles and updates from our member countries. This has made me appreciate even more the few individuals and country representatives—like RWOTA—who consistently showed up, believed that our voices matter, and took the time to share them.

Looking ahead, I urge us to make the most of what we've been given. Imagine a newsletter that is fully

representative of our 20+ member countries. One that features multilingual contributions, highlights student voices, promotes original African scholarship, and tells the untold stories of OT practice in rural and urban communities alike. A newsletter that is not only informative but also transformative.

To get there, I recommend the formation of a small but committed Editorial Team to share the workload and ensure diversity of voices. I also encourage better integration with our social media platforms to bring our content to broader audiences in engaging ways. And above all, I urge each OTARG member to take ownership of this publication by contributing, nominating, translating,

or simply sharing stories from your corner of the continent.

As I step away from this role, I do so with a heart full of gratitude and hope. Gratitude for the opportunity to serve. Hope that someone passionate and creative will rise to take the baton and run with it. If you're reading this and feel even a flicker of curiosity or calling, this role might be yours to embrace.

The OTARG newsletter is more than just a document. It is a living archive of who we are, where we've come from, and who we are becoming. Let's ensure it continues to reflect the bold, inclusive, and dynamic spirit of occupational therapy in Africa. Thank you for the privilege of being part of this legacy.



## What's New on the Website?

### Stay Connected

The updated website features a sleek, modern design that makes navigation easy and intuitive.

Whether you're looking for information on upcoming events, research opportunities, or OT resources, the site's clear layout ensures quick access to all key sections.

### Access Research and Learning Tools

Whether you are a student or a practising therapist, the website's extensive library of OT materials is an invaluable resource for professional growth.

### Get Involved

From calls for papers to volunteer opportunities at the upcoming OTARG Congress, the new website is the go-to place to find ways to contribute and collaborate.



## A Historic Moment for OT Leadership: Two Black Women Make OT History



Dr. Tecla Mlambo, PhD, MSc OT, MSc Clin Epidemiology, BSc HOT (Zimbabwe), has been elected President Elect of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT). This marks the first time an African occupational therapist will ascend to the pinnacle of WFOT's leadership.

Dr. Mlambo, a seasoned educator and researcher, will help steer an organization representing over 633,000 occupational therapists worldwide. Her election is a proud milestone not only for Zimbabwe but for the entire African OT community, as she brings African representation to the global stage of our profession.



Dr. Arameh Anvarizadeh, OTD, OTR/L, FAOTA (USA), has assumed office as President of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) – making history as AOTA's first Black President in its 100+ year history.

Dr. Anvarizadeh, a faculty member at USC and a champion for diversity, was officially introduced as President at AOTA Inspire 2025.

Like Dr. Mlambo, she has built an impressive career of service and leadership, breaking barriers to reach the very top.

### Significance for Black Women in Global OT Leadership

These simultaneous leadership achievements send a powerful message about representation and possibility. For decades, Black women have been underrepresented in the highest echelons of OT leadership. Now, with Dr. Mlambo and Dr. Anvarizadeh at the helm, a new era of inclusion and inspiration is unfolding. They exemplify resilience, excellence, and service, rising through years of dedication in academia, clinical practice, and professional service to claim their spots in history. Their leadership is not just personal success; it is a beacon of hope and pride for Black therapists everywhere. It underscores that diversity and inclusion are advancing in our field, to the benefit of the profession and the populations we serve.

### A Call to African OTs: Aspire Higher

The rise of these trailblazers comes with a challenge and invitation to all occupational therapists across Africa: aspire to higher leadership, research, education, and advocacy roles. Dr. Mlambo and Dr. Anvarizadeh have shown that no goal is beyond reach, even the presidency of international and national bodies. It is now up to us in the African OT community to build on this momentum. Let this moment ignite our ambition to:

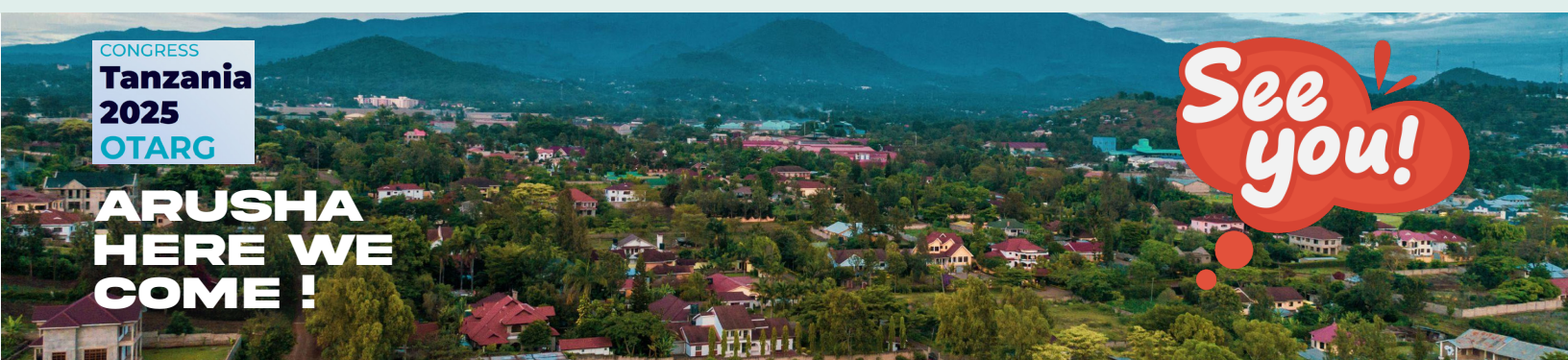
- **Lead:** Step forward for leadership roles in professional associations, committees, and institutions. Our voice is needed at decision-making tables regionally and globally.
- **Research:** Pursue advanced degrees and research endeavours. By contributing African perspectives to OT research, we strengthen the evidence base and show the world the innovations arising from our context.
- **Educate:** Engage in training the next generation of OTs. Whether as clinical supervisors or academic faculty, African OTs can shape curricula and mentor young therapists to strive for excellence.
- **Advocate:** Champion occupational therapy in our communities and beyond. Influence health policy, create public awareness, and ensure OT services are accessible and valued across Africa.

As members of OTARG and the broader African OT family, we must support one another in these pursuits. Our regional collaboration is key – through networking, mentorship, and sharing opportunities, we can produce more leaders like Dr. Mlambo and Dr. Anvarizadeh. When one of us rises, we all rise. Their achievements belong to all of us as proof of what is possible.

### Onward and Upward – The Future is Ours

In celebrating Dr. Tecla Mlambo and Dr. Arameh Anvarizadeh, we celebrate the dawn of a new chapter for occupational therapy. This is a moment of joy, pride, and renewed commitment. With African women now standing tall in global OT leadership, the narrative of our profession is forever changed. Let their success energise us to dream bigger and work harder.

Today, we applaud these pioneers; tomorrow, we follow in their footsteps. In unity and determination, the occupational therapists of Africa will continue to push our profession to new heights – onward and upward! Together, let's ensure that this historic moment is not a culmination, but a catalyst for even greater achievements across Africa. The future of OT leadership, research, education, and advocacy is ours to shape – the time to step up is now. Congratulations once again to Dr. Mlambo and Dr. Anvarizadeh – you have made us proud, and you have shown us the way.



Together, we can continue to drive forward occupational therapy in Africa and create meaningful change!

## Join the OTARG Virtual Community today!

Get instant updates on all OTARG activities and updates, interact with OT's across Africa & the world beyond. OTARG seeks to build a massive hub to foster cooperation, knowledge sharing, the promotion of all things OT. Get on, you'll fit right in.

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